

EU Policy on Immigration and Integration:
Multiculturalism or Assimilation?

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Abstract

During the last decades, there has been an intense political contest about the mode of integration of third country nationals in the European Union (EU) and its member states. There is an ambiguity whether the union is first and foremost the champion of diversity and multicultural policies, or if it has returned to assimilative-oriented policies in the emerging modern form of civic integration policies. The backdrop is the growing assimilative practices and policies throughout the union. This paper will explore the existence of both assimilative-oriented/civic integration tendencies and tendencies of multiculturalism in recent immigration and integration policies of the EU by analysing the Commission's Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals from 2016. Special focus will be on finding out whether the Action Plan supports the hypothesis that the EU has entered into a distinct post-multiculturalism period. The conclusion of the article supports this hypothesis convincingly, showing that the plan contains evenly matched representations of both multicultural and assimilative-oriented/civic integration policies. Moreover, this article discovers clear representations of the intercultural policy paradigm, in addition to a heavy focus on economic instrumentalism and employment in the Action Plan's integration policies.

Keywords

Multiculturalism, assimilation, civic integration, Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals, integration policies, immigrants, third-country nationals (TCNs), European Union, post-multiculturalism period

About the author

Gustav Blomberg holds a Master of Science in European Studies from the University of Gothenburg.

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This article was written in spring 2020, before the EU Commission's proposal for a New Pact on Migration and Asylum was released (September 2020), which is why the Pact is not discussed in the present text. It should also be noted that the article was largely written before the Corona Crisis. The author is also thankful for the two anonymous reviewers' helpful comments, which greatly improved the text.

1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) is established on the multicultural motto of ‘United in Diversity’, meaning that the differences among the countries on the geographical continent of Europe can be bridged through a shared common European heritage and identity. It also means that the EU must endorse cultural diversity among its member states (see the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union, art. 167, title XIII). A set of common values such as respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance have become fundamental aspects of an EU identity – both externally and internally – which suggests a framework that accommodates multiculturalism and cultural minorities (Modood et al. 2006, p. 13). The EU has moreover established the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union in which the principles of religious and cultural diversity within member states are preserved. The idea of ‘united in diversity’ has not only been referred to in the context of the diversity of cultures and languages already existing in Europe but also with reference to the tolerance of immigrants¹ from countries outside the EU.

The idea has become a foundation in the European Commission’s policies towards immigration and integration of immigrants from outside the union (Aggestam & Hill 2008, pp. 99, 105–106). Aggestam & Hill (2008, p. 106) hold that the EU’s approach to immigration and integration has been “closest to some kind of multiculturalism in that the emphasis is on immigrants being able to preserve and practise their cultures and faiths”. In formulating a common EU approach to immigration and integration policy the European Commission has actively accentuated immigrants’ rights and that they should be given equal economic, cultural, social and legal rights without being expected to abandon their cultural identity (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 99; European Commission 2003; European Commission 2011, European Commission 2016).

Recently, however, the Corona Crisis, Brexit and restrictions on free movement of EU workers illustrate a series of serious backlashes against the fundamental markers of EU identity, and may point to the need for reflection on the European project (Zapata-Barrero 2017, p. 2; Triandafyllidou & Gropas 2015). The European identity of ‘united in diversity’ has been challenged by complex domestic and international developments, including (but not limited to) increased legal and illegal migration, globalization, expansion of the EU, the advent of Islamist movements in the Arab world, the EU’s desire to play a global role, and the political engagement of a growing number of European Muslims (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 99). Recently, the measures that have been put in place by the EU and other European countries (e.g. internal travel restrictions and closure of the EU’s external and

¹ The use of the terms ‘immigrant’ and ‘immigration’ throughout this article is primarily referring to third-country nationals (TCNs) in relation to the EU, also including asylum seekers and refugees (see definition of TCNs in next footnote).

internal borders) to fight the Corona crisis can be added to the list of developments that challenge the unity of the EU.

Even though there have been significant advancements in creating a European identity based on diversity and multiculturalism, as well as a European approach to immigration and integration based on some form of multiculturalism, in recent decades there has been a move among EU member states away from multiculturalist approaches towards policies that favour a new type of assimilation policies (civic integration policies) and security measures against immigrants from outside the EU (Carrera & Wiesbrock 2009, p. 3; Gozdecka et al. 2014, pp. 55–56). There is clearly an ambiguity in the EU as to whether the union is first and foremost the champion of diversity and multicultural integration policies, or if it actually has turned to assimilative oriented policies in the emerging modern form of civic integration policies (Aggestam & Hill 2008, pp. 99–105; Joppke 2007, p. 9; Wiesbrock 2009, p. 3).

The main purpose of this article is to explore whether there is any multiculturalism, i.e. parts of multicultural policies, in recent EU integration and immigration policy documents. Another purpose is to contribute to the understanding of the current EU immigration and integration policies in order to better comprehend their character and their impact on member states. The case study used is the EU Commission's Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals from 2016 (hereinafter: the Action Plan). The Action Plan is the latest policy document on integration of third country nationals (TCNs)² to be adopted by the Commission. It provides a broad framework to support Member States in their endeavour to develop and strengthen their integration policies. It also specifies concrete measures the Commission will implement in this regard. More specifically, this article will answer the following questions: 1) what types of policies and actions, which correspond to either the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system or the multicultural integration system, can be found in the Action Plan, and 2) does the Action Plan support the hypothesis that the EU has entered into a post-multiculturalism period characterized by an acknowledgment of group distinctions combined with the quest of social cohesion and building a national identity?

