

Is It Racist To Want Stricter Border Controls?

After last week's post about the potential end of Europe as we know it, today I want to share with you a piece from the New York Times about the [reaction of people in Denmark](#) to the rise in Muslim migration there over the last two or so years.

The article interviews a number of Danes (both native born and immigrants) and suggests that there is a growing backlash against the number of asylum seekers who have moved there since 2014: 16,000 Syrian refugees in 2014 and 2015; and overall 36,000 mostly Muslim asylum seekers from all countries in the same time period. This may not seem like a large number for a country of 5.7 million people (less than one per cent of the population) and pales in comparison to the numbers seen in neighbouring Germany (well over one million in a population of 80 million) and Sweden (163,000 in a population of 9.5 million).

However, the history of Denmark is one of overwhelmingly homogeneity; the country had no experience of large scale immigration until 1967 when "guest workers" were invited from Turkey, Pakistan and Yugoslavia. Since then, the percentage of native-born Danes has declined. In 1980 97 per cent of the population was born in Denmark, today it sits at 88 per cent. This has led to complaints about the number and culture of recent migrants:

"Critics complain that these newcomers have been slow to learn Danish – though the Immigration Ministry recently reported that 72 percent passed a required language exam. Some Danes bristle at what they see as ethnic enclaves: About 30 percent of new immigrants lived in the nation's two largest cities, Aarhus and Copenhagen, where Muslim women in abayas and men in prayer caps stand out among the

blond and blue-eyed crowds on narrow streets.

Perhaps the leading – and most substantive – concern is that the migrants are an economic drain. In 2014, 48 percent of immigrants from non-Western countries ages 16 to 64 were employed, compared with 74 percent of native Danes.”

In response to criticisms the centre-right government has introduced various measures including tightening immigration requirements, making the citizenship test more difficult, slashing the integration benefits package, and empowering authorities to confiscate valuables from migrants to contribute to the cost of resettling them. The Immigration Ministry talks of weeding out those with “weaker capabilities for being able to integrate into Danish society” and is seeking to avoid “parrallel societies” of immigrants. Last year, Denmark placed ads in Arabic-language newspapers stressing its hardline approach in an effort to dissuade potential immigrants (and in marked contrast to Angela Merkel’s policy).

The Danish government is right to be concerned about the voters’ worries since they are in danger of being outflanked on the right on this issue: the Danish People’s Party (which is critical of current immigration policy) is now the second largest party in the Danish Parliament.

According to the New York Times, there is an underlying layer of racism being seen in Denmark. The article cites “analsyts” who point out that there was little opposition to the 5,000 Poles and 3,300 Americans who emigrated to Denmark in 2014; ire is reserved for the overwhelmingly Muslim, Middle Eastern migrants.

“Freedom of speech is now interpreted as freedom to say anything hateful,” said Julie Jeeg, a law student who volunteers with an antiracism group. ‘Denmark is closing

in on itself. People are retreating inward.'"

However, to suggest that smaller numbers of Poles and Americans should be treated by the public as a big an integration problem as larger numbers of Middle Eastern refugees and asylum seekers is somewhat myopic. As the Danish culture minister, Bertel Haarder notes:

"Muslims do not assimilate as easily as Europeans or some Asians, said ... Haarder, partly because, as he put it, their patriarchal culture frowns on women working outside the home and often constrains freedom of speech.

'It's not racism to be aware of the difference – it's stupid not to be aware,' Mr. Haarder said. 'We do them a blessing by being very clear and outspoken as to what kind of country they have come to, what are our basic values.'"

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Europe the dream of a unified, borderless Europe cherished by so many is slipping away with the rising of the sun: Macedonia, Hungary and Slovenia have built border fences to help stem immigration. Denmark imposed identity controls on its border with Germany in January. Even liberal posterchild Sweden now requires Danes to show identity papers when entering, something last seen in 1958.

Is it racist to want stricter border controls? Is it beholden on a first world country to let anyone who wants to migrate there do so? Is there a danger in labeling all questions about immigration policy as "racist"?

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