

Moaning won't help: it's the global market that determines migration. It makes more sense to analyse ongoing experiences to try and import the methods that work best. The British model is turning out to be very efficient in terms of managing skilled manpower, while the American model offers interesting ideas for a government-business relationship

The British model is more efficient

MIGRATIONS 2

by Danilo Taino

From Padua's wall – a real one, built to keep out North African drug dealers – to the Rio Grande wall, so far only a proposal to keep the Hispanics out, the issue is now a global one. Immigration bursts out in periodic waves as the biggest of all problems; an emergency; a danger. The floating wrecks that arrive on the shores of Lampedusa and the Canary Islands, the immigration bill being discussed in Washington, the entry of new countries into the EU: "The barbarians are at our gates", public opinion, a large number of politicians and the authorities say at this point; "They have to be stopped".

"Immigration is the toughest political issue that Europe and the U.S. are facing today", Tony Blair said recently. Pat Buchanan, a former populist American presidential candidate, has titled his new book *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America*. And some Italian ministers have toyed with the idea of turning clandestine immigrants into informers against those who exploit them in exchange for a residence permit.

It's panic stations, basically. But is the issue of immigration, particularly illegal immigration, really so impossible and so unmanageable in the 21st century? If politicians would only manage to keep their nerve, the reply would be "No": it is a serious and gigantic problem but, according to the top experts in the field, there are logical and even positive solutions. There would be two requirements, however: keeping our nerve, precisely, and a certain



amount of clear thinking to establish what exactly we are talking about. People cannot be taught to keep their nerve: they are either capable of it or not. However, an analysis of the situation can certainly be attempted. Demetrios Papademetriou, the founder and chairman of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington and one of the world's leading experts in migratory flows, says that the world entered a new era at the end of the 1990s. "Illegal migration has been by far the fastest rising single form of migration during the past 5-10 years", he says. "And the ratio of illegal to legal migrants is higher every year, worldwide – it is a global phenomenon". He calculates that there are currently about 12 million illegal immigrants in the U.S. and that their number increases by half a million

every year, coming in mainly from across the border with Mexico. "The shocking figure", says Papademetriou, "is that a third of the foreign-born people living in the United States is illegal. No other part of the world has a similar situation. But there are half a million illegals in Canada too, and their number grows by 50-100,000 every year. In the European Union, Eurostat actually refuses to count them and provide estimates, but we can easily say that there are from seven to ten million illegal immigrants and that their number grows by at least 300,000 a year, although I suspect that we're looking at figures of closer to half a million". Sociologist Guido Bolaffi, who has contributed to drawing up nearly all of Italy's immigration laws, sums up the situation by citing a study by the U.N.'s Global Commission on International Migration, which says we are now experiencing the "liberalisation of immigration". He adds that this is obviously related to totally new flows, which have nothing to do with the movement of the old emigrants from the Italian South who left for Milan or America. "Unfortunately, we are still bound to a dated idea of immigration", he said in a recent interview to "Corriere della Sera". "Of a time when mobile phones didn't exist and letters took a month to reach their destination; when low-cost flights didn't exist and there was no globalisation. Volkswagen once had centres to hire Italian workers in Rome, Naples and Palermo, to choose workers and send them to its plants in Germany. It was a time when industry and programming existed. Today this is no longer the case; immigration is different, it is linked to services and plays a role on the market".

In other words, people often leave their country without a secure job and, more often than not, an illegal migrant has totally different expectations. "My father went to Belgium with a five-year contract and then stayed on", says Marco Martiniello, a professor of Italian origin at the University of Liège and perhaps the top expert on the subject in Europe. "That was at the end of the 1970s: immigrants settled in a place and stayed there. Things are different now; we are looking at circulatory immigration – people arriving in one country are open to the idea of then going on to another, or returning home sooner or later".



Contrasto (2)

A new era, therefore, created by globalisation, ease of movement and the globalisation of communications. Above all, however, it is the result – as always – of demand and supply. For, if illegal immigration has become the biggest phenomenon of recent years, it is because there is basically a demand for workers of this type in wealthy countries – this type meaning low-cost, not necessarily skilled manpower, willing to work in poorly regulated sectors such as construction and agriculture, but increasingly in personal services as well, specifically as nannies and caregivers. "Illegal immigration", says Papademetriou, "is part of the vital lubricant of our society. It would not be happening if so many people's interests were not served by this status quo".

The expert, who himself emigrated from Greece to America, adds that it is the most inflexible economies that have the highest demand for the category of illegal immigrants. "In the United States", he says, "the OECD estimates that the underground economy accounts for 5 to 10% of GDP, while in the large European countries the figure ranges from 15% to as much as 25% of GDP. One of the reasons for this difference



_People often leave their country without a secure job. In the European Union, according to some estimates, there are from seven to ten million illegal immigrants and their number grows by 300,000 a year

is the fact that the real minimum wage in America is low – currently \$5.45 an hour. So, in the United States, many illegal immigrants also work in the legitimate economy because employers probably don't pay them much in any case and this way, at least they don't violate labour laws".

