

■ *How is it possible to support democracy and governance in a society that is becoming more and more disjointed?*

The source of the problem called disunity is not immigration (though it certainly contributes to it). The problem that my Anglo-Saxon colleagues refer to as the dissolution of social bonds and cohesion is something that accompanies all *industrial societies*. Let's keep in mind that when Ferdinand Tönnies recorded the shift from 'Gemeinschaft' to 'Gesellschaft'. It was in the last thirty-three or so years of the nineteenth century.

When talking about a compromise between certain groups that adhere to incompatible values, I would like to make three comments.

First of all, I am not quite sure that we should be speaking about groups here, i.e. about some entities that are united by a culture and a religion. When we do that, we accept *statistical units* as the *units of social action*. For instance, if a person comes from a Muslim country, he tends to fall under the 'Muslim' category. But we do not ask ourselves how his/her belonging to a certain group influences his behaviour or the behaviour of his children. It is quite often the case that there is no influence at all. Two-thirds of Morocco natives residing in France and approximately the same ratio of Turkish natives living in Germany are actually ATHEISTS.

At the same time, they do not mind being lumped into the 'Muslims' category. Islam for them continues to be a cultural identification marker. **Thus, we are not facing a group in the sociological sense. It is rather a statistical category, or most probably more of a category for self-identification**, rather than being a category indicating the presence of a coherent group that exhibits the same cultural loyalty and ideological orientation.

Secondly, if we are talking about values, why have we decided to talk about any incompatibility in this particular case? Why have we come to the conclusion that differences in ethnic identity must also be connected with differences in culture and values? **In my opinion, we should stop mistaking the effect of the mass media for a genuine reflection of reality.** We should realise that modern capitalism successfully erases any differences. The only culture that is, in essence, allowed by capitalism is the culture of consumerism. Our television sets did their best to represent the turmoil in the suburbs of Paris, which happened in the autumn of 2005, as a result of the cultural incompatibility between teenagers of Magrib descent and 'native French teenagers'. However, this is a deceptive picture of the situation, as they all share the same values - the values of a consumer society and the hooligans from the suburbs did not actually demonstrate their cultural differences. On the contrary, they demonstrated their desire to be just like everybody else and especially their anger at having been denied such an opportunity.

And, finally, the third thing. In my opinion, a stubborn fixation on the cultural dimension of the immigration problem is an attempt (sometimes involuntarily and sometimes very much on purpose) to avoid resolving the actual social and structural problems related to immigration, but not engendered by it. An analysis should be primarily focused on such issues as the separation of labour (including the ethnic dimension therein), discrimination, social exclusion, marginalisation, etc. ■

Vladimir Malakhov was speaking with Alexander Pavlov

EUROPE IS AT ODDS WITH PLURALISM



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The European and the international Anglo-Saxon democratic tradition have historically had great difficulties in dealing with the questions of multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity. For example, ancient democratic Athens harboured a large number of resident 'foreigners', such as women and slaves without civic rights. A unique policy of cultural totalitarianism existed in Europe before the adoption of democracy. The Treaty of Westphalia, which in 1648 ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe, stipulated, as an inter-state compromise, that the ruler should decide the religion of his people. Thus, it is hardly surprising that Western Europe has more problems with multiculturalism and multi-ethnicity than other parts of the world.

Successful multicultural democracies do, in fact, exist in the world. India is the most impressive example of all, with dozens of major different languages, several scripts for writing, two major and many smaller religions, an ancient ethnocultural and North-South divide, not to speak of innumerable

sub-castes and local customs. There have been tension, conflicts, and violence, but an independent India, which had never before been united, has not produced any powerful secessionist movement, nor have there been any suspended or rigged elections. Moreover, there have only been peaceful transfers of governmental power for more than sixty years now.

Thus, democracy has no intrinsic problem with multi-ethnicity. Most citizens, and almost all scholarly observers of Australia, Canada and the USA, for instance, will argue that they have more active, participatory democracies now than was the case 40-50 years ago under the 'Whites Only' rule.

But xenophobia and xenophobic politicians are indeed a problem. The concrete grievances of people who feel that they are losers in a mobile world have to be taken seriously, and met with adequate social and economic policies. At the same time, the demagogues and the mobs have to be confronted and combated relentlessly. ■