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THE IMPACT OF INCREASED INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ON FRENCH IMMIGRATION POLICY

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Abstract. In this article the author looks into the transformation of French immigration policy under the influence of burgeoning international migration. Initially focused on controlling of labour market access, the policy has evolved to encompass immigrant integration and citizenship criteria. This shift marks a transition from restrictive to selective immigration regulation, with the French establishment viewing it as a means to depoliticise the immigration issue. However, the challenge of successfully integrating of non-European immigrants into French society remains unresolved, largely due to the perceived supremacy of French culture over those of African and Asian origins.

Keywords: international migration; immigration policy; migration networks; imagined community; France.

ВЛИЯНИЕ РОСТА МЕЖДУНАРОДНОЙ МИГРАЦИИ НА ИММИГРАЦИОННУЮ ПОЛИТИКУ ФРАНЦИИ

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Аннотация. Проанализирован процесс трансформации иммиграционной политики Франции под влиянием роста международной миграции. Данная политика перешла от контроля доступа к рынку труда к решению проблемы интеграции иммигрантов и определению критериев предоставления гражданства. В стране осуществлен переход от ограничительного принципа регулирования иммиграции к избирательному принципу, в котором французский истеблишмент увидел возможность деполитизировать иммиграционный вопрос. Однако проблема успешной интеграции неевропейских иммигрантов во французское общество остается нерешенной. Причиной данной ситуации стало представление о верховенстве французской культуры над культурами африканских и азиатских народов.

Ключевые слова: международная миграция; иммиграционная политика; сети миграции; воображаемое сообщество; Франция.

Introduction

The final third of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st century witnessed a significant surge in international migration. According to the Institute of Labour Economics in Germany, the number of international migrants worldwide tripled during this period¹. Several factors underpin this phenomenon. Firstly, the decolonisation of Asian and African countries expanded the range of states involved in international migration.

¹Ferrie J.-P., Hatton T.-J. Two centuries of international migration [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://ftp.iza.org/dp7866.pdf> (date of access: 20.02.2024).

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Secondly, newly developing states experienced high population growth rates. Thirdly, there remains a stark contrast in living standards between developed and developing nations.

The relevance of this research topic is underscored by France's exemplary status in illustrating the challenges faced by European societies from increased international migration. As the oldest migrant-receiving country in Europe, France saw widespread immigration beginning in the 19th century. The influx of immigrants continued into the 20th century, save for interruptions during the two world wars. Labour immigration notably increased during this time. However, by the late 20th century, immigration began to be perceived as a pressing issue.

Several factors contributed to the changing attitudes of French society and policymakers towards immigration. The economic slowdown post-1974 reduced the French state's capacity to integrate new arrivals into its national economy. Additionally, the influx of immigrants from France's former colonies in Africa and Asia heightened ethno-religious diversity within French society. The arrival of individuals from countries with markedly different cultural and religious traditions – viewed through

a colonial lens – began to be perceived as a threat. As French culture gradually dissolved in the global information space, a crisis of national identity began to emerge. The growing sense of disunity among French citizens and the sociocultural autonomy of foreign diasporas brought the question of integrating immigrants into French society to the forefront.

This study aims to examine how French immigration policy has evolved in response to the rise in international migration. The study spans from 1974, when the French government first imposed restrictions on immigration, to 2006. This period began with the decision to ban permanent labour migration on 3 July 1974, marking a shift from attracting foreign labour to limiting its influx. The period concludes with the final approval of the Code on the entry and stay of foreigners and the right to asylum (CESEDA) on 15 November 2006. Since then, French governments have transitioned from a restrictive to a selective immigration policy. Despite these efforts, the proportion of immigrants in the overall population increased from 7.4 % to 8.1 %². Moreover, immigration regulation became a political hot potato, with various approaches to reforming policy being tried and tested.