2 Definition according to the European Commission: Any person who is not a citizen of the European Union within the meaning of Art. 20(1) of TFEU and who is not a person enjoying the European Union right to free movement, as defined in Art. 2(5) of the Regulation (EU) 2016/399 (Schengen Borders Code).

1.1. EU policies towards immigration and integration of immigrants

We live in an age of migration. Modern developments such as globalization, new security threats, new technological achievements, and spread of cultures and ideas, are all interrelated with the global character of international migration in contemporary society. This global development is without precedence in our history; it affects most regions and countries, and links with other global processes, which changes our world (Castles Hein De Haas & Miller 2014). Moreover, the EU now faces several crises connected to globalization and the global character of migration, such as the global climate and sustainability crises, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the EU, the influx of immigrants after the Arab Spring and the continuing Syrian War has made immigration of TCNs (especially asylum seekers and refugees) affect notably borderline regions in the South and South East of Europe, i.e. main transport ways en route to main hubs of destination³. Secondary migratory routes have also been established that funnel immigrants to northern Europe.

Social and institutional constraints in the EU have limited the union's capacity to act on immigrant integration and immigration of TCNs, as the policy areas have largely not been harmonised at the EU level. Nonetheless, there have been important developments at the EU level and these advancements do increasingly have an essential role to play in understanding current immigration and integration policies within the EU (Boswell & Geddes 2011, p. 201). Thus, while EU member states try to deal with immigration and the integration of newcomers through different policy means, the EU dimension has gained in importance in forming policy answers to immigration and integration issues.

According to Aggestam and Hill (2008, p. 105) the reasons are:

- 1) *past failure to integrate immigrants adequately into host societies;*
- 2) *the rise of right-wing parties and extremism; and*
- 3) *the realization that the problem of migration will persist in a globalized world and that a collective EU policy is likely to have more effect than individual measures.*

The logic goes that the EU level simply provides member states with more options to address legal and political restrictions that they may face domestically (Aggestam & Hill, 2008, p. 105). Here, regarding the process of forming immigration and integration policies at EU level, further European integration can be seen as a 'rescue of the nation-state' in the words of Alan Milward (2000). Accordingly, Joppke (2007, pp. 1–2) holds that policy action at the EU level is gaining ground at the expense of the national level: "a key feature of the policy solutions that have been offered in response to the integration crisis is the weakening of

3 Examples of these regions include southern Spain, Greek islands in the Adriatic Sea and other Mediterranean islands such as Malta, Sicily, and Cyprus.

national distinctiveness, and a convergence with respect to the general direction and content of integration policy”. Accordingly, even though there are a multitude – and expanding over the years because of the EU enlargement process – of member states’ measures and policies towards immigration and integration of immigrants, there have evidently been some harmonizing effects due to the evolution of EU regulations and policies in relation to both migrants within the EU and TCNs (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 106).

In recent years the EU has defined new immigration and integration of TCNs in terms of crisis and emergency and has vividly connected immigration and integration issues to security issues (Gozdecka et al. 2014, pp. 53, 55–56). Especially in European countries, multicultural societies – and indeed multiculturalism – have been attributed to social security issues (Gozdecka et al. 2014, p. 55). Nationally, there has been a shift from equal treatment towards conditioned citizenship. Similarly, in the EU, in line with the perception that immigrants are perceived as a threat to national values, there has been shift towards migration policies that guarantee social cohesion and put focus on social security issues (Carrera & Wiesbrock 2009, pp. 5–7; Gozdecka et al. 2014, p. 56; Kostakopoulou et al. 2009). The EU has moreover rearranged focus towards externalization of immigration policies. This externalization, in particular with regard to asylum seekers, can be categorized in three types; 1) shift of moral responsibility by putting blame on immigrants for their own misfortunes (socio-psychological externalization), 2) external projection of EU rules and immigration control policies to the southern neighbourhood and the eastern neighbourhood (political-legal externalization), and 3) shift of economic responsibility to take care of refugees and immigrants and their reintegration towards transit countries and countries of readmission/return (Faist 2018, pp. 10–22). These externalization processes have helped to create invisible barriers for incoming immigrants to Europe (Wolff 2017, pp. 379–380; Attinà 2016, pp. 21–22). The EU’s process of externalization of immigration policies (and its connection to the emerging security narrative) is maybe best represented by the EU’s response to the challenge of the increased immigration into Europe, the Commission’s Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) adopted in 2011. In the GAMM one can notice the preference of the EU Member States towards a development of short-term employment-oriented immigration policies that favour TCNs to work and stay temporarily in the union (Attinà 2016, pp. 21–22).

