



## TIES ACROSS BORDERS: THE GROWING SALIENCE OF TRANSNATIONALISM AND DIASPORA POLITICS

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**Transnational  
connections offer  
challenges for  
source and host  
countries**

**Governments no  
longer ignore  
transnational ties**

**Conflicting  
attitudes produce  
obstacles for  
migration  
management**

**Combine policy  
agendas and  
regard immigrants  
as individual  
agents**

**SUMMARY** Most contemporary forms of migration create enduring ties across international borders. Migrants' transnational connections and activities offer both opportunities and challenges for source and destination countries. Sending countries try to tap into the economic resources their expatriates manage to acquire by encouraging the flow of remittances or the return of economically successful emigrants. At the same time, however, the governments of these countries often feel threatened by the political activities of emigrant groups who are not under their control and who sometimes promote political change in the homeland through mobilisation in the host country. A similar contradictory attitude can be found in receiving countries that are suspicious about newcomers' divided loyalties and thus respond to transnational activities as though they were obstacles to immigrant integration. In an effort to reduce push factors for irregular migration, some receiving countries, however, now encourage the investment of immigrants' remittances in their country of origin. Others discourage long-term integration of economic migrants in order to promote circulatory patterns of migration.

In past periods, governments often chose to ignore migrants' transnational ties. They regarded emigrants as 'lost populations' and expected immigrants to either return to their countries of origin or cut ties with them altogether. Sending states today frequently try to retain some control over those who have left, while Europe's receiving countries have begun introducing integration tests as a condition for permanent residence and access to citizenship.

These conflicting attitudes towards migrant transnationalism can produce serious obstacles for the migration management that policymakers on both sides claim to pursue. Political attempts to either instrumentalise or constrain transnational ties are often highly counterproductive. It is therefore important for policymakers, NGOs and migrant organisations to:

- combine the agendas of immigrant integration and sending country development within a single coherent framework;
- accommodate transnational ties from both sides of migration, instead of expecting migrants to maintain exclusive loyalties;

**This policy brief defines transnationalism and analyses new realities and policy trends**

- regard migrants as individual agents whose identities and activities are not determined by the context of either origin or settlement, but are self-chosen in response to opportunities and challenges shaped by sending and receiving countries.

This policy brief arises from the IMISCOE theory conference Diaspora and Transnationalism: Conceptual, Theoretical and Methodological Challenges, hosted by the European University Institute in Florence on 10 and 11 April 2008. It addresses:

- how to define transnationalism and the related term ‘diaspora’;
- new realities of transnationalism and political attitudes towards them;
- seven major policy trends that promote, accommodate or constrain political ties across borders: external citizenship, EU citizenship, multiple nationality, external voting, kin-state protection, diaspora mobilisation and co-development policies.

**Transnational processes are shaped by sending and receiving states, migrant associations and individual migrants**

**Defining transnationalism and diaspora** **Transnationalism** refers to processes and activities that transcend international borders. First, different from the universal impact of globalisation, transnational phenomena occur within the limited social and geographic spaces of a particular set of countries. Second, unlike international relations, transnationalism involves non-state actors. These definitions apply to the cross-border activities of NGOs and social protest movements, to the migration flows that link specific sending and receiving countries, as well as to the ongoing ties migrants retain with their countries of origin. Country of origin, country of destination and the individual migrant thus create a triangular framework that is often expanded through the presence of other agents, including migrant associations and non-state political entities, such as hometown municipalities.

**‘Diaspora’ has become a political slogan for mobilising projects in an external homeland**

**Diaspora** is a much older concept than transnationalism, though its use and meaning have undergone dramatic change in recent times. Originally, the concept referred only to the historic experience of particular ethnic groups, specifically Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Chinese. Since the late 1980s, however, diaspora has been applied to many other cases. Most current definitions can be summed up by four elements: (a) traumatic dispersal from a homeland; (b) resistance against full assimilation and retention of a distinct group identity in countries of settlement across multiple generations; (c) horizontal ties of solidarity and joint activity between groups of the same origin settled in different places; and (d) homeland-oriented projects to shape that country’s future by influencing it from abroad or by returning there. Over the last decade, the term ‘diaspora’ has become very popular in both academic literature and the public discourse. Whereas transnationalism is a scholarly concept used to describe many different aspects of migrant experiences and subsequent changes in society, diaspora has primarily become a political slogan. It is invoked to mobilise support for a group identity or some political project in the service of an exter-

nal homeland. In some cases, the imagined homeland can also be a non-territorial one, such as a global Islamic umma. Recently, even source countries of economic migration have used the term ‘diaspora’ to encourage financial investments and promote political loyalty among economically successful expatriates.

