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Europe is caught in a Wheel of Xenophobia

The assimilation policy of integration, actively practiced across Europe, is one of the main prerequisites of xenophobia.

The latest measurements in Europe show that after a sharp spike in xenophobia and radicalism in 2015 caused by the migration crisis, the situation has improved slightly, but in some respects it has become [even worse](#). In 2017, for example, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia recorded the highest level of [Roma-phobia](#) in the last four years, and in Italy and France the same is true for anti-Semitism. A peak of anti-Islamic attitudes over the same period was recorded in Britain, Germany and France.

The situation surrounding hate crimes has further [deteriorated](#). In 2017, an increase in violence was recorded in Britain, France, Greece, Italy, Poland and many other countries. The Netherlands, Germany and Russia are an exception, but this summer Germany experienced right-wing riots in Chemnitz, and in September there were inter-ethnic clashes in the Russian region of Kabardino-Balkaria, which indicates that the situation is still very far from stable.

The level of hatred is still extremely high, and the trends are not encouraging. There are reasons to doubt that this is exclusively the result of the activities of the parties and movements we call extremist or radical. These trends are part of a more complex system that reproduces xenophobia and radical attitudes on a large scale. A variety of political forces are involved in this system — not only extremist ones. In a certain sense, the state plays a significant role here.

In fact, the state establishes the rules of the game, including the rules for the integration of minorities. At the same time, it makes mistakes, leading to radicalization. This happens insofar as it offers mainly [assimilation models](#) that are rejected on average by 25-28% of those for whom these models are intended. Within assimilation, one part of a society (or an entire ethnos) loses its distinctive features, which are replaced by features borrowed from another part of society (another ethnos).

The discriminatory conditions for registration of Muslim religious communities in [Slovakia](#) and [Austria](#), discrimination against Muslims in terms of language in the religious worship in [Italy](#), the temporary withdrawal of children from immigrant families to imbue them with Christian values in [Denmark](#), or the ban on teaching in schools of national minorities in the languages of national minorities in [Ukraine](#) and [Latvia](#), and even the ban on religious headgear are the elements of assimilation with expressed traits of violence. People rejecting assimilation are locked in the self-created ghetto, where they become victims of radicals of all colors.

This is the main problem: In 2017, 22% of Muslims in France and Germany, and 32% and 38% in Britain and Austria respectively, did not have or did not seek any contact with non-Muslims and with the nationals of [host countries](#).

Winners of the Game

Naturally, the state does not exist in a vacuum. It is influenced by various political forces seeking the dividends from the current situation. The conservative parties and those right of center are the main players here, and the parties in power are the main beneficiaries of this game. The migration crisis caught many of them unawares. Right-wing radical views became more and more popular among their voters, but these parties did not want to give the voices to the extreme right. Instead, they began to play on the right-wing field.

They lost only once, when they decided to play the Brexit card. In other cases, the elite always won. In France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Poland and Ukraine the ruling parties managed to outplay the right-wing radicals in their own field, effectively playing the anti-migration and nationalist cards, and taking tough security measures, on the verge of violating fundamental human rights. For example, in the Netherlands, strict [anti-terrorism legislation](#) was adopted, authorizing expatriation out of court. Foreigners who participated in armed hostilities, financed terrorism or were members of extremist groups were declared as undesirable. For a long time this postulation could not be disputed in court; an opportunity to do so appeared only in 2017.

In Hungary and Poland, the government actively used the migration crisis to stir up [fear toward migrants and Muslims](#) among ordinary voters, seizing the initiative from the radicals. As a result, in 2016, the Poles and Hungarians demonstrated the highest indicators of fear of migrants and hatred of Muslims in Europe. At the same time, the ruling parties, Fidesz in Hungary and Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland, have increased their ratings, and neo-Nazis from Hungary's Jobbik party were forced to distance themselves from the topic of migrants. In [Ukraine](#), the ruling parties practically intercepted the nationalist Russophobic agenda, actively promoting the Ukrainian language and culture at the expense of minority ones.

What is the social danger of this phenomenon? It's the fact that the ruling parties, playing on the right-wing field, are forced to drift to the right. Thus, instead of extinguishing xenophobia, the ruling elites play on the xenophobic sentiment and sometimes contribute to the growth of prejudice.

Carpe Diem

The second player and another group of beneficiaries are parliamentary right-wing radical and populist parties. Realizing the chance presented to them today, they are eager to use it to enter the political elite. Unlike establishment parties, they are moving toward the center, understanding the need to expand their electoral base, including representatives of the minorities, whom they just recently positioned as enemies of the nation. They abandon their most odious slogans and formally become presentable for external audience.

