

Does Integration make sense anymore? Why knock at a door that has already been shut?

By *Fiona Tepshi*¹

This blog explores the immigrant struggle in the current age of rising nationalism in the Western world. Moreover, central in this blog is whether integration, for people to properly become a part of the community they immigrated to, is something immigrants should actually strive for. The reason being that there have been debates circling around involving nativist rhetoric, in relation to also limiting the right to asylum for example. This blog provides insights into the legal domain and the use of this nativist rhetoric and considers questions such as: “Does striving for naturalisation make sense anymore?” The blog will answer that the striving for naturalisation still makes sense.

Keywords:

Immigration, Nativism, Passport, Migration Law, Right wing-parties, Racism, Western countries, Elections, European Union, EU, International Law, Struggle

The phenomena of the rise of the right in Europe

*Fratelli d'Italia, Rassemblement National, Sweden Democrats, PVV and die Alternative für Deutschland (AfD).*²

All of the above-mentioned political parties share a pattern, namely being right wing in Europe and having gained popularity in recent years.³

If one follows politics, it will not come as a surprise to read that there has been a new wave in the politics concerning Europe, a rising right wing wave, particularly in Western Europe.⁴

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² ‘No Tidal Wave but Creeping Influence: The Far Right in the European Parliamentary Elections | German Marshall Fund of the United States’ (www.gmfus.org) <<https://www.gmfus.org/news/no-tidal-wave-creeping-influence-far-right-european-parliamentary-elections>>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ ‘The Year of Elections: The Rise of Europe’s Far Right’ (Ibanet.org2024) <<https://www.ibanet.org/The-year-of-elections-The-rise-of-Europes-far-right?>> accessed 16 February 2025.

As with all right-wing parties, they also share the similarity of using nativism and populism⁵ as a form of rhetoric to promote their own political party.⁶

This leads me to properly explain first what these terms exactly mean.

Nativism and populism

In *Mudde, C. & Rovira, C. (2017).*

Populism: A Very Short Introduction it is stated that populism and nativism are often intertwined.^[6] The former depicts society as ‘pure people’ versus the corrupt elite’, connecting with the latter, which strives to protect the native’ people from threats posed by outsiders.⁷

Personal experiences and observations

Having grown up as someone with an immigration background myself in

Germany, I have noticed this nativist rhetoric being used by right-wingers my whole life.⁸ Especially in recent years, I have witnessed how some politicians increasingly attempt to depict immigrants, like myself, as ‘non-native’ and not fitting with the German ‘Leitkultur’.⁹

Leitkultur, literally ‘leading culture’, describes the dominant culture in Germany.¹⁰ Moreover, it is used to justify the argument that immigrants have to adapt to this culture, emphasising ‘leading culture’ instead of ‘multiculturalism’.¹¹

At the same time, I have realised that even immigrants fully integrated within the ‘Leitkultur’ are treated as outsiders and are not fully accepted in the German society.¹² This raises the question if integration,

⁵ European Center for Populism Studies, ‘Right-Wing Populism - ECPS’ (*European Center for Populism Studies*)
<<https://www.populismstudies.org/Vocabulary/right-wing-populism/>>.

⁶ Dragana Svraka, ‘🧠 How Populism and Nativism Matter for Minorities’ (*The Loop* 29 December 2023)
<<https://theloop.ecpr.eu/how-populism-and-nativism-matter-for-minorities/>>.

⁷ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism : A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2017).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Irie Sentner, ‘Trump Says Migrants Caused a “Surge in Crime” in a Small

Wisconsin City. Its Residents Reject That. - POLITICO’ (*POLITICO* November 2024)
<<https://www.politico.com/news/2024/11/02/trump-candidacy-false-migrant-invasion-00186875>>.

¹⁰ Christiane Toyka-Seid, ‘Leitkultur’ (*bpb.de* 30 March 2023)
<<https://www.bpb.de/kurz-knapp/lexika/das-junge-politik-lexikon/320732/leitkultur/>> accessed 16 February 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² ‘Debates on German Leitkultur and Multiculturalism’ (*Istanbul Bilgi University PRIME Youth Website*)

subject to the German standards, makes sense even more.

In particular, due to the fact that even naturalised immigrants, thus having the passport of their country of origin, can be considered ‘unfitting’ in society.¹³ Even though the principle of *jus soli*, a legal principle that grants the right to citizenship based on the birth of the country’s territory, applies also in Germany.¹⁴ This means that even though there is the legal right of being considered ‘German’, since birth established, one can still be considered unfitting within the German society. This leads me to provide more insights into how the political rhetoric in Germany, in particular that of the right wing party, the Alternative für

Deutschland (AfD),¹⁵ inserts itself into legal reforms (discussions).

