**John Torpey**

Hi, my name is John Torpey, and I'm director of the Ralph Bunche Institute for International Studies at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Welcome to International Horizons, a podcast to the Ralph Bunche institute that brings scholarly expertise to bear on our understanding of a wide range of international issues. Today we explore developments in Europe, five years after German Chancellor Angela Merkel declared in the face of a million potential immigrants into Europe “We'll manage that”, or in German “Wir schaffen das”. And this is a really appropriate follow up to our last podcast with Michael Sharpe, who talked about the place of immigration and race in contemporary Japanese society, which, like Germany, not too long ago used to understand itself as a country that was not a country of immigrants or immigration.

And we're fortunate to have with us today, Professor Christian Joppke, a Professor of sociology at the University of Bern in Switzerland. Although he's German by origin, Professor Joppke is also a recurrent visiting professor in the nationalism studies program at Central European University in Budapest, and an honorary professor in the Department of Political Science at Aarhus University in Denmark. He's a member of the Council of Experts on integration and migration in Germany, which advises the German government on immigration and integration policy. He previously taught at the University of Southern California, the European University Institute in Florence, the University of British Columbia in Canada and the International University Bremen and the American University of Paris. He's the author of 10 books, one of which, I must confess, he coauthored with me. His most recent is *Neoliberal Nationalism, Immigration and the Rise of the Populist Right*, which will appear in early 2021.

Thank you for joining us today, Professor Joppke, great to have you with us. So, let's launch right in. As I've already noted in the introduction five years ago, Chancellor Angela Merkel stated in response to the prospect of a million unexpected immigrants to Europe, especially from the conflict in Syria, but also from Afghanistan, North Africa and elsewhere. “Wir schaffen das” or ‘we’ll manage that’. How has that worked out?

**Christian Joppke**

Yeah. First and not maybe positive about the history of this famous remark, the sharpness just a few weeks before she uttered that remarkable line, Angela Merkel had visited the first time in her life actually a refugee center in the east of the country and she met, as on other occasions, young people of migrant background. One of these encounters was televised. And she was asked by a young Palestinian in the audience, a 13-year-old Palestinian pupil, why she had to be deported together with her family. Obviously, their asylum request had not been acknowledged. And she responded at first rather routinely, “look you have to understand there is an asylum law and policy, and only if you meet the criteria, can we grant asylum. If everybody could come, that's kind of Wir schaffen das nicht. So before she turned around “Wir schaffen das”, she had publicly stated that's “das schaffen wir”. For the non-native German speakers in the audience, let's just say that that means we manage that. So first was we can't manage that which was then miraculously transformed into we will manage that.

That is a remarkable conversion because we know that Miss Merkel always followed Maggie Thatcher’s TINA principle (there is no alternative); a very methodical, not charismatic politician who essentially waits until there is no other way of acting and she then acts in that situation there is not alternative in. In Merkel’s language that is in that moment there was no alternative to say “Wir schaffen das” because the country was riding high on an enthusiastic wave of celebrating, in a way, their non-nationalist nationalism. You know, these refugees were welcomed at the Munich train station, ice cream was handed out, toys by ordinary people and by police. It was a moment, Durkheim would have called it collective effervescence, right? This famous collective enthusiasm that reminds people that they're not just potatoes in a sack but member of a collectivity, of the community. So it was that enthusiasm that generated “Wir schaffen das” in a very macro way; there was in that situation, literally no alternative. Now, how did they handle it?

It was 1 million people arriving rather suddenly and unannounced, created huge logistical challenge: how to house them, how to feed them, how to distribute them across the country. All of that was done in fairly in German style, efficiently one would have to say. Two challenges, middle and long term that were generated by this. First, an economic integration challenge. And secondly, a cultural integration challenge. How both challenges have been met? The economic integration challenge has been half success, half failure. As of last year, I think the last figures say that about one third of those who arrived in 2015 and 16 and after, one third of them are in some form of paid employment and or training, boost training, professional training of sorts. One third, which is not too bad, but if you turn it around a full 70% are still fully dependent on minimum social aid.

The skill structure of those who arrived were not optimally tuned to German labor market needs, the saying went around at the time that Merkel is solving the labor power problem, if not her demographic problem. Danish and French diplomats, I think responded in this rather cynical mode. This is only half true, if at all half true, because the skill structure is rather not suited to the economic needs of the German labor market; about one fifth of arrivals indeed, had kind of tertiary education, that is one fifth were fairly educated. But the other four fifths and large majority of them had at best, some kind of school education, but no professional education of any kind. And the biggest economic demand on the German labor market momentarily is for people with middles skills, like plumbers, carpenters, some type of worker that requires well post-school training, and the Syrians were not, the majority of them were not really prepared to do that, so it's a hugely costly effort.

