

Brussels Diaspora Policy Forum

Mitigating the Politics of Exclusion: Diaspora Engagement with the European Union

According to recent European Commission statistics, as of 2012, 33 million foreign-born people live within the European Union (EU).¹ EU Member States however, still control the regulation of immigration of non-EU migrants. Further, individual countries have distinct approaches in how they choose to engage with these new immigrants. Such people often constitute minority communities residing alongside the local population; but for Member States, they may also represent an important international link to the sending countries and thus have implications for resultant *diaspora* communities. The figures also show that 1.3 million people previously residing inside an EU-27 Member State have migrated to another Member State. The certainty of EU enlargement and the ethos of free labour movement, both suggest a continued trend in the movements of people within the Union, even when external borders are aggressively regulated.

In the wake of the global financial crisis on the one hand, and 'suspicion' of certain immigrant communities in the aftermath of 9/11, the issue of immigration (broadly interpreted) has become a politically sensitive battleground and an outlet for complaint across many European states. In the United Kingdom for example, the media and political discourse, stoked by public fears, often suggests that the increase in Eastern European immigration has been economically and culturally detrimental, especially to the British workers' well-being and to social cohesion, due to depreciating wages and the stresses on social welfare payments and public service provision. This is then further linked to the supposed 'lack of integration' and 'cultural incomparability' of Muslim communities in Western liberal democracies. There are similar stories in those countries severely affected by the crisis and plagued with high unemployment.

This has encouraged a tendency for scapegoating of the 'outsiders' by those who deem themselves the 'indigenous' population, which has in turn, contributed to an increase in intolerance of, political extremism and xenophobia. The heightened sense of fear and insecurity related to concerns over migrant radicalization as well as their economic/religious/cultural threat, has led to the increased securitization² of diaspora communities over the past decade. Yet, diaspora communities are not homogeneous but are often treated as such, without due attention being paid to the diverse range of views and perspectives within them. . The rhetoric of Diaspora engagement is thus wrapped up in debates about cultural difference and security from threats posed to existing local populations. This has consequently led to the positioning of diaspora communities at the social margins, at the expense of true engagement.

In examining the implications of immigration concerns on the increased securitization of diaspora communities and how policymakers engage with such communities, our broader objective is to open the dialogue on how the EU can contribute to a positive and realistic discourse of Diasporas as citizens so that their views are reflected in all aspects of policy. *This forum thus aims to explore the ways in which views from diaspora communities can be accessed, understood and accommodated, especially in EU policy making in the areas of Freedom, Justice and Home Affairs.* The forum will also examine the types of roles that civil society organizations can play in the context of constructive engagements between policymakers and diaspora communities.

¹ These number refers to all those born outside EU-27 regardless of current citizenship

² By securitization we mean 'a political technique of framing policy questions in logics of survival with a capacity to mobilize politics of fear in which social relations are structured on the basis of distrust.' J.Huysmans, 2006



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This Forum is an important platform to launch a collaborative network of participants drawn from Diaspora groups themselves, civil society more broadly, academia and policy practitioners within the EU and from Member States. The Forum will engender intense discussion over the connections between security linked immigration concerns and the level of inclusion of diaspora groups in the policy process, based on insights from the participants.

The Forum will draw on International Alert's "Voices Across Borders" (2012) research programme and its experience of working with young diaspora communities in the UK over the past three years, and the ongoing work of academics at the Conflict Analysis Research Centre at the University of Kent Subtitled 'Remapping Understandings of Diaspora Identities, Behaviour and Relevance for International Security.'