

OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS / EUROPEAN YOUNG LEADERS '40 UNDER 40'

HOW CAN WE DEVELOP A NEW NARRATIVE ON IMMIGRATION?



Report of the workshop held on 25th of October 2012

Brussels

CONTEXT

There is a new tribalism in Europe at national and European levels. On a national level, the “other” is the immigrant, who comes to our countries, takes our jobs and benefits from our social security systems, for which he has not paid. On a European level it is the “lazy” South Europeans, which the German tax payer has to finance. It seems that the essence of both narratives is the same: they touch upon a sense of “fairness” and values that are not respected by “the other”. In some countries, populist parties have been extremely successful in tapping into these sentiments, and have made big electoral gains, often by combining a xenophobic and anti-European agenda. The discourse in Europe on immigration has moved to the right, with immigrants becoming the scapegoat for all kinds of problems in societies and, as a result, immigration policy is becoming more restrictive.

As the economic crisis is not over, and its effects in Europe are to be felt for years to come, we cannot create a narrative around an argument that the cake is big enough to allow for “diversity” and “tolerance”. On the other hand, although economic arguments pointing to the benefits of immigration, particularly in the context of our ageing society are being put forward through academics and some policymakers, they don’t seem to resonate with the public. As a recent study of Facebook fans of populist parties by the UK think tank Demos has confirmed, people are afraid that their “identity” is under threat, and this threat weighs heavier on their minds than the potential benefits of migration, such as a young workforce able to compensate for current demographic trends. Though large parts of the liberal political elite see the necessity and benefits of immigration, they do not seem to be able to develop convincing ways of communicating these and are becoming more and more reluctant to defend immigration policy and open societies.

How can we change the narrative on immigration? Will the same arguments work all over Europe? How different are the various national debates? How can we convince politicians and the media to adopt a new narrative and start defending liberal immigration policies?

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this workshop is to discuss how the current toxic narrative on immigration in Europe can be changed into a positive and constructive one. Participants will try to develop recommendations which will, together with the discussion, be summarised in a paper. These recommendations will be a first step towards developing an innovative pilot project, led by the European Young Leaders.

CONCEPT

- A one-day workshop at the Open Society Foundations - Brussels
- “Out of the box” inputs from some of the “European Young Leaders” (40 under 40 programme participants)
- Input from researchers and activists working on the issue
- Feedback from outside the EU
- Output: A summary of the discussions with recommendations for potential projects

PROGRAMME

9.30 – 10.00 *Welcome coffee*

10.00 – 10.15: Introduction and Welcome by Thomas Houdaille and Ellen Riotte

Sessions facilitators: **Kirsten Van den Hul and Farid Tabarki**

10:15 – 11:15: European Young Leaders input

- What would you do if you were given unlimited resources to counter the current toxic narrative on migration in Europe and replace it with a positive one?
Out of the box ideas from each of the European Young Leaders participant

11.15 – 11.30 *Coffee break*

11.30 – 12.45: Precising the context and correcting the myths

Before looking at strategies to change the narrative, a brief overview of the current situation:

- Background: key figures of immigration, overview of current narratives and how they differ across Europe, insights from most recent polls on attitudes towards immigrants
- What are we talking about? Migrants, foreigners...
- What is at stake? Balance of active / inactive European population, growth, the vision of an open society
- What are the real problems in terms of labour markets, identity issues, culture, etc.?

Drawing on their own professional/personal experience, each external expert answered the following two questions:

- What are the main issues at stake in the migration debate in Europe?
- What do you see as possible solutions and strategies to tackle those issues?

12.45 – 14.00 *Lunch break*

14.00 – 15.00: Plenary brainstorm on the parameters of a new narrative

Drawing on some of the input from the previous sessions, participants brainstormed on what this new narrative could (or should) look like. Which arguments should be used to counter the negative framing of the European migration debate?

- Ethical arguments: “I am the other” vision of the society
- Historical arguments: the European society is a result of migrations
- Economic argument: a positive impact on the short-term but a long-term vision is necessary

14.45 – 15.00 *Coffee break*

15.00 – 16.40: Next steps: What recommendations to move on?

Brainstorm in two break-out groups, building on the ideas and input previously discussed:

- What project could we imagine after this discussion?
- Who is our target? (e.g. policy makers, journalists, citizens)
- Who does what and when?
- What partnerships do we need?

