

Xenophobia – The Cause of Terrorism in a Democratic Society

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Abstract

In recent years there has been an increase in the perception of the gravity of the problem of intolerance, aggressive behavior, racism and xenophobia. In Slovakia, the debate on xenophobia was sparked as part of the discussion about the migration crisis affecting the whole EU. Refugees and migrants have been flowing into the EU since its inception, but in recent years, mainly due to the conflict in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan and the difficult living conditions in those countries, the influx of refugees has increased. While in 2014 around 283,500 people illegally crossed the border Schengen (Čokyna, J. 2015, p.1), this year the number is estimated to be 1,000,000 (UNHCR) and the forecast for next year is also increasing.

Keywords: Xenophobia, migration, migrants, refugees, foreign, extremism, terrorism, social inclusion, integration

Xenophobia in contemporary society

The EU and the governments of its members do not seem to be coping well with the refugee situation, and the issue of refugees is becoming the number one topic of the domestic media and politics in all of the member states. The discussion about the arrival of refugees has developed on several levels: In the area of security, the infiltration by Islamic terrorists is expected; in religious matters, there are concerns that militant Islam would become a threat to other religions, from the economic perspective there are concerns that accommodating and providing for a larger number of refugees will be too costly; and in healthcare, citizens are worried that the arrival of migrants from different geographical areas would also mean the introduction of tropical and other new diseases against which the population of Europe is not resistant. The EU has proposed to address this situation through the introduction of quotas for individual Member States, but the proposal triggered fierce public debate which increasingly intertwined xenophobia and populism (Mesežnikov, 2015, p.1).

Political parties in many states have exploited the situation for political gains. In Slovakia for example; due to the proximity of the parliamentary elections, the Slovak politicians claimed that the vast majority of refugees are actually only economic migrants who will cost a lot of money, take local jobs, increase crime, and can bring terrorism not only to the EU but also to Slovakia. They talked about their different cultures, customs, religions and overall way of life that would threaten the "ours", not only in Slovakia, but also in Europe. Some Slovak politicians have even openly said that Slovakia is ready to help only Christians. Slovakia, together with the other V4 countries opposed the quotas, despite the fact that countries which are traditionally targeted by migrants (e.g. Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Germany, Austria) hoped that the introduction of quotas would help them cope with administrative processes as well as with the social facilities for asylum seekers.

The main topics of the discussions about refugees include economic, social and security consequences of the migration flows for the country accepting asylum seekers, however, the very lives of migrants have entirely disappeared from the debate (Mesežnikov, 2015, p. 1). The fact that foreigners are not welcome in Slovakia was also reflected through a series of protests against the "Islamization of Europe and the dictates of Brussels" and to support the "Europe for Europeans", which was attended by several thousand right-wing extremists, radical Nazis and neo-Nazis.

The right-wing groups are attacking the liberal democratic governments and minority groups in order to create pressure so that such minority groups are either deported or degraded, or receive just limited civil rights and freedoms (Kavický, V. et al. 2015, pp. 135-136). The most radical protesters in Bratislava caused clashes with the police, attacked foreigners as well as Slovaks who expressed disagreement with their opinion and interrupted a prestigious cycling race that was taking place at the same time. It should be noted that in this crowd there were not only Slovak anti-immigration movements, but also groups from the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Austria, mainly from the ranks of neo-Nazis.

These marches are painting an increasingly clearer picture of "White Europe" against "colored parasites" (Mesežnikov, 2015, p. 2) not only from the Slovak perspective, but also from the perspective of other EU countries. To what extent is Slovakia and the EU resistant to xenophobia which could lead to the development of extremism, crime and terrorism? Another line of support for xenophobia is religion where mostly fundamentalist religious groups seek to promote their beliefs and strongly oppose other religions that are perceived as a threat to the country and the world (Kavický, V. et al. 2015, p. 132).

Xenophobia - the origin, characteristics and causes

The word xenophobia comes from the Greek word "Xen" or "Xenos", which means foreign, unknown or different, and the word "phobia", which means fear, hatred or resentment towards the unknown because the unknown is inexplicable and therefore dangerous and hostile. In this case, the definition of foreign could be used in the reference to the self-identification of individuals or groups meaning socially and ethnically foreign person. In today's modern sociology the term xenophobia is linked to inter-ethnicity, describing relations between the so-called "original" and "foreign" ethnic groups. Fear of foreigners and its impact is therefore directly related to ethnocentrism, i.e. the attitude that one group is superior to another (Yakushuko, O. 2009, p.44).