When referring to the situation of non-EU immigrants (especially asylum seekers) some even say that the EU has become a ‘Fortress Europe’ (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 106; Wolff 2017, p. 379). But why has the EU and its member states, some might say, become protectionists by shielding against immigration, and started to push for assimilative-oriented immigration integration policies? Should not the EU show global responsibility and leadership in global immigration issues? It might be that some EU member states are

not ready to become immigration societies, as the goals of immigration policies focusing on increasing immigrant numbers seem not yet to have been accepted by sizable parts of the European population (Enzensberger 1994, p. 136; van Krieken 2012, p. 516).⁴

Immigration and increasing ethnic diversity, as well as the perceived failure of certain state policies to secure integration of immigrants within EU member states, seems to drive a change of attitudes and mobilization of peoples (Boswell & Geddes 2011, p. 207). This mobilization brings about social and political movements, which are substantial forces behind securitized and assimilative-oriented immigration and integration policies at the EU level. This in turn fuels assimilative-oriented policies in the member states, and in the whole European security machinery. It seems as if the “securitization framework has penetrated most diversity-management thinking” in the EU (Zapata-Barrero 2017, p. 2).

Logically, the securitization of immigration and integration policies in the EU is counterproductive if the goal is to protect the multicultural Europe – not to mention multicultural policies – as it is hindering more open, cosmopolitan⁵ and humanistic policies towards TCNs (Zapata-Barrero 2017, p. 2).

1.2. Multiculturalism and the return of assimilative policies in Europe

There is no commonly agreed understanding of what ‘multiculturalism’ means. First, it should be noted here that there is an important distinction to be made between multiculturalism and multiculturality. One can see multicultural societies as a reality of world history, of our cities and countries, rather than as an ideology. Both proponents and opponents of multiculturalism tend to miss the inbuilt contradiction between multiculturalism as an ideology and the multicultural reality of societies. Diversity exists in both terms, but with quite different meanings. Brian Barry’s (2001) distinction between multiculturalism and multiculturality is very useful: multiculturalism is an ideology, a project often affiliated with nation-states and governance, and it is about the acceptance of group rights and diversity, while multiculturality means the actual reality and fact of cultural diversity, with many cultural groups understanding themselves as being separate from the nation-state and/or its majority culture (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 98). In this article, when referring to multiculturalism, I mean the ideology associated with governance of societies.

Realising the social costs of war, Western societies developed multicultural approaches

4 The explanation may lie in the fact that in some European countries it has been possible (until very recently) to argue that they have not ‘really’ been countries of immigration (in relation to classic immigration countries such as the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand characterized by heterogeneity) (van Krieken 2012, p. 516).

5 With regard to cosmopolitanism and immigration, see Miller’s (2016) principle of ‘weak cosmopolitanism’ and how it can explain the EU’s recent policies on and handling of refugees and asylum seekers.

to immigrant integration over the decades following the First and Second World Wars (Alexander 2013, p. 532). For more than 30 years European countries stuck to policies that promoted tolerance and respect for cultural identities, especially of ethnic minorities and immigrants. These policies included measures such as support for community associations and cultural activities, strengthening positive images in the media, monitoring diversity in the workplace, and keeping a flexible public service system in order to accommodate culture-based differences (Vertovec 2018, p. 167).

However, since the end of the 1990's and during the 2000's there have been powerful national narratives containing theories and beliefs which have caused a wide and fundamental rollback of multiculturalism in Europe (Vertovec 2018). Both contemporary social debates and academic research have generated doubt about multicultural societies. Multiculturalism has, for instance, faced heavy criticism from interculturalists⁶ that it, among other things, perceives cultural groups as fixed and living apart from each other (Simpson 2007; Bosetti et al. 2011; Brahm Levey 2019, p. 209).

The trend of discrediting multiculturalism has played into the emerging political focus on assimilation-oriented policies. There is a talk of a 'return to assimilation' (Brubaker 2001). This return of assimilation policies is closely connected to growing fears of alienation and radicalization of, and violence among, a minority of Europe's Muslim populations (Boswell & Geddes 2011, pp. 202, 205–206, 223).

Issues like the 'home-grown' element of international terrorism, the changing nature of global migration, the large influx of immigrants putting pressure on EU member states, new social formations across countries, the continuing poor socio-economic standing of immigrant and minority groups, and intense debates about the role of immigrants and the role of Islam in Europe, have created extensive critique against European models of multicultural integration. Domestic debates about multiculturalism have often rapidly become politicized and internationalized (Vertovec 2018, p. 167; Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 97).

Driven by the belief that previous policies failed, European nation-states' national civic integration policies have created a Europe-wide framework for comprehending policy problems and solutions to them (Boswell & Geddes 2011, p. 207). Hence, in later years, emerging national civic integration policies have become widely used in Europe. According to Zapata-Barrero (2017, p. 2) the national civic policy paradigm is a renovated (and often more inclusive) popularized version of the assimilation paradigm. Civic integration policy

6 Interculturalism is a contacts-based approach. It is seen as an anti-racist tool but can also be used as a type of integration policy. It focusses on greater dialogue and contact, understanding and respect between different cultures and groups with different backgrounds by removing factors which hinder contact zones. Interculturalism aims to foster communication and relations among people with different backgrounds and focus on common bonds rather than differences (Zapata-Barrero 2017, pp. 2–3, 7–8, 17).

has developed towards focusing on coercive integration practices. In European countries it is now commonplace, with civic integration policies that are more about duties and obligations than actual rights (Joppke 2007, p. 9; Zapata-Barrero 2017). According to Joppke (2007, p. 9) “the obligatory and coercive thrust of civic integration is moving to the fore almost everywhere”.