Group 1:

- Kirsten Van Den Hul
- Sunder Katwala
- Jamila Aanzi
- Javier Gonzales
- Sarah Joseph
- Guillaume Klossa

Group 2:

- Farid Tabarki
- Lindsey Nefesh Clarke
- Elizabeth Collet
- Sameer Padania
- Paul Morin
- Thomas Houdaille

16.40-17.00: Plenary presentation of ideas and next steps

PARTICIPANTS

European Young Leaders

- **Kirsten Van Den Hul**, Netherlands, Change agent, columnist
- **Farid Tabarki**, Netherlands, Founder, *Studio Zeitgeist*
- **Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke**, UK, Founder, *The Women's Worldwide Web* and Director, *Enfants d'Asie*
- **Javier Gonzales**, CEO, *Aquamobil*
- **Sarah Joseph**, CEO and Editor, Muslim lifestyle magazine *Emel*

External participants

- **Jamila Aanzi**, former Vice-president, *Youth Network of the Dutch Federation of Trade Unions*, diversity trainer, author
- **Sunder Katwala**, Director, *British Future*
- **Elizabeth Collett**, Director, *MPI-Europe* and Senior Advisor, *MPI's Transatlantic Council on Migration*
- **Sameer Padania**, Programme officer, *Media Policy at Open Society Foundations*
- **Shada Islam**, Head of Policy, *Friends of Europe*
- **Paul Morin**, Director, *European Grassroots Antiracist Movement (EGAM)*

EuropaNova

- **Guillaume Klossa**, President, *EuropaNova*
- **Thomas Houdaille**, Secretary general, *EuropaNova*
- **Andreea Tarcan**, Programme manager, *EuropaNova*

Open Society Foundations

- **Debora Guidetti**, Programme Manager, *Open Society Fund to Counter Xenophobia*
- **Nadja Groot**, Programme Assistant, *Open Society Foresight*
- **Costanza Hermanin**, Program Officer, *Open Society Justice Initiative*
- **Ellen Riotte**, Programme Manager, *Open Society Foresight*

EUROPEAN YOUNG LEADERS AND THEIR VIEW OF EUROPEAN IMMIGRATION TODAY

Creating a new narrative on immigration in Europe is a cumbersome task in the current quandary that the continent and its people are going through. Few things seem to be of more importance than changing this trend that has coined “the other” as an outlaw, an untouchable, a pariah. The European Young Leaders started off this one day workshop by presenting, in turn, their own input on this issue and answering the question: *“What would you do if you were given unlimited resources to counter the current toxic narrative on migration in Europe and replace it with a positive one?”*

Kirsten van den Hul started the discussion by sharing that one of the most powerful images from her childhood related to inclusive thinking was the *United Colors of Benetton* campaign shot by Oliviero Toscani and who had created the UNHATE campaign in 2011, in which he caused ripples by photoshopping images of world leaders kissing. Kirsten suggested creating a *United Colors of Europe* campaign – directed by Toscani – to spread the word all around the world that Europe is an inclusive continent where discrimination is not tolerated.

Farid Tabarki took over to share his views by stating that in his opinion this debate is far too toxic and politicized. Business leaders avoid the topic and are rarely asked what they think about immigration even if entrepreneurs are far more concerned by immigration than the average politician. *“The migration debate needs more business leaders to get involved. I would like to open up the platform of discussion not only to politicians, but to entrepreneurs as well. And not merely to them...to the entire society”.*



Sarah Joseph then continued by highlighting the fact that nowadays, inferiority and superiority complexes are emerging exponentially and this tendency has to be broken. We have to break the Faustian pact of extremes because the numbers that we are presented do not match the perceptions and images that are promoted by the media. We need to use both hard power and soft power to succeed as they both lead to *“confidence and identity”*. Politicians are no longer leading figures. New heroes such as Mo Farah are doing much more for integration than any forward thinking politician. *“We need to leverage faith and work on education and community building.”* Sarah also underlined the power of the media and the importance it has to an anti-discrimination campaign to become viral. The longevity of such a project can only be assured by influencing the press and critics into seeing the importance of the subject and its thorny aspects, but not merely from a negative point of view.

A new perspective on the topic was introduced by **Javier Gonzales**, who recommended a collection of real and trustworthy data on immigration. *“We need a professional management of diversity and linguistic and cultural mediation”*. There is dire need of a systemic education of the European population on the realities of immigration. People tend to believe that immigrants are taking their jobs and benefit from the system without contributing anything to it. The key is to decode the cultural gap

and this should start at an early age. Educational programmes for children, adults and the elderly should be implemented at a rapid pace. *“The time to act is now.”*

Lindsey Nefesh-Clarke stressed upon the fact that the research of the Human rights watch report is very depressing. Politicians are reinforcing this state of continuous fear of the masses instead of condemning xenophobia and extremism. Extremist parties rely on their young members to use the social media to propagate their hateful ideas and extend their base. We can no longer rely on politicians to do the job for us. We must take action. An innovative social media platform putting forward messages that counter discrimination has to be implemented and marketed in order to show how migrants have contributed to building the European Union. *“We are undermining our soft power in Europe. When you read about the institutions that lead us you see that the situation is difficult to change. Can we not bring pressure to bear and form new alliances?”* In a time of austerity, the discourse is not easily turned around. Creating an enabling environment and reinforcing schemes for entrepreneurship, social-entrepreneurship and education must be a priority.

