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Managing Migration in the 21st Century: Policy Options for Canada and Europe

**Roundtable Discussion, Nov. 1, 2011, Carleton University, Ottawa
Event Report by Anca Gurzu, Research Assistant**

The Canada-Europe Transatlantic Dialogue, the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University facilitated a lively roundtable discussion in Ottawa on Nov. 1. The event provided an opportunity for the panellists and the public to discuss and debate the highly relevant -- but politically sensitive -- topic of migration, while also exploring possible policy options for tackling migration in Canada and Europe.

Today, managing migration is posing a great challenge for countries around the world. This is also true on both sides of the Atlantic. While Canada's immigration system is often cited as a 'model' in Europe, some critics have labelled that system as being 'broken.' In Europe, the debate is over the need to bolster the working age population versus a rise in anti-immigrant sentiment in some quarters.

The audience at the roundtable discussion was diverse, ranging from government officials, diplomats and academics to immigration lawyers and representatives of the non-governmental sector.

A number of key points emerged from the discussion:

- The majority of the panellists agreed that immigration is beneficial overall. However, they presented different understandings as to why that is the case. Some speakers highlighted labour market needs, while others emphasized the overall contribution

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made by migrants to society. Some questioned these assumptions, arguing -- in Canada's case -- that immigration is no longer needed.

- Participants disagreed over the true economic benefits of migration. While some cited studies depicting immigrants as a burden on society, others pointed out that, in the long term, migrants and their children surpass the economic achievements of the native, non-immigrant population.
- A successful immigration system must look at newcomers in terms of more than their economic function. Social integration policies, with a focus on equal opportunity, must complement market selection policies with the purpose of allowing migrants to develop a sense of identification with the new society.
- While Canada has long taken this approach, EU member-states, including Germany, have been slow to recognize the importance of integration policies.
- Panellists said multiculturalism has different meanings on each side of the Atlantic. In Canada the term is highly valued, referring to a set of policies that emphasize equality of opportunity, while in Germany the concept carries more negative connotations, focusing mostly on problematic social implications of failed or inappropriate integration policies. It has become a highly politically-contested term especially in Germany and the Netherlands.
- Participants had mixed views regarding family reunification policies. While some argued that reuniting with parents and grandparents is part of a successful integration process and is a constitutional and legal right in most receiving countries, others highlighted economic and social problems resulting from a too liberal stance on family reunification.

Remarks

After a brief introduction, the five participants at the roundtable discussion each shared their views and experiences in dealing with migration, while also highlighting challenges and presenting policy recommendations.

Martin Geiger, visiting scholar with Carleton University's Centre for European Studies, provided an introduction to the debate by highlighting that international migration is an ordinary aspect of today's global world. For many people, he said, migration facilitates remittances, a safe income, the opportunity to meet new people and share new experiences. Despite the fact that migration has become a normal facet of life, Geiger noted that cross-border migration has often been framed as a security concern and a threat. In response to this, he said the newly-created concept of "migration management" aims to move away from a negative approach and present migration as a benefit to all. He pointed out that many European Union member states have started to test new balanced approaches to migration, making the EU as a whole an interesting testing ground for regulated openness, which includes restrictive entry policies in some cases but also liberalization for temporary migration. In times of demographic decline and uncertain economic conditions, Geiger emphasized it is important to gain more knowledge about the governance, restriction and facilitation of migration.

Sebastian Edathy, Member of the German Parliament, noted that there is no common European approach to migration, because individual member-states still have responsibility for immigration policy. However, he also said it's only a matter of time until this changes. Edathy touched on the issue of asylum seeking in Europe, noting that a migrant can only ask for asylum in the first EU member-state in which they arrive. Nevertheless, he said Germany has recently decided not to return asylum seekers, arriving from Greece, due to that country's poor humanitarian standards for refugees. He argued in favour of a common EU asylum quota, but noted, as yet, there is no consensus. Touching on integration policies, Edathy said Germany has been slow to recognize itself as country of immigration. Only in 2005 did the German government introduce language courses for foreigners.

Edathy highlighted three policy considerations. Firstly, there is no integration without identification, meaning that only people who feel responsible for the society they live in will also feel part of it. Secondly, Edathy argued that temporary migrant workers should not be

welcomed only as guests, but also as potential citizens. Lastly, he said any good migration policy needs to include anti-discrimination policies.

Mark Davidson, Director General of the International and Intergovernmental Relations branch at Citizenship and Immigration Canada, said Canada continues to rank among the world's major immigrant-receiving countries, receiving -- on average -- 250,000 permanent residents and over 200,000 temporary foreign workers and international students each year. Davidson noted that, like many other countries in Europe, Canada is facing skills and demographic challenges due to slowing labour force growth and an ageing population. This is why immigration will continue to play an important role in the country's development even though immigration on its own cannot solve the demographic challenge. He also emphasized that, unlike any other country, there is stable and broad support for large scale immigration in Canada. This ongoing public support is critical for Canada to continue having successful immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism programs -- a success the department cannot take for granted, he added.

Davidson listed a number of recent departmental and governmental initiatives aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of Canada's immigration and refugee systems. Among others, he touched on the 2008 Action Plan for Faster Immigration (which led to a reduction in the backlog of applications in the federal skilled worker program) and the 2010 agreement between the federal government and provinces and territories to speed up the recognition of foreign credentials for newcomers to Canada. Important legislative changes include a new law targeting unscrupulous immigration consultants and also a reformed refugee system. Davidson also noted changes to the citizenship test and to screening tools to ensure applicants have adequate knowledge of English or French.

Davidson also touched on the importance of CIC's international partnerships with EU member states and other organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the International Organization for Migration in areas of refugee and asylum policies, visa policies, border controls and integration policies.

