AlterNatives : the changing face of Europe

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NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

AlterNatives

The Changing Face of Europe

A Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information

Final-Year Project

An illustrated feature on

Immigration and integration in the European Union

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Abstract

What will Singapore be in 50 years' time with 6.5 million people of different nationalities and cultures? Will we have enough room physically and emotionally to accept these newcomers? Such questions can only be answered - perhaps by peering into a crystal ball. We aim to accomplish this by looking to Europe, a continent that has been battling with migration for far longer than Singapore has, to draw from their experiences. Using the perspectives of both the natives and immigrants, our feature seeks to highlight how the immigration situation is changing Europe's social fabric and sculpting a new cultural landscape. Will Singapore react the same way to immigration too? AlterNatives brings you the changing face of Europe, a thought-provoking investigation into dealing with outsiders.

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1. Introduction

Singapore is seeing a spike in immigrants and migrant workers in the recent years, a trend driven by low birth rates and ageing population. Immigration is now a hot topic that continues to be regularly discussed in the local news. While there has been substantial coverage on the impact of immigration on Singapore, they are mostly contained within the local context and have largely focused on the economic effects.

Few have explored how immigration may alter our distinctive Singaporean culture in the long run, and there has never been an in-depth feature that seeks to draw insights from countries that have had more experience with immigration.

We look to the European Union for such lessons. Our chosen destinations of Great Britain, Germany, Belgium, France and Poland all have longstanding histories of migration. While each country has its own set of issues, there are many aspects that we find similar to Singapore's situation. For one, both the German and Belgian governments brought in foreign workers to fill jobs in the 1950s, which is similar to what Singapore is doing.

Hence, our feature seeks to shed light on how immigration has altered the European society – and to offer a glimpse of how Singapore's may be affected in the future. Through the stories of both natives and migrants, we also seek to highlight valuable lessons and mistakes learnt from the European experience that may be useful as Singapore advances through the stages of immigration.

2. Background

Every year, Singapore welcomes thousands of new citizens. Last year, 20,513 foreigners became citizens, while another 79,167 took up permanent residency, according to Mr Wong Kan Seng, head of the National Population Committee.[1]

As a result, immigration has become a prominent topic in the local press, and several have plumbed the depths of why Singaporeans are feeling increasingly uneasy towards immigrants. Dekle & Lakshmanan of *The Straits Times* identified in a commentary that many Singaporeans perceive problems such as overcrowding on public transport, increase in crime rates and competition for jobs to be linked to the influx of immigrants.[2]

Despite that, the government plans to increase Singapore's population by a further two million with the help of immigration. A reason is to improve the nation's economic competitiveness. In the last five years, Singapore's population grew by about 1.2 million, and accordingly, our gross domestic product (GDP) per capita increased by US $10,000 to reach US $38,000.[2]

However, the Singapore government has recently introduced several measures to soothe the friction. Earlier this March, the government's Budget proposed an increase in foreign workers' levies to take the edge of foreign workers' low wages. Employers thus have to think twice about roping in migrant workers, as they are no longer as

[1] Li, X. (2009, February 6). Panel to help immigrants integrate; Planned council signals major push to bridge the local-foreign divide. *The Straits Times (Singapore)*. Retrieved February 18, 2010 from the Lexis-Nexis Academic - NTU database.
[2] Dekle, D., & Lakshmanan, T. (2010, January 26). Immigration on/off switch needs fine-tuning. [Editorial]. *The Straits Times (Singapore)*. Retrieved February 18, 2010 from Lexis-Nexis Academic - NTU database.

cheap as before, which hands a greater advantage to Singaporeans who are after the same jobs.[3]

Furthermore, the National Integration Council under the Ministry of Community, Youth and Sports was set up last April to stream migrants towards assimilation. The council later introduced a new $10 million Community Integration Fund in September to help to pay for integration projects island-wide.[4]

Similarly, many countries in the European Union (EU) are facing rising resent towards immigrants, and their governments are reacting to the immigration phenomenon, albeit in different ways. Great Britain's capital, London, which has long been a sought-after destination for people all over the world, is a hotspot for illegal immigrants.[5] In a recent poll there, 83 percent believed that there is an "immigration crisis", with 84 percent in favour of halting immigration completely.[6]

An effect of the hostility is that migrants get pushed into isolation. Geographical segregation, or ghettoising, is on the rise in London. A study observed that there is an increasing trend of residential isolation for many minority groups, especially the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis.[7] Some areas in Greater London densely populated by Poles are also commonly called "Polish Towns".

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[3] Singh, M. (2010, March 8). Foreign worker levy hike: short pain, long gain. [Editorial]. *The Business Times (Singapore)*. Retrieved February 18, 2010 from Lexis-Nexis Academic - NTU database.

[4] Chia, S. (2009, September 17). Singapore sets up fund to forge bonds between old, new citizens. *BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific*. Retrieved February 18, 2010 from Lexis-Nexis Academic - NTU database.

[5] The Economist. (March 12, 2009). Illegal immigrants: All sins forgiven. From The Economist

print edition, March 2009. Retrieved July 3, 2009 from http://www.economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displaystory.cfm?subjectid=894664&story _id=13279183

[6] Sammut, C. (June 27, 2009). Silence on immigration fails us all. Published in online news commentary politics.co.uk.

[7] Schönwälder, K. (Ed.) (2007). Residential Segregation and the Integration of Immigrants: Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. Discussion Paper Nr. SP IV 2007-602. Retrieved June 30, 2009 from http://www.wzb.eu/zkd/aki/files/iv07-602_segregation_three_countries.pdf

However, the negative sentiment towards foreigners does not seem to be stopping them from flocking to the UK, with an announcement last June that UK citizenship applications has increased by 57 percent from the previous year.[8]

This has sparked a debate among politicians, with Prime Minister Gordon Brown announcing a new council-housing plan in the same month that specifies priority to be given to the "locals".[9]

Marseille too, has been seeing scores of Muslim immigrants, mainly from North African nations such as Algeria, thanks to its position as a port city on the fringes of France. Although it should be a hotspot for racial tension and clashes, it has been peaceful compared to other French cities such as Paris, where there have been violent riots. In fact, several media reports have painted it as a model city for integration.[10]

However, it is not without controversy. Earlier this February, French fast food chain Quick caused the ire of its indigenous French population when it removed its popular bacon burgers from the menus of several chains, including some in Marseille, in order to make its restaurants more Muslim-friendly.[11]

As for Berlin, the capital of Germany, it is home to more than 110,000 Turkish foreign nationals, which makes up about one-third of the city's population.[12]

Despite their prominent presence, Turks are often the targets of racial discrimination, with a 2004 survey by the Turkish Studies Center in the Rhein region reporting that

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[8] *UK Citizenship applications go up 57 percent.* (2009). Retrieved February 20, 2010 from Workpermit: http://www.workpermit.com/news/2009-06-24/uk/ uk-citizenship-applications-go-up-57-percent.htm.
[9] Stratton, A. (2009). *Gordon Brown's council house plan stirs migrant debate.* Retrieved January 20, 2010 from The Guardian UK: http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2009/jun/28/ social-housing-entitlements.
[10] Purvis, A. (December 2007). Marseille's Ethnic Bouillabasisse. Smithsonian magazine. Retrieved 28 June, 2009, from http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/marseille-200712.html?c=y&page=1

[11] French fast food chain Quick sparks halal burger appeal. (2010, February 19). *BBC News*. Retrieved March 02, 2010
[12] Berlin. (2009). Retrieved on June 30, 2009 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin#cite_note- 42

80 percent of the Turks in Germany felt discriminated against.[13]

This is why the German government is seeking ways to integrate migrants, firstly, by developing an integration policy in 2005. However, a survey done last year revealed that many immigrant children are poorly integrated in schools, indicating that the country still has a long way to go to fully embrace their immigrant communities.[14]

Meanwhile, Brussels, the capital of Belgium – which is also the administrative centre of the European Union – has a foreign-born population of almost 30 percent. Italians and Moroccans are the largest group of immigrants in Belgium.[15]

Currently, the country's national integration programme includes language and social orientation classes for newcomers.[16] But a large part of the problem lies in asylum seekers. Despite being one of the smallest countries in the continent, Belgium has a large number of refugees, and is ranked eighth out of 28 European countries in 2001 in terms of the numbers of asylum seekers.[17] The country is estimated have 14,263 asylum seekers who are either awaiting to be regularised as refugees or have failed in their application.[18]

Problems that this community brings include the rise of undocumented workers – and they also tend to choose illegal residence.[19] A recent reaction by Belgian authorities is

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[13] 80% of German-Turks Feel Discriminated Against. (2004). Retrieved on June 30, 2009 from http://www.turks.us/article.php?story=20041127112248644

[14] Elger, K., Kneip, A., & Theile, M. (2009). *Survey Shows Alarming Lack of Integration in Germany.* Retrieved February 26, 2010 from Speigel Online International: http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,603588,00.html.

[15] Martiniello, M., & Rea, A. (2003). *Belgium's Immigration Policy Brings Renewal and Challenges* . Retrieved January 20, 2010 from Migration Information Source: http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?id=164.

[16] Carrera, Sergio, "A Typology of Different Integration Programmes in the EU," Brussels 2006, pp. 12-23.

[17] Oecd. (2001). *Asylum Seekers (most recent) by country* . Retrieved January 12, 2010 from NationMaster: http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/ imm_asy_see-immigration-asylum-seekers.