Theoretical basis

Publications on this topic are divided into two main streams. The first stream focuses on describing French immigration policy using a challenge-solution approach. A prime example is the book by French historian V. Viet "Immigrant France: construction of a policy 1914–1997" [1]. The second stream looks at specific aspects of immigration. French historian Y. Gastaut examined the evolution of French society's attitudes towards immigrants [2]. Russian-speaking researchers have also contributed to these areas. Russian historian E. O. Obichkina attributes the tightening of France's immigration policy to the country's deteriorating economic situation [3]. Historian E. B. Demintseva explored the unique dynamics between Arab immigrants and French society [4]. The diversity of publications masks the lack of a unified picture that reflects the transformation of French immigration policy.

One of the hurdles in the scientific study of French immigration policy is the insufficient conceptualisation of terms and the complexity inherent in international migration, which is studied across various disciplines: economics, sociology, history, political science, and law. Two fundamental questions need addressing. The first is the lack of consensus on terminology. Russian political scientist A. A. Ashmarina analysed Russian and European migration-related terms and concluded: "Comprehensive work is needed to systematise the diversity of migration definitions at all levels of decision-ma-

king, involving experts from academia and government agencies"³ [5, p. 961]. The second question is closely tied to the first. It lies in the significant differences in how various disciplines approach the analysis of migration. Demographers discuss the varying population densities across different regions. Economists focus on disparities in income levels and labour market demands. Sociologists explore the underlying motives that drive people to move. Political scientists scrutinise shifts in party rhetoric and government actions. Legal experts determine the status of migrants.

Creating a unified scientific approach to the study of international migration and immigration policy seems unlikely shortly. However, it is feasible to integrate theories from different disciplines in specific studies. To analyse French immigration policy between 1974 and 2006, the author of this article employed the migration network theory developed by American sociologist D. S. Massey [6].

Migration networks are social connections that link people in the sending region with those in the receiving region. These networks influence the scale and direction of migration flows as well as the adaptation outcomes for migrants at their destination. As more individuals rely on these networks to migrate, they expand even further. Through this feedback loop, migration flows become self-sustaining and eventually decouple from the economic conditions that initially triggered them.

²Population immigrée en France [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/fichier/2381757/demo-etran-part-pop-immig.xlsx> (date of access: 31.01.2024).

³Hereinafter translated by us. – K. S.

In the host country, migration networks form spatially confined enclaves of immigrants, which in large cities often coincide with ethnic or racial ghettos. These enclaves maintain transnational ties that link sending and receiving societies.

Migration network theory views immigration as a social issue. To translate this into the political realm, the author of the article introduced the concept of the immigration issue. The immigration issue represents a contradiction in the relationship between the host society and immigrants. It is associated with changes in the immigration process, difficulties in immigrant adaptation, and how residents of the host country perceive them, thereby shaping the political agenda. The transformation of the immigration issue from a social to a political matter is driven by processes of politicisation and depoliticisation. According to Russian political scientist M. V. Danilov, these processes can be either organic or technological⁴. Organic politicisation occurs

as a result of natural socio-political processes, where an issue gains political significance and activists bring it to party agendas. Technological politicisation arises from individuals seeking to exploit the political system for their interests. The media play a crucial role in this process by bringing societal attention to specific problems.

The outcome of immigration policy can lead to either the integration of immigrants into a cohesive community or their segregation into disparate groups. To scrutinise these outcomes, scholars often turn to the theory of the nation, particularly the notion of “imagined communities” as articulated by British political scientist B. Anderson. He observed: “In an anthropological spirit, then, I propose the following definition of the nation: it is an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” [7, p. 5–6]. What is paramount in defining a nation is not the binary of falsity versus authenticity, but rather how it is conceptualised and represented.