Muslim immigration has generated a popular fear of the vulnerability and the potential degradation of the European civil sphere. Notably, since 9/11 a negative discourse, especially against Muslims and their physical places of expressing culture and religion, have played into the anti-multicultural sentiments. The negative discourse includes fear, hostility, discriminatory actions, violence, polluting sentiments, and aversion. In addition, extremist political parties have gained in popularity due to their anti-multicultural rhetoric. Multiculturalism has moreover been renounced by both intellectuals as well as political Left and political Right politicians, including conservatives and (quite surprisingly) also some liberals and socialists (Alexander 2013, pp. 542–546). European countries have therefore shifted away from embracing a multicultural model of integration of immigrants to assimilative integration practices. This change of policy has resulted in the enactment of restrictive laws, ‘invisible’ barriers, and tougher immigration and naturalization policies (Alexander 2013, p. 533, 542–546; Joppke 2007, pp. 7–8, 14; Vertovec 2018). Notably the introduction of citizenship tests or immigration tests, for instance in Britain and the Netherlands respectively, put in practice a changeover away from multicultural immigrant integration policies towards integration systems that focus on assimilation-like practices and civic integration policies, such as linguistic qualities and (‘Liberal’) socio-economic integration. Multicultural policies usually emphasized group-based rights and own-language teaching (Joppke 2007, pp. 7–8, 14; Boswell & Geddes 2011, p. 202, Vertovec 2018, pp. 174–175). The repressive dimension of civic integration is connected to liberalism/neoliberalism (Joppke 2007, p. 18). According to Joppke (2007, p. 14) “[c]ivic integration is an instance, next to eugenics and workfare policies, of ‘illiberal social policy’ in a liberal state”. According to Desmond King (1999) and Joppke (2007, p. 16) such illiberal policies, which as we have seen in the case of civic integration policies focusing more on obligations and duties than rights, are not necessarily born out of nationalism or racism, but are built-in into Liberalism itself. Civic integration policies for immigrants reveal instead the existence of Liberalism of power and disciplining (Joppke 2007, p. 16).

While this is happening, it seems that the EU is becoming more multicultural in terms of presence and the share number of people from other cultures and countries outside the EU. As a fact, in many EU member states, undeterred by anti-multicultural public rhetoric, public opinion polls nonetheless display high levels of respect for diversity (Vertovec 2018, p.176). Of course, the decades of strong presence of multiculturalism, the evolution of

super-diversity and transnationalism (Vertovec 2018, pp. 173–176) have, in most European Western countries, led to a state where multiculturalism has been notably mainstreamed, “such that pluralistic provisions and some acceptance of the need to be culturally sensitive (ridiculed as ‘political correctness’) have become widespread and commonplace” (Vertovec 2018, p. 169).

There have also been observations that, despite the EU-wide backlash against multiculturalism, local authorities and major cities in the EU have continued to adapt to immigration and minorities, and diversity practices have been built into current institutions (Alexander 2013, pp. 534–535; Crul & Schneider 2010, p. 1257; Gebhardt 2016), for example in Britain (Meer & Modood 2009, pp. 479, 485). Moreover, there is a ‘diversity buzz’ in the business world, and there are agreements among unions, branches in the public sector and big companies to increase hiring of minorities (Alexander 2013, pp. 534–535; Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010, p. 19).

2. Clarifying key concepts and analytical framework

When it comes to different forms of handling immigrants and their integration, the diversity of policy responses developed over time in Europe can be crystalized into three distinct models; 1) the assimilationist model, 2) the multicultural model, and 3) the guest worker model (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 103). The latter model is largely discredited nowadays as it is handling immigrants only as guest workers, and in its most refined state, is based on ethnic considerations in order to build monoculturalism. In Europe the model is not in use any longer, while it was associated for many years with Germany and Austria (Aggestam & Hill 2008, pp. 103–104). Because this model is not in use in the EU today, I will not use it my analytical framework.

I will define and explain the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system and the multicultural integration system, which will form the base of the analytical tool on which the content analysis of the Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals will be dependent. Definitions and concepts will be drawn from analytical research about distinctions between the assimilation-/national civic integration model and the multicultural integration model, and about policies of multiculturalism and national civic integration polices (e.g. Joppke 2007; Zapata-Berrero 2017; Vertovec 2018; Aggestam & Hill 2008).

The multicultural integration system celebrates diversity and sees it as a permanent rather than a short-lived phenomenon. It promotes civic unity only if at the same time it is possible that the quest for unity accommodates and recognizes the multicultural diversity of society, and it does so by granting rights (besides to individuals) collectively to important cultural and religious groups in the society (Aggestam & Hill 2008, pp. 103–

104). It promotes equality, power sharing, and inclusion while still recognizing differences among specific groups as it seeks to represent, maintain, and reflect the cultural identities of groups of immigrants and minorities by virtue of the intrinsic value of their cultures (Zapata-Berrero 2017, p. 2; Boswell & Geddes 2011, p. 207). For instance, it is in line with the multicultural approach to provide opportunities for representation in local and national government bodies for minority groups based on culture and ethnicity, or to restructure public institutions towards service production that incorporates pluralism and accommodate them to different groups' cultures and traditions, or to ensure the continuity of minorities and immigrants by recognizing and supporting their distinctive religions, traditions, cultural practices and languages (Vertovec 2018, p. 168; Joppke 2007, pp. 5–14; Zapata-Berrero 2017, pp. 3–7).