The reality is therefore a complex and changing one, but at least a couple of things are clear. For example, it is clear that migratory flows cannot be stopped, for the simple reason that there is a demand for them; in parallel, there are the technical means for people to move and hence for supply to meet demand. Another thing that is clear is that the majority of current flows are illegal. The main reasons are that restrictive laws often make it difficult to enter a country legally and remain there to work, and that labour markets are often so rigid that they actually encourage the search for illegal workers to lower bureaucratic costs and

charges (this is often the case with families requiring personal services). The first conclusion is therefore that it makes no sense to scream and shout about migratory flows, and the politicians who do so either haven't understood the issue or are playing to the crowd. The second conclusion is that illegality can be at least partly overcome through more intelligent systems of access to domestic labour markets and by reducing the rigidity that encourages the growth of an underground economy.

Papademetriou believes that the British system of regulating migratory flows is the one that currently works best. It is a mixed system that draws to some extent on the Canadian system, i.e. it assigns points to individuals wanting to work in the U.K. on the basis of their profiles. The method works well in terms of wooing foreign talent, because it makes it possible to select the skills the country requires from the outset, but it leaves out the substantial demand for unskilled jobs. From this point of view, says Papademetriou, the American system, which British lawmakers have also studied, is better: it consists of giving a certain number of companies or individuals, selected by the

government on the basis of their credibility and history, the permission to hire abroad: in exchange, these entities undertake to accept auditing by the government at any time. The need for unskilled manpower can thereby be met. Besides, the British system envisages temporary work permits, generally used by young people, for citizens of countries with which London has signed bilateral agreements. The idea is essentially to seek the maximum flexibility so as to open channels through which to make illegal immigration totally legal. To strengthen this, Papademetriou proposes that the EU sign agreements with countries like Libya and Morocco providing more immigration visas, with an increasing number of visas issued over time, in exchange for strict border controls to check the flow of illegal immigrants.

Bolaffi essentially agrees with this scheme, to which he however adds the need to start forms of common border patrols, draw up tougher laws against criminality in the sector, e.g. extending the application of the Italian 41 bis law, which specifies strict prison sentences for Mafia bosses, to human traffickers, and establish European regulations on family reunification, political asylum and the visa system. "An American colleague had his own practical formula for illegal immigrants", says Bolaffi, "i.e.: stop them before they leave, intercept them on their travels, catch them if they arrive".

All in all, if the immigration problem were to be solved through the search for an effective regulation of flows, it would not be too difficult to naturally resolve the issue. The trouble is that this is not the case. Once they have arrived, immigrants must be integrated, put in a position to enter the host society, adapt to it and not be rejected. Recent events in France and the U.K., which believed that they had the two most successful models of multicultural integration, have shown how difficult this is. The riots in France's suburbs, where young second or third generation immigrants laid waste to the city, made it clear that the French system is going through a major crisis. While the British system is perhaps not yet crisis-ridden, the July 2005 terrorist attacks in London opened a horrifying window onto the so-called Londonistan, peopled by youngsters, also second or third



generation immigrants, who rebel against their families by choosing the path of radical Islamic or even terrorist militancy against the country in which they were born and educated.

Integration is in fact probably the most difficult part of an immigration policy, the part that requires the most fine-tuning, the widest local application, the greatest search for public consensus and, in some cases, even greater rigidity to impose shared codes of conduct – in other words, a greater capacity for political control of the territory.

Obviously, there is no recipe for total success. However, the experience of the last few decades has established certain facts. Firstly, language: it must be carried to immigrants, who must learn it. "There is the need for a major plan in schools devoted to children of immigrants, to make certain that they can integrate", says Marzio Barbagli, a sociology lecturer at the Statistics faculty of the University of Bologna and also one of the leading European researchers on migratory phenomena. "We need cultural mediators everywhere, who are recognised as professionals, and special classes devoted to the study of Italian, as with English in



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America" – as well as exams in Italian, history and civic education to accompany the achievement of citizenship and political rights.

Martiniello points out that there are examples of positive integration in Europe, particularly at the local level. The idea is to collect the best cases, as the EU is trying to do, and spread awareness of them, because in most cases it is not the State that supplies the best solutions as regards integration. On the contrary: Papademetriou proposes that highly centralised European policies be revolutionised to give power on immigration matters to decentralised entities – churches, voluntary groups and civil society. There are hundreds of experiences and hence solutions, none of them entirely successful, but all of them probably useful if accompanied by the absolute need to legalise immigrants (who can never be integrated

otherwise) and create market conditions such that immigrants can not only be given rights but can also find work and the possibility of emancipation. This will not be a short-term task, not least because it is not a win-win process. The result will probably be positive in the long term, but many people along the way will only stand to lose from the arrival of immigrants. It will be necessary to manage the reactions of these social segments, perhaps compensate them for their loss, and try to reduce social tensions.

As for the rest, "Time will tell", says Bolaffi. The key to it all, in his opinion, is the test of *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*, the Stanley Kramer film that focuses on the family and society's reactions to the prospect of a white girl marrying a black boy. Real integration will happen when this hypothesis no longer creates any tension. Until then, we will have to work patiently – case by case, neighbourhood by neighbourhood and school by school – on encouraging the development of shared interests between locals and immigrants. It is not an easy task. But there is no alternative: the market needs immigrants, dearie.