[18] *Regional Operations Profile - Northern, Western and Southern Europe.* (2010). Retrieved January 16, 2010 from The UN Refugee Agency: http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/page?page=49e48e2e6.

[19] Martiniello, M., & Rea, A. (2004). *Belgium's Undocumented Hold Lessons for EU* . Retrieved February 16, 2010 from Migration Information Source: http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?id=195.

to stop illegals from crossing the border. Last week, ethnic Albanian asylum seekers traveling to Belgium were intercepted in Serbia and sent back home.[20]

And for Poland, they remain more commonly known as a source of migrants rather than a destination country for them, but the country's ascension into the EU in 2004 has gradually boosted its lure factor for labour migrants and refugees from former Soviet countries such as Ukraine. Another group is the Vietnamese, who came during the 1990s, facilitated by the diplomatic bonds formed between the two countries during Communist rule in the 1970s. While their official population stands at around 5,000, many are illegal, and the community is estimated to number up to 20,000.[21]

While Poland needs to find ways to manage the influx of immigrants, the task is hampered by the fact that many migrants do not intend to remain in there, but are using the country as a stepping stone to the richer EU states, such as the UK.[22]

In addition, many migrant Polish are returning to Poland – they have been steadily doing so since their country joined the EU in 2004, but the recent economic recession has accelerated the trend.[23] For those who have been away for many years, they may need to re-integrate themselves into Polish society once more, as Poland has changed drastically since attaining EU membership. To rein in these disassociated groups of migrants, the Polish government is currently drafting a proposal to change its integration policy, according to a ministry representative, migration expert Ms

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[20] Lowen, M. (2010). *Sad return for Serbia's failed asylum.* Retrieved March 17, 2010 from BBC News: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/8569920.stm

[21] Gmaj, K. (2007). *"Do it yourself" Immigrants' integration to Polish society.* Retrieved March 02, 2010 from CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS : http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00004829/.

[22] Fomina, J., & Frelak, J. (2008). *NEXT STOPSKI LONDON.* Retrieved March 02, 2010 from Institute of Public Affairs : http://www.pasos.org/content/download/24110/113181/file/ nextstopskilondon.pdf.

[23] Harrison, D. (2009, February 21). UK Poles return home . [Editorial]. *Telegraph UK*, pp. 1-2.

Katarzyna Oyrzanowska, whom we corresponded with during the course of our research.

All in all, while each of our chosen destinations have immigration situations that differ from Singapore's, all of them encounter the same situation of "locals versus migrants", and the measures in which they seek to address this cultural clash appear to be similar – all of them have tried or are trying to implement integration programmes and policies and to control the influx of immigrants into and within the country in one way or another.

3. Proposed audience

We aim to appeal to three categories of readers – the average Singaporean reader, the average European reader and officials affiliated with the European Commission and the European Union.

Firstly, as Singaporeans and descendants of immigrants, we feel that the topic of immigration, regardless of location and people, has a great potential to resonate with every person. This is more so for Singapore, which is considered a cosmopolitan city that sees foreign arrivals all year long. Hence, we aligned our story with readers of *The Straits Times*, which is the largest-circulating paper in Singapore. We aim to publish our feature in the Saturday Special Report, which often carries long features, including those from abroad. This is the most effective way to communicate a rarely covered topic to readers in a way that is easily digestible and accessible.

The average European reader, too, can relate to our feature as they might have experienced similar issues in their home countries, where we are reporting on. However, what they are getting from our feature that is hard to find in their local press is an outsider's viewpoint. Our position as foreigners reporting on issues faced by foreigners can add a fresh dimension to a commonly debated issue that the local press might overlook. We feel that this perspective can be both interesting and relevant for European readers.

Bearing in mind that we will be publishing the magazine for the European Commission (EC) to distribute through their offices across the globe, incorporating the aim of reaching out to European readers helps us to adopt a more internationally-friendly perspective that is required for us to fulfill this requirement.

Similarly, we had to keep in mind not to undermine any policy officers, who are the most likely receivers of this magazine from the EC. After all, we are not political experts and cannot be said to be totally familiar with the European situation, which is a vast topic. Hence, we took a more personal approach rather than a political one, choosing to let the voices of the migrants and natives dominate.

We also had to constantly remind ourselves of our prejudices as Singaporeans which may translate badly to this knowledgeable group of audience. Instead, we tried to find out what the typical European prejudices and mindsets are through our interviewees so that we may understand how to adequately explain issues that relate well to their way of thinking. This allows our stories to connect with this audience group without sounding too amateurish.

4. Analysis of the style used

4.1. Writing style

Using descriptive storytelling technique interspersed with facts and strong arguments, we aimed to humanise the migration situation in Europe and bring the readers to the homes, the schools, the offices and the cafes, where we met our interviewees and witnessed their stories unfold. We took special effort to describe the physical appearances, settings, and our observations of the interviewee's mannerisms to paint a visual image in the reader's mind. We want the readers to establish a bond with the characters and evoke emotions of pity, ridicule, joy, anger and shock through our feature. Our writing style aims to compel readers into introspection of how they will feel if they were the outsiders. As our scope includes five countries, we also organised our reportage into issue-based arguments rather than country-by-country analysis so that readers will not be lost in the smorgasbord of facts.

In the three main stories, *Where you feel accepted – that's where your heart is, Educate to integrate* and *When your culture offends*, we used clear directional markers and transition indicators to guide readers through different situations in different countries. We also try to group quotes from interviewees from the same country within the subsequent paragraphs to avoid confusion.

We also adopted different techniques in writing our three main stories. For instance, in the main 3000-word story, *Where you feel accepted,* which is also our opening story, we used a macro perspective to highlight the migration issues in Europe in order to establish the situation and set the tone for the rest of the package. In *When your culture offends*, the writing takes on a more analytical style on what migrants do when they are the odd ones out in a foreign country. *Educate to Integrate* is an in-

depth analysis into education policies and their role in integration. The latter two stories are extended from issues touched on in the main story, so they help to add depth and perspective to the whole package.

For the short features, we also made an effort to make each one interesting with a variety of writing styles. For example, the section *Survivors* consisting of profiles on two refugees were written as first-person narratives, as if they were diary accounts. This helps to break the mould of using anecdotal leads and the first-person also brings forth emotional elements of the interviewees' stories.

4.2. Photography style

Due to the short duration of our stay in Europe and extensive coverage of five countries, we had to divide into two teams to cover different countries. However, since there were only three of us, and only one of us is familiar with photojournalism and handling of a DSLR camera, it was very difficult to split up. It was also not safe for one of us to go alone to another country. Hence, we roped in the help of Nuria Ling, also a final-year WKWSCI student to help us with the photography.

Nuria's style captured physical traces of diversity and migration in everyday lives. Using landscape and street photography, she managed to show poignant social relations between migrants and natives that many would not bat an eyelid about, but through her lens, becomes telling. For instance, how a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf stands out in the Berlin subway, a group of Algerian boys playing soccer in front of a historical French theatre, and the colourful markets in migrant neighbourhoods.

As for our internal photographer, she captured the essence of the interviewees through portraits, detailed shots about their houses, daily lives, and family relations. Her photography style encapsulates a more personal, microscopic and straightforward tone to portray visually the essence of a place and person.

Together, the two styles provide a great variety of photographs that can be used extensively throughout the layout to create an array of moods and feelings.

4.3. Layout Design

To convey the serious subject matter, we used a magazine publishing format to package our story such that the reader feel as if he is picking up a regular copy of any news magazine. Instead of a photo-centric cover, we designed a graphic illustration interlaced with words relating to migration using a photograph of Turkish migrant Sükran Demirkan, as we felt that no other photos could adequately portray the title AlterNatives than her graphically-composed portrait.

Another key reason was to avoid making a single person the 'poster-boy' for European immigration, because there are many categories of migrants and we feel that they cannot be accurately represented by a single photo profile shot. With the graphic design, the identity of the person becomes less prominent. Instead, her silhouette takes centre-stage – that of a headscarf-donning woman – which conflicts with the typical image of a European native, allowing us to subtly convey our main message that immigration is altering Europe's demographic. Key words such as 'immigration' and 'integration' that are gracefully weaved into the graphic also helped to prevent our topic from becoming too vague to the reader at first glance.

We also adopted modern newspaper and magazine design styles such as headers for different stories to help readers navigate through the magazine. Taking into account the flow of the stories, we made sure that text-heavy stories were balanced with strong photographs. We allowed readers to take a breather by inserting short features and photo spreads in between the lengthy features. We also made sure that the graphics and fonts suit the overall professional tone of our magazine. In addition, we employed a variety of presentation techniques throughout the magazine to offer the readers a fresh impact each time he turns the page.

For example, we created graphic headlines for profile stories such as *Mixing in Berlin* and designed eye-catching introduction pages with stand-firsts to the short feature packages. However, we took care not to deviate from the main style and sought to retain as many components as possible so that there is a unifying element throughout the magazine. For example, we used page markers at the top-left corners of spreads as signposts for readers, and kept the fonts and copy mechanics of headlines and photo captions identical. We also chose to use navy blue as the text highlight colour, as it is the colour of the European Union flag.

The result, we hope, is a delightful lexical and visual journey through the magazine.

5. Methodology

5.1. Preliminary interviews and research

While there were many newspaper articles and research papers with reports on the migration situation in Europe, they did not provide clear background information and analysis of the situation. Hence, we conducted preliminary interviews with the Director of the European Union Centre in Singapore, Dr Yeo Lay Hwee, European Union fellows such as Mr Dorian Prince who is a visiting fellow to the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, and sociologists at the National University of Singapore specialising in migration to find out more about Europe's situation. These interviews allowed us to firm up our angle.

