



THE « MIDIS DE LA MEDITERRANÉE »

« Migrations between the Maghreb and Europe »

Lunch debate organized by the European Movement Belgium and the Medea Institute on Monday May 21, 2009 at the EMB. Report: Nathalie Jeanne d'Othée.

With the support of the

Representation of the European Commission Belgium

Speaker:

Prof. Bichara Khader, Director of CERMAC (Center for Studies and Research on the Contemporary Arab World) at the Catholic University of Louvain.

Presentation of the speaker by *Nathalie Janne d'Othée*, Medea Institute.

It is our pleasure to receive Professor Bichara Khader for his second intervention at the Midis de la Méditerranée. Having first discussed the French Mediterranean Union Project, he will discuss today migrations between the Maghreb and Europe.

Professor Khader is professor at the Catholic University of Louvain and director of the Center for Studies and Research on the Contemporary Arab World in the same institution. He is a former member of the Group of High Experts on the European Policy of Security and Cooperation (European Commission 1998-2000) and former member of the 'Groupe des Sages' for the euro-Mediterranean cultural dialogue (European Presidency 2003-2004).

He has recently published two books: *Le Monde arabe expliqué à l'Europe. Histoire, imaginaire, culture, politique, économie, géopolitique et l'Europe pour la Méditerranée. De Barcelone à Barcelone (1995-2008)* both published this year by L'Harmattan. On the issue of migrations, Professor Khader coordinated three years ago the book *Penser l'immigration et l'intégration autrement: une initiative belge inter-universitaire*, following a conference regrouping various Belgian universities dealing with this topic in 2004.

Presentation of the Alicante Congress (previously known as the Valencia Congress) by *Charles Kleinermann*, Secretary General of the Medea Institute

From the 19th to the 21st of November 2009, the European Movement International is organizing, with the help of the Medea Institute, a Congress on education and migrations in the context of North-South Mediterranean Dialogue, first launched in Malta 5 years ago. This initiative aims to discuss the Mediterranean between Northern and Southern shores, avoiding the imposition of a Northern agenda on Southern partners.

The Congress was initially set to take place in Valencia, but the inauguration of the *Maison de la Méditerranée* in Alicante, taking place during the same dates, presents a unique occasion to bring together various converging initiatives.

The organizers strongly encourage participation in the Congress. Anyone wishing to put forward ideas or initiatives regarding education and migration is invited to address them to the Medea Institute and to take part in the Alicante Congress.

Migrations between the Maghreb and Europe

Overview of the books:

- *Le Monde Arabe Expliqué à l'Europe* was written by the Professor's students. One of its chapters is dedicated to the issue of migrations ("Geopolitics of Arab and Maghrebi Migrations to Europe").
- *L'Europe pour la Méditerranée* offers a chapter focusing on European migration policies.
- *Penser l'immigration et l'intégration autrement* is the fruit of an inter-university conference on migration and integration financed by a Belgian aristocrat, which resulted in an inter-university consortium on immigration and integration.

This talk will not concentrate on the integration of North African immigrants in Europe. The topic of migration has become a central focus of many pieces of work: over 537 books published in all 27 countries of the EU on this topic.

This discussion will address the geopolitics of migration in the Mediterranean arena, offering an analysis of the past, an evaluation of the present, as well as an insight into future migratory patterns.

A history of Arab migrations

It is worth noting that the Arab world was first a land of immigration before becoming a land of emigration. Over a million French citizens settled in Algeria during the colonial period.

Three migratory patterns characterize Arab migrations in contemporary history:

1) Migrations to the American continent

These migrations first aim for Latin America: Arab populations flee Ottoman domination and persecutions following the Young Turks Revolution. These migrants are primarily Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinians. Paradoxically, they are nicknamed "the Turks" by the local populations. They have given a number of Latin American Presidents. These Arabs have been fully integrated in their host country, but, recently, the fifth generation has become nostalgic of its roots and some have tried to return. This community has developed a specific literature, *Adab al Mahjar* (Literature of the diaspora). It preserves an emotional and sometimes economic solidarity with the country of origin.

