Summary

National/regional public policies and discourses on integration and anti-racism

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This report examines anti-racist policies and public bodies in seven European states (Portugal, Denmark, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and UK). Based on the specificities of each national/regional context it presents a general framework to discuss the current politics of anti-racism in the European Union.

TOLERACE proposes that this discussion must engage with the tension between nationality and citizenship and thus with the ways in which the governmentality of 'integration' and 'social cohesion' is constructing the immigrant and the minority as 'race' in the sense the notion has taken on today. Regarding this, this research points out that racism has being reconfigured for the past two decades in contemporary European contexts, as related to matters of immigration and the so-called 'inclusion/integration' of minorities. On this basis, public debates have revolved around questions of how much immigration a society can 'accommodate' and under which conditions. Two assumptions have become self-evident and they need to be challenged: that one can clearly distinguish between a unified national society (ethnically un-marked), and various (ethnically/racially marked) minorities, and that the 'host' society naturally and legitimately cannot accept 'all' immigrants.

Key findings

The lack of correspondence between the scarce efforts made to fight racism and the long-lasting sources of the problem of racism lie at the core of the inefficiency of anti-racist policies. In face of this, the research points to the following issues:

- For a sound understanding of racism as a political phenomenon, it is crucial to disconnect the question of racism from that of contemporary movements of immigration.

- Racism is naturalised within the discourses and policy developments on 'integration' and 'social cohesion', which makes possible the continuous redrawing of a line between 'us' and the 'other' (non-EU immigrants; ethnic minorities, 'second-generation' immigrants). Understanding these processes demands that we do not confine the analysis of racism and anti-racist policies to a question of the majority's attitudes towards immigrants and minorities.

- Racism is the exercise of power that produces and perpetuates privilege and its naturalisation. This naturalisation makes invisible racism and creates the idea of the post-racial, i.e. societies in which people can be individuals without imposition of ethnically/racially-marked constraints. However, the post-racial arises not through the elimination of racism, but through a discursive re-configuration which makes it increasingly difficult to locate racism in Western societies except historically or exceptionally.

- The effect of this post-racial imaginary is a growing marginality of anti-racist measures and approaches within policy making.

- The tendency towards the post-racial is not uniform. It intersects with national or regional identity narratives in which race and ethnicity take on different functions. It also takes shape in political contexts where the significance of anti-discrimination and anti-racist policies in the past decades has varied immensely.

- Discourses about 'national culture and values' are performed as a highly excluding and racist discourse of power together with imaginaries about the 'natural' difference of immigrants/minorities.

- Discourses about integration often ascribe the causes of current 'problems of integration' to immigrants. Directly or not, racism is being related to the imagined (ontologised) 'deficiencies' of immigrants. Within this logic, racism is explained not as racism, but as 'natural' reactions of 'nationals' to difference: i.e. to immigrants and their characteristics.