We also contacted the various embassies and met the ambassadors to find out more about their countries' migration issues. It was also useful in building contacts as they recommended us European agencies that may provide expert viewpoints. The interviews, though not used in our final package, were crucial in preparing us for our interviews on the ground. We knew what to expect and focus on when we were in Europe. We also had the privilege to work with Goethe-Institut, the German cultural exchange office, on fixing interviews with the Berlin contacts and providing translator-guides for us in Germany.

5.2. Story-planning

With the research, we also drafted our story lines that mapped out the topics we would be concentrating on. We came up with more than eight general topics, such as 'The unwanted citizens', 'In search of happily ever after', 'Outsiders no more', 'The delicate balance', etc. Such angle shooting helped us in our field work as we knew

what kind of interviewees we should get, what questions to ask, and what kind of photographs would be needed.

5.3. Contact-building

While the Goethe-Institut fixed our interviews in Berlin, we had to search for our own contacts for the rest of the four countries. Our first step in establishing contacts was mostly through the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and think-tanks. We searched for them through the Internet and newspaper articles they were quoted in. We first established a personal touch by calling them before following up with an email detailing our project requirements. We also sought their help in arranging interviews with migrants, or permission to attend their migrant workshops for photo opportunities. Many were happy to help us find out more about their work and the migration situation, but stopped short at arranging interviews with migrants, citing confidentiality or their busy work schedules. We also contacted the press officers of political parties such as the British National Party, known for their anti-migrants stand, for an interview. Moreover, we managed to clinch interviews with Europe's border agency, Frontex, and Poland's migration policy expert from the Ministry of Interior and Administration. We also arranged interviews with academic experts for a macro-social perspective to our story.

5.4. On-the-street interviews

As it was difficult to contact the migrants for arranged interviews, most of our interviews were conducted by selecting people off the streets – at museums, cafés and community clubs where migrants frequent. We also spoke to migrants at NGO events. It was amazing how fast they opened to us and shared their stories. Some even invited us to their homes to have a meal, and such homely settings helped put the

interviewees at ease and also provided good photo opportunities. We also got a glimpse into their livelihood and characters, which helped us describe them more vividly in our stories.

But this may not work all the time in fast-paced Europe, where interviews have to be arranged at least a week in advance. Hence sometimes, we get turned down or even stood up by our interviewees. Also, we packed our itinerary with interviews with various NGOs and it was hard to squeeze last minute interviews with new contacts during the short span of time in each country. In such cases, we asked for their contact details so we could contact them via email when we return to Singapore.

5.5. Interviewing

For Germany and France, we had help from translators when we interviewed people who did not speak English. Most of them also did not speak German well and the interviews had to be conducted via a three-way translation, for example, from Turkish to German to English. These were somewhat confusing; hence we rephrased our questions several times to make sure that we got the right meaning across. It was frustrating at times, but we made sure that we kept our composure and not let our emotions ruin our working relationships with the translators and interviewees.

Even for the English-speaking interviewees, it was not easy as we had to battle with the unfamiliar accent. It was hard to understand them too, but after a few days, we got accustomed to the accent.

Initially, it was hard approaching the interviewees as foreigners, and some may have their reservations about speaking to us. However, when we explained to them who we were and why we were there, many were more than willing to help us as everyone

was happy to share their stories once someone took an interest in them. The fact that we came from such a faraway country to speak to them also made them more enthusiastic to help us as it showed them that we were really sincere about our research topic.

5.6. Transcription and concept maps

Upon our return, we had to share our notes, as we had divided ourselves into two teams and we needed to make sure that every interviewee was made known to each team member. Otherwise, it would be hard to craft our stories accurately. Hence, we took time to tell each other about our personal experiences with the people whom we met, and also to transcribe our recordings to share with one another. The next step was to synthesize the information into working stories according to our story plans drafted before our trip. We drew concept maps, matching interviewees to our topics. After repeated consultations with our supervisor Mr Andrew Duffy, we came up with the feature package – consisting of main story, extended stories, short features, profiles and extended photo captions.

6. Overcoming obstacles

6.1. Trip planning and budgeting

Our trip coincided with the Christmas holidays in Europe, a big festival akin to Chinese New Year in Singapore, where everything shuts down. Hence, we could not conduct interviews with NGOs and officials during the festive week. The migrants were also busy preparing for the holidays, and some did not have time to entertain us. There were some who went back to their hometown. Moreover, Christmas for the Europeans is a close-knit family affair; therefore, we did not manage to get invitations to Christmas parties for interviewing and photo opportunities. The streets were also empty as shops were closed on the eve of Christmas and a few days after.

More importantly, we had initially planned for Berlin to be our last stop because we flew with Germany's national carrier Lufthansa and our return flight had to be from Germany too. Unfortunately, the end of our trip was on the Christmas week.

Therefore, the Goethe-Institut could not make any arrangements for us. We had to push forward our Berlin trip and changed the whole itinerary. Since we got the news too late, we forfeited most of our train, air, and bus tickets we had already booked to get from one city to another. This was a huge cost to our budget, but we could not afford to forego Berlin as it was the city that guaranteed good contacts and productive reportage, especially with the help of the Goethe-Institut.

We also had the privilege to have the support from the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Singapore in our project with a funding of S$14,000. It was a timely coincidence on how we got into the partnership.

We had approached Mr Andrew Duffy for prospects of working on a Europe-based project, and at the same time, the Singapore EU Delegation's press officer had also approached Mr Duffy for possible collaboration with WKWSCI final year students on projects that could increase the coverage of the EU in Singapore media. Hence, that was how our partnership began.

This support had helped tremendously in us seeing our EU-related project to fruition.

Yet, we had to work within this budget - bearing in mind the high cost of living in Europe, strong exchange rate, and the expensive air tickets for four people. After deducting the transportation and insurance cost for the team, we were left with around S$600. Hence we had to look for budget accomodations – either by couch-surfing, or appealing to friends staying in these countries for help. These two options failed as none of the couch-surfers replied, or simply rejected us, while our friends did not stay near the city centres or have enough room for us. Hence we had to fork out money from our own pockets for accommodation.

6.2. Choosing the assistant photographer

In section 4.2, we mentioned our intention to divide into two teams to cover more ground and the need for an extra photographer. More importantly, our internal photographer felt that she needed help with the photography as she had to report and write too. She was worried that her photography might be compromised. Hence, another photographer would complement our team's photography.

But finding a suitable photographer who matched the team's dynamics and possessed strong photojournalism skills was not an easy task. We had to sieve out people who knew photojournalism and was willing to put in the long hours on a reporting trip. We

had to be wary of people who tried to take advantage of us, using the chance for a free holiday, knowing that their air tickets will be covered by our budget.

At first, we had Kee Yating, a Photography and Digital Imaging student at NTU's School of Art, Design and Media, to help us. However, she had to pull out as she would be in Australia for a photography competition during the period we were in Europe.

We turned to Jonathan Wong, a freelance photographer and personal friend, who had been the chief photographer at the 2008 Singapore Sun Festival. However, we felt that he did not possess the photojournalistic style and were worried that his interpretation of the topic through his pictures may not be up to journalistic standards. We had to part ways.

At the point of desperation, we decided to look for WKWSCI photographers. We initially thought most of them would rather focus on their own photojournalism FYPs than waste the precious December holiday on our trip. However, we managed to engage Nuria, who could provide the journalism style we required based on her experience as an intern at the Straits Times photo desk. We have also worked with her during COM490 Going Overseas for Advanced Reporting (GO-FAR), and understood and appreciated her working style.

The partnership with Nuria was a blessing as she took pride in her work even though she was not a registered member of the group. She also took the effort to research about migration in Europe and had a sharp eye for details. She was able to capture many unguarded moments that made strong photographs. Her photojournalism experience also helped her to interpret photographs that captured the news point.

6.3. Bureaucracy and red-tape

This was especially a big barrier in London, where the media is very well-established and people are media-savvy. There are also many human rights protection laws that made it hard for us to gain access into schools or get records of migrants for substantiation and description purposes. For instance, for our topic on education and integration, we wanted to interview students and their parents on their views on diversity in schools. We also wanted to feature programmes that promote diversity. While we secured interviews with organisations helping ethnic minority children in their education (the Ethnic Minority Achievement Services and Our Languages-UK), we did not manage to gain access into schools or speak to the parents as we had to first undergo a criminal record check, which will take approximately three months, before we could enter the schools. The UK has this rule to ensure the protection of children and vulnerable adults.

Given that we had less than two months to plan for our trip, we would not be able to seek clearance. But we concede that *Educate to Integrate* would have been richer if we had more on the ground observations and interviews. To achieve the same effect, we asked the organisations for anecdotes and personal encounters they had while executing the programmes.

Also, many of the NGOs, especially for Terrence Higgins Trust which helps migrants with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), were unwilling to divulge their clients to us, citing confidentiality. Therefore, many of the migrant interviews had to be conducted by stopping random people off the streets.

In addition, many of the UK migrants are third or fourth generation migrants who are very well assimilated, hence they share the same mentality with the natives, who tend to be more protective of their privacy.

Yet despite this, we managed to contact grassroots community clubs, such as the Queen's Park Bangladesh Association, which helped us arranged an interview with a Bangladeshi migrant and provided translation.