Arabs later migrated to North America. A number of scientists have originated from the Arab community both in the United States and Canada (various Nobel Prizes). It would be interesting to analyze the community's capacity to evolve into a pressure group, through a comparison with other communities such as the Jewish community for example. Contrarily to the Arab population, the latter constitutes a powerful lobby in the United States. One of the answers is, without doubt, the different context of origin of the Arab populations. These populations have primarily originated from the Machrek, but recently Canada has started witnessing immigration from the Maghreb.

2) Migrations towards the Gulf

5 to 6 million Palestinians, Syrians and Egyptians have, for economic reasons, emigrated in the Countries of the Gulf. It corresponds, in other words, to a migration from poor and highly-populated Arab countries to richer and scarcely populated countries. The economic support of the Palestinian community in the Gulf is important for the Palestinian resistance.

3) Migrations from the Maghreb to Europe

They start before the First World War. During the war, an important number of Algerians immigrate to France to work in industries in order to replace soldiers sent to the Front. Algerian immigration continues in the inter-war period and is joined by Moroccan and Tunisian immigration.

In Belgium, immigration from the Maghreb starts in 1964. Belgium contractors travelled to Morocco to promote the Belgian Eldorado. They were in need of workforce and sought to attract Moroccans to Belgian industries.

They are currently 5-6 million regular and irregular North African immigrants in Europe. It is often suggested that only 2.5 million reside in Europe, but this fails to take into account naturalized immigrants. If we include illegal immigrants, figures reach 7 million. In Spain, there is one irregular immigrant for two regular immigrants.

The Three phases of Maghrebi immigration in Europe

First phase

The 1960s represent the climax of North African migrations in Europe. Sources of Eastern and Southern Europe have run out. The iron curtain to the East jeopardizes the arrival of workers from the East. In Italy, workers from the South prefer migrating in Northern Spain which is developing. Turkish and Greek workforces have passably run out. It is in this context that contractors travel to Morocco and other countries of the Maghreb in search of workforce for *Difficult, Dirty and Dangerous* (DDD) jobs.

Immigration in this first phase has a number of specific characteristics: it is primarily masculine (95% are men), young (92% are less than 25 years of age) and analphabet. The young man has left behind his family in his country of origin and has immigrated to earn money in Europe. He often lives in shared accommodation with other workers. His long-term project is to buy a taxi, a small business, a car on his return. 75% of immigrants sent their earnings directly back to their country of origin.

In 1973, the oil crisis slows down this period of immigration.

Second phase

The economy is in crisis, the legislation becomes restrictive in terms of immigration. New migrants are no longer needed, doors are shut. A policy of family reunification is initiated for migrants present in Europe. This has both quantitative and qualitative consequences for the immigrant population.

On a quantitative level, spouses and their families arrive or immigrants return home to pick up their spouses in their country of origin. In Belgium, the immigrant population doubles.

On a qualitative level, this population is increasingly female, younger and more dependent. In fact, new-born children clearly make the population younger and, therefore, in need of structures and care.

The dependence of immigrants on their host society increases as only one in three immigrants is employed.

The visibility of the immigrant population also changes. The immigrant worker used to spend his day at work, eat, eventually have a coffee, often surrounded by other people of the same origin and finally went to bed. Nowadays, women go out in the street and children go to school. The immigrant population thus enters the public sphere.

This confrontation has provoked a sense of fear and, consequently, a stigmatization of this population by the indigenous population. Immigrants take over abandoned districts, creating a de facto ghettoisation.

The 1970s and 1980s are marked by a rising feeling of xenophobia vis-à-vis North Africans. This feeling is not solely associated with this population but results rather from the eternal fear of the 'Other'.

Third Phase

Although doors to Europe are closed, immigration prevails through open windows (policy of family reunification, policy of visas and illegal immigration). All countries are not affected in the same way. Countries of Southern Europe, such as Italy and Spain, are greatly confronted with this third phase of North African immigration.

These two countries, previously lands of emigration, attract immigrants as a result of their growing economies and informal sectors. Immigrants represent an extensive and cheap workforce.

Example: Moroccan immigrants in Spain: numbers have grown from 50,000 to 750,000 in 20 years and have been primarily absorbed by the hotel, agricultural and construction industries. The growth of Spain's tourist sector has resulted in an important need for employees in the hotel industry as well as in the housing and construction sectors. With regards to the agricultural sector, the growing numbers of invernaderos (greenhouses) in Southern Spain have required an important workforce and few Spanish workers accept the low income.