James Bissett, Member of the Advisory Board of the Centre for Immigration Policy Reform, argued that Canada's immigration system went from being a highly successful one, focused on the country's labour force requirements, to a system out of control and badly managed. From the mid 1960s until the 1990s, Bissett said Canada moved from a restricted immigration policy

of selecting newcomers mainly from European countries to a global policy of accepting immigrants from around the world. The selection, he said, was based on a points-based system stressing education, skills, age and labour demands. It was a non-discriminatory system that also controlled numbers, he added. Bissett said the success of newcomers and the belief that immigration was important for Canada's economic development strengthened the system, allowing it to win international acclamation.

However, that has now changed, Bissett said, and there are a number of reasons why the Canadian immigration system is badly managed today. Some of the ones he mentioned are: changes in the selection grid, placing emphasis on years of education as opposed to the skills and trades that are in short supply; the growing numbers and costs of asylum seekers entering the country; the increasing litigious nature of immigration as a result of the protection the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* offers to newcomers; and the participation of provinces in the selection of immigrants without any national selection standards. Bissett also pointed to two provisions in the 2001 Immigration Act, which, he said, had diminished the effectiveness of the system and inadvertently had created an enormous backlog (one million by 2008): the right to sponsor parents and grandparents of any age, and the stipulation that everyone who meets the selection criteria "shall" – as opposed to "may"-- be accepted. Although the first of these provisions had been corrected, he said the damage had been done and the backlog remains a serious handicap for effective management of the programme.

Nevertheless, Bissett said the primary reason why Canada's immigration system is broken is because ever since the 1990s politicians have started to see immigrants as a means of getting more votes. Since numbers are the most important factor in this political pursuit, Bissett said the motivation has been to increase immigration levels regardless of economic conditions. He said the system is in need of reform. Canada needs to return to a managed system of migration, he said, warning that continuing with the current model could lead to chaos.

Victor Piché, Associate Researcher for the Oppenheimer Chair on International Public Law at McGill University, said the Canadian immigration system has undergone two key historical shifts in the last decade: official policy has shifted from an ethnic-based approach to a points system based essentially on human capital criteria; and integration policy has moved from assimilation to multiculturalism.

However, Piché also pointed to recent shifts in immigration policies, which he described as troubling. Firstly, he argued that the Canadian government is responding to demographic changes and recruitment pressures by enabling more temporary migrant-worker programs. This, he said, is leading to the development of a two-tier approach to immigration: those who qualify for permanent residency are given access to all human rights, while temporary migrants are given only a few rights. Secondly, Piché said that while historically, new immigrants very quickly narrowed their income earnings gap with the native-born population, the declining earnings of recently arrived immigrants is jeopardizing this economic integration trend. Piché said discrimination, especially towards visible minorities, plays an important role in explaining these developments. Thirdly, he said Canada's open approach towards the admission of refugees is becoming more and more restrictive. He also referred to the Canadian government's recent decision to eliminate the long-form questionnaire from the census, which may have an adverse effect on the research of immigration patterns.

Based on the trends he identified, Piché said there is a need to open the debate on the role of temporary migrant programs and access to human rights, and there is also a need to look at the factors explaining the increasing earnings gap between immigrants and native-born workers. He also recommended a return to a more open refugee policy and, lastly, emphasized the importance of understanding the impact of eliminating the long-form questionnaire from the census.

Oliver Schmidtke, lead researcher for the Canada-Europe Transatlantic Dialogue and Jean Monnet Chair in European History and Politics at the University of Victoria, argued that the Canadian immigration debate is shaped by an economic utilitarian logic: immigration is an integral part of Canada's future prosperity and development. Schmidtke then mentioned two paradoxes in the European context. Firstly, he said that while European policy-makers have increasingly pointed to Canada's immigration system as a model in tackling demographic changes and labour needs, the resulting policies have been, at best, very timid. Schmidtke said there is a clear difference between the public political debate in Europe and actually bringing new policies onto the agenda. Secondly, while there is a desire to attract more highly-skilled migrants to Europe there are also patterns of social exclusion. He said it is hard for highly-skilled immigrants, even second or third generation migrants, to find appropriate professional positions. He pointed to a lack of equal opportunity as one of the problems.

Schmidtke also analyzed the implications of looking at migrants solely as economic contributors. While there is a logic behind the utilitarian economic approach, he also argued this exclusive emphasis on a market-oriented perspective can have unintended consequences. For example, he said the economic focus implies that the state has no role in promoting the social and professional integration of migrants, instead leaving this responsibility to the market. This is why, Schmidtke said, there are hardly any integration policies in Europe. Secondly, he argued the narrow focus on migrants as producers of prosperity could lead to further exclusionary effects and in fact to a backlash against immigration in general. Since not everyone can contribute to society in the same way (for different reasons), and since the focus in Europe is exclusively on the advantages of immigration, the native-born population might perceive some migrants as placing hardships on the system. However, Schmidtke further argued, there is not sufficient recognition that the system does not offer equal labour opportunities for all.

Schmidtke argued European policy-makers are selective in their adoption of the Canadian immigration model, without looking at the broader political context, which creates unexpected results.

Discussion

CBC Journalist **Adrian Harewood** kicked off a lively debate by observing that much of the discussion up to that point had presented immigration as a burden for governments and society. He then engaged with the speakers on a variety of topics including the need for immigration, the significance of multiculturalism and integration policies, and the economic numbers behind migration.

In response to questions from the audience, the panellists debated the role of provinces in selecting new immigrants as well as the challenge of reducing the current backlog of applications at the federal level, including for skilled workers, and parents and grandparents. Participants also debated issues of residency fraud in Canada, the economic contribution of refugees, discrimination policies, the best policies for family reunification and the potential impact of issues such as climate change on the immigration systems in Europe and Canada.