One thing actually was that the yearly price tag of receiving this 1 million was at the height of the country's defense budget. Of course, Germany doesn't become fanciest of armies, as we know an underperforming army, but nevertheless 21 billion euros per year, the price tag that is not insignificant. So economically, half success half failure. Still a significant integration challenge.

The second challenge is cultural. Well, the cultural challenge, of course, it was not quite noticed at the moment that the vast majority of those who came and practically all who came from Syria are Muslims. And it took this famous or infamous event just a few months into the beginning of the refugee episode, the famous New Year's Eve of 2015-2016, which is a rather sad event on which hundreds of women were kind of sexually aggressed and harassed by, one must say it, intoxicated hordes of young males, the vast majority of them from North Africa and the Middle East. There was a very grim moment when the welcoming culture, this was the initial response in a way, was threatened to transform itself into something nastier.

That was the moment in which a lot of discussion again was about a dominant culture that newcomers had to adjust to that was, of course, the founding food of the populist Alternative for Germany who jumped on it with gusto. So that was a rather abrupt moment that even made the government do some cautious populist moves. A law was passed, not really known abroad because it's such as soft and stupid law, that more or less codifies prohibitions for judges or for police officers not to wear full face veil. It went in a way already with existing law that said that was not possible. So, it symbolically affirmed that this is that is forbidden.

But I have to say that was it, and it has become quiet since. There was a study by our research center about how integration courses, or the contents of integration courses, may have changed in response to that juncture. And the finding is that actually the contents of these integration courses remained not really culture focused, with the intent to adapt newcomers to German particularities, but when again gender relations were mentioned in these course materials, it was immediately said that it took hundreds of years for even Germany to achieve gender equality and with respect to equal pay for equal work. Of course, it has not even remotely arrived yet. So the official response despite this symbolic foray into legislation was prudent and self-limiting and the entire integration efforts never went into aggressive moves to enforce cultural assimilation, but limited themselves to language training and a certain basic knowledge of the essentials of a liberal democracy and of how to get by in everyday life in a new country. So no big drama there, no big cultural assimilation turned in response to that very significant challenge.

**John Torpey**

Interesting. So, this is just a product of the kind of general acceptance of multiculturalism. And I mean, there was a turn some years ago in Germany and elsewhere to kind of insistence on the acceptance by immigrants of what in German is called the Leitkultur (dominant culture) that you've mentioned a couple of times. So is this a sort of transformation in liberal democratic sensibilities across the board, or was this a response to an unprecedented situation where suddenly a lot of culturally other people had to be integrated into the society? I mean, how should we understand that?

**Christian Joppke**

I think not the word of multiculturalism, but its content kind of, to accept diversity and ethnic pluralism has surely arrived, at basically all levels of society except the 10% hardcore voters for the populist AfD. There was that moment in 2010 or 12, when Merkel famously pronounced that multiculturalism has absolutely failed. That was together with Sarkozy and David Cameron making similar statements in the neighboring countries to the north and to the west of Germany at the time. But that was already posturing, party strategic posturing, to keep voters in line because at the same time that this programmatic statement was made, there was a huge initiative to establish Islamic faculties at a number of German universities at public expense. Kind of like Protestant Catholic faculties that means that this university education for priests, for imams in that respect, which is now fully paid by the German state as much as a priest of a Christian provenience paid by the state. At the same moment there were big Islam integration summits. Islam instruction was further institutionalized in the public school system, which is simply driven by constitutional law constraints because such instruction already exists for Christian for Christian Creed.

So you see multiculturalism has, not the word but the reality, solidly arrived in Germany. The whole discourse is rather left liberal, shades of left liberalism. For example, one of the biggest items now is the so-called intercultural opening of the administration, particularly the federal administration. That's the biggest campaign drive now by the poor migrant lobby, which is very strong and mainstream in Germany, even including parts of the Christian Democratic Party, the Greens of course in total, and the largest parts of the SPD. That means intercultural opening of the administration. In the most extreme version, it means quotas for people with migrant background. You know, Midlothian center Guan is the new official label for these 20 to 25% of the resident population in Germany that have at least one immigrant parent. And the quota is the radical demand in the filling of positions at all levels in the public administration from teachers to clerks. So interculturalism is actually a term that is fully institutionalized. Multicultural. The word is out but under a different flag acknowledging diversity and interculturalism, the multicultural gospel is fully in place.

**John Torpey**

Fascinating, but not everybody has gotten on the liberal left bandwagon. You mentioned the AfD, which are the German initials of the Alternative for Germany, Alternative for Deutschland. And when this large migration influx took place, the AfD got a lot of upwind so to speak, was really originally an anti-Brussels and anti-European party, but then quickly kind of became a much more anti-immigration force and began to populate the federal legislature, the legislatures of a number of states, and made a lot of people outside Germany (as well as of course inside Germany) very nervous about where things were headed in Germany. Much of that seemed to die down. Could you tell us where does the AfD stand today? And how did the political backlash about this migration influx play out?