### **Transnationalism: new realities and changing perspectives**

#### **New technologies strengthen transnational opportunities**

Is transnationalism a new phenomenon? Historical studies reveal that earlier migration flows could also be characterised as transnational. A case in point is the transatlantic movement from Europe to North America between the mid-nineteenth century and World War I. This mass movement was marked by surprisingly high rates of circulatory and return migration, relatively enduring ties between first-generation migrants and their countries of origin and the formation of intergenerational ethnic enclaves and ‘parallel societies’ with strong links across different countries of settlement. What seems new, therefore, is less the process of transnationalisation itself than its present scope and pace. Cheap air travel and the availability of electronic telecommunication have facilitated long-distance mobility and information flows between source and destination countries in a historically unprecedented way. New technology alone, however, cannot explain why opportunities for migrant transnationalism have so much expanded; the second crucial condition was a profound change in the attitude of states.

**Today’s transportation and information technologies provide unprecedented opportunities for migrant transnationalism**

#### **Changing attitudes of immigration and emigration states**

The interwar period of the twentieth century was a time of intense hostility towards new migration in both the United States and Europe. During this time, ethnic minorities originating from the earlier waves were pushed to fully assimilate. The second half of the twentieth century, however, witnessed the gradual acceptance of migrants’ transnational ties in Western receiving countries. Long-term resident foreigners gained access to civil liberties, social welfare benefits and even some rights to political participation. Greater cultural diversity became more and more accepted as a lasting effect of immigration. Full integration into a receiving society and maintaining strong ties with one’s country of origin were no longer seen as being mutually exclusive.

**Both receiving and sending countries’ attitudes towards transnational ties have changed profoundly**

Corresponding changes in the policies of sending states mostly occurred much later, but they were often more dramatic. During earlier migration waves, sending country attitudes had differed widely: some welcomed emigration, seeing it as a safety valve to deal with mass unemployment or political dissent; others blamed emigrants for abandoning their homeland; and still others promoted temporary outmigration as a way to benefit from returnees’ qualifications and investments. Recently, major sending countries, such as Mexico, Turkey, India and the Philippines, have begun to regard their long-term emigrants settled abroad as a major asset for the economy and a source of political influence in the host country. Correspondingly, many such states have

abandoned their hostile attitude towards dual citizenship and the political integration of their citizens as expatriates elsewhere.

### Policy trends that promote, accommodate or constrain transnationalism

Migrants move between countries for various reasons. They seek economic opportunities, they wish to join their families already living abroad or they attempt to escape from violence in their current place of residence. Once settled in a country, migrants may retain transnational ties for similar reasons: to be able to return to their homeland, to stay in touch with family or to exercise their political voice there. States shape migrants' opportunities in both respects through providing a legal status and bestowing on them rights and duties. Each state decides independently on which laws apply to foreign nationals who take up residence and which apply to emigrant citizens residing abroad. Yet one country's immigrants are another country's emigrants. The legal status, rights and duties of migrants are therefore jointly determined by both receiving and sending countries. Policymakers on both sides should try to better understand how their decisions on granting or withdrawing resident status and citizenship impact the migrants themselves as well as other states.

Source and destination states jointly determine the legal status and rights of migrants

Since all states consider legislation on citizenship to be a core element of national sovereignty, coordinating citizenship policies across states has been broadly reduced to setting minimum standards in international law. Every state is interested in determining for itself what the conditions of immigrant integration are and what its relations with expatriates will be like. However, sending and receiving states willing to coordinate their efforts – or at least to engage in mutual consultation – are more likely to achieve their respective and cooperative goals.

States' attempts to promote, accommodate or constrain migrant transnationalism can be summed up in seven major policy trends.

**(1) External citizenship** There is great variety in the practices states employ to determine which populations residing abroad are granted citizenship. Only few states withdraw citizenship from first-generation emigrants after a certain number of years. A larger number of states require renunciation when emigrants acquire the citizenship of their new country of residence, though there is growing toleration of dual nationality in such cases. A significant number of countries of origin (including all Arab states) still adheres to the doctrine of 'perpetual allegiance', thus prohibiting voluntary renunciation by emigrants. While all countries have *ius sanguinis* provisions for the acquisition of external citizenship by birth abroad to citizen parents, many limit this transmission across generations by requiring a parent to have previously resided in the country of origin. Nineteen of the European Union member states, however, permit the unlimited transmission of external citizenship by *ius sanguinis* across generations; some offer citizenship even to those who can show that one of their grandparents

Unconditional *ius sanguinis* policies inflate the numbers of external citizens without genuine links to the country of their nationality

had held it from the same country. These policies greatly inflate the number of persons who permanently reside in one state while possessing one or more external citizenships of countries with which they have no genuine transnational link. Rights of free movement within the EU create strong incentives for claiming such external citizenships, which can be used as an entry ticket to other member states.