The assimilative-oriented/civic integration system is, on the other hand, representative of a universalist nationalism. It adheres to social cohesion (that is, order, not justice) and perceives that the nation, people and culture are an integral whole, and as such it expects solidarity and that immigrants and minority groups are to be incorporated into the dominant culture of society (Aggestam & Hill 2008, pp. 103–104). Thus, it is also about mainstreaming integration politics⁷, moving away from specific integration policies (Simon & Beaujeu 2018, p. 41). Following the same logic, it also highlights individual responsibility in immigrants' integration – “their adaptation to the host society is perceived as a one-sided effort” (van Breugel & Scholten 2018, p. 131). It is thus the responsibility of immigrants and minorities to demonstrate desire to belong to the nation-state and learn about its history, norms and institutions and adopt its cultural practices and values. It is in line with the assimilative-oriented/civic integration approach to focus on measures that support necessitated social inclusion⁸, conformity, national identity and dominant cultural values, and on obligations and duties (sometimes placing them as a condition for the grant of rights) – for example by locking down low-skilled immigrants⁹ more firmly into established state borders, or by applying harshened language requirements (normally through compulsory courses and tests) so that immigrants acquire a certain standard or level of competency in official language(s) in order to integrate in the society or get citizenship (Vertovec 2018, p. 174; Zapata-Berrero 2017, pp. 5–7; Joppke 2007, pp. 5–14, 17–18).

It is uncommon to find any of the two above systems fully refined in a nation-state.

7 ‘Mainstreaming integration politics’ in this context does not mean an enlargement of the interest in immigrants or minorities, but rather an attempt to get away from group-based actions which create resentment in the majority population (see Simon & Beaujeu 2018, p. 41).

8 In this context the main purpose of social inclusion is social cohesion. It includes obligation-imposing elements, and sometimes requires people to become included.

9 Locking down low-skilled immigrants connects to externalisation of integration politics and to the EU's overall external and security politics.

However, states can (and often do) show an ambiguity, or maybe sometimes a clear consciousness, about combining several elements of more than one model into their own state-led immigrant integration systems. So, the difference in integration and immigration policies between member states in the EU can be quite stark.

Vertovec (2018, pp. 170–175) holds that that state-led immigration and integration policies in Europe have entered into a post-multiculturalist period. Multiculturalism has been disregarded and heavily criticized across the political spectrum and across countries because of the rise of ‘transnationalism’ (i.e. migrants’ increasing cross-border technology-driven links to their homeland or to their kin in other parts of the world), as well as the rise of ‘super-diversity’ (meaning the growing size and complexity of migration and mobility, distinguished by a dynamic interplay of factors including migrants’ country of origin, type of migration channel, and their legal status). The post-multiculturalist period is characterized by a nation-state where acknowledgment of group distinctions is combined with the quest of building a national identity and a system where laws and government policies affect every group in the society the same (irrespective of ethnicity, cultural background etc.). In the words of Vertovec (2018, p. 175) “[p]ost-multiculturalist policies and discourse seek to have it both ways: a strong common identity and values coupled with the recognition of cultural differences (alongside differences based on gender, sexuality, age and disability)”. There is a search in several European countries for integration policies that combine the political Right (curbing new immigration as it is understood as disruptive to society, decreasing competing values and promoting national identity) and the political Left (fostering social capital, supporting diversity, and reducing socioeconomic inequality) (Vertovec 2018, p. 175).

The present case study will use content analysis¹⁰ in analysing the EU Commission’s Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals. Hence, it is possible to explore the use of key words and sentences that correspond to either the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system or the multicultural integration system in order to find out whether the former European Commission’s policies on immigration and integration rest heavily on the former or the latter mode of integration, or if it is an even game between the two. Through the content analysis of the Action Plan I will also find out whether there is support to Steven Vertovec’s (2018) argument that the EU is in a distinct post-multiculturalism period and if this is true in the Commission’s recent policies on integration of immigrants.

10 During the coding I have placed the relevant codes under a set of created sub-categories which I judged to represent these codes of interest. The sub-categories are thus meant to group the codes representing different types of meaning associated with the two specific integration systems. I have also extracted codes which relate more clearly to a couple of other concepts or themes, i.e. not specifically connected either of the two integration systems. Those categories include a) intercultural dialogue, b) economic instrumentalism, and c) problem formulation and background. The reader can get the coding and categorization scheme from the researcher.

I will explore the document's text openly and find explanations in the central codes and categories, which are to be investigated in the document based on the research questions and my conceptual and theoretical framework. Before the result and analysis section, I will however make a short summary of the Action Plan.

The European Commission adopted the Action Plan in June 2016. The Action Plan provides an all-covering policy document to support Member States' efforts in developing and strengthening their integration policies. Furthermore, it describes the concrete actions the Commission will implement. While it targets all TCNs in the EU, it also contains actions to address the specific challenges faced by refugees.