**Christian Joppke**

At the moment, they have about 10% of people who would vote for AfD. That's the famous question asked routinely: if there was a vote on federal vote next Sunday, about 10% now would vote AfD. They entered Parliament in 2017, I think, almost 13%. So, they have they have passed their climax, I would say, and part of the problem is internally they are self-destructing. There are infights. With respect to whether to kick out of the party clear not just radical rightists, but radical kind of extremist writers who clearly do not draw a sharp line between Nazis and contemporary nationalist populism. And so infighting has harmed the party, that is one big factor.

And secondly, migration, at least since March, there's no issue anymore. You know, the borders were closed even for people like myself, for UK citizens, and of course, they were closed for migrants and closed for refugees. So the AfD has always completely fed of distemper about Merkel's open borders policy, which officially has never ended. And to the degree that migration and refugees are non-issue as they largely are right now, or the AfD is losing the wind out of its wings.

**John Torpey**

Interesting. So, you've talked about how the coronavirus has affected the political system and the political scene, but how has this affected immigrant populations in Europe? What is the situation patient populations with you know, with the onset of the coronavirus?

**Christian Joppke**

We are well you must distinguish here between stock and flow, right? For the stock, that is those who are in and we have residents’ titles, nothing has changed, they’re as affected as everybody else. Of course, for those who want to put their food into the country or into European countries, things have radically changed as they have for tourists and for Americans and again for the rest of the world. So, there is no particular harm done to whatever you call immigrants or migrants here, just the complete rapture of international people movement of all categories, including businessmen, that is the biggest effect of the of the virus.

I mean, one interesting reframing of particularly low skilled migration has occurred in the meantime. And while people obviously notice that a lot of these care workers, and these essential personal services that just cannot be automated in any form, are being done by low skilled migrants, also the German health system to large degree nurses are of migrant background and they tend to be badly paid as in most other countries, and they previously were regarded with contempt because there was this fetishism of the highly skilled that was a big movement across all OECD countries from South Korea well to Sweden. And that fetishism has a little bit calmed down, and there is no more appreciation of the unskilled work, kind of migrant work that has to be done and is just mostly done by migrants and not by natives. But this is rather an abstract consideration momentarily, you know; it may have made more positive the attitude towards low skilled stock, but the flow question is of course, an altogether different one and that is not a specific migrant question but a general people movement across borders question across all categories.

**John Torpey**

So, the coronavirus has resulted in lots of lockdowns across Europe in the past months and a lot of people are very worried about the possibility that a second wave is going to require more lockdowns in the fall as we move our activities indoors and people are more and more in close proximity to each other simply unavoidably because they can't have their activities outside. I wonder how you see all that playing out, because this is obviously a major issue for the simply the freedom of movement. But there are all kinds of other issues implicated, of course for the economy, for schools, and the like. So I wonder how you see that all playing out.

**Christian Joppke**

I think governments will try as much as they can to avoid second lockdown given the economic damage that the first one has already inflicted. The economic capacity of France has been reduced by 15%, which is an unheard collapse of economic output, and put on a second lockdown to it and you get 30. This is simply inconceivable. I think it will be avoided at all cost to close schools again because the damage done to students from the primary school age on to the university age population is of incredible magnitude and it is of course particularly vulnerable groups in society with low education and with low income, which has been disproportionately damaged by that. So, you just cannot afford to do this again. You just cannot afford it the risk.

There are other risks that are a moment already probably more important than, you know, the few casualties that the virus in Europe momentarily creates. Every person is one too much, we value human life like nothing else actually, this is interesting inside of the virus situation, but to repeat, other risks are to be considered and balanced. However, as much as governments will try to keep shops open, cafes open, schools in particular open, they are a bit wobbly on free movement and you see it already right now: the Germans with their travel warnings which actually applies to all the business travel between the two big continental European capitals has stalled momentarily. I find that absolutely amazing and unsupportable. It is so much against the idea of Schengen free movement, is the one accomplishment of the European project for ordinary people from the student level, to the worker level, to the business people level. And I think a little bit too fast and covered here in putting that at risk. The Schengen and the free movement regime has never met a more serious challenge than right now, and I don't see much of consciousness of indeed the dangerous situation that exists for that regime. So that is an issue.

And we have to see how it works out other governments, including Switzerland, have not followed this. I mean, who does? People who return from travel, that's the official labeling of it. And of course, there is no tourism in France, except the few people who want to see the Eiffel Tower of course, it's quite a number but more Chinese people than say people from Europe.