The evolution of the immigration issue in France

Since 1974, France has embarked on a policy aimed at curtailing immigration. This shift was driven by the French establishment’s desire to reassert state control over the immigration process. Following World War II, France’s primary source of labour was its colonial territories in North Africa. This was facilitated by a simplified regime for entry and residency for individuals from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. By the mid-1950s, the state had effectively ceded control over external labour migration to entrepreneurs. French business owners viewed workers from North Africa as a source of cheap and temporary labour. As historian V. Viet pointed out: “Need we recall that migration from European countries was perceived as a search for work and permanent housing, while migration from the North African colonies was considered the migration of workers who had “accepted celibacy”?” [1, p. 508]. The political upheaval of May – June 1968 saw trade unions and left-wing political forces seek to rally immigrant workers in their struggle for labour rights, causing consternation among the ruling elite. Secretary of state for labour immigrants A. Postel-Vinay remarked: “Our unstable and restless society could well have perished back in May 1968 if it had been supported by a sufficient mass of foreign workers”⁵.

Moreover, relations between North African immigrants and the French were further strained by the lingering memories of France’s defeat in the Algerian War of 1954–1962. The consolidation of far-right forces led to the formation of the National front party in 1972. In 1973, a wave of crimes against North African immigrants

swept across the country. Historian Y. Gastaut noted: “The outbreak of racism caused concern in French society about immigration from North Africa, a concern that has since become widespread” [2, p. 61]. French politicians largely turned a blind eye to this surge in racism.

Consequently, on 3 July 1974, the government decided to prohibit the entry of long-term labour migrants into the country without engaging in widespread public discussion or considering the unique dynamics between the French populace and immigrants from non-European countries.

The lack of public consensus on the decision led, over time, to its adaptation to the socio-economic and socio-cultural dynamics prevailing in society. Consequently, we can identify the period from 1974 to 1980 as a significant phase in the formation of France’s immigration restriction policy. During this era, French governments implemented immigration policies using established methods of administrative regulation. This phase culminated in 1980 with the enactment of the Law of the French Republic of 10 January 1980 No. 80-9 on the prevention of illegal immigration. The process of drafting and enforcing this law brought the issue of immigration regulation into the political spotlight.

Since the early 1980s, the immigration debates have come to the fore in France. Due to restrictions on hiring foreign workers, the nature of immigration shifted dramatically. Family reunification, rather than employment, became the primary reason for entering the country. Between 1974 and 1980, the number of permanent foreign workers in France plummeted from 68 000 to

⁴Danilov M. V. *Institutes, mechanisms and technologies of society politicisation in post-Soviet Russia (1990s–2000s)* : diss. ... doct. of political science : 23.00.02. Saratov; 2015. p. 35. (in Russ.)

⁵Laurens S. «1974» et la fermeture des frontières. *Analyse critique d’une décision érigée en turning-point* // Politix. 2008. Vol. 82. P. 69–94.

17 000⁶. Conversely, the number of immigrant family members surged from 4 900 to 42 000⁷. This transition from labour-based to family-based immigration expanded migration networks and led to the formation of immigrant enclaves. The influx of women, children, and elderly individuals resulted in a decline in economic activity among newcomers.

Most labour immigrants took on jobs that were generally unattractive to French citizens, primarily in industries such as manufacturing, construction, and agriculture. However, the shift towards a post-industrial economy led to a reduction in jobs within these sectors. Specifically, between 1975 and 1990, more than half a million jobs occupied by foreigners were eliminated in French industry⁸. As a result, unemployment rates among foreign workers soared to nearly double the national average. Many immigrants found themselves trapped in poverty despite their standard of living being higher than in their countries of origin; it remained low compared to the majority of the French population. This disparity fuelled increased protest activity, crime, and reliance on government assistance.

Social inequality was further exacerbated by the significant cultural gap between North African immigrants – who brought with them Arab culture rooted in Islamic traditions – and the French populace. North African immigrants

often identified themselves based on religion or ethnicity, which clashed with the secular and individualistic values underpinning French national identity.