So the French National Front was forced to radically change the ideology of its party, making it completely tolerant, for example, to the LGBTQ and Jewish communities.

Today, one third of French gay couples [votes](#) for them. The same can be said about the Freedom Party in Holland. Its leader Geert Wilders abandoned anti-Semitism and sexism in his public speeches. In Hungary, Jobbik, which has acquired a neo-Nazi reputation, has [changed its tone](#). Its leader, Gábor Vona, [sent congratulations](#) to the leadership of the Jewish community on the Hanukkah holiday in 2016 and demonstrates a serious liberalization of views, even being criticized by ordinary members of the party.

However, such maneuvers don't mean these parties should be hastily transferred from the right-populist and right-wing radical spectrum to the center right. Their birthmarks are still there, although they are stubbornly trying to hide them. So, the leader of the [Alternative for Germany](#) (AfD) [Alexander Gauland stated](#) during the campaign in the Bundestag that Germany "should be proud of its soldiers who participated in both world wars, and people should stop reproaching the Germans with the Second World War." His colleague, the leader of the party branch in the federal state of Thuringia, Björn Höcke, [called](#) the monument to the victims of the Holocaust in Berlin "the disgrace of Germany."

This is proved also by Marine Le Pen's proposal to [close all mosques in France](#), as well as the participation of PiS activists in anti-Semitic actions in Poland. The latter was highlighted even by the extremely politically correct [European Jewish Congress](#). The leader of the Russian LDPR party, which seemed to get rid of its nationalistic image, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, included frankly xenophobic, nationalistic and anti-migrant slogans in his program during this year's presidential election and managed to get more than 5% of votes, [coming in third place](#).

Small right and left-radical parties, as well as Islamists, are the remaining players and beneficiaries of the third and fourth levels. They generate hatred at the domestic level and commit acts of terrorism and hate crimes. At the same time, right-wing radicals tend to occupy the extreme-right niche and conquer the ultra-right electorate, who traditionally voted for those parties, which today, in their opinion, betrayed their old ideals by rushing into power.

They are more radical than their predecessors. They openly profess the ideology of fascism and Nazism, question the outcome of the Second World War and so on. They are hungry, and therefore they strive to do everything possible to be recognized by the street — so far unsuccessfully. In the past six months, they have failed to attract more than a few hundred people to their events. Even in [Chemnitz](#) in August, right-wing radicals, despite great efforts, brought no more than 900 people to the streets, although a year ago tens of thousands participated in their actions.

The Islamists were also significantly weakened after the defeat of the so-called Islamic State in the Middle East. The flow of recruits from European countries decreased. The cash flow has also markedly dried up when ISIS lost control of the oil fields. They continue to work as before by ideologically engaging youth through their legal organizations, [recruiting young people](#) into terrorist organizations and even sending them to Syria and Iraq, but on a much smaller scale.

The Wheel of Xenophobia

What is the real danger? It is a process that can be called a wheel of xenophobia, when [all the players](#) interact with each other, eroding the situation from within.

The state, acting as the main participant of the process, essentially defines the rules of the game, offering minorities an assimilative — and, in fact, discriminatory — form of integration and undertaking interventions in the Middle East. Unwillingly, it creates conditions for Islamists to work destructively within minorities. Right-wing radicals use this situation to stir up hatred, this time among the indigenous population of Europe. The right-centrist parties of the political establishment and the parliamentary ultra-right parties, which drift toward each other, try to get maximum dividends from this situation. They are most effective today in the electoral field, attracting a frightened voter.

Thanks to this voter, they get into the parliament and form, sometimes together, a government, making even greater mistakes in the sphere of minority integration. The wheel of xenophobia spins faster and faster, washing away the boundaries between democracy and outright discrimination.

The second danger is the rapprochement of large right-wing radical populist parties and the political establishment, as it shifts the entire political spectrum of Western society to the right and threatens democratic values. Political establishment parties no longer see any problems in forming a government together with right-wing radicals and populists. They see even fewer problems in cooperating with right-wing radicals on certain issues without joining them in government. This is really dangerous for social unity.