So I think, yeah, the point I'm trying to make is, the German government did a great, stupid thing. Other European countries, luckily, have not or not yet followed this. How it will develop if temperature falls and if the so-called second wave that actually is already happening occurs. Nobody knows the future. But that so-called second wave, to the degree that it's already happening, because the number of infections and the rate of infections has increased since mid-August. So, it's mostly young people. I said it before, but because of our technical problem, I probably should say it again, it's mostly young people who get tested positive, they return home get told not to have contact with anyone but they are not sick. These people are not sick.

So this testing, which is widely accessible in France, actually more than any other European country with the exception of Germany probably, it's this mass testing and people having incentives of if ‘I'm positive, I don't have to go to work for a week.’ I can't find what the motivation of all these guys are to submit themselves to testing if they have a small headache, and indeed, they're testing positive but otherwise are not sick. So, I'm not a biologist, I don't know. But if you see the numbers, it's very few people who actually die from this damn thing right now. Most people are not even developing sickness symptoms. So if that is the second wave, then I don't think it would create too much of a problem but I shouldn't go into this into this as a biologist, I cannot claim any competency.

**John Torpey**

So your comments lead in the direction of a question I wanted to ask about the United States. There's a big difference between what you just described in the European and particularly the French situation and that of the United States. Well, two big differences. One is that a lot of people are dying in the United States, seemingly because of reopening of economies in places that really weren't ready where the rate of positive testing, the rate of reproduction of the virus were higher than they really could be in order to do those re-openings. And the other thing is that the testing regime that you just described in France is nonexistent here. And there’s a lot difficulty in getting a test and getting a test results within a useful amount of time, so that a contact tracing program can have any effectiveness and so I have we have done a number of these interviews with people in Europe. And I want to ask you as well, how do you see the situation in the United States and what do you think is likely to happen depending on the outcome of the election?

**Christian Joppke**

I will not ever myself judge the American situation which is so far away. I got a few warnings, or how should I call it disaster calls, from colleagues who say that the situation in America has become so unsupportable not just because of this virus, but because of Trump is on the one side, and lunatic anti-racist let loose movement on the other hand that tries to exorcise racism where it is at its worst and most viral and such as the Princeton University sociology department and UCLA. So you get kind of a dystopian picture of, of a country that is polarized to the maximum between two different types of lunatics, populist right and anti-racist ultra-left. To me America was always Jack Kerouac and beatniks and the Vesuvio cafe in San Francisco. I just cannot resonate these memories in any reasonable way with the news you get out of America these days. How this election will work out, there’s no idea from *the Economist*, obviously where I get most of my information. Like many other informed viewers, your listeners to that program thinks the chances for the Donald nine to one I think is vastly exaggerated as these things swing wildly and unexpectedly in the shortest of possible times as they have always in most previous elections. It is way too early to call the Donald out. I just don't know what one thing is clear. The Europeans pray, with the exception maybe of Michel Cousteau, just an incurable provocateur is this famous writer whose novels I actually eat like hamburgers; I love them. He loves Trump, he thinks is one of the greatest presidents that America ever had, he says. I think all sane non provocateur European pray at night and day that the Donald will not make a second term.

**John Torpey**

Well, that's certainly my sense of the European perspective. All this, I just wonder, kind of how the transatlantic relationship, the European-American relationship will develop if in fact, he's reelected. I don't think at the moment based on the data that I've seen, that doesn't seem terribly likely, but it is entirely possible and, you know, we still have 54 days to go before the election, and that's a long time in politics. So

**Christian Joppke**

There's one virtue of Trump, which ones shouldn't forget, that this is tough handling of China. I do think China is the biggest threat to the liberal world that has existed. Since well, mid 20th century and Trump is handling that challenge maybe not most effectively, but he just does instinctively the right things not to let these guys mess with 5G so that they can report all data from the Western Hemisphere, broadly understood back to the Beijing party headquarters, the Europeans are totally in lala land in that respect. They have not understood the challenge of China. They happily sell their ports to China. They tried and I think still tried to buy Saudi airports, and the French or the Europeans just do not understand the great risk that China poses in the larger geopolitical order of things. A Trump however, through wrong motifs, he at least is taking on this challenge. And so, this so called famous Western Alliance doesn't matter any longer so much since China is there as the big challenger, and as a big threat. And I think Europe has to wake up with or without America, I think America under Trump at least has woken up to the terms of China.

**John Torpey**

Great, thank you very much. That's all the time we have for today. That, of course, is the subject of another podcast that will have to do in the near future. But the question of the relationship between China and Europe and indeed between China and the rest of the world is obviously a major sort of issue that we need to look at closely. But I want to thank Professor Christian Joppke of the University of Bern for taking the time to discuss the issue of immigration politics in Europe today. I also want to thank Hristo Voynov for his technical assistance. This is John Torpey, saying thanks for joining us, and we look forward to having you with us again for the next episode of International Horizons.