The negative perception of North African immigrants among the French was also influenced by stereotypes dating back to the colonial era. As Russian historian E. B. Demintseva observed: “For many French, Africa seemed to be a region where concepts like “civilisation” and “culture” were deemed inapplicable” [4, p. 27]. The far-right National front party seized the moment, portraying immigration from non-European countries as the root cause of rising crime rates, unemployment, and the erosion of national identity. Under their influence, the immigration debate in France took on a more technological and media-savvy character.

Historically, the political engagement of French immigrants had been stifled due to stringent regulations, particularly under the Decree-law of 12 April 1939 “On foreign associations and organisations including foreigners”. The repeal of this decree in 1981 coincided with the waning popularity of traditional political parties. Consequently, French immigrants began to assert their rights through public demonstrations and actions. Meanwhile, the National front adeptly captured media attention, reshaping the immigration discourse to align with their narrative.

Transformation of French immigration policy

The 1980s marked a fierce tug-of-war between the leading political factions. This began with F. Mitterrand’s victory in the 1981 presidential elections as the candidate of the French Socialist party. F. Mitterrand was the first to propose comprehensive reforms to the nation’s immigration policy as part of his electoral platform. By 1986, centre-right parties had also jumped into the fray, initiating their own set of reforms.

This political struggle unveiled a stark contrast between two divergent approaches to immigration control: the liberal and the conservative. The liberal approach championed human rights, advocating for freedom of movement and residence. In contrast, the conservative stance prioritised national interests, calling for stricter immigration controls. During this period, various parties proposed radical changes to immigration regulation, but these often failed to align with the realities on the ground or meet public expectations. Consequently, they struggled to devise a sustainable solution to the immigration issue. Despite efforts to reform integration and naturalisation processes, successive governments

largely confined their actions to tweaking entry and residency conditions for foreigners.

By 1993, after much political wrangling, a consensus emerged among the ruling parties. The aim of regulating immigration was now framed as serving national interests while still respecting human rights standards. This consensus-building occurred against a backdrop of increasing support for the far-right National front party. In the 1981 parliamentary elections, they garnered a mere 0.17 % of the vote, but by 1993, their share had surged to 12.47 %⁹. Russian historian E. O. Obichkina observed: “If we can talk about a clearly expressed ideological and political identity of any party in modern France, then this is the National front. It was he who became the refuge of the radical protest electorate in the last decade of the 20th century” [3, p. 59]. Indeed, the ruling parties’ victory over the far right has increasingly hinged on depoliticising the immigration issue for the French electorate.

The period from 1993 to 2006 marked the final phase of stringent immigration policies. This era was set in

⁶Travailleurs permanents salariés étrangers entrés en France (Délivrance d’un premier titre de séjour) selon la nationalité, de 1946 à 1999 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/fichier/2118519/rp99pipe_cd-ax3.xls (date of access: 31.07.2022).

⁷Membres de familles de travailleurs permanents salariés étrangers entrés en France, selon la nationalité du travailleur, de 1947 à 1999 [Electronic resource]. URL: https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/fichier/2118519/rp99pipe_cd-ax4.xls (date of access: 31.07.2022).

⁸Marie C.-V. «A quoi sert l’emploi des étrangers ?» // Les lois de l’inhospitalité. Les politiques de l’immigration à l’épreuve des sans-papiers / D. Fassin, A. Morice, C. Quiminal, eds. Paris : La Découverte, 1997. P. 145–175.

⁹Delwit P. Le Front national et les élections In Le Front national. Mutations de l’extrême droite française / P. Delwit. Bruxelles : Editions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2012. P. 113–145.

motion by a series of events. In May 1993, significant changes were made to the conditions for obtaining French citizenship, signalling a broadening of immigration policy measures. These now encompassed not only control over the entry and residence of foreigners but also the process of granting citizenship. Additionally, in November 1993, the Treaty on the European Union came into force, establishing a single EU citizenship and underscoring the need for unified rules on border crossing, asylum, and immigration policy. From that point onwards, French politicians had to align their reforms with broader European directives.