Summarized, the Action Plan provides measures in the following policy areas:

- Pre-departure and pre-arrival measures, including actions to prepare migrants and the local communities for the integration process
- Education, including actions to promote language training, participation of migrant children to early childhood education and care, teacher training and civic education
- Employment and vocational training, including actions to promote early integration into the labour market and migrants' entrepreneurship
- Access to basic services such as housing and healthcare
- Active participation and social inclusion, including actions to support exchanges with the receiving society, migrants' participation to cultural life, and fighting discrimination

The Action Plan also provides tools to strengthen coordination between the different actors working on integration at local, regional and national levels.

3. Summarization and analysis of the findings

Below, a condensed presentation of the result of the content analysis of the Action Plan is provided. It maps out the created sub-categories (based on the codes found) relating to either the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system or the multicultural integration system.

A) The multicultural integration system	B) The assimilative-oriented/civic integration system
<p>A1) Rights and freedoms for TCNs, as well as promoting anti-discrimination, equality and power sharing.</p> <p>A2) Measures targeting the receiving society/majority culture trying to counteract anti-inclusive tendencies.</p> <p>A3) Celebrating and recognizing cultural diversity in the society.</p> <p>A4) Unconstrained support to participate in the society and promoting equality, power sharing and, inclusion, while still recognizing diversity in the society.</p> <p>A5) Recognition of TCN competencies and skills as equal to citizens' competencies and skills.</p> <p>A6) Promoting civic unity only if at the same time it is possible that the quest for unity accommodates and recognizes the multicultural diversity of society.</p> <p>A7) Group-based support and measures and positive discrimination.</p>	<p>B1) Cohesion of society of fundamental importance.</p> <p>B2) Responsibilities and duties; fostering national identity, creating a sense of belonging to the nation-state and loyal subjects; understanding and mastering language, culture, traditions and values.</p> <p>B3) Mainstreaming integration policies.</p> <p>B4) Externalisation of immigration and integration policies.</p> <p>B5) Education, childhood education and care, training, assessment and sport as social inclusion.</p> <p>B6) Health issues and isolation obstacles to social inclusion.</p>

According to the result the above types (constructed categories) of policies and actions, that correspond to either the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system or the multicultural integration system, can be found in the Commission's Action Plan on the integration of third-country nationals.

The Action Plan, moreover, acknowledges the 'super-diversity' (see p. 9) of the immigration of the TCNs as it highlights the increasing share of non-EU nationals residing in the EU and that "European societies are, and will continue to become, increasingly diverse" (European Commission 2016, p. 2), as well as highlighting factors in relation to integration such as that "individual integration needs vary widely depending on the person's reason for coming to the EU, the expected length of stay as well as their skills, level of education and working experiences" (European Commission 2016, p. 4). It also, to some degree, acknowledges, the 'transnationalism' of the non-EU immigrants as it includes diasporas and migrant communities in non-governmental stakeholders that should be involved in forming immigrant integration policies (European Commission 2016, p. 14).

The content analysis of the Action Plan shows evenly matched representations of both multicultural and assimilative-oriented/civic integration policies and actions. Additionally, representations of the intercultural policy paradigm and a heavy focus on economic instrumentalism and employment in integration policies were found. These findings support the argument that the Action Plan is an example of how the EU has entered into a post-multiculturalism period in line with Vertovec's (2018) and others' (e.g. Joppke 2007) understanding of the development of TCN integration policies in the EU. The conclusion is that the EU promotes immigration and integration policies that adhere to the post-multiculturalist notion. The policies are characterized by a complex blend of different political positions from both the Right and the Left on the political spectrum, as well as of both multicultural and assimilative-oriented/civic integration policies, where the former protects diversity while the latter defends unity. Different paradigms seem to exist side by side and contradict each other, which can lead to confusion, but in line with what Simon & Beaujeu (2018) have concluded with regard to the philosophies of integration and policy designs in France, the UK and the Netherlands: "[w]hat could be seen as a plurality of paradigms is actually a struggle between forces that try to impose their own agenda to multicultural societies" (Simon & Beaujeu 2018, p. 40).

Joppke (2007) illustrates this policy convergence and post-multiculturalist development in the EU by noting that the European Council agreement on common basic principles of immigrant integration policy from 2004 has a reduced emphasis on cultural recognition, as earlier programmatic statements by EU member states "were much louder in affirming the integrity of [im]migrant cultures and ways of life", and this "points to an important reorientation of European states' immigrant integration policies" (Joppke 2007, p. 4).

The document instead formulates an inclusiveness that represents a distinct ‘two-way’ integration approach meaning that “integration is a dynamic, two-way process of mutual accommodation by all immigrants and residents of the Member States” (Council of the European Union 2004, p. 19). Interestingly, the document lacks commitment and obligation from EU member states to advance and protect immigrant (or minority) languages and cultures, hence the member state does not become active in their maintenance or protection. At the same time there is a heavy focus on equality and non-discrimination, which corresponds to the proliferation of anti-discrimination laws and policies in the EU that reflects Europe’s structural transformation into a multi-ethnic society (Joppke 2007, pp. 4–5).