We also had an extremely hard time nailing down Richard Barnbrook, the representative member of the British National Party in the London Assembly for an interview. His anti-migration stand would serve as a good counter-balance to the NGOs plea for better integration efforts and also a glimpse into some of the natives' perspective. However, he stood us up several times and we only managed to catch him for a 10-minute door-stop interview after his London Assembly meeting on our last day in London.

6.4. Language and cultural barriers in Marseille and Poland

We also faced communication problems in France and Poland, as we spoke little French and not a word of Polish. Hence, it was hard getting interview requests while we were in Singapore. For Marseille, we went there with hardly any contacts, but thanks to the hospitable people we met, one contact could open doors to many others. We even had a waiter - whom we met during lunch - volunteering as our translator and guide. It also helped that we could speak a little French, which helped to break the ice. Once we established the rapport, most of the interviewees switched to English to accommodate us. In the end, we had 20 over interviews done within four days in Marseille, mostly heartfelt migrant stories.

As for Poland, it was tough as our main focus group were the Vietnamese. They do not speak English, and we do not speak Vietnamese or Polish. We tried translating our interview questions using online translation services and printing them in the form of a questionnaire. However, it proved too difficult as none of them understood the flawed translation. Also, most of the Vietnamese were illegal migrants, hence they were hesitant about speaking to us or having their pictures taken. As a result, we only managed to get generic pictures of their church mass. We did not manage to get interviews with these illegal migrants, which would have added another dimension to our story.

However, we were very lucky to get the contact of a Polish priest who heads the Vietnamese congregation, who in turn put us in touch with two Vietnamese helpers in the church who could speak English. The result was a profile story of Dang Thu Huong, the Vietnamese doctor and volunteer translator for Vietnamese migrants.

Thankfully, most of the academics and NGOs staff spoke English and they acted as translators when we interviewed the Chechen refugees. However, during the sushi outing, which *Wasabi in Warsaw* was based on, the English-speaking officials were unable to accompany us. Initially, we could not find the bus stop where the refugees were waiting for us and almost missed the photo opportunity if not for the help of a female staff at a hotel nearby. During the activity, it was difficult to understand what was going on as everyone was speaking in Russian and Polish, so we could not get many quotes from the participants. Luckily, a man hired to film a video of the outing could speak English and we were able to get several precious quotes with his help, as well as the names and ages of the people for photo captioning.

Yet Poland is not easy to navigate if one does not know Polish because the street signs are in Polish. Hence, we often got lost. When we tried to ask for directions, we were snubbed by the natives as we did not speak Polish. We were late for our appointments on the first day as we took some time to adjust to the transport system.

This language barrier and our foreign looks made us easy targets for racist remarks and treatment. Such encounters made us feel miserable in Poland - partly aggravated by the extreme cold - but we pressed on to complete our reporting, with the goal in mind to make full use of the privilege of being on the ground to report. It will be a waste not to come back to Singapore with notebooks filled with information. Also, we took heed that such bad experiences are part and parcel of a foreign correspondent's life. It is never smooth sailing as a journalist in a foreign land. Such experiences only make us stronger, and the trip more memorable.

6.5. The joy of too many contacts, but at the risk of our safety

We blasted out many emails to numerous organisations requesting interviews to make sure that if one does not reply, there were still a few others to fall back on. However, most of the NGOs were so willing to help us that our days were packed with interviews, with only less than an hour to get from one venue to the other. This meant that we often skipped meals, and when we secured interviews with new contacts, we had to split up to visit the interviewees alone so as to maximise the time. It was rather dangerous, especially when night falls early at 4 pm during winter. Some of the interviews also took place in quiet neighbourhoods till 10pm in the night, and we had to go back alone. Thankfully, we were not attacked or robbed.

Through this, we learned not to schedule so many interviews back-to-back, so that we can have time to rest and recharge, and also because we could slot in last-minute

interviews with new contacts whom we have just met. While having in-depth interviews are crucial to our FYP, our safety is also of paramount, especially in foreign countries.

6.6. Keeping to the word limit

Our word count was also bursting at its seams. It was hard to keep to the word limit of 8,000, as our feature package spans over five countries, with each country needing in-depth background explanations of their migration situations in order for our arguments to make sense. The reader also will feel lost with a sloppy background introduction.

Moreover, we felt that if we reduced our word limit to 8,000 instead of the current 12,000, we will lose the essence of our reportage. We met over 100 people, each with their unique stories that contributed to the fabric of AlterNatives.

We are also working in partnership with the European Commission on this reportage, hence we are under the obligation to produce a well-investigated reportage so that we could justify their generous support. Our magazine will look amateurish and unprofessional if we did not produce enough stories to reflect what we had done in Europe, and an 8,000-word magazine will not do justice to the amount of work we had put in.

However, we were aware that there must be tight control of our word limit too and not simply include any stories just because we had the interviews. All our stories were carefully selected to fit the theme of the magazine, and any stories that did not serve to push forth the central theme were spiked. In order to keep the word limit as close to the guidelines as possible, we spiked three short features and several profiles too.

Hence, the magazine is a compilation of vigorously edited and well-thought out stories.

In addition, while we had tried to cut down words, we had to add additional words at times so that the layout is aligned, and fills up the space properly. Hence, such editing may have increased the word limit. It is a sacrifice we had to make as we did not want our magazine to look slipshod and amateurish with such misalignments. It would reflect badly on our professionalism and our meticulousness, which are essential attitudes in the journalism industry.

6.7. Printing and publishing woes

We also faced problems with the file formats when we exported numerous pages of our magazine from the InDesign file to Portable Document Format (PDF), throwing our meticulously designed work into chaos of misalignments. We realised this just as we were about to send the copy to print at the printer's, and spent more than six hours correcting everything and proofreading the final copy again there.

In addition, due to the limited types of paper available at instant printing shops, we had to recolour our pages at the digital printer's counter to suit our initial concept of a news magazine. The inside pages of our magazine were printed on 100 gsm matt paper – which is what we normally use at home and school printers. However such papers are bleached, so we decided to redo every page to include a yellow-tinged background to make it resemble the recycled paper that most news magazines use. This means that every graphic had to be reprocessed in Adobe Photoshop, and white text that were placed against dark backgrounds also had to be changed to a gentle cream colour. And because we added a yellow-tinted box as the background, some copies of the magazine that were not properly trimmed revealed a white strip of the

original bleached paper colour. When we asked the printer to trim the edges off, some pages were trimmed too much and several photo captions placed at the corners were shaved off. Hence, we had to choose three best copies for submission.

As we foresee problems cropping up during the printing process, we made sure to send our magazine to print at least a week before the submission date. This episode also taught us to be prepared to put in the extra hours for a job in the printing and publishing business, and to be mentally prepared for any unexpected problems.

7. Conclusion

It has been a long journey since we sat down at the Starbucks café in Tanglin Mall last July, as a newly-minted FYP group, brainstorming possible topics for the major project. Though we were really excited about the prospects of Europe, neither of us really believed that our idea was feasible. At the back of our minds, we knew that there was a high possibility that our dreams may crash because of funding issues. Hence, as we packed our winter coats and sweaters for Europe, it felt surreal.

It was also because we felt apprehensive about our skills in handling such a big journalistic expedition to Europe, where the media industry is already so well-established. All the experience we had was from our internship at *The Straits Times* and our GO-FAR trip to Bangladesh.

Yet we had risen up to the challenge.

We've displayed strong interviewing skills, gritted our teeth through dire circumstances of freezing temperature and fatigue – all for the sake of a better story, a deeper perspective.

We were not parachute journalists, but journalists who put their hearts on the line. We reported because we cared. We took time to understand our sources, visited their homes, tagged along when they go about their daily chores. Most importantly, we listened.

As a team, our synergy gelled our strengths into ideas which surpassed our expectations. The title AlterNatives came up after a session of brainstorming in which we built up on each other's ideas. At times when one was lacking, another helped sustained the group through. Each of us had complementary strengths. While

Lynnette is good with public relations, event execution and designing the magazine, Chian Hui functioned as the chief editor, directing story structures and angles and writing. Huifen concentrated on fixing interviews, reporting and photography. The writers also chose features that suited her personal style. Chian Hui's crisp style allows the interviewees' voices to shine through in the main story, *"When you feel accepted – that's where your heart is"* without being bogged down by background details. Meanwhile, Huifen's more narrative method allows her to add colour to more explanatory pieces like *When your culture offends*. Such synergy made sure that none was fighting for recognition or trying to outdo each other.

Yet our project is not without its glitches. We did not concentrate much on gathering the natives' perspectives, which would have made our stories more balanced. This was because we were focusing more on sourcing for interviews with migrants, which we did not manage to arrange when we were in Singapore. We also did not get interviews with the EU's Commissioner for Justice, Peace and Security in Brussels. The EU delegation in Singapore had arranged for us to meet him in Brussels, but it was cancelled a few days prior to our appointment as he was not available. The Belgium Immigration Department of the Ministry of Interior, which was supposed to arrange interviews with Belgium policy makers, did not respond to our request, despite the fact that the Belgium embassy in Singapore had helped us contact its main office. Hence, apart from Germany and Poland, we did not get an official viewpoint on the migration situation in the countries. However, such reports could be easily obtained through the newspapers, and what matters most is that we got the stories of the migrants, which are often overlooked in newsrooms. Moreover, our objective was to put a human face to the migration situation in Europe, and we have achieved that.