Case Study-Germany

For instance, in regard to the debate over dual citizenship, or naturalisation, it is often stated how having these concepts integrated into our constitution goes against the perseverance of the ‘purity’ of the nation of Germany.¹⁶

In addition to such, there have been discussions regarding a ‘Remigration’ plan in 2023, raised by AfD members and other far right persons.¹⁷ This plan involved the mass deportation of everyone not

<<https://bpy.bilgi.edu.tr/en/blog/debates-german-leitkultur-and-multiculturalism/>>.

¹³ ‘German Far-Right Party Leaders Planned Mass Deportation Laws with Neo-Nazis’ *Le Monde.fr* (11 January 2024) <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/01/11/leaders-of-germany-s-far-right-afd-party-are-considering-mass-expulsion-of-germans-of-foreign-origin_6422332_4.html>.

¹⁴ Auswärtiges Amt, ‘Law on Nationality’ (*German Federal Foreign Office* 2024) <<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/visa-service/konsularisches/229970-229970>>.

¹⁵ Natasha Mellersh, ‘German Opposition Calls for Reversal of Citizenship Reform’ (*InfoMigrants* 7 January 2025)

<<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/62097/german-opposition-calls-for-reversal-of-citizenship-reform>> accessed 15 February 2025.

¹⁶ GEIR MOULSON, ‘A Far-Right Party Is Heading for Its Strongest Result yet in Germany’s Election’ (*AP News* 13 February 2025)

<<https://apnews.com/article/germany-far-right-afd-election-migration-weidel-53ed34f57556ad394c53868726d47194>>.

¹⁷ ‘Germany: Far-Right “Remigration” Meeting Provokes Anger in the Streets, Interior Minister Attributes Decrease in Irregular Border Crossings to Stronger Controls despite Concerns over Schengen Rules, Adoption of the “Repatriation Improvement Act” Raises Fears and Concerns among NGOs | European

considered ‘assimilated’ and refers to asylum seekers, foreign residents, and naturalised Germans.¹⁸ This would be illegal under the German ‘Aufenthaltsgesetz’ as only non-citizens that have illegally entered or are residing in the country,¹⁹ people that have committed a serious criminal offence²⁰ or pose in general threat to the safety of the public,²¹ are allowed to get deported.

Once the details of this meeting became public, measures were taken by ‘The Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz’ (The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution), to put a classification on the AfD, as a ‘suspected extremist group’. This consequently led to more surveillance of the AfD.

Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE)’ <<https://ecre.org/germany-far-right-remigration-meeting-provokes-anger-in-the-streets-chancellor-attributes-decrease-in-irregular-border-crossings-to-stronger-controls-despite-concerns-over-schengen/>>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ the, ‘Illegal Entry and Immigrant Smuggling’ (Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community²⁵ September 2017) <<https://www.bmi.bund.de/EN/topics/migration/illegal-entry/illegal-entry-node.html>>.

Should we give up trying to integrate?

To consider and answer the initial question for this blog, it is essential to note that this remains a subjective assessment. There are many opinions regarding such a complex issue.

Nevertheless, I am taking the liberty to say, also being influenced by my own experiences, that under no circumstances we should give up the concept of integration. Especially because of the increased hatred towards us with migration background!

While it is true, as I discussed before, that there are also legal reforms that can impact us, it is still always better to have more power through the concept of integration. As a lot of legal reforms are still only up to discussion and the AfD has not won any

²⁰ ‘54 Residence Act: Ultimate Facts on the Interest in Deportation!’ (*migrando.de*³¹ May 2024)

<<https://migrando.de/en/blog/law/54-aufenthg-ausweisungsinteresse-und-betroffenenrechte/>> accessed 16 February 2025.

²¹ ‘Tightening of Deportation Law | Federal Government’ (*Website of the Federal Government* | *Bundesregierung*²⁶ June 2024)

<<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/tightening-deportation-law-2294668>> accessed 16 February 2025.

elections yet. That is why it is more important than ever to use the power one has, if one is a naturalised German, to vote in the next elections with the idea to really make a difference. Especially, to also vote for those that cannot. Moreover, many people are making their voices heard through protests in Berlin against the right-wing party, for instance.²²

Of course, having a migration background myself, I know that it is always important to be wary of things, even of such things like dual citizenship, as one never knows

who will lead Germany in the future and if the reforms might affect us negatively instead of being something positive.

We also must not forget that there will always be people that will not accept migrants. Even if the AfD never comes into power, there will always be people that will not see us on an equal level and will shut the door in our face. That is why it is crucial to be aware of the power we ourselves hold, and to also break doors down that want to shut us out to make us feel hurt.

²² tagesschau.de, 'Etwa 30.000 Teilnehmer Bei Kundgebung Gegen Hass Und Hetze in Berlin' (*tagesschau.de* 16 February 2025)

<<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/berlin/demonstration-berlin-104.html>> accessed 16 February 2025.

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