This period saw the development of new facets of immigration regulation and a gradual shift towards the communitarianisation of French immigration policy. The unexpected entry of J.-M. Le Pen, leader of the ultra-right National front, to the second round of the 2002 presidential elections served as a wake-up call for the nation's ruling elite, prompting a reassessment of immigration regulation approaches. Initially, government policy viewed immigration as a barrier to the labour market, by 1993, it began incorporating requirements for obtaining citizenship. By the early 21st century, the focus had shifted to integrating immigrants into French society.

There emerged an urgent need to codify immigration laws. Consequently, in 2004, work commenced on the CESEDA. The mass unrest among youth of immigrant origin in October – November 2005 further spurred the government to introduce several amendments aimed at bolstering social integration. Following the publication of its normative part on 15 November 2006, CESEDA came into force.

This legislation epitomised the communitarianisation of French immigration policy. Influenced by European Union initiatives, French politicians began to embrace selective regulation of immigration. Key features included efforts to attract highly skilled foreign labour and combat abuses related to immigration (such as sham marriages and asylum fraud). Thus, it can be

argued that by 2006, France had transitioned to a policy of selective immigration.

The new trajectory of French immigration policy has emphasised the compulsory social integration of immigrants. Any foreigner arriving in France for permanent residence must enter into a Reception and integration agreement with the authorities. This agreement obliges them to learn the French language, understand the fundamentals of French law, and assimilate into the culture and core values of their new home. The principle of enforced social integration is rooted in the notion of the supremacy of French culture over others. French sociologist A. Touraine expressed: “My culture is universal. Yours is private. The particular is lower than the universal. It is necessary to strive for a universal level”¹⁰.

This ideology stems from the unique formation of French national identity, which historically aimed to transcend ethnic differences by subordinating them to the institutions of a unified state power. Russian historian Yu. Rubinskii observed: “The Germans and Italians could maintain state fragmentation for one and a half millennia, without ever losing the consciousness of belonging to one people. While the French always needed a common denominator, which initially did not have a single ethnic basis. It became a political and administrative instrument designed to purposefully shape the cultural identity of the nation from above – as it was already in the times of Roman Gaul. It could only become a single centralised state. Therefore, the concepts of nation and state became synonymous in France, with the second preceding the first”¹¹. The intertwining of immigrant social integration with nation-building efforts, coupled with a desire to uphold a hierarchical structure in intercultural relations, has complicated interactions between the French populace and immigrants.

Revisions in immigration legislation have successfully depoliticised the immigration issue, thereby diminishing electoral support for far-right factions. In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the National front garnered only 4.29 % of the vote¹².

Conclusions

In response to escalating international migration, French immigration policy has evolved into a multifaceted framework. French governments have shifted from merely controlling access to the labour market to defining criteria for citizenship and enforcing social integration. This evolution marks a transition from restrictive to selective immigration regulation, with the latter seen by the French establishment as a means to depoliticise immigration issues. However, the challenge

of effectively integrating non-European immigrants into French society remains unresolved.

In today's interconnected world, where social networks and international alliances abound, the state continues to play a crucial role in regulating immigration processes. Its responsibilities encompass addressing labour market needs, ensuring law and order within its borders, and maintaining a unified stance on the fundamental principles underpinning civil society.

¹⁰Touraine A., Badinter E. Une France plurielle... ou éclatée? // Le Nouvel Observateur. 2003. 19 juin. P. 20–23.

¹¹Rubinskii Yu. I. National idea in French political culture // National idea : history, ideology, myth / G. Yu. Semigin, ed. M. : Institut sravnitel'noi politologii RAN, 2004. P. 15 (in Russ.).

¹²Delwit P. Le Front national et les élections // Delwit P. Le Front national. Mutations de l'extrême droite française. Bruxelles : Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 2012. P. 113–145.

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