It took us sleepless nights ploughing through the Internet for contacts, battling time differences to arrange interviews, transcribing, writing, editing, designing and proofreading. But it was all worth it.

Our feature package aims to evoke laughter, sadness, sympathy, disbelief and shock in the readers. We hope that the reading journey will be a cathartic process, where one finds a piece of himself reflected in any of the interviewees. For the search for identity and belonging are not just the migrants' desire, but is a lifelong goal among us all.

Appendix A: Contact List

London, United Kingdom

Name	**Position**	**Contact details**
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Berlin, Germany

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Brussels, Belgium

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Theonille Kaytesi	Student of CBAI's two-year course on starting intercultural initiatives	Contact via trainer, Marc Andre (above)
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Marseille, France

Name	Position	Contact details
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Warsaw, Poland

Name	Position	Contact
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Krzysztof Finlinski	Board Member of the Polish Association of Legal Education	+48228271192
Ramzan Abdurahmanow	PSEP participant	Contact via PSEP chairwoman, Agniezska Kloc, abi2000@wp.pl

Appendix B: Proposal

Proposal for
Final Year Project 2009

News report and feature on immigration issues in four EU nations

To the European Commission of Singapore

Prepared by:

Huang Huifen, Lynnette Lee & Poon Chian Hui

Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

NANYANG TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

July 11, 2009

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report contains details of our final year project and a proposal for sponsorship to four European nations that is needed for the project to be carried out. The final product will be a collection of news stories and features on immigration. They will be packaged and presented as a complete news feature for publication in a newspaper in Singapore.

The backdrop

The recent European parliament elections and the economic crisis have thrown the perennial immigrant issue even further into the shadows, with the appointment of anti-immigrant far-right parties across the nations. Many governments are also imposing more restrictions on immigrants, according to a report published last month.[24]

Furthermore, a study of seven countries published by the German Marshall Fund[25] revealed that 47 per cent of Europeans and 50 per cent of Americans perceive immigration to be a problem rather than an opportunity. But majorities in France and the Netherlands, as well as sizable minorities in other countries think the opposite. The findings intrigue us to delve deeper into the reasons these people react so differently.

It takes two to make a right -- what do the natives have to say about this supposed "growing xenophobia" [26] or are the immigrants themselves reluctant to assimilate into their new homeland?

As the migrants react, the already bubbling dissension of the migrant population sets the stage for possible significant social and economic changes.

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[24] Organisation For Economic Co-operation and Development. (June 30, 2009). *Keep doors open to migrant workers to meet long-term labour needs, says OECD*. From http://www.oecd.org/document/39/0,3343,en_2649_201185_43195111_1_1_1_1,00.htmla

[25] The German Marshall Fund of the United States. *Transatlantic Trends on Immigration 2008 Key Findings* [Data file]. Retrieved from http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/doc/TTI_2008_Final.pdf

[26] People protectionism. (July 1, 2009). *In The Economist online*. Retrieved July 10, 2009, from http://www.economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displaystory.cfm?subjectid=894664&story_id=13938782

Yet, with falling birth rates, the EU needs migrants to beef up the workforce, pay taxes and shoulder the responsibilities of an aging population. This interdependence paves way for policies of peaceful integration among the natives and the migrants.

Now the question on everybody's mind is – since immigration is not likely to stop, how can the cultural gap be narrowed and will these immigrants ever be able to integrate into their adopted home nations successfully? How are migrants coping with marginalisation? Why the hostility and apathy towards them? How are such tensions solved at the grassroots level? Are there locals who are lending a helping hand? Will the immigrants choose to return home? These are some of the questions we will want to address.

Purpose of project

We seek to put a human face on the immigrant issue from both the ordinary natives' and immigrants' points of view. As Singapore faces a surge of new immigrants and the challenges it brings along with it, investigating and understanding more from the longstanding European side will not only provide a special news feature, but also a possible case study for Singapore and even other parts of the global village to consider when handling their immigration issues.

Primarily, we intend to find out and feature individuals, organisations and other groups that are helping to bridge the divide. For instance, in Berlin, a group of women from the city council has formed a group called "Neighbourhood Mothers" to help Turkish women fit in better with the German society.

Why we chose this topic

Three of us spent one semester last year on exchange. Huang Huifen went to Washington, United States, which has a profound migrant heritage. She was so fascinated with the cultures of these people and their dynamics with the Native Americans that she wrote a feature story on a Native American lady's struggle with her own ethnicity. Interaction with people such as a Turkish migrant who came to US to get married, and being discriminated for being Asian drove in the realisation that not everyone tolerates people who are different from them.

Poon Chian Hui went to Jönköping, Sweden, while Lynnette Lee did an exchange programme on a ship that took her all around the world. Both went on a month-long backpacking trip together in Europe before returning to Singapore. The cultural diversity and presence of immigrants was a uniform observation as they made their

way down from Scandinavia to the central and eastern countries. There were children of Vietnamese refugees in Sweden who spoke Swedish as crisply as the natives; in Belgium, they stayed with an immigrant family from Malaysia who still speak Cantonese in their home; met a Hungarian landlord who spoke Mandarin like a pro thanks to his friends from China, couch-surfed with an Iranian family in the Netherlands and in France, with a white man in a predominantly black neighbourhood on the outskirts of Paris.

Experiencing community life in Europe, USA and Asia has certainly moved us to feature the struggles of the minorities in EU, and how help is rendered for these people. The immigrant issue is one that we believe is becoming increasingly relevant in the Singapore society as well.

Finally, Nuria Ling, the team's main photographer, spent half a year as a photojournalist with The Straits Times early this year. Nuria likes spending time with her subjects, as she firmly believes that this will bring in more depth to the pictures. She has a keen interest in photographing human rights issues. Her photography specialisation skills in landscape and people will enhance the visual quality of our news feature and photo exhibition.

The Singapore link

Coverage on the EU is spare in the Singapore press. However, many similarities exist. Singapore has more than one million migrant workers as of 2008, and this number is set to increase – the government has the intention of bringing in another two million in the next few years to bolster our country's workforce. There is also an increasing trend of immigration – the number of Singapore Permanent Residents jumped about 8 per cent from 2007 to 2008 and another 20,000 were given citizenship rights last year.

This topic will therefore strike a chord with many Singaporeans who may have already or will come to contact with immigrants and migrant workers in their neighbourhood, workplace, and schools.

Already there have been issues pertaining to integration of immigrants in our society. For example, the hoo-ha over immigrants moving in across the road of upper-middle class Singaporeans at Serangoon Gardens last year ignited much debate. The people were upset on the setting-up of living quarters in a residential area and of the idea of embracing these foreigners who have long been regarded as an "invisible"

community. The comparison with the more longstanding immigrant situation in the selected European communities will definitely give insight on how Singapore is set to transform in the next few decades.

Coverage in The Straits Times

We plan to publish this feature in The Straits Times, Saturday Special Report section. The Straits Times is the main English broadsheet and the most widely circulated newspaper in Singapore. We will have the advantage of tapping on our range of contacts as two of us have done our internships there earlier this year.

Request for support

We hope to work closely with the European Commission on this project. Hence, we seek the assistance of the organization in providing us with the necessary support and other resources if necessary.

Details of support

We will like to request for $14,000 to cover travel fares, accommodations and insurance. Details can be found in Part II of the report.

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Thank you for this great opportunity and we look forward to your favourable response.

Table of contents

PART I

The project

Overview

We will travel to four locations with pertinent immigrant presences and issues – Berlin, Warsaw, London and Marseille. Our news feature therefore will capture snapshots of the different aspects of immigrant livelihood, challenges and sources of aid under the overarching theme of minority integration.

Key points of interest for the news feature are:

- **Berlin, Germany** – impact of new immigrant policy on Turkish communities and Turkey's bid to enter the EU.
- **Warsaw, Poland** – the shortfalls of integration programmes, focusing on the Vietnamese who are considered the success story among Polish immigrants.
- **London, UK** – the sentiments of immigrants who are increasingly sidelined by the government, plus a look at the second-generation ethnic minorities.
- **Marseille, France** – the stakeholders who made racial harmony in Marseille possible.

1.1 Berlin, Germany

The changes to Germany's immigration policy in 2007 made knowledge of the German language and its society a prerequisite for spouses of immigrants to get citizenship and for immigrants to have rights of residence. The Turkish, one of the largest ethnic minority in Germany, has widely criticized the changes as discriminatory and racist against them. This is because other ethnic groups like the

Americans and Japanese citizens are exempted from this condition. Hence, the policy changes appear to specifically restrict the influx of Turkish migrants.[27]

In Berlin, 113,779 of the total population of 3,416,300 are Turkish foreign nationals.[28]

Besides being politically disadvantaged, the Turks are also objects of racial discrimination, with a 2004 survey by the Turkish Studies Center in the Rhein region reporting that 80 per cent of the Turks in Germany felt discriminated against.[29]

1.2 Intended coverage

Our stories here will feature the impact of the immigration policy changes on this community and what is done to help them, addressing questions such as:

1) What goes on in the German integration classes? How do new immigrants fare, and how do these classes help them? What comes next after they pass? What happens when they fail? We could perhaps profile those who passed and those who didn't and what is being done to help them.

2) What happens to relationships when spouses/children do not make it to Germany? What are NGOs, EU members, and the government doing to help?