It can be noted that at the EU level – in contrast to the national level – there is a certain twist to the whole spectrum of immigration and integration policies as the EU is obliged to embrace the fundamental principles and the rights framework that underpins the whole construction of the union. As a result, “the spatial relocation to the EU level does create a distinct setting with its own forms of legal, social and political power; but, equally, the EU setting cannot be detached from national developments” (Boswell & Geddes 2011, pp. 207–208).

Results from the content analysis also show a connection to two categories other than the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system or the multicultural integration system. These other categories are the economic instrumentalism category, and the intercultural policy paradigm category. Considering these categories helped answer the question of whether the Action Plan supports the hypothesis that the EU has entered into a post-multiculturalism period.

Economics in immigration is important, not the least at the EU level. Castles Hein De Haas & Miller (2014) show that economic immigration is vital for advanced economies, as immigration often has positive impacts on low birth-rates and on the economic growth as it, for instance, solves worker shortages. As expected, the Action Plan contained a significant portion of economic instrumentalism. Considering that economic immigration is of fundamental importance to advanced economies it comes as no surprise that this aspect is integrated into integration strategies and policies. In the Action Plan there is a focus, for example, on early (fast track) integration into and participation in the labour market for newly arrived TCNs (especially vulnerable groups such as women and youths), on building socio-economically thriving societies, and on the well-being and prosperity of European societies connected to immigration and their integration. In the Action Plan it is communicated that the failure to release the potential of TCNs would represent a massive waste of resources. The centrality of employment in Europe’s contemporary immigrant integration policies can also clearly be observed in earlier Commission documents, such as

the Commission's first Annual Report on Migration and Integration (European Commission 2004), the EU's earlier European Agenda for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals 2011–2015 (European Commission 2011), as well as in the European Council agreement on 'common basic principles' of immigrant integration policy from 2004 (Council of the European Union 2004).

Socioeconomic integration is a focal point of EU member states' immigrant integration policies. The economic instrumentalism and the need to get everyone in the society into the labour market as quickly as possible has to do with the contemporary trend of European states focusing on the flexible individual and her 'autonomy' and 'self-sufficiency' (providing incomes for the state), as well as with the EU's global competition goals. Non-state dependent individuals increase the competitiveness of member states and of the EU as a whole (Faist 2017, p. 29; Joppke 2007, pp. 4, 16–17). So, in order to "allow a full utilisation of society's resources in the global competition" the EU ties everything from anti-discrimination regulations and policies to immigrant integration and social inclusion policies with labour market integration (Joppke 2007, p. 16–17). Moreover, the economic efficiency of immigration into the EU and how this is tied to the global competition goals is of great significance in the Commission's Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (Attinà 2016, p. 21–22). According to Joppke (2017, p. 17) this economic instrumentalism and the focus on employment in social inclusion policies cannot be connected to traditional assimilationist and cultural homogenisation, however "there is still a 'perfectionist' dimension to it, and one with paternalist, obligation-imposing possibilities, in the sense that being in 'work' is not just a means for an income, but is seen as of intrinsic importance to an individual's well-being, and thus to be pursued, or imposed, for its own sake". Joppke (2017, p. 17) concludes that the "main purpose of social inclusion is social cohesion, that is, order, not justice". In line with this reasoning one could connect economic instrumentalism and the focus on employment in integration policies with the civic integration system. However, in the document analysis I opted to separate economic and employment aspects from the assimilative-oriented/civic integration system category, as it is unclear in the literature on the civic integration paradigm whether there is an obvious connection.

Another quite recurrent theme (if not as prominent as the other three themes) in the Action Plan is the promotion of intercultural dialogue between TCNs and the host society. It includes actions such as promotion of TCNs' participation in early childhood education and care in order to learn to "live together in heterogeneous societies" (pp. 7–8), "involvement of TCNs themselves in the design and implementation of integration policies" (p. 12), "sustaining real people-to-people contacts through social, cultural and sports activities and even political engagement" (p. 12), as well as creating links and exchanges between TCNs and host societies "through volunteering, sport and culture activities from the very

beginning” (p. 13) in order to facilitate the cohesion of the society and dialogue and mutual understanding (European Commission 2016).

This theme corresponds to the intercultural policy paradigm (interculturalism) put forward by Ricard Zapata-Barrero (2017, 2013, 2015) and others (see Wood 2009, Bouchard 2011), often cited as a response to a post-multiculturalist Europe and a response to the complexities raised by superdiversity (van Breugel & Scholten 2018). Importantly, interculturalism is seen as a middle ground between the multiculturalism paradigm and the national civic policy paradigm, as it holds “diversity as an advantage and a resource while its main normative policy drivers are community cohesion and a diversity-based common public culture” (Zapata-Barrero 2017, p. 3).

4. Discussion – arguing for a return of multiculturalism in the EU

Policy reactions to multiculturalism and handling minorities vary greatly between EU member states, as they are associated to specific national concepts of citizenship and experiences of state-building (Aggestam & Hill 2008, p. 103).

There is a significant amount of scientific research on the development of civic integration policies and their illiberal and/or assimilationist character in relation to immigrants (Gebhardt 2016, p. 743). It has been argued by many that sociocultural factors, that are understood as paramount to the civic integration policies, play an ever-increasing role in understanding the perceived problems (and the solutions to them) of integration of immigrants. Ruud Koopmans (2016, p. 213), for instance, argues that the sociocultural factors of language proficiency, social capital and gender values explain labour market gaps between natives and immigrants.