Therefore, immigration has grown because there was a need. This new phase of immigrants is different because it is constituted of men and women, 80% of whom are alphabetized, who have business notions and a "liking for adventure".

European Policy in terms of immigration

In the face of this phenomenon, Europe legislates but this is not enough to stem immigration; while capital does not go where people are, people go where capital can be found. Europe has somewhat preserved its image of Eldorado, but North Africans remain attracted by the North of the Mediterranean as a means of escaping a difficult economic reality at worst a dictatorship.

To control this immigration, Europe seeks to limit access to visas. Endless queues outside consulates demonstrate, nonetheless, that this is not the right solution. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership has not improved mobility between the two shores of the Mediterranean. European policy represents a paradox between cooperation, talks of openness and these barriers affecting mobility.

Other solutions have already been envisaged: the European Blue Card, Sarkozy's selective migration, quotas, seasonal contracts. But all these policies will not prevent the desire to immigrate amongst young North Africans.

Conclusion

It is necessary to consider the existence of pull factors in Europe in addition to the push factors present in the countries of the Maghreb. A demand for migrants in high technology sectors such as engineering or computer science, as well as in the jobs left vacant by the indigenous population, undoubtedly exists.

While the economy needs migrants, society refuses them. In other words, contractors request more migrants, while decision-makers are held by a dependence on a reticent electorate and regular elections.

QUESTIONS / ANSWERS

- A contradiction is present in this speech because the reason for a demand by the professional sector for immigrant workers is rather dictated by the terms of contract that may be imposed. And another point that has not been addressed is that of security issues and terrorism.

Prof. Khader: It is true that immigrants can render precarious the situation of indigenous workers and ultimately weaken the job market. Contractors who use this system have at hand a large and undemanding workforce. One should perhaps reflect on possible ways of developing a more flexible labor market.

Regarding terrorism and crime, it is important to note that the problems of societies of origin have an external impact. One should not go as far as saying that the problems are due to immigration.

- The Mediterranean is itself an area of African migration: can we differentiate these migrants? There is indeed a contradiction, the European Union armed and trained the Maghreb countries to stem migration flows from Southern Africa.

Prof. Khader: The Maghreb countries have indeed become transit countries. They have thus begun to legislate accordingly. Europe asks them to be the border guards of the European Union. By granting the Maghreb countries this role, Europe shatters South-South solidarities. The Frontex agency has, for example, recently decided to train Moroccan coast guards to contain boat people. But migration is not a crime. Freedom of movement is a human right, a right currently denied.

- The situation of African immigrants in the Moroccan Rif is unworthy. There is a real contradiction between the ideal for which the EU stands and its legislation on immigration. Most immigrants would not leave if they had better opportunities in their countries of origin. It is therefore necessary to consider migrations in correlation with development.
- In the end, who is responsible and where are the solutions? An anecdote: grey shrimps caught in the North Sea are sent to Morocco to be peeled by cheap labor. It is thus not necessary to migrate to be exploited.
- What would happen if we lifted all restrictions?
- Algeria may struggle to contain the migratory phenomenon but is confronted with a strong pressure from Sub-Saharan Africa. This question is treated in a bilateral manner with the European Union rather than in the Euromed process.

Prof. Khader: There is in all cases a necessity to ensure genuine freedom of movement in the Mediterranean. The European Union and its members must initially apply a more generous policy in terms of visa, regarding, for example, the mobility of researchers, professors, students ... (see the results of the conference held March 6, 2007 by the Institute Medea "the movement of holders of dialogue"). The visa policy is even more shocking when compared to the ease with which Europeans get visas in Southern Mediterranean. Above all, a human management of these issues is needed.

Daring an insight in the future, it is possible that Europe and the Maghreb countries have yet to face 10-15 years of tensions over the immigration issue. After that, on the one hand North Africa will have

become a land of immigration for Sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand the other the North African population will stabilize because fertility rates are already declining.

Ultimately, there is no real solution, but an observation: when there is a significant economic difference within a geographical region swaging, there is migration. Conversely, when we reduced the difference in living standards and wages, migration decreases.

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