Such an attitude in the state or social groups can cultivate hatred among people or communities based on ethnic, social or religious differences.

There are various types of xenophobia, which can be divided into:

- ethnic and racial phobia - discrimination and prejudice against other races or ethnic groups, for example: whites vs. blacks, anti-Semitism, etc.
- religious phobia - fear, discrimination and prejudice against believers of another faith, for example. Islamophobia
- phobia toward groups of people with different social, cultural, physical or natural features. This group includes many other specific phobias, for example: phobia of migrants, phobia of handicapped people, sexism etc. The number of these phobias are growing in social crisis situations, when the fear of the unknown is escalating (Dichek, 2014, p. 217).

However, many international organizations, organizations defending human rights and sociologists use the word xenophobia in praxis to describe anti-immigration sentiments. This article will therefore use the word xenophobia in relation to the prejudice and hatred against immigrants (Yakushuko, O. 2009, p.44).

Xenophobia is closely linked to nationalism and ethnocentrism, terms that can be characterized by a belief that one ethnicity or nationality is superior to others. Authors like Esses, Dovidio, Semenya, and Jackson found that individuals or groups that combine national identity with nativism (the belief that citizenship is acquired by birth) and is not based on cultural and civil standards (i.e. not based on a voluntary commitment to public institutions of the competent State) tend to have stronger negative views on foreigners (Yakushuko, O. 2009, p.45). Watts combines xenophobia and its discriminating properties with situations where there is a danger to a personal or collective level. A good example may be: the domestic population feeling threatened because immigrants are taking their jobs. Such sentiments may result in political xenophobia, which is the wish of the domestic population groups to create laws or practices that would openly discriminate against foreign nationals.

Xenophobia is often linked to economic or political instability that forces the residents of the fragile states to move, in another words migrate to countries that can protect their lives and where they can earn more for themselves and their families. Such migration of large numbers of people raises fears and concerns in the local population, either for economic reasons - namely, that their home country does not have as many economic resources, or for ethnic and cultural differences. In such cases, the anti-immigration sentiments are often considered acceptable, either as a blame laying tactic or because they are perceived to be based on reasonable fears of the domestic population. In the media and among the population questions such as this are often raised: Should the state first take care of the indigenous population or immigrants? (Yakushuko, O. 2009, p.45).

Xenophobia is caused by the fear and prejudice against the unknown. On this basis, there are four main divisions of the origin of prejudice:

- A real risk - political or economic threat to the domestic populations caused by foreigners (e.g. foreigners will take all the jobs)
- Symbolic risk - risks resulting from different values, religion, ethics, etc.
- Intergroup anxiety and negative stereotypes - avoiding awkward interaction between domestic and foreign populations

Fear and prejudice lead to permanent neuroticism, which is on behavioral levels often manifesting as aggression, less frequently as depression or melancholy / hopelessness. On this basis, two forms of expression of xenophobia can be observed:

- Latent or hidden (depression, for example: the Jews bought the whole world, blacks are taking everything from us)
- Open (aggression, for example: I will beat someone up)

Psychological instinct (fear) influenced by ideological ideas that are based on "xenophobia from above", supported by the state, are developing and morphing for example into strict migration policies that limit migration waves, require tighter controls etc. It creates negative stereotypes and images of the foreign as an uncivilized barbarian, creating the need to maintain an ethnically "pure" nation and safeguard the interests of indigenous peoples that are often anchored in laws disadvantageous to the immigrants - typical of Western states (Dichek, 2014, p. 185).

The impact of xenophobia on the society

Feelings of hostility towards immigrants can have far-reaching consequences not only for migrants themselves, but also to the society in which these feelings are based. Images of immigrants as uncivilized barbarians, criminals or rapists are often presented in the media, thus creating and reinforcing existing stereotypes in society. Contradictory expectations of native populations leave immigrants puzzled: Immigrants are considered to be a danger for the local society especially when they gain prestigious jobs because by doing so they take this opportunity from the domestic population.

