



Forum of Concerned Citizens of Europe

Living with diversity: For a politics of hope without fear

An open letter to Europe

Xenophobia is not contained to Europe's extremist fringes but part of the political mainstream, writes the Forum of Concerned Citizens of Europe in an open letter to Europe's leaders. Quick-fix political solutions appealing to a mythical Europe of homogenous communities must be replaced by a politics of hospitality, fairness and solidarity.

Rather like climate change, a quietly brewing concoction of xenophobia, intolerance and fear of difference is threatening the future of Europe. Aggressive political demagoguery drumming up hatred against minorities, immigrants and democracy itself is on the march again. Leading the charge are not only fundamentalist and xenophobic movements, but also, most worryingly, mainstream political forces trying to appease national majorities, looking for a quick fix to address public insecurities related to economic uncertainty, future stability and Europe's place in the world. And, alarmingly, they are proving to be successful. Many people in many European countries are coming to see the stranger and those deemed to be different as a contaminant or threat, much in the same way as Europe did in colonial times and during its dark totalitarian decades prior to 1945.

Fear, suspicion and hatred are becoming everyday public sentiments, legitimating vilification and harsh forms of discipline as normal, breeding on endless talk of greedy asylum seekers, disloyal and seditious immigrants, would-be Muslim terrorists, and an illusory desire to return to founding principles and chauvinistic values. A new lexicon of "us versus them" is being rolled out, blaming the victims of unfettered financial speculation, poverty, inequality, and authoritarianism at a global scale, and pretending to ignore how the contribution of immigrants and refugees has been, is and will remain essential to European social, economic and cultural life. A new mentality of "catastrophe management" is being promoted, centred on the containment or elimination of the stranger and non-conformist through extensive surveillance, border controls, curtailment of rights, naming and shaming.

This is a dangerous turn, and as in the darkest moments of its history, Europe runs the risk of waking up too late. We are close to the point of no return from a Europe excessively obsessed with diversity and wrongly blaming difference for its problems. These are complex problems, linked to a variety of causes such as deep economic crisis and instability, the impacts of market society on individual and collective responsibility, the absence of a model of belonging appropriate for a plural and open society, the breakdown of comprehensive risk mitigation and social insurance systems, the intensification of a politics of surveillance, normalisation and punishment after 9/11, and nostalgia for a

mythical Europe of cosy, homogeneous communities. These problems need to be acknowledged and alternative solutions need to be found; solutions that can harness diversity and difference

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