On a side note, we will also like to examine healthcare for the aging migrant population. An International Herald Tribune report in 2008 highlighted efforts by the government in providing elderly care for the Turkish migrant workers who have now called Germany their home and final resting place.[30]

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[27] Immigration Law "Hits Turks Below the Belt' (2007). Retrieved on June 30, 2009 from http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/0,1518,494027,00.html
[28] Berlin. (2009). Retrieved on June 30, 2009 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berlin#cite_note-42
[29] 80% of GermanTurks Feel Discriminated Against. (2004). Retrieved on June 30, 2009 from http://www.turks.us/article.php?story=20041127112248644
[30] Naomi Kresge. (2008, February 23). Growing old in a new home; Germany tries to integrate its senior Turkish citizens. *The International Herald Tribune*, Finance, pg. 15.

More and more nursing homes are catered towards the Turkish lifestyle needs, such as prayer rooms pointing towards Mecca, and bilingual services. We would like to feature these new nursing homes.

Also, with the upcoming bid by Turkey to be part of the European Union (EU), the results of its bid will be a major watershed in the way the Turkish are treated in Berlin. Hence, our story will also cover the impact of Turkey's bid into EU, and the impact of the immigration policy thus far on the Turkish community in Berlin.

Questions that will be addressed:

1) Is it easier for migration to take place between the two countries if Turkey becomes a member of EU?
2) What does Turkey's entry into the EU mean for the Turkish minority?
3) What are the native Germans' take on this issue?

1.3 Possible Contacts

- Kenan Kolat, chairman of the Turkish Community in Germany (TGD) organisation
- Turkish Union in Berlin-Brandenburg
- Turkish embassy in Berlin
- Turkish immigration associations
- Turkish Federation of Berlin-Brandenburg
- DITIB (Turkish Islamic Union)
- Marseille-Kliniken, a company based in Berlin, and Vitanas/Caritas home in Berlin which offers culturally-sensitive healthcare for Turkish migrants
- Feridun Findik, a German-born Turk who now resides in Tokyo
- *Karen Schönwälder,* head of the Programme on Intercultural Conflicts and Societal Integration at the Social Science Research Center, Berlin

2.1 Warsaw, Poland

Poland has become host to thousands of immigrants, both legal and illegal, as well as refugees during the past two decades. Despite that, integration ranks lowly in its immigrant policy, and such programmes are often less effective than planned. This is a predicament as immigrants continue to rise year after year.[31]

A study[32] by the Association of Law Intervention and Institute of Public Affairs identified the following problems regarding the integration of immigrants in Poland.

- Insufficient training in the Polish language
- Lack of common knowledge by the polish society on the refugee phenomenon, which can lead to hostility and racism towards foreigners
- Lack of motivation to integrate
- Inadequate cooperation between institutions involved in the integration process

2.2 Intended coverage

The Vietnamese in Poland are an exception as they are a new immigrant group who can be described as thriving and successful.[33] Our main story in Poland will focus on how the Vietnamese achieved their current economic stability despite the weaknesses of integration programmes and to explore areas of discrimination that they still face today.

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[31] Triandafyllidou, A & Gropas, R. (2007). European Immigration. Ashgate Publishing Ltd, UK

[32] Department of Labour and Social Policy (2007). Speech by Paulina Babis, Department of Social Assistance and Integration. Retrieved June 29, 2009 from http://www.slovo21.cz/prilohy/PaulinBabis_Integration_of_immigrants_in_Poland-ost.pdf

[33] Iglicka, K. (2005). Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Poland.

About 30,000 Vietnamese are estimated to reside in Poland, but at least half are illegal immigrants. The Polish media has expressed fears of the Vietnamese as their economic activity threatens Polish firms.[34] Hence, we will like to explore the viewpoint of native Polish people. Do they possess similar anxieties and why – perhaps they have encountered unpleasant experiences with immigrants?

Following are campaigns and integration programmes that are possible starting points:

1) **Individual integration programmes (IIP)** from the Act of 12 March 2004 on Social Assistance hands out cash benefits for living expenses and Polish language training, counseling, and health insurance to people like refugees.

2) **European fund for the integration of third-country nationals for Poland**, 2007-2013, by the European Commission, seeks to establish intercultural competence and aid immigrants. As of 2008, integration programmes include language courses, training in civic knowledge and vocational training. There were also public campaigns and publications on immigrants in local communities..

3) **Act of Protection of Aliens, 2003; Aliens Act** marks the first regularization programme for unauthorized immigrants.

4) **The EDI project** helps asylum seekers integrate into Polish society through legal aid, language teaching and by providing information on Polish culture and history for immigrants to know their newly adopted home better. Of interest are “cultural meetings” -- sharing sessions between immigrants and local communities.

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[34] *Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg*. Retrieved June 30, 2009 from http://www.politis-europe.uni-oldenburg.de/download/Poland.pdf

5) **e-Inclusion** is an initiative by the European Commission to promote socio-economic inclusion through information technology to the disadvantaged.

Lastly, we will like to feature organisations and associations that help the Vietnamese community in Poland. Through these groups, we may understand the current policy gaps and how problems are being addressed at the grassroots level.

1) **Association of Vietnamese in Poland**, Solidarity and Friendship
2) **Centre for Assistance for Refugees and Migrants of Caritas** helps foreigners in Poland. Help for refugees are, according to the centre, "in greatest demand".
3) **Barka Foundation for Mutual Help** offers support to excluded groups.
4) **Habitat for Humanity** provides poor families with homes. This initiative requires participation of families in the building process.
5) ***Stadion Dziesieciolecia*** is a big marketplace in Warsaw where Vietnamese immigrants make a living. English journalist Natalia Sosin termed it one of" Europe's largest black market bazaars".[35] It is supposedly where many refugee and illegal Vietnamese immigrants ply their trade.

2.3 Proposed contacts

- Institute of Public Affairs, a public policy think-tank in Poland
- Secretariat of the Soderkoping/Cross-Border Cooperation Process
- Robert Krzysztoń, activist involved with Vietnamese immigrants
- Centre for European and Regional Studies, Warsaw University
- Jagiellonian University, Human Rights Centre
- Katarzyna Gmaj, Centre for International Relations
- Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
- Municipal Social Assistance Office (MOPS)
- District Family Assistance Centres, which helps to implement the IIP
- UN High Commissioner for Refugees Representative in Poland
- Refugee Council in Poland
- Barka Foundation
- Habitat for Humanity

[35] Sosin, N. (2006). Disappearing in the crowd: Vietnamese immigrants in Poland. Published in cafebabel.com, a European magazine.

- "Dan Chim Viet" newspaper

3.1 London, United Kingdom

The immigration issue in Britain is reaching boiling point. The capital, London, is also a hotspot for illegal immigrants.[36] In a recent poll there, 83 per cent believed that there is an "immigration crisis", with 84 per cent in favour of halting immigration completely.[37]

Prime Minister Gordon Brown's new council housing plan on June 28 further aggravated the situation – he specifies priority to be given to the "locals" – in a bid for votes in the next election. In January, work strikes against migrant labour occurred in anger of Brown's failure to uphold his 2007 pledge to create "British jobs for British workers".

Add the support given to anti-immigrant British National Party that won them two seats in the EU parliamentary elections -- the hostility against the Caribbeans, East Africans, Indians, Polish, Pakistanis, Chinese, Bangladeshis is cemented on the political level.

However, the negative sentiment towards foreigners doesn't seem to be stopping them from flocking to the UK, with the recent announcement on June 24 that UK citizenship applications has increased by 57 percent from last year.

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[36] *The Economist*. (March 12, 2009). Illegal immigrants: All sins forgiven. From *The Economist* print edition, March 2009. Retrieved July 3, 2009 from http://www.economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displaystory.cfm?subjectid=894664&story_id=13279183

[37] Sammut, C. (June 27, 2009). Silence on immigration fails us all. Published in online news commentary politics.co.uk.

3.2 Intended coverage

Our stories will focus on the immigrants' response to the politicking and whether they are rethinking their plans to settle down in England. If so, what options are they seeking?

An interesting angle would be the geographical segregation of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups build their homes in clusters – for example, some areas in Greater London densely populated by Poles are commonly referred to as "Polish towns" – and this physical isolation may hinder the integration of immigrants into the English society.

A study observed that an increasing trend of residential isolation for many minority groups, especially the Pakistanis and Bangladeshis in London. However, it found that the increase is not due to new immigrants moving in to escape discrimination, but due to existing families expanding.[38] This means that South Asian couples are raising their children in the increasingly immigrant-hostile environment. We will like to feature them to find out why they chose England as their home, how the kinship with fellow South Asians in the cluster helps them and whether they are rethinking their plans for the future.

Linking the above would be a closer look at children of ethnic minorities who are born or raised in England. These second-generation children have never known their parents' birth nations and may instead have greater loyalty to England.

Some noteworthy projects and programmes that we can reach out to are as follows:

1) **The 'Our Languages' project** began in 2007 to raise the status of community languages in the curriculum. The project currently involves 90 schools across England. Examples in London are Valentines High School, which offers Turkish, Panjabi, Tamil, Urdu, Somali and Polish language

[38] Schönwälder, K. (Ed.) (2007). Residential Segregation and the Integration of Immigrants: Britain, the Netherlands and Sweden. Discussion Paper Nr. SP IV 2007-602. Retrieved June 30, 2009 from http://www.wzb.eu/zkd/aki/files/iv07-602_segregation_three_countries.pdf

classes, and Rustam Iranian School, which teaches Persian language to second-generation Iranian children.

2) **Ethnic Minority Achievement Service (EMAS)** is based in London and raises the achievement of black and minority ethnic pupils, provides training and support to schools and tackles underachievement of specific groups of pupils.