To sum up, the European Young Leaders suggested several straightforward pathways to consider in creating a new narrative for immigration:

- ✓ Forming new multidisciplinary alliances that move away from the political arena
- ✓ Turning a negative picture in a positive one via the social media
- ✓ Reforming the educational system for all
- ✓ Using different arguments to change the narrative, such as demographics, business benefits, etc.
- ✓ Promoting social-entrepreneurship to change the playing field

PRECISING THE CONTEXT AND CORRECTING THE MYTHS

With a solid background in journalism and as an expert on immigration, **Shada Islam** opened the experts' input session by underlining one of the main problems the immigration narrative is facing in Europe: the lack of sustainable initiatives and the difficulty to uphold long-term interest of the media and the public. *“We need to feed the media and journalists facts and figures that are accurate and show the positive sides of immigration. We have to be their guide in order to counter right-wing propoganda.”* However, Shada stated, the issue is also to be dealt with at an institutional level as within the European Parliament, out of over 700 MEPs less than two dozen come from an ethnic background. Ethnic groups and especially ethnic minorities have to be part of the major league and be in those main news rooms and conference rooms, and no longer stay behind closed doors. *“We need more people that are NOT white in the decision-making circles. Grey haired men are in our institutions and this is no longer the image of our society”.*



Shada also stressed upon another fundamental issue: the security and terrorism debate has to be disconnected from the migration debate as that is not the problem we are dealing with when searching for solutions for an improved narrative on immigration. *“Interculturalism is yesterday's topic. We are talking about new Europeans. We are Europe”.*

Elizabeth Collet then interviened to stress upon the importance of individuals in attitude change. Today, 32.5 million people living in Europe are non-nationals and their voices need to be heard. There is dire need to change

policy-makers values and views on the topic as they seem to be on a slightly different trajectory than that of ordinary civilians'. She suggested a new way of presenting the different points related to immigration:

- Economic issue: avoid focus on discourses such as “They are taking away our jobs” and prefer “We are in dire need of skills that can be provided for by hiring immigrants”.
- Demographical issue: avoid focus on discourses such as “We are about to be taken over by them” and prefer “We need them as our population is aging rapidly”.
- Cultural issue: avoid focus on “They will overwhelm us with their difference” and prefer “The richness of their diversity”.
- Social issue: avoid focus on the scarcity of public services able to cope with immigrants and prefer a stress on the new social dimension that is available with them.

Elizabeth concluded by underlining the importance of framing and language: *“Should we talk about minorities or immigrants? The identity issues are to be dealt with by focusing on positive local stories in the media.”*

“What is our audience and message? Who and what are we talking about?” asked **Sunder Katwala**. His answer was simple: we are talking about our society and our future! There is a real need to implement a message of fairness and inclusion for everybody in Europe today. And our target audience should of course be those who do not yet agree with this discourse, but who might be convinced to by using the right message at the right time. These are *“the persuadable skeptics”*.



Jamila Aanzi focused on the importance of education from an early age and the use of the correct positive message for thwarting negative discourses. Immigration is not a “temporary” thing and diversity should be seen as an opportunity. Figures of unemployment for migrant youth in Europe are double and even sometimes triple than for the national youth. *“The biggest issue for kids with migrant background is the lack of relevant networks and soft skills. Teach this at school!”*, she stressed. A cross-generational action plan needs to be implemented so that younger generations who are much more open to the new society that we are living in can pass on the message to their family elders and thus make them think on the issue and maybe even change attitudes.

Paul Morin further showed that immigration is facing harsh political and cultural challenges. *“It has become shockingly acceptable in Europe to be openly racist”* he stated. There is need for more grassroots cooperation, positive lobbying and training activists on a local, national and European level.

Sameer Padania continued the analysis by saying that there is a huge disparity between the national and local media outlets. *“There needs to be more solidarity and the illusion of online participation has to be made real”*. Widely used platforms such as Google and Facebook have to play the game as well and become stakeholders in shaping this new narrative.

To sum up, the experts drew upon what the European Young Leaders previously proposed and strengthened their suggestions with ideas such as:

- ✓ The media need to be informed in a pro-active and positive way about immigration
- ✓ Using the opponents’ narratives to our advantage and turning a negative discourse in a positive one by focusing on success stories
- ✓ Target message for *“the persuadable skeptics”*
- ✓ Educational and informational programmes have to be implemented in our schools and societies
- ✓ Everybody has to play their part!