**(2) EU citizenship** A transnational perspective is also important to understand why and when migrants opt to change their citizenship status. Rates of naturalisation depend not only on the degree of social, economic and cultural integration or the costs and legal conditions of acquiring citizenship in a country of settlement. Naturalisation is also determined by how valuable migrants consider a citizenship of origin, both instrumentally and as an expression of their identity, and what possibilities exist to retain that citizenship when applying for naturalisation.

**EU citizenship grants transnational rights that reduce incentives for naturalisation**

Within the EU, citizens of other member states rarely opt to become naturalised because doing so would hardly improve their legal status. Their rights to family reunification with third-country nationals are often more extensive (e.g. through inclusion of parents and adult children) than those of their host country's citizens. Several EU member states have facilitated naturalisation of EU citizens by reducing residence requirements (Austria, Italy, Sweden) or tolerating dual citizenship specifically for EU citizens (Germany). EU citizenship is itself primarily a transnational legal status for migrants; most of its rights are activated only upon moving to another member state. In policies towards EU citizens, it is clear that freedom of movement has taken priority over public concerns about integration into host societies.

The EU Long-Term Residents Directive (2003/109/EC) has, to a certain extent, harmonised the rights of third-country nationals in the EU member states. It has thus created a status of 'EU denizenship' that can be transferred upon movement to another member state. Not fully achieved, however, has been the goal of the Tampere European Council of October 1999 to give third-country nationals automatic access to this EU denizenship and to grant them 'a set of uniform rights which are as near as possible to those enjoyed by EU citizens'. A growing number of countries have made access to this status conditional to passing integration tests. For third-country nationals, dual nationality therefore remains highly attractive. It is, after all, the only transnational status providing full citizenship in the country of immigration as well as the unconditional right to residence in, and free movement between, countries of origin and settlement.

**(3) Multiple nationality** The global proliferation of multiple nationality is the most visible sign that national citizenship itself has become transnationalised. There are four main causes for this development: a) gender-neutral *ius sanguinis* through which children can inherit two distinct citizenships, from their father and their mother; b) a still small

**There is a strong trend in Europe to tolerate dual citizenship**

but growing number of immigration countries that introduce *ius soli*, i.e. citizenship acquisition by birth in the territory; c) a growing number of immigration countries that do not require renunciation of a previous citizenship upon naturalisation; and d) an even faster-growing number of sending countries permitting emigrants to retain their citizenship of origin when they become naturalised elsewhere. Toleration of dual citizenship acquired by birth through descent or *ius soli* has become a norm of international law (see e.g. art. 14 of the 1997 European Convention on Nationality). Dual nationality acquired through naturalisation is still a matter of domestic legislation or bilateral agreements, but the trend is clearly towards greater toleration. Twelve of the EU-27 member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovenia) still expect naturalisation applicants, in general, to renounce their prior nationality. Germany and the Netherlands, however, allow many exceptions and member states that joined the EU as of 2004 mostly permit dual nationality for large numbers of persons who are seen as sharing a common ancestry or ethnicity with the country's native population.

**The right to vote from abroad is now granted in 115 countries**

**(4) External voting** An even stronger global trend towards promoting active migrant transnationalism is the granting of external voting rights. In 1945 there were only six countries that had introduced absentee voting for soldiers, sailors and public administrators. A 2007 survey carried out by IDEA/IFE counted 115 states and independent territories that allow citizens abroad to cast votes in domestic elections. Voting rights for expatriates have today become a new standard that is supported by the vast majority of democratic states. Reforms introducing such transnational political participation have been lobbied for by associations of expatriates, though it seems that they are more often driven by the sending states' interests to strengthen ties with their citizens abroad. In several countries with particularly large numbers of external citizens (e.g. Ireland, Greece, Israel) there is a fear that ballots cast abroad could significantly influence election outcomes. Prima facie, voting by citizens who are permanent residents abroad seems to violate a basic principle of democratic legitimacy: that only those who are subjected to the laws should be represented in their making. Yet, the proliferation of external voting rights shows that most democracies today accept the fact that first-generation migrants have a significant stake in their countries of origin and should therefore have the option to participate in shaping those countries' future.