3.3 Proposed contacts

- Trevor Phillips, director of the Commission for Racial Equality and himself an Afro-Caribbean
- Charlie Sammut, former politician and international policy analyst for the Transnational Crisis project
- Metropolitan police race hate crime forum
- Peter Herbert, the chairman of the Society of Black Lawyers
- Department for Children, Schools and Families
- Our Languages
- EMAS
- Ceri Peach, professor of Social Geography at Oxford University and a fellow of St. Catherine's College.
- Susan Easton, European correspondent for *Human Events*

4.1 Marseille, France

Violent clashes between the Muslim Arabs, Algerians and the Israeli Jews are an everyday sight. Putting these groups together is a likely combination for tension. But the opposite is true in Marseille, for the city is a model for future migration policies[39] [40] dealing with a large numbers of immigrants and how to live harmoniously with the

[39] Berlinski, C. (January, 2005). The Hope of Marseille. Message posted to http://www.berlinski.com/node/34

[40] Purvis, A. (December 2007). Marseille's Ethnic Bouillabasisse. *Smithsonian magazine*. Retrieved 28 June, 2009, from http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/marseille-200712.html?c=y&page=1

natives. We will be engaging with all stakeholders in an immigrant society, namely, the government, the public, and the immigrants.

4.2 Intended coverage

Our story in Marseille is to understand her formula for this substantial success -- why are the different ethnicities in Marseille able to remain so calm and tolerant compared to the rest of France where the number of violent acts and the extent of violence are greater

At the national level, these are some of the examples and stories to look at:

1) **Vigorous police work**, plus the toll-free number set up by the government for Marseille's Jews to call. The police are said to be instructed to treat harassment complaints seriously [11].

2) **The *Lellouche* Law**, which came into effect in 2003, calling for the doubling of punishments for crimes committed with a racist or anti-Semitic motive[11].

3) ***Marseille Esperance*** engages the city's religious leaders and the mayor in regular discussions on civic problems, to "combat intolerance, ignorance, and incomprehension and promote respect for one another". The organisation is said to be the key to the city's social harmony. For example, the leaders of the Marseille's Islamic community firmly condemned the series of anti-Semitic attacks that hit France in 2002.

4) **The European Commission's INTI programme**[41] focuses on improving the provision of micro-loans and services such as training and mentoring to support immigrants in building their businesses. Heading the French

[41] European Commission. Programmes - Migrants. Retrieved 28 June, 2009, from http://www.european-microfinance.org/nos-programmes-inti-objectifs_en.php

community in this programme is Adie (Association pour le droit à l'initiative économique).

5) The European Commission's making **2010** the year for combating poverty and social exclusion with one of the themes being "overcoming discrimination and promoting the integration of immigrants and the social and labour market inclusion of ethnic minorities". [42]

Next are stories of how organisations, communities and individuals are helping with the integration of immigrants into society, into becoming Marseillais.

- **Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitie entre les Peuples' (MRAP)** work is to educate people to respond appropriately to discrimination, educating immigrants on their basic rights and offering legal support. [43]

- **Local radio station *La Garre*** is linked to MRAP's community outreach work and promotes the recognition of the ethnic diversity of its listeners.[15]

- **CIERES centre** teaches new immigrants French and assists them in job hunting and accommodation. It is also a focal point for the formation of peer groups and development of a sense of community, which can be of great support to immigrants who often feel alienated in a new and foreign society.[15]

- **Catherine Baduel, director of "Les Yeux de la Terre"** ("The eyes of the Earth") is a photographer who did a three-year photography exhibition that follows the lives of immigrant women from their arrival to their integration in France.[44]

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[42] European Microfinance Network. European Year 2010. Retrieved 28 June, 2009, from http://www.european-microfinance.org/context-objectives_en.php
[43] Peaceboat. (October 7, 2002). Port of Call - Marseilles, France. Retrieved 28 June, 2009, from http://www.peaceboat.org/english/voyg/ov/39th/oct/1007/01.html
[44] European Commission. (2007). 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All - Faces of the Year. Retrieved 28 June, 2009, from http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/index.cfm?cat_id=FY

- **Tilt** has a project this year where young immigrants share information of their native country across the Provence (south of France). The theme of these projections will be "Immigration in Europe". Youths will choose movies to show to the people of several little towns in Provence, with the aim of igniting reactions and reflections of what it means to have a "European citizenship".[45]

4.3 Proposed contacts

- Bernard Vialla, a lecturer on immigrant issues at Marseille University
- Zvi Ammar, President of the Jewish Consistory of Marseille
- SOS Racisme
- Pierre Lellouche, a politician who sponsored the Lellouche Law
- Marseille's Police Force
- Tilt
- Catherine Baduel, Director of the organisation "Les Yeux de la Terre"
- "Mouvement contre le Racisme et pour l'Amitie entre les Peuples"
- Local radio station "La Garre"
- Claire Berlinski, International Relations, Balliol College at Oxford University.

[45] Hardut, M. (12 March 2009). Immigration in Europe, France, August 2009. Message posted to http://www.caleidoscop.org/Members/Marius/news-caleidoscop-2009/immigration-in-europe-france-august-2009

PART II: Support

5. 1 Route and travel fares

Team 1:

3rd 8th 10th 16th 17th 27th 28th

Singapore -- Berlin -- London -- Marseille -- Brussels -- Warsaw – Berlin -- Singapore

Team 2:

3rd 4th 9th 14th 17th 27th 28th

Singapore -- Berlin -- London -- Berlin -- Brussels -- Warsaw – Berlin -- Singapore

5.1.1 Breakdown of travel itinerary

Ticket type	From	To	Date (Dec)	Airline / Train / Bus	Details	Price per pax (SGD)*
Round	***Singapore Changi Terminal 2***	***Berlin De Tegel Airport***	3rd & 28th	Lufthansa Airlines	Going: 2335h - 0740h Returning: 1745h – 1630h One stopover in Munich	1,565.00
One-way	***Berlin Schonefeld Airport***	***London Stansted Airport***	4th & 8th	RyanAir Flight 8545	1625h - 1715h 50 min, direct	€ 40,00 ~ 83.00
One-way	***London***	***Marseille***	10th	Eurostar	0655h - 1017h 2h 22min, London to Paris	£ 29.00 ~ 68.00
				TGV Rail	1416h – 1721h 3h 05min, Paris to Marseille	€ 25,00 ~ 52.00
One-way	***Berlin***	***Brussels***	14th	Eurolines	1900h – 0545h	€ 48,00 ~

					(+1)	100.00
One-way	***Marseille***	***Brussels***	16th	Brussels Airlines Flight SN3598	1155h – 1345h 1h 50min, direct	€ 59,00 ~ 123.00
One-way	***Brussels Airport Terminal: M***	***Warsaw Airport Terminal: 2***	17th	LOT Airlines Flight LO0236	0955h – 1155h 2h 00min, direct	€ 111,00 ~ 231.00
One-way	***Warsaw***	***Berlin***	27th	Deutsche Bahn Rail	2320h – 0739h One stopover in Frankfurt	€ 50,00 ~ 104.00
					Estimated total (4 pax)	**7,884.65**

**** Schedules are based on July 09 and may alter at time of booking***

5.2 Accommodation

5.2.1 Estimated costs for one room (to be shared between 4 pax)

Place	**No. of nights**	**Price range for 1 room (Euros)**	**Average price (Euros)**	**Average price to nearest dollar (SGD)***
Berlin	8	Supported by the Goethe-Visitors Service in Berlin		
Warsaw	10	Supported by the Polish Embassy in Singapore		
London	6	590 to 865	637	1,320
Marseille	6	324 to 440	365	756
Brussels	2	172 to 350	223	463
			Estimated total	**2,539**

**** Currency conversions are based on June 27 and may alter at time of booking.***

5.3 Transport

5.3.1 Airport transfers to city centre

Place	Transport mode	Type of ticket	Price per pax (SGD)
Berlin	Bus	Round	11.45
Warsaw	Bus	Round	1.28
London	Heathrow Connect Rail	One-way	16.77
OR	Gatwick Southern Railway	One-way	26.49
Marseille	Bus	Round	34.77
Brussels	Train	Round	21.00
		Estimated total (for 4 pax)	**447.04**

**** Currency conversions are based on June 27 and may alter at time of booking.***

5.3.2 Public transport

Place	Name of travel card	Valid for	Price x length of stay	Price in SGD for 4 pax
Berlin	Berlin Welcome Card	3 days	22 EUR	179.96
OR	Group ticket	1 day	16.10 EUR x 3 days = 48.30 EUR	98.77
Warsaw	Travelcard	3 days	12 Polish zloty (after ISIC student discount)	21.91
Marseille	Metro card	4 days	18.40 EUR	150.52

Brussels	Group Card	1 day	10 EUR x 3 days	62.20
			Estimated total	**513.36**

**** Currency conversions are based on June 27 and may alter at time of booking.***

5.4 Insurance

Insurer company: **Tenet Insurance Company**

Travel period 26 days

Rates

SGD $345.40 for Elite Group Single Trip Policy

5.5 Proposed support

Type	Proposed amount in SGD
Airfares	9,000
Accommodation	3,000
Transport	1,100
Insurance	400
Sub- total	**$13,500**
Final amount with buffer margin	**$14,000**

-End-

Appendix C: Illustrated Feature Writing - AlterNatives

Foreword

Immigration. The word is on everyone's lips these days. In Singapore, citizens hear politicians deliberating on how to manage foreign labourers, permanent residents and their integration. Neigbourhoods become increasingly diverse, as people from China, India, Bangladesh and the Philippines converge on the nation's shores.

