

Migration issue- a cognitive dissonance

The news is rich in information on migration. Not all published data belong to the same register. Some concern migration policies, with an ideology and often repressive strategies claimed. Others are public reports, carried out by experts with scientific analysis, based on official statistics that document the evolution of the labor market and the evolution of the foreign workforce. The first information appeals to emotions and knowingly creates a diffuse threat and generates anxiety. The latter address reason, by demonstrating, with the support of figures, the reality of a phenomenon that has always existed since the beginnings of humanity, migration.

Public opinion, taken as a witness in the first case, reassured in the second case, is trapped in «cognitive dissonance». Developed in 1957 by the American psychologist Léon Festinger, the theory of cognitive dissonance (TCD) is considered as a major model for psychology (1). It has inspired many theories and generates many studies and reflections, both in social psychology and in related disciplines. It can be summarized by a three-step process: (a) when an individual is confronted with two inconsistent cognitions, (b) he /she will feel psychological discomfort (i.e., a state of cognitive dissonance) (c) which will motivate him/her to use strategies to find a satisfactory state. In matters of migration, public opinion is caught in a pincer's grip and questioned.

The migration strategy of the United States since the arrival of a new conservative team in Washington, in January 2025, is deliberately caricatural to strike public opinion, both within its borders and outside. Elected on an openly anti-migration program, with xenophobic excesses for the most extreme part of the Republican electorate (MAGA - Make America great again), the presidency of Donald Trump insults and brutalizes migrants (all “potential criminals” or “terrorists”), especially those who are in an irregular situation, often living and working for several years on American territory. Special police for migration (ICE), richly endowed, is assigned to their search with muscular arrests, readily televised and relayed by social networks. A step was taken in 2025. The novelty is that the American government intends to impose its views on the rest of the Western world, in particular on Europe, a form of ideological “vassalization”.

In a national strategy document published on Friday, December 5, 2025, the United States denounces Europe threatened with "economic decline" and a "civic erasure" due to immigration (2). The document reproduces the remarks made by Vice-President JD Vance during the Security Conference in Munich in February 2025. The American document marks an expected erasure, according to its authors, of Europe due to 'the decline in birth rates, the loss of national identities, the repression of political opposition, the censorship of freedom of expression, 'regulatory asphyxia,' and immigration. It is stated that «In the long term, it is more than plausible that within a few decades at most some NATO members will be mostly non-European». The American team continues its open interference by suggesting an "ideological annexation", conditioning its aid on support from European countries for "patriotic European parties”, that is to say anti-migration and openly against the European Union.

The brutality of the American strategy towards the European Union, and its members, does not only concern migration but its instrumentalization is a specific tactic of the extreme right. Based on the work of American political scientist Elisabeth Carter, French researchers Tristan

Boursier and Antoine Lemor have identified seven categories of their ideas: national identity, tradition, authority, promotion of individual merit, order and rejection of both equality and immigration (3). By repeating these ideas, they end up contaminating minds destabilized by economic, political, and social crises and the tormented geopolitics. More easily influenced, they willingly look for scapegoats. The offensive of the United States, since January 2025, once a democratic compass, further increases confusion.

In order to neutralize these worrying information which is a matter of ideology and propaganda, Western democracies, and particularly European ones, have adopted different strategies according to their history and the economic, social and political situation. To avoid being accused of laxity, social-democratic governments, as in Denmark since the migration crisis of 2015, have adopted a restrictive migration policy, worried about the threat that hangs over their Welfare State, and the rise of the extreme right among its immediate neighbors, in Sweden or the Netherlands where it entered the government. The European Union, anticipating a breakthrough for far-right parties in the 2024 European Parliament elections (where they increased from one quarter to one third of parliamentary staff), tightened the terms of the Asylum and Migration Pact, which is due to enter into force in June 2026, by strengthening border procedures and lowering the solidarity requirement (with regard to refugees) in the European countries deemed most at risk (Cyprus, Spain, Greece, Italy...).

It is most important to highlight examples of 'good practices' or 'role models' in Europe. Spain is an example of economic dynamism in Europe (2.6% growth in 2025), which it owes to its foreign workforce. It facilitated their entry through a policy of openness on the part of several Spanish governments, particularly regarding Latin American nationals (law on the historical memory passed by Zapatero in 2007 supplemented in 2022 by the law on the democratic memory by Sanchez). Documenting is equally crucial. The reports published by Think Tanks specialized in migration insist on the needs of foreign labour in the face of the real demographic decline of Europe and the increasing number of jobs not provided by nationals- ProCausa in Spain, Terra Nova in France (5)... in addition to official statistics, European ones (Eurostat) or international ones (OECD) which go in the same direction.

The mobilization of civil society (local elected officials, associations, entrepreneurs, citizens...) is decisive. In Sweden, the association of Swedish municipalities and regions (SKR) alerted in November 2024 (6) about the shortage of national labor and the need for foreign skills in their communities as foreign workforce represents 22% of municipal and regional jobs, 40% of doctors, 50% of home care workers, In France, a team of associations questioned public authorities in the media by denouncing a security strategy that costs public finances (150 million Euros to evacuate the camps) while entire sectors of the economy would need the labor power of the exiles. (7)

The "Brussels effect" has not said its last word - we are today building an unprecedented model of resistance and resilience in the face of "fake friends" and real "enemies" who attack us on all fronts. The strategy that maintains confusion with anxiety-inducing information and multiplies its attacks to denigrate Europe is rational and deliberate. Resisting is the only means of survival for Europeans to preserve their psychic integrity (in the face of cognitive dissonance) and continue defending their values. More than ever – let's proudly say *In varietate concordia* !

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- (1) Alexandre Bran, David Vaidis. Nouveaux Horizons sur la Dissonance Cognitive : Développements Récents, Modèles Intégratifs et Pistes de Recherche. L'Année psychologique, 2022, Vol. 122 (1), pp.149-183. 10.3917/anpsy1.221.0149. halshs-03772406-<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03772406/document>
- (2) Piotr Smolar « Washington prend les Européens pour cible », Le Monde, dimanche 7 et lundi 8 décembre 2025
- (3) Note de lecture de Claire Legros sur le numéro 2, volume 75 de la Revue française de science politique, avril-juin 2025, Le Monde, 6 décembre 2025.
- (4) Isabelle Piquer, « L'Espagne stimule sa prospérité grâce à l'immigration », Le Monde, 22 octobre 2025
- (5) Hakim El Karoui et Juba Ihaddaden, rapport publié par la Fondation Terra Nova, Paris, 12 mai 2025- https://tnova.fr/site/assets/files/70453/terra_nova_-_travailleurs_immigres_-_12_05_25.pdf?1wgvz3
- (6) Anne-Françoise Hivert (Malmö (Suède), « En Suède, les communes défient le gouvernement sur l'aide au retour volontaire des immigrés, Le Monde 23 octobre 2025
- (7) Team of associations including Parcours d'exil, Médecins du Monde, Association Osiris, La Cimade, réseau Louis Guilloux, Médecins sans Frontières, Jesuit Refugee Service France, Centre Primo Levi, Ligue des droits de l'homme, Forum Réfugiés, Secours catholique, Auberge des migrants, Médecins du monde, or GISTI that have filed an appeal with the Council of State , Le Monde, 15 octobre 2025