For example, in 2018, the government of Denmark, which includes the right-wing radical Danish People's Party, adopted a new set of rules to [regulate](#) life in 25 low-income Muslim enclaves of the country (thereby recognizing the presence of the Muslim ghetto in Denmark). People living in the “ghetto” were referred to a special category of citizens who are actually deprived of the rights. For instance, they can be imprisoned if they force their children to make a long trip to their country of origin, [described](#) in the law as a “retraining trip.” Now, for such an “offense,” parents can face up to four years in jail.

Double penalties are given for any crime within the indicated 25 Muslim enclaves. Even infants are subject to special measures. Now children older than one and born in ghettos will be forcibly removed from their families for at least 25 hours per week, for compulsory education in “Danish values,” including the traditions of Christmas and Easter, the Danish language, etc. Non-observance can lead to the termination of social payments from the state, even if the family doesn't have other sources of income. These measures do not just contradict democratic values, but resemble a certain experience of the recent past. There is a difference — one can leave the ghetto. But if you don't want to be assimilated, it is better to leave the country altogether.

In the Name of Integration

There is a second example: Ukraine, a country where right-wing radicals are not in power, but have a significant impact on government policy, especially in the areas of culture, education and ideology. Last year, a [new law](#) on education came into force that bans education in any language other than the Ukrainian. Starting from 2018, teaching in

the languages of the national minorities is only allowed at primary school level. Some 400,000 children will not be granted the right to education in their native language. Starting from the fifth grade, the teaching in the languages of national minorities has been almost eliminated. From 2020, education across the country will only be conducted in Ukrainian.

This worsens the quality of educational training for children. According to the conclusions of international organizations and researchers, teaching a child in a non-native language lowers its potential achievements by 20-30%. According to the well-known Danish scientist [Tove Skutnabb-Kangas](#), who studies the influence of the language of education on the future fate of communities not only in Europe but also [all over the world](#), “teaching children in a non-native language contributes to their disintegration, marginalization and even suicide.”

“We have been ‘fenced out.’”

Nations have been building border walls for ages, but the number has soared since World War II. Since the start of the migrant crisis in 2015, at least 800 miles of fences have been erected in Europe. <https://t.co/LHoWoj65T1> pic.twitter.com/6iweEtE4ea

From the point of view of human rights regulations, the law puts children from different language groups in an unequal position: It allows for one of the groups to acquire knowledge faster and better, and creates problems for others. As a result, a significant part of children from linguistic minority groups will not receive the necessary knowledge and will be in a worse position when entering universities or the labor market. If parents want to give their children a good education, they have no other choice but to leave the country with their children.

Approximately the same law was adopted in 2018 in [Latvia](#). Here, even Russian private schools and universities were banned. Here the right-wing radical party, All for Latvia, initiated the law.

In all these cases, it is no longer just a question of voluntary assimilation, which is normative in European integration models, but rather the partial introduction of violent methods, since the subject is deprived of choice. Cooperation between right-centrist and right-wing radical parties almost always leads to changes in the legislation and implementation of laws in the sphere of national and religious policy toward the introduction of violent methods of assimilation.

Does this violate any international legal norms, like the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe? No, it doesn't. Although Article 5.2. of the convention [says](#) that “the parties refrain from any political or practical actions aimed at assimilation of persons belonging to national minorities against their will and protect these persons from any actions aimed at such assimilation,” but at the same time makes a very significant reservation that “without damage to the measures taken within the framework of its overall integration policy.” Thus, if assimilation measures are justified by the interests of integration, then everything is completely legitimate.

In general, we can say that we are moving toward the creation of monocultural and monoethnic states. That absolutely contradicts the reality of the modern globalized world. Moreover, violent methods start to appear in this movement. The process of merging political elites with right-wing radical groups, which was impossible 20 years ago, leads to a series of problems. They include the legitimization of discrimination against minorities; devaluation of democratic values as a result of the conflict between values and interests, such as the right to choose and freedom of religion conflicting with the need for assimilative integration of minorities aimed to create a homogeneous society; the transformation of the political establishment, which includes right-wing radical and populist parties, who may formally abandoned their populism and radicalism but kept it in their policies; and further radicalization of the voter under the influence of all these factors, as well as pro-government media.

Such a process has already occurred in the 1930s. All this ended up with the fascist and Nazi parties coming to power in a number of European countries. Everybody loses everything in such a scenario: a minority that becomes the subject of discrimination at state level, the majority that develops a problematic relationship with the minority, the authorities that get a splintered society and, finally, a democracy that is devalued as a result of a conflict between values and interests, where the interests get the upper hand. Only political players win, earning political capital on the radical field.

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