It's not that different from Europe. Over there, politicians are up in arms over an immigration situation that seems to be spiraling out of control – as migrants from the Middle East, Africa and Asia threaten to erode the European culture. On buses and trains, a litany of languages is spoken – to which nobody raises an eyebrow.

Life, it seems, is multicultural now. As native Belgian Marc Andre, a teacher to immigrants at the Brussels Intercultural Action Centre, says: "Interculturalism is a phenomenon. I don't need to imagine what it means; we're living it right now."

Immigration is transforming the world, and every one of us is a part of it.

In Europe, this wave of economic migrants all started with the entry of foreign labourers half a century ago – akin to what Singapore is doing now with the calibrated admission of economic immigrants into the country's workforce.

Which is why we packed our bags to travel halfway around the world to see how immigration has changed the social fabric of Europe – and how it might alter Singapore's, too.

The four of us hit the streets of London, Berlin, Marseille, Brussels and Warsaw in one of Europe's coldest winters ever, navigating narrow alleys with nothing more than photographs of Google Map screenshots in our phones, taken at an Internet cafe the night before. We went in circles around the cities' convoluted streets lined with signs in unfamiliar languages, battling to complete interviews before sunset at 4pm.

We stopped strangers in their tracks, strained to make sense of three-way translations and survived forays into dodgy places.

All that, just to meet people willing to share their side of the immigration story.

There were many.

Passionate activists, staunch survivors, hapless refugees, worried parents, unhappy residents, disapproving politicians, critical academics, optimistic families, happy-go-lucky youths – we met them all; over 100 of them. Together they painted a picture of a continent in the midst of an intense transition, caught between the ups and downs of immigration.

We were outsiders reporting on outsiders. Strange, but sometimes it takes a fellow outsider to understand how it feels to be different. We were sneered at explicitly in a shopping mall. One man even raised a rude middle finger at us. At restaurants without English menus, we had only the vaguest idea of what we had ordered until the food came.

For immigrants, this struggle is surely much worse. They face unfamiliarity in every aspect of their lives, from the workplace to their children's schools, from taking public transport to figuring out how to pay their utility bills. And for them it is not a project; it is their life.

In **AlterNatives**, we are not striving to be insider experts of the European situation. Rather, we aim to present a heartfelt look into its growing cultural diversity and how people are responding to that change.

It's about their smiles, tears and fears. After all, these emotions apply not only to Europe, but are universal among us all.

"Where you feel accepted – that's where your heart is"

Globalisation has created a new rank of transnational citizens – migrants and their children who straddle two cultures, two lifestyles, two identities. Their search for a home away from home is intertwined with coming to terms with who they are, and seeking acceptance from the people around them. Can any one find a true home overseas?

Six years ago, Sükran Demirkan's 26-year-old daughter Canseri returned home from a job centre in Berlin, Germany, with a startling question for her mother: "Should I take off my headscarf?"

"I told her no, because that's who you are," said the 48-year-old German-Turkish café manager, who is Muslim. "How would you feel if you were asked to take off your headscarf for better job chances? She feels lost, and not accepted."

The incident did not surprise Demirkan, whose parents came from Turkey when she was seven years old. She too, has been asked many times by German acquaintances when she will stop wearing her headscarf, a symbol often associated with conservatism and in recent years, Islamic radicalism.

"I'm sick of people asking. Sick of trying to integrate," she said with brutal honesty. "People tell me that I'm not German enough."

Such a cultural collision is a thorny, but inevitable dilemma that comes with immigration. And for the European Union (EU), the situation seems to be reaching saturation point.

Before 2002, net migration into the EU had never exceeded the million mark. But from 2002 to 2007, it ranged between 1.64 and 2.03 million per year, according to statistics agency Eurostat.

This also means that in recent years, immigration has contributed more to EU's total population growth than natural increase. In fact, net migration in 2008 was almost three times higher than the rate of natural population growth.

With a significant number of migrants from Islamic countries – Turks and Moroccans head the list of foreigners from outside of the EU – it's no small matter when they bring along beliefs that seem frightening to many Europeans.

Joachim Bololt, a 66-year-old retiree who lives in the migrant-populated area of Neukölln in Berlin, recounts an unpleasant encounter during the recent Eid holiday, also known as *haji* or the Festival of Sacrifice for Muslims.

"I was putting away the garbage downstairs, but when I opened the lid of the garbage container, I saw a sheep's head staring back at me," he said. "Immigration is a bad thing – their culture is so different."

But it could simply be a fear of the unknown. "When you behave differently, people are scared… scared of another culture," said Demirkan.

Yet, having Muslims in their midst shouldn't be new to most Germans – the country first opened its doors to Turkish guest workers back in the 1960s, as part of an economic bilateral agreement. Then, Turkey was facing high unemployment, and Germany, devastated by World War II, needed extra hands to rebuild the nation.

But things took a turn for the worse when the guest workers programme was scrapped in 1973. But remaining Turkish workers were still allowed to bring their families over, making Germany their permanent home and suddenly, the Germans had to grapple with living alongside people with habits and beliefs that are a world apart from their own.

Even so, it took more than 30 years for the German government to pass a law on immigration and integration, which they did in 2005, said Safter Cinar, a German-Turkish politician with the Turkish Berlin-Brandenburg Union.

"Till the end of the 1990s, the political ideology was that Germany was not an immigrant country," he explained. "Nobody talked about what should be changed in the education system if they were to have tens of thousands of children from another culture, another religion, who speak another language.

"I've been in politics for over 30 years, and I say that I don't know why we couldn't go one step further to accept this immigration."

Close-knit or Cut-off?

But even countries that recognise their significant migrant population are caught in a quandary.

Take Great Britain, a nation that is no stranger to multiculturalism, thanks to its colonial past. Today, its capital, London, teems with ethnic diversity – to the point that it would be peculiar to only see Caucasians on the city's crowded streets.

The years of immigration have also left a mark on the cityscape. Brick Lane, in east London, is also known as "Banglatown" – and it's not difficult to see why. Streets are lined with shop signs for

Bangladeshi cuisine, banks and clothing stores, many with Bengali translation. There is even a park with a replica of a famous monument that is in Bangladesh, the Shaheed Minar, which commemorates the Bengali Language Movement.

The good thing about such diversity is that ethnic minorities feel comfortable living in London, according to British-Bangladeshi Jamal (Abdul Quayum). The 39-year-old, whose grandfather came to Britain during English colonial rule of what was then India in 1934, runs the well-known grocery Taj Stores at Brick Lane with his two brothers.

"All's fine here – no racial discrimination or anything of that sort," said Jamal, who is married with two sons aged 12 and 9. "To be honest, we call ourselves British-Bangladeshis but we consider ourselves more British than Bangladeshi, you know?"

But such migrant enclaves are sometimes referred by the locals as ghettos – a term that evokes gritty images of America's crime-rampant neighbourhoods where drug pushers, prostitutes and homeless people roam the streets.

While Britain has yet to reach that perilous stage, the banding of migrant communities remains undesirable for some because it appears to be encouraging isolation, not integration.

Several politicians, such as David Cameron – leader of UK's Conservative Party – have publicly denounced these detached communities. In a 2006 speech, he vowed to "ban Muslim ghettos" so that migrants will be obliged to interact with people outside of their community.

The right-wing, anti-immigrant British National Party (BNP) is going further. Richard Barnbrook, who represents the party on the London Assembly, believes that migration should be halted completely.

"There has to be a total freeze on migration because we don't have a lot of resources," he said, adding that exceptions can be made for asylum seekers as their lives may be in danger. "As for illegal immigrants – kick them out."

Barnbrook, who is also on the Barking and Dagenham council, backs his case by describing how migrants have caused frustration for the locals in east London.

"Migrants create antagonism within the community; they remove employment and housing, and have no desire to integrate," he said. "It creates frustration, frustration leads to anger, and anger will lead to violence."

Even European citizens, like the well-established Polish community in London, feel the heat.

The economic recession is partly to blame, said Jan Mokrzycki, vice-president of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain, which oversees Polish organizations in the country.

"The general sentiment towards migrants in Britain has been improving in the past few years," he said. "But with the recession, the right-wing parties are beginning to start a rise of nationalism.

"The British are thinking, I am losing my job because a Pole has got it – why should he get it when I have been here all my life?"

The latent tension is an ominous signal to many immigrants that their search for home might be far from over. British-Bangladeshi Jamiar Miah, 47, admits that he feels insecure about his family's future, despite having UK citizenship.

"If anti-immigrant parties come into power, I'd start to worry," said Jamiar, who works as a chef at an Indian restaurant. He came to London in 1991 for an arranged marriage to a Bangladeshi woman, who was already a British citizen. They have five children aged between two and 21.

Last June, the BNP won two seats in the recent European Parliament elections, and Jamiar continued: "If the BNP comes to power, they might just one day say, all immigrants, get out of my country."

If that happens, he will have little choice but to take his family back to Bangladesh.

We Need Them, But We Don't Want Them

Yet Europe cannot do without immigrants. With an ageing population – currently, half of the EU's population is 40 years old and above – they are needed to bolster the continent's economy.

More importantly, immigrants take jobs that the locals do not want, said Mieczyslaw Cezaryolszewski, a long-time London resident and manager of *The Polