



The Immigration Boom

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Almost four million foreign nationals live in Spain today. The great majority of these immigrants come from outside the European Union; they have arrived to our country in recent years from Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. In the last three years, the influx of illegal immigrants to our territory has indeed increased in spectacular fashion. Therefore, whereas in 2003, we estimate the arrival of 370,000 immigrants, that number rose to 650,000 in 2004 and that number might be even higher in 2005 according to Eurostar. This real immigration boom, encouraged by the irresponsible policy carried out by the current government - better known as "papeles para todos" demanding legalization of all foreigners on Spanish territory who want to stay - threatens to go beyond the Spanish society's ability to assimilate them and it might generate a deep social crisis in our country.

The recent events experienced in France, with non-stop riots in the outskirts of its most important cities and

provoked by second- and third-generation immigrant youths, alert us to the long time dangers of an out-of-control immigration, unable to accept our democratic values and to assimilate adequately in our society. In that respect, the progressive radicalization of the Islamic communities everywhere in Europe represents an element of deep worry.

In the year 2004, the percentage of immigrants counting the overall Spanish population was 8.4 percent according to the OECD. Today, it possibly is around 10 percent, very close to the rates found in European countries like France, the Netherlands or Germany, that have been receptor countries of migratory flows for decades. The Spanish singularity is how explosive this phenomenon has become. In fact, Spain is the European country that gets most immigrants now, absorbing on its own more than a quarter of last year's total immigration flow to the European Union.

In the middle of this overwhelming flow of immigrants arriving to our country, the Spanish government adopted a policy to authorize a massive regularization for those illegal immigrants, creating a powerful magnet effect. On one hand, the largest regularization process for illegal immigrants in the history of the world has started, a process that can end up with more than 1.200.000 newly legalized immigrants, taking into consideration the possibility of family reunification. On the other hand, new alien regulation has been approved and

that largely facilitates becoming legal for those illegal immigrants that reach our territory, reducing to one year the compulsory period to obtain a permit if in possession of a work contract.

The consequences of this policy showed up right away. Migration of non-accompanied minors from North Africa has risen 146 percent in the first half of the year 2005. The total percentage of illegal immigrants rejected at border posts has increased 66 percent in the same period. In Ceuta and Melilla, we have witnessed more than 20 avalanches of illegal immigrants that, according to the *Guardia Civil* Police, had more than 11.000 people involved.

The policy of "papers for all" has caused great alarm, not only in our own country - by breaking the political consensus about immigration reached during the last legislature, and putting immigration as the second most worrying problem for Spaniards - it has also outraged our European partners. The French Interior Minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, has called the Spanish government the "Sor-

cerer's Apprentice" in terms of immigration before the French National Assembly; those massive regularizations have consequences that France considers to be disastrous for the rest of Europe, accelerating crises of flammable proportions like the ones in Ceuta and Melilla. And then we have Otto Schilly, the German Interior Minister, who had previously accused the Spanish government in the prestigious *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagzeitung* of "having created a flammable precedent for all Europe" and that "massive regularization has the knock-on effect of attracting new illegals" with catastrophic consequences, turning Ceuta and Melilla into a dangerous powder keg.

The second characteristic of the Spanish immigration phenomenon is its illegal nature. 98 percent of all foreigners arriving to Spain during recent years have done it illegally or have overstayed their visas remaining in the country. On the contrary, legal immigration, i.e., those that arrive to Spain with the required residence or work visas has been practically irrelevant, little more than 20.000 to 30.000 persons per year in a fixed quota.

The fact that today's immigration in our country has been and still is practically illegal as a whole, produce an exponential growth of the social dangers derived from it. On one hand, the access for many of these immigrants is reached through organized mafias dedicated to human trafficking and as a result, that produces multiple cases of exploitation, human rights violations, forced prostitution and incitement to commit crimes. In second place, the initial or temporary illegal status makes social assimilation largely a difficult matter, leading to

work abuses and rousing a tendency in the immigrant not to follow the rules of the receptor society.

The massive arrival of immigrants into Spain happens by sea as well as by plane and by land. The arrival of floating devices to our shores constitute, without any doubt, the most dramatic way that illegal immigrants gain access to our territory. According to official estimates, in 2004, 81 immigrants lost their lives trying to reach land from Morocco to the peninsula or to the Canary Islands and 60 more were reported missing. According to other NGOs, the death toll reached 289 that year and 163 in the first half of 2005.

We have to acknowledge that the famous SIVE surveillance system – promoted and launched by the former governments run by the Peoples's Party (PP) – has been successful up to a point, containing an illegal access that causes the highest human cost for the immigrants. Therefore, it is remarkable that the number of small boats reaching our shores has decreased 37 percent, however the immigration flow where the SIVE system is not operative has substantially increased: Malaga has received 24 percent more immigrants by sea, Gran Canaria 371 percent and Tenerife 239 percent. These numbers demonstrate that the number of small boats reaching the coast has decreased because of the SIVE system and not because of a possible cooperation deal with Moroccan authorities.

A second access way, much more important in quantitative terms, takes place in the border posts for non-EU citizens. In all those posts, we found a

66 percent increase in the rejection rate, which shows a rise in the migratory pressure that we have to face.

A great deal of the immigrants living in our country has come in legally using those border posts. The problem is that once their visas or residence permits expired, they decided to overstay them illegally. To fight against this phenomenon would demand a stricter policy when granting visas as well as a greater control of entrances, exits and stays of these foreigners.

A second group enters Spain using false documentation facilitated by mafias or by organized groups specialized in human trafficking. In most cases, our borders lack the technical and human expertise required to detect fraud.

The Madrilenian airport of Barajas is in fact the main immigration entrance door to our country. Of the 7,716 persons rejected at the border in the first six months of 2005, no less than 4,489 were rejected at this airport. Secondly, the seaports opened to the international traffic of travelers have increasingly become one more access point for illegal immigrants. In the latest operation called "Crossing the Strait" (Summer is that time of year in which millions of Maghribian residents in Europe travel back) 1,334 persons were rejected in Algeciras trying to reach Spanish soil illegally. That triplicates the estimates of the previous year.

The lack of required safeguards in the recent massive regularization process included the exemption to demonstrate residence and that generated a powerful magnet effect of illegal im-

migrants from other nations within the European Union as well as immigrants from Eastern Europe seeking legal status. Many of these illegal immigrants could have entered through the Pyrenees. There are no official records about the possible flow of illegal immigrants in our border with France; in fact, there are no such borders because they belong to the so-called Schengen area that eliminated internal controls. Nevertheless, Police unions have reported the intensity of this illegal immigration flow that could have totaled more than 300,000 immigrants during the months that the regularization process lasted.

The case of our borders regarding Ceuta and Mellilla with Morocco deserve special attention. During the last two months, these cities have practically suffered a siege registering more than 20 human avalanches with a total of, at least, 11,000 Sub-Saharan immigrants taking part. Apparently, around 2,000 managed to gain access to Spanish soil. European Union sources indicate that there are 30,000 more Sub-Saharan immigrants just waiting in Morocco and Algeria to cross the border into Spain. It is necessary to emphasize the gravity of the situation created in these two cities, a crisis that has cost the lives of at least eight of these sub-Saharan immigrants in their desperate attempt that would give them a foothold on Spanish soil.

So, the Spanish borders have been repeatedly violated and we have a situation that has turned into a real humanitarian crisis after a disproportioned intervention by the Moroccan Army to deport all those thousands of people, some of them left abandoned

in the desert in inhuman conditions. Moreover, all has happened with the complacency and, later, the complicity of a Spanish government unable to guarantee safety along our borders, becoming finally responsible of these avalanches provoked by the magnet effect.

The official forecasts of the Government about the evolution of immigration in Spain can be found in the last projections done by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (INE), specially a projection of the Spanish population until the year 2050. In this study, the INE states that the foreseeable number of immigrants for the next 40 years will be around 250,000 per year. This forecast means that our country will receive no less than 14 million new immigrants from today until the year 2050. That figure means that in 2050, almost a third of the Spanish population will be made up of foreigners, in comparison to today's 10 percent. If this projection turns out to be accurate, Spain will become the country with the highest rate of foreign nationals in all of Europe, in absolute and relative terms.

