

## Multiculturalism in Canada - A Model for Germany?

### Abstract:

*In 1971, Canada established itself as the world's first officially multicultural nation. For more than thirty years, the different ethnic groups of the Canadian population have lived together under the ideology and policy of multiculturalism.*

*"Living together with differences" - "engaging diversity" is the main principle of multiculturalism. It is composed by seven essential elements:*

- 1. a commitment to migration and to its consequence, to the ethnocultural differences and diversity;*
- 2. the right of minority women and men to be ethnoculturally different;*
- 3. the principle of mutual respect for each other, because all cultures are equally valued;*
- 4. the "multicultural assumption" (the social psychology of multiculturalism): only those who are secure in their cultural background will be open to and tolerant towards others;*
- 5. the principle of "unity within diversity": ethnocultural diversity is not unlimited; the right to be different and mutual respect end when differences interfere with core institutional values, with laws, with human rights and the rights of individuals;*
- 6. social inclusiveness: equality of opportunities and of participation in economic, social cultural and political life for all ethnic groups;*
- 7. active political management: multiculturalism does not develop by itself, it needs political promotion.*

*These principles were entrenched in the Canadian Constitution and in several laws, especially in the Multiculturalism Act and the Employment Equity Act.*

*Although there have been and there are a lot of debates about the content and the effects of multiculturalism, although multiculturalism has been and is still criticized from the right as well as from the left, nearly all political elites and a vast majority of Canadians are pro-multicultural. Multiculturalism has become an essential part of Canadian identity.*

*Canadian multiculturalism has developed in a special historical, social, cultural and political context which does not exist in other countries - e.g. in Germany or Japan. Canada is a classical immigration country while Germany is a modern one with monocultural traditions, and in Japan the discussion about immigration and integration of ethnic minorities is just at its starting point. That is why it is an illusion to consider Canadian multiculturalism as an export hit to other societies. Nevertheless, some experiences of the Canadian social experiment may be vague points of reference for other countries which need immigration for economic or demographic reasons:*

- 1. Immigration and the integration of immigrants need a sophisticated political management (immigration and integration policy).*

2. *In public discussion immigration and immigrants must primarily be considered as a positive chance and not primarily as a negative problem - as it has been done for nearly two decades in Germany.*
3. *Multicultural integration of ethnic minorities based on the principle of unity-within-diversity is better than monocultural assimilation of ethnic minorities. It corresponds better to the core values of humanity, tolerance and mutual respect.*

## I. Canada - the world's first officially multicultural nation

More than three decades ago, Canada established itself as the world's first officially multicultural nation. In 1971, the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau proclaimed multiculturalism as a main principle of Canadian policy. For more than thirty years, the different ethnic groups of the Canadian population - the Canadian "ethnic mosaic", as the Canadians say - have been living together under the ideology and policy of multiculturalism.<sup>1</sup>

### The philosophy of multiculturalism

The core principle of the multicultural Canadian society is "living together with differences", "living together in diversity", "engaging diversity" (cf. the title of *Fleras/Elliot* 2002). This principle is composed by seven essential elements:<sup>2</sup>

1. A **commitment to immigration** and to its consequences, to the **ethnocultural differences and diversity**.
2. The **right** of minority women and men **to be** ethnoculturally **different**.
3. The principle of **mutual respect** for each other because all cultures are **equally valued**.
4. The so-called "**multicultural assumption**" - a kind of social psychology of multiculturalism: only those who are secure in their ethnocultural background will be open to others and tolerant toward others - a hypothesis grounded on empirical research (*Kalin/Berry* 1994).
5. The principle of "**unity within diversity**" (or "diversity within unity"): ethnocultural diversity is not unlimited; the right to be different and mutual respect end when differences interfere with core institutional values, with laws, with human rights and the rights of individuals. A problem of this principle is where to draw the so-called "multicultural line" (*Fleras/Elliot* 2002, 24 ff.): Where are the limits of the differences? Where does the obligation to unity begin? The demarcation of this

<sup>1</sup> Important books on Canadian multiculturalism are *Fleras /Elliot* 2002; *Fleras/Kunz* 2001; *Day* 2000; *Kymlicka* 1998; *Driedger* 1996; *Berry/Laponce* 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the following documents: *Pierre Trudeau's* speech to Parliament on October 8, 1971; Multiculturalism Act 1988; Annual Reports of the Department of Canadian Heritage on the Operation of the Multiculturalism Act; Ontario Policy On Multiculturalism.

line is subject to political discussions and decisions as well as to decisions of the courts.

6. **Social inclusiveness:** equality of opportunities and of participation in economic, social, cultural and political life for all ethnic groups.
7. **Active political management:** multiculturalism does not develop by itself, it needs political promotion.

### Constitutional and legal entrenchment of multiculturalism

These principles were entrenched in the Canadian constitution. The famous article 27 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* clearly states that multiculturalism is a prominent part of the national agenda at the highest levels. It prescribes "the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians".

Multiculturalism was also entrenched in several laws; the most important ones are the Multiculturalism Act (1988) and the Employment Equity Act (1986). Both laws oblige the Canadian government to promote equality and full participation of individuals from all ethnic groups and - at the same time - to foster recognition of cultural differences. Living together with differences means "**different, yet equal**" (Fleras/Elliott 2002, 16).