IDEAS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND SOLUTIONS

The latter part of the workshop was dedicated to practical sessions of brainstorming with everybody and then in groups in order to find clear-cut recommendations and the projects that could be set-up.



Group 1 built upon several points that were discussed, starting with “*the positive message that has to be delivered differently*”. As language is such an important factor in communication we have to consider which type of words and linguistics to use so as the message resonates with the targeted people. Thus, a **research project on immigration language** could be created based on focus groups and involving activists, the media and “real people”. Continuing in this direction, the idea of a **European story exchange platform** was put forward showcasing stories about “being the other” and diversity in an on and offline format. A catalogue of stories could do more to changing the image of “the other” than any news piece or media report as one can more easily identify with a relatable and personal story. The idea of **engaging script writers** was also brought up so that more inclusive positive messages can be included in mainstream media – sitcoms, series and soaps – was brought about. A special focus was put on **branding and communication**. Hiring brand specialists and reputation managers to deal with the message we want to spread. Brands are dynamic, not static and a particular attention has to be paid to this to ensure the success of the message as well as its sustainability.

Group 2 focused on education as their starting point as it is a cross-cutting issue. A **curriculum focused on literacy on immigration and identity** was suggested. The main issue of immigration today in Europe is the negative picture painted by the media and the right-wing activist and politicians. This is why a **campaign with a straightforward and positive image** has to be set-up. “*Communication in and on Europe today presents Europe as a thing of the elite. Civil society campaigns that bear a different message don’t have the power to reach a wide range of citizens*”, said **Thomas Houdaille**. A platform such as Avanti!, the European Avaaz, could give voice to the silent majority all across Europe. The campaign the group came up with is “**WE ARE EUROPE!**” and it will focus on spreading the positive message on immigration to the European population on both a European and national level and by asking for the support of well-known national individuals who come from an ethnic background to be the faces of the campaign. The European Young Leaders’ network could be efficiently used and put in motion to federate sustainable projects such as this campaign and make them visible on a European level. Promoting the benefits of diversity and the contribution of the migrants could resonate rather well with most of these young individuals who are coming from a wide range of European countries and personal and professional backgrounds, and represent all the “colors” of what Europe is today.



CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

1) Content / creating a new discourse

- ✓ Setting up a research project on immigration language involving the media, activists, citizens, etc.
- ✓ An online European story exchange platform to share personal stories on “being the other”. This collection of stories could be published in a book format as well.
- ✓ Recruit photographers, directors, script-writers and brand specialist to work on positive discourse campaigns on the model of the United Colors of Benetton UNHATE campaign by Toscani or movies such as *An Inconvenient Truth* by Al Gore, *Home* by Yann Arthus Bertrand
- ✓ Disconnecting the terrorist and security discourse from the immigration discourse
- ✓ Implement a professional management of diversity, linguistic and cultural mediation on a national level, with European supervision
- ✓ Play upon populists’ and right-wing propaganda messages and turn their hateful and exclusive discourse around into an open, fair and inclusive one
- ✓ Promote policies and actions that have a positive image in the mainstream media and collective thought such as: promoting youth mobility, reinforcing the Erasmus programme, promoting cultural diversity, focus on skills and manpower that can be provided by immigrant workers, etc.
- ✓ Implementing a curriculum focused on literacy on immigration and identity in schools

2) Communicating the new discourse

- ✓ Create a multi-stakeholder network to disseminate the discourse (e.g. entrepreneurs, civil society leaders, the media, national personalities)
- ✓ Imagine a innovative communication format that could be integrated into educational systems
- ✓ Challenge the media: develop a dissemination plan in order to regularly meet the local and national media and maintain the sustainability of the new narrative on immigration. In addition, media gate keepers – editors, journalists, researchers – would be lobbied so as to ensure the sustainability of the discourse and a sharing of key contacts and decision-makers.
- ✓ Challenge the institutions and political parties
- ✓ Develop a cross-generational action plan so that younger generations can pass on the positive message to their family elders and thus change attitudes.

3) Other suggested initiatives and remarks

- ✓ Develop a “We are Europe!” campaign focusing on upgraded positive values, both on a European level and a national level and by using national and international stars who come from ethnic backgrounds as the faces of the campaign
- ✓ Develop a digital campaigning platform (the European Avaaz) to recruit millions of concerned Europeans by using an innovative narrative and young language with petitions and communication campaigns.
- ✓ The next European election would be a good opportunity to launch a pan-European initiative and put the immigration issue on the public debate table.

Based on this workshop results, a meeting will be organized between OSF and the European Young Leaders ‘40 under 40’ management team to consider and plan the next steps to take.