This scenario would become even more worrisome if our country continues suffering the immigrant tide as during these last five years and with an average rate of more than 500,000 annually. In fact, the forecast given by the INE about the number of foreign nationals living in our country during 2004 fell short by one million people.

To continue bearing the immigration pressure of these recent years would mean that Spain could reach the 15-million mark, a third of its population today, just in less than two decades. The effects of having an immigration

boom of this proportion are difficult to gauge, but one cannot dismiss the possibility of social collapse in our country as the one experienced in France. This government's current policies seem to lead us in that direction.

The perils of an out-of-control immigration policy

The perils of a sustained immigration boom, like the one we are experiencing in Spain, are diverse and intricate. For reasons of space, we must restrict this analysis to summarizing only the most dangerous risks. Among them, we must emphasize the predictable rise in criminal activities, the deterioration of public services, the inability to assimilate those growing-ever-larger communities, the specter of racist feelings in our society and the increase of the terrorist menace.

The relation between illegal immigration and the increase of crime is a scientifically proven fact, though politically controversial (Aviles, Juan, *Inmigración y Seguridad Ciudadana*, IUISI, 2004). In the first place, it is an objective fact that in recent years, a spectacular increase in the number of crimes committed by foreign nationals has taken place in our country. Secondly, it is also unquestionable that the rate of criminality among foreigners in Spain is several times higher than the one shown by the Spanish population.

The number of foreigners arrested because of alleged crimes has doubled in the last four years, so the detainees held by the *Cuerpo Nacional de Policía* have gone from 60,000 to 144,000 in 2004. This number means that more than a third of the detainees for alleged crimes committed in our coun-

try were foreign nationals and that estimate rises when it is about crimes against sexual freedom or drug trafficking. 40 percent of the detainees accused of murder by the *Cuerpo Nacional de Policía* in the Community of Madrid in 2003 were foreign nationals. Secondly, 36 percent of the detainees for domestic violence were also foreign nationals. The rates for serious offenses are four times higher among foreign residents in our country.

Regarding the nationality of the detainees, Moroccans stand first, followed by Algerians, Romanians and Colombians. However, in relative terms, the ones presenting a higher crime rate were the Algerians with almost 283 detainees per 1,000 residents, followed by Romanians with 67 and Moroccans with 63. It is also important to point out that there is no great difference in the crime rate between legal and illegal immigrants.

All the previous data show that in those areas where there is a higher density of immigrants, one also finds deterioration in public safety as a consequence of higher crime rates as well as a population falling prey to criminals in those areas. This is a fact, not only objective but it also produces a subjective perception that one can find mirrored in different opinion polls. It is not a matter of criminalizing immigration or to think that all foreigners are criminals, but we cannot run from the fact that the arrival of illegal immigrants without any controls to our country can have a very negative effect – it already has – on public safety.

The deterioration of public services as basic as education or health care is

another undesired consequence of the uncontrolled immigration boom. There is a simple reason for that, in just five years, we have added almost two million people to the health care system and more than 200,000 children in the school system. Since the financial resources have stayed at the same levels and we have not added more personnel or equipment, the logical consequence is that the system loses quality and that the administrations run up big deficits. The hand-outs given by the Central Government to alleviate the situation are just laughable.

The integration of foreign students creates problems to the children themselves, to their parents and teachers. The immigrants' lack of language skills is an important problem, probably the immediate priority. In addition, the lack of knowledge of many parents with a low educational level is problematic, something that hinders family involvement with homework tasks. Teenage students of Muslim origin have problems accepting the authority of female teachers and some South American youths fall prey to different gangs slipping into vandalism and crime.

Besides, immigrant students tend to concentrate in a reduced number of schools, usually public schools. On the other hand, immigrant concentration in certain municipalities or districts makes that their children attend school in the same centers. This process is reinforced when Spanish parents choose to take their children out of those schools so that their children's learning does not become impaired or because of coexistence problems in the classrooms. All this hinders the integration of immigrant

children and youths to society through the school system.

Immigrants compete more every day for access to certain social services, including access to housing. Even without positive discrimination in favor of immigrants, as it usually happens, the fact is that immigrants have lower incomes and more children and therefore they have priority on most public benefits. This often creates a sense of marginalization suffered by the native population.