**(5) Kin-states and their external minorities** Policies of granting external co-ethnic populations citizenship status or quasi-citizenship rights are widespread in both Western and Eastern Europe. The main difference is that Central Eastern European states attempt to maintain transnational ties not only with emigrants and their descendants, but also with co-ethnic minorities separated from the current state through a redrawing of international borders. Easy access to the citizenship of a kin-state is especially attractive in the EU because of the attached

**Transnational citizenship policies towards co-ethnic minorities in neighbouring kin-states create tension in Central Eastern Europe**

rights of free movement within the whole EU. Apart from their impact on migration into other EU member states, such policies can also reinforce suspicions of minority disloyalty and kin-state support for irredentism in the kin minority's country of residence. In the context of ethnonational conflicts, transnational citizenship offered by neighbouring kin-states may serve to protect vulnerable minorities, but it can also fuel simmering tensions or trigger minority exodus. It is therefore very important for strategies of conflict prevention and resolution to pay close attention to the external citizenship policies of kin-states.

**Diasporic mobilisation can fuel ethnic conflict in the homeland...**

**(6) The impact of diaspora mobilisation on democracy and ethnic conflicts** While kin-states try to mobilise external minorities in order to put pressure on their countries of settlement, diasporas are mobilised to influence political developments in emigrants' homelands. Whether a population of migrant origin will form a diaspora cannot be determined merely by examining their geographic origin and the circumstances of their departure. A group's transformation into a diaspora needs to be explained by contemporary experiences of exclusion, ongoing conflicts in the homeland (mostly involving demands for regime change or national self-determination) and the mobilising activities of ethnic minority elites in the country of settlement.

**Yet it can also contribute to peacemaking and democratic transition**

There are two alternative hypotheses about diasporic orientations towards external homelands. One says that diasporas engage in 'long-distance nationalism' and are more likely to support extreme factions in ethnic conflicts in the homeland because they are cut off from its population and do not face the same risks. The other hypothesis suggests that emigrants who are politically socialised and integrated in democratic countries of immigration are more likely to support peace processes and democratic transition in their countries of origin. Specifying the conditions under which these alternative attitudes are likely to develop is an important task for comparative research on diasporas.

**Promoting transnational ties for co-development policies is still at odds with goals for immigrant integration**

**(7) Migration and co-development** For some time now, EU migration policy has acknowledged the need to cooperate with migration source countries in its neighbourhood. The declared aim is not only to fight irregular migration, but also to address the root causes of poverty-driven emigration. In December 2005 the European Council adopted a 'global approach' to migration that emphasises managing return migration and co-development efforts in the Mediterranean region. Although the role of migrant remittances as a major source for economic development is now widely acknowledged, the conditions under which they may be productively spent are still being debated. A more recent discovery is that economically successful immigrants do not only send money to their families back home, but also become agents of development by investing directly into public projects in their regions of origin. European Mediterranean immigration countries, specifically France and Spain, now cooperate with immigrant associations in a proactive effort to tap into this resource for co-

development.

A September 2005 European Commission Communication identified diasporas as agents of economic development. In the Commission's eyes, diasporas are groups of migrant origin – whatever their citizenship status and including second generations – so long as the individuals retain some commitment to, or interest in, their countries of origin. Temporary return and circulatory migration are seen as sustaining diasporic commitments. There seems to be little reflection on the diversity of orientations within migrant groups that do not identify themselves as diasporas. Moreover, there is little awareness of the tension between testing individual efforts at cultural integration as a condition for admission to long-term residence or citizenship and the hope that transnational ties can be instrumentalised for co-development and reducing emigration pressure. Frequently, ministries in charge of foreign relations and development pursue agendas that conflict with policies promoted by ministries of justice and home affairs. EU member states still need to develop a comprehensive and realistic view of immigrant integration. Such a conception must incorporate migrants' transnational ties to their countries of origin. It must do so, however, without regarding them as permanently fixed and shared by all who have a similar migration background.

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**IMISCOE (International Migration, Integration and Social Cohesion in Europe)** is a Network of Excellence funded in the Sixth Framework Programme for Research of the European Commission (a grant of €4.5 million for the period 1 April 2004 – 1 April 2009). With over 500 researchers from 23 European institutes, IMISCOE has developed a research programme, a system of training and a worldwide infrastructure for communication. [www.imiscoe.org](http://www.imiscoe.org)

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