

Muslims in Spain: social and political integration

Yulia Ranchina

School of Governance and Politics, MGIMO University

Abstract: The article aims to look into Muslim immigration to Spain in recent years. The paper provides the social portrait of Muslims coming to Spain and deals with the problem of social and political integration of new members into the Spanish society.

Key words: *Introduction: immigrants, migration flows, immigration, emigration, legal migration, social and political integration, political rights, repatriation, deportation, Muslim residents, citizens, Spain*

The global migration crisis raises the question of social and political integration of new members into the society. Europe has been facing a massive influx of immigrants, especially Muslims. Due to the fact that religion, traditions and legislation of the countries of origin and the receptor countries differ from each other, various conflicts between the residents of the countries and newcomers occur at different levels. Spain has recently become attractive to immigrants, but has already faced all the problems connected to this huge immigration wave. Among other European states, Spain stands out because, despite the great number of Muslims, the attitude of locals towards them is quite tolerant.

Main body

Although Spain has gone from being a country of emigrants to a country of immigrants just in the beginning of 1990s due to its economic development, it has experienced the same migration processes as other European states, but in a much more accelerated way. If in 1985 there were just 435 000 foreigners in Spain, in 2018 the number of legal immigrants was more than 4.700 million people according to the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE). The UN, in its turn, claims that nowadays Spain has become a home country for more than 6, 5 million foreigners.

Immigration in Spain is not homogeneous; however it is easy to distinguish several main regions. The major part of foreigners comes from the European Union (Romania and Ukraine), Latin America (Colombia, Ecuador, and Dominican Republic) and North Africa (Morocco). In 2016, the leading emigration countries were Morocco with 29.986 foreigners, Romania with 28.589, and Colombia with 22.850 (data INE).

The reasons of migration differ. Some immigrants come to Spain searching economic benefits. As the agricultural sector is really huge and requires lots of temporary workers every year, foreigners (especially from Morocco) come for temporary jobs to grow fruit and vegetables. Those from Latin America and some people from Africa arrive to Spain to receive education, since Spain's education quality is much better than that in their home countries. After graduating, a major part of immigrants returns home, but there are also those who stay in Spain. There are other reasons for immigration: repatriation of those sent to other countries during Franco's regime, the influence of social media, and other political reasons. However, these are not so frequent. Moreover, there are thousands of illegal immigrants whose reasons are unclear.

Most immigrants are young men, 25-30 years old without any educational background. However, in the last years the number of women newcomers has risen significantly. They are coming to Spain to work as housekeepers, nannies and social workers¹ According to data published by INE, 26,47% of women are between 25 and 35 years of age, while 37,75% are between 36 to 45. The majority of them have never received any education.

Due to the increase in migration flows from other countries, the Spanish government was forced to organize special programs to integrate new members into Spanish society. These programs are aimed at helping immigrants to adapt to new social realities and are considered to be among the most successful in Europe². Many countries consider Spain's approach to be excessively liberal and urge the government to adapt more stringent measures to control migration. The integration programs include the possibility to study Spanish and Spanish culture, to work with professional psychologists and to participate in special events for immigrants. Many Muslim communities have financial support from the government, which

¹ María José Aguilar Idáñez. Género, inmigración y domesticidad. Universidad de Castilla La Mancha. – Albacete: Instituto de estudios Albacetenses “Don Juan Manuel”.2009.

² Fernando Conde, Diego Herranz. Los procesos de integración de los inmigrantes Pautas de consumo de alcohol y modelos culturales de referencia. – Madrid. 2004

enables them to help Muslims who do not want to participate in programs at schools or universities.

For Muslims, integration into society as full members is essential for their well-being. This long and difficult process brings many problems to the immigrants' lives. The Spanish way of life, their emancipation, the absence of traditional values, and norms surprise Muslims—all of which can cause rejection. The Qur'an condemns both materialism and hedonism, which are inherent in Spanish society. In Spain, the cult of the elders turned into a cult of children. The younger generation is allowed to do anything. The older generation often does not educate the younger. Grandparents prefer to enjoy their life than to spend time with their grandchildren.

The majority of Muslims integrates into Spanish society and adopts Western values and habits without any difficulties. This does not mean that they change their religion. They start practicing it at home privately. Young people, especially, middle-class boys forget the traditions of Islam and turn into European citizens. However, there are groups of radical Muslims who are reluctant to adopt new norms and try to impose their religious norms in Spain. These groups are rare and do not have any support from Muslim organizations that advocate for peaceful coexistence with the Spanish people on the same territory and promote equality and friendship.

Muslim women integrate easily into the Spanish society. By having moved to another country they have violated the norms of traditional Islam, so the only thing they can do is fully integrate into the new society. Muslim women have much more opportunities than men to accept the Spanish culture, since they often communicate with the local population, because they normally are domestic or hired workers. They learn Spanish realities from inside and actively adopt Spanish values. Men quickly adapt to new conditions if their wife or mother work outside the house. They accept that a woman without a husband can go outside on their own, and talk to strangers, which make it easier for them to integrate into a new society.

However, the majority of Muslims never fully integrate as it is impossible to reject the norms and traditions of Islam. The family forms the most important part of their life. Adultery and abortions are considered to be deadly sins. When forming a family, both Muslim men and women opt to marry to another Muslim.

As the number of immigrants has risen significantly in Spain, the problem of their political integration arose several years ago. The Spanish government is making an

effort to allow non- European Union citizens to vote in Spanish affairs. It is a rather complicated process; since according to the Spanish Constitution voting rights can be given to foreign citizens who come from outside the EU only on the basis of reciprocity. That is why the government is forced to negotiate with other states in order to sign bilateral diplomatic agreements.

The legal immigrants have almost the same political rights as the Spanish as long as they are residents of Spain. The right to participate in demonstrations and public meetings, the freedoms of association and assembly, and the right to protest freely and peacefully enable a foreigner to participate in political life. However, if a foreign citizen is willing to express his political opinion, he should really understand that these actions can lead to certain consequences: incarceration, revocation of a residence permit, and deportation.

Although Muslims have their own parties in Spain, only Spanish citizens are allowed to vote on a national level. These parties (the Party of Renaissance and Unification of Spain, The Caballas Coalition) advocate for protection of Muslims and are willing to facilitate immigration into Spain. Besides, their political agenda include teaching the Arabic language and culture at schools and universities.

Conclusion

Uncontrolled immigration has become a serious problem in European countries, including Spain. Due to the rise of immigration flows, the Spanish government tries to find effective ways of integration. Although there are various techniques that are used to help people adapt to new rules and traditions, the majority of Muslims finds it impossible to fully accept new norms and values. Social integration in Spain is considered successful as many Muslims try, at least, to form a part of a new society. Political integration, in its turn, is a rather complicated process and requires actions from immigrants' home countries as well.

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