However, if an immigrant does not work, and only receives state social benefits, the domestic population accuses the migrant of burdening the economic and social benefit system. The indigenous population often expects immigrants to assimilate and completely abandon their culture. Such a requirement, however, can leave the migrant cultural confused and may lead to his/hers isolation, since they will naturally want to keep at least some aspects of their culture (Yakushuko, O. 2009, p.45). Prejudice, discrimination and hostility have a very negative impact on the psychological health and development of foreigners who can and often do suffer from various anxiety, depression and other psychological disorders that can lead to suicidal tendencies or to radicalism. Immigrants, for example. those who find themselves at Europe's borders who do not have access to basic food, hygiene and psychological support, who feel hostility and discrimination after the sorrowful journey to Europe and are disappointed with the EU attitude towards them, may feel that they have nothing to lose, and are an easier recruitment target for radical groups which are able to provide not only material support but also a sense of "belonging and meaning of life." This will pose a threat not only to migrants themselves but also to the local society. The most common targets of such attacks are the symbols of the country, places with large concentrations of indigenous peoples, and the political leaders and other personalities that subscribe to xenophobic policies.

Terrorism as a potential result of an increase in xenophobia

If xenophobia, discrimination or hostility towards immigrants in the country where they live are not severely condemned, radical neo-Nazi, Nazi, fascist and nationalist groups and individuals will try to attack the immigrant population, either verbally, through the media or physically, because they know it will be difficult to be convicted for such acts. Also unstable and easily influenced individuals in the resident population, who are easily influenced by the media, prejudice and radical groups will be disappointed with the Government response to the immigrant crisis, and will also turn to radicalism and extremism, either by joining extremist groups or by engaging in so called Lone wolf attacks. The most frequent targets of such attacks will be immigrants themselves or native religious community group members. The primary targets are also the meeting points for example: Muslim prayer rooms in Germany and the Czech Republic, where the reported incidents were; nailing a pig head on a door, painted walls with defamatory or fascist signs, or an attempt to ignite them.

Secondary targets may be public figures and politicians promoting the integration of migrants into society and the indigenous population sharing this view. This method was also chosen in the past by orthodox Jew Yigal Amir in the attack on Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as an act of "saving Jews from Palestinians." The most common method that can be used for such attacks are attacks using cold weapons (knife, ax, machete), firearm attacks (pistol, machine gun), bomb attacks or attacks using vehicles (running over people in a crowd). Xenophobia and extremism can thus lead to social instability, and an atmosphere of fear in the country, which in turn can result in the suppression of democracy, loss of freedom, economic instability, and also the departure of foreign investors or they might decide not to invest in that country, the deterioration of international relations with other countries. It can be extremely difficult and painful to get such society back to normal.

How to fight against xenophobia

As pointed out above, xenophobia constitutes a dangerous social phenomenon with far-reaching consequences, and should therefore be eliminated. Elimination of xenophobia should take place simultaneously at several levels:

- Modifying laws to criminalize manifestations of xenophobia, racism and extremism so that the radical groups of the population are monitored, preventing the attacks and violence against minority groups.
- Prohibition of extremist and terrorist propaganda in the media and on social networks.
- Educating indigenous people about xenophobia, its origins and impact on society. Also educating the resident population on foreign cultures, and the demolition of negative stereotypes.
- Social inclusion and creation of opportunities for immigrants to integrate into society, learn the language, learn about a new culture and customs and thus prevent the creation of isolated groups and communities.
- Positivism and seeking of common grounds between the indigenous culture and the cultures of the immigrants.

Experts predict persistent, if not even greater immigration waves for the coming years, not only because of military conflicts, but also due to climate change. It is therefore necessary to count on the fact that the issue of immigration and its associated manifestations of xenophobia will not just disappear. Without strict condemnation of any manifestations of xenophobia, racism and extremism, especially if these manifestations come from policy-makers, thus giving an example to other population groups, the fight against xenophobia will be difficult. It is necessary to adopt new legislation that prohibits such acts, put in place suitable education in schools and provide adequate space for immigrants to integrate.

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