The kind and size of the immigration boom experienced by Spain also generates an almost inevitable cultural clash. The Spanish people's preoccupation with the immigration problem has stopped growing in these recent years. Today, 54 percent of Spaniards think that it is one of the biggest problems facing the nation. Nevertheless, the polls show certain ambivalence. Most of the people polled still show positive and tolerant personal opinions about immigration, but the majority already thinks that society as a whole is treating immigrants with contempt or indifference.

The Spanish attitude towards immigrants improved during the first half of the 90's, but in 2003, it had gone down 9 percentage points when asked if Spaniards could accept a daughter marrying a Moroccan and 6 percent less when asked if they could accept these immigrants as neighbors or co-workers. The polls start showing a dominant opinion: The influx of immigrants to Spain has already reached a level that is either enough or excessive.

Recent sociological studies about the immigration phenomenon (V́ctor

Pérez Díaz, Berta Álvarez Miranda y Carmen González Enríquez, "*España ante la inmigración*", Fundación La Caixa 2001) recognize that the coexistence frictions have a lot to do with density. The concentration of foreign nationals in certain districts is perceived with big uneasiness. The neighbors' perception in these areas with high levels of immigration is that it reinforces social inequalities. There are numerous complaints about the rise of criminal activity, blamed on immigrant youths showing an attitude both arrogant and threatening because they feel immune.

When it comes to Maghribian immigrants, there is a growing social rejection towards the excess of religious zeal in these communities, representing a hinder to coexistence. There is also major contempt for the submissiveness that most Muslim women have to endure in our country.

In any case, the cultural clash does not seem to be a conflict between two religions set at odds, but instead between a secular society and some groups that make religion the fundamental guide of their political and social life. The Muslim community constitutes the main identity reference for Maghribian immigrants, even more than their national identity. In any case, we cannot dismiss the potential of a conflict between a secular state that recognizes a Catholic social majority and a growing Muslim minority that finds many contradictions between being able to practice their Islamic religion and the way of living, habits and even legal rules of the receptor nation. In all this conflict, the antagonistic role of women in one culture and the other stands out in a very noticeable way.

The last worrying factor is the increasing radicalization of the Islamic communities living in Spain. Different studies done in other countries show growing infiltration of the Jihadist school of thought in many European Islamic youths belonging to second- and even third-immigrant generations. Many of them have come to justify and even support terrorist attacks as horrendous as the Madrid bombings or the most recent ones in London. Under these circumstances, it is evident that the bigger these Islamic communities become, the more potential support to Jihadist networks they would give and then, the intelligence community will have a harder time controlling them. The terrorist threat is a factor that influences the need to control immigration more strictly and efficiently, putting special emphasis in the immigration coming from North Africa.

Conclusion

Immigration has been a phenomenon contributing to the economic growth of our country in recent years and it can continue doing so in a positive way to alleviate the accelerated ageing of the Spanish population during the coming years. However, the expansive way of the phenomenon; the illegal nature of the process in almost all cases of immigrants arriving to Spain in recent years; the lack of control; the Spanish *impromptu* policy related to immigration matters; all this makes that the immigration problem may soon burst in our country with extremely negative effects for social peace and democratic coexistence.

Therefore, it is urgent to start a radical reform of the irresponsible immigration policy carried out by the So-

cialist government. The foundations of this new immigration policy should be a strict and effective illegal immigration control (They keep on arriving massively to our country); a much more proactive and selective migratory policy - one that allows to see the new immigrants' profiles and origins; a better balance and a step-wise recognition of rights and duties for immigrants; adapting the welfare state to the new demographic and social reality caused by immigration; and a more active defense of our cultural heritage in view of the threat of multiculturalism that, in the name of a false tolerance, we do not end up

surrendering our democratic principles.

The violent crisis experienced in France in recent weeks shows that the threat of social collapse caused by the lack of assimilation is a sure risk. Besides, the experience lived by our neighboring country shows that instead of becoming easier to solve, the problem tends to become more serious with the generational change. The risk of radicalization in Islamic communities is the gravest threat to coexistence and to our security in the long run and it should be confronted as such.

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