### Criticism and support

Since the beginning of the multicultural period there have been a lot of debates about multiculturalism - about its meaning, its content, its effects. The First Nations - as the aboriginal people are called - and many Franco-Canadians have never agreed to the idea of multiculturalism, and the concept has been criticized and is still being criticized from the right as well as from the left.

**First Nations** and **Franco-Canadians** refuse to be considered as equal ethnocultural groups among many others, they fear to **lose their particular historically rooted status**: the Franco-Canadians demand to be recognized as one of the two "founding nations" with a "distinct" or "unique society", and the First Nations claim their rights as "citizens plus" (Frideres 1998, 290) - as first settlers of the country who have been suppressed by the British and French immigrants for centuries and are entitled to get compensation.

A main point of the critics from **the right** is: **Multiculturalism is divisive**, it produces tribalism, balkanization, ethnic ghettos.<sup>3</sup>

A main point of the critics from **the left** is: Multiculturalism is nothing but a system of symbols without substance. It is **a symbolic instrument to manipulate voters**; with its promise of equality it covers the really existing inequalities.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Stoffman 2002; Roberts 1997; Mallet 1996; Paquet 1994; Bissoondath 1994; Bibby 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Fleras/Kunz 2001, 23; Bolaria/Li 1988.

However, despite these debates and criticism, nearly all political elites of Canada and a solid majority of Canadians are pro-multicultural, they support the idea of multiculturalism. Canadian elites and most of the Canadians are proud of their multicultural society. In 1999, a representative survey showed that about 75 per cent of all Canadians agree with the statement: "Our multicultural and multiracist make-up is an important part of what makes us Canadians" (MCLEAN'S December 12, 1999). Multiculturalism has become an essential element of Canadian identity. The experts of multiculturalism research call it "an innovative yet flawed experiment" (*Fleras/Elliott* 2002, 13).

## II. A model for Germany?

May this Canadian experiment be considered as a model for Germany or other countries - like Japan e.g.?

### Similarities

At first sight there are some similarities between Canada and Germany:

- By international conventions both countries - as well as Japan - are obliged to accept refugees from other societies.
- For almost half a century, the German as well as the Canadian economy have depended on migrant workers. And there is no doubt that Germany will need immigration in the future, too - because of simple demographic reasons: For thirty years, birth rates have been very low; each generation of children is smaller than the generations of their parents by about one third. And that means: Without immigration, the German population and workforce would decrease dramatically, and the economy as well as the system of social security - especially for the elderly people - would collapse. Today more than ten percent of the population belong to ethnic minorities, and this percentage will double within the next twenty to thirty years. Germany has become an immigration country and will continue to be an immigration country during the next decades (cf. *Geißler* 2002, 49 - 80).

So far my short remarks on the similarities.

### Differences

Yet there are a lot of differences between Canada and Germany - and my answer to the question "May Canada be considered as a model for Germany?" is "no" and "yes" at the same time.

No - because the Canadian multiculturalism has developed in a special historical, social, cultural and political context which does not exist in other countries - neither in Germany (for more details cf. *Geißler* 2003) nor in Japan. Canada is a classical

immigration country, its history is a history of immigration. From its beginning people with different ethnic and cultural background had to live together.

Germany is not a classical, but a modern immigration country. It calls itself "*Deutschland*" - "country of the Germans" - and has deeply rooted monocultural traditions. The Japanese society, too, has a similar monocultural fundament and the public discussion about immigration and intergration is - as far as I know - just at its starting point. That is why it is an illusion to consider Canadian multiculturalism as an export hit to other countries.

### What we may learn from Canada

Nevertheless, some experiences of the Canadian experiment may be "vague points of reference" - as I call it - for other countries which need immigration for humanitarian, economic and demographic reasons. Germany - and I think Japan, too - may learn three things from Canada:

1. Immigration and the integration of immigrants need a sophisticated political management. A **well-thought-out immigration policy and integration policy** is necessary for immigration countries, albeit classical or modern ones. In this regard, Germany has serious deficits. Up to the end of the nineties, the German political elites and opinion leaders did not recognize that Germany was an immigration country. The public discussion was dominated by the slogan "*Germany is not an immigration country!*" During the last years, however, the situation has radically changed: the political elites have accepted the demographic facts and recognized that Germany needs immigration. The government has liberalized the very restrictive citizenship laws and elaborated the draft of an immigration law, the first immigration law in German history.

During the preparation of the law the Canadian immigration law - especially its point-system - played an important role. The Canadians distinguish between three classes of immigrants: refugees, family reunification class and "independents". Immediate members of the families are admitted into Canada for humanitarian reasons and in order to foster the process of integration. The admission of the so-called "independents" is regulated by the point-system which evaluates the "suitability" of the candidates and is particularly based on the level of education, specific vocational skills and experiences and official language knowledge and - only with regard to the so-called "business class" - on financial investments and experiences as entrepreneurs (cf. *Fleras/Elliott* 2002a).

2. In public discussion immigration and immigrants must primarily be considered as a **positive chance** and **not** primarily as a **negative problem** - as it has been done in Germany for nearly two decades (cf. *Geißler* 1999 and 2000; *Ruhrmann/Demren* 2000).
3. The integration of ethnic minorities should be based on the multicultural principle of **unity - within - diversity**. **Multicultural integration is better than monocultural assimilation**. It tries to find a just balance between the interests of

the majority and those of the minorities and it corresponds more to the core values of humanity, tolerance and mutual respect (*Geißler* 2003).

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