It could, however, be argued that such a focus on social cultural factors with regard to integration is only reinforcing the stigma of immigrants as something alien to the society that needs to be forced into employment and educated in the ways of our culture. When immigrants and minorities try to become part of the host country’s civil society it is well understood that immigrants’ incorporation through assimilation-oriented (including civic integration) policies is only making the ‘outsiders’ more unfamiliar, and reinforces prejudices of immigrant groups in the society, since assimilation is only allowing persons, but not their qualities, to be incorporated (Alexander 2013, pp. 534, 547). When stigmatized immigrants try to jump from the economic into the civil sphere, the empirical instabilities of assimilative incorporation have been quite clearly displayed in earlier research (Alexander 2013, p. 547). There are thus question marks that speak against the logic behind the fruitfulness of assimilation policies.

Taking into account factors such as the reality of societies' multiculturalism, the plight and shrinking numbers of many minority cultures and languages in Europe (and the world), as well as the sheer number of immigrants in most of our urban societies, I argue that the EU should strive for reversing the assimilation-oriented policies in Europe. The EU should promote and reinvest in heterogeneity, the dispersion of cultures, and in minority culture language, practices and traditions. This is because not only TCNs gain from such policies, but also national historical minorities who find it difficult to safeguard the survival of their cultures and traditions, such as the hundreds of national ethnic and linguistic minority groups that exist in Europe.

I argue that there is a gap – both in much of the literature on integration policies and in the Commission's recent policies on the integration of TCNs – in altruism and in taking into consideration more seriously the human rights of TCNs, and Europe's common responsibility to respond to the global inequalities that the EU is actively fuelling and to embrace more fully the increasingly multicultural (i.e. the multiculturalism of) European societies. As the EU and its member states, for instance, are facilitating fishing contracts (that intensify poverty and immigration to the EU) and are allying with warring sides in deadly conflicts in northern African and Middle Eastern countries, both EU member states and the union itself have the responsibility to acknowledge their part in the current global order and the historical and economical injustices. The EU has instead, on the contrary, concentrated on externalization of immigration and integration policies, in particular with regard to asylum seekers, by: 1) shifting moral responsibility by putting blame on immigrants for their own misfortunes, 2) external projection of EU rules and immigration control policies to the southern neighbourhood and the eastern neighbourhood, and 3) by shifting economic responsibility to take care of refugees and immigrants and their reintegration towards transit countries and countries of readmission/return (Faist 2018, pp. 10–22).

One way to find the right scope of policy actions would be a modern form of multiculturalism. Here the Bristol school of multiculturalism (BSM) could be of interest to forthcoming EU integration policies (Brahm Levey 2019). BSM takes the legitimacy of multiculturalism from the situation of the multiculturalism of societies where people from different backgrounds “seek recognition and inclusion in their societies as they are and for what they are” (Brahm Levey 2019, p. 205). The BSM holds that multiculturalism (besides fighting discrimination and xenophobia etc.) must take “minorities' ‘positive difference’ seriously by fashioning more inclusive policies and services, restructuring institutions and broadening the national story” (Brahm Levey 2019, p. 206). A set of essential principles guide the BSM: 1) equality (reject interpretations of equal treatment that ignore differences in people's background circumstances), 2) along with ethnic and cultural groups and identities multiculturalism should also include religious groups and

identity, 3) intercommunal dialogue, and 4) the importance of a sense of belonging in one's society (the notion of 'civic multicultural national identity' where national identity is perceived as being a collective work in progress) (Brahm Levey 2019, pp. 207–215). In short, the BSM can be explained as a “distinctive in multicultural political thought” that is “[f]undamentally critical of liberal doctrine and highly assertive of cultural minorities' identities and right to belong”, while it “is also accepting of liberal operative public values and supportive of a remade national identity” (Brahm Levey 2019, pp. 219–220).

5. Concluding remarks

While bearing in mind present-day differences in socio-economic conditions and politics of belonging, it is interesting to take note of history. Societies characterized by multiculturalism do prosper if managed inclusively. Examples include the city of Cordoba in southern Spain during the Muslim reign, Constantinople during the Byzantine period, or Baku in ancient times, just to mention a few. Multicultural societies, states, and empires have existed for millennia. However, how societies have adapted to multicultural realities has shifted across time and space. In the past and present we can see examples of societies celebrating diversity and emphasizing multiple identities in forming their social culture, and we should recognize the advantages of societies that are integrated while still holding on to their different ethnic and cultural identities.

As a conclusion, in the past and present we know that multicultural societies have benefited from a celebration of multiculturalism, and have benefited from a multicultural-sensitive set-up of their societies and their governance structures. We can here use the words of Jeffrey Alexander (2013, p. 547): “[o]nly by making itself multicultural can Europe preserve its democratic values in the globalizing world that it confronts today”. In relation to recent political development in the EU, a question arises here about the decision to assign the newly appointed EU vice president of the European Commission with the task/title of 'promoting the European way of life'. Such a title seems to go in the opposite direction of the EU motto, 'United in Diversity', and the multicultural Europe. It is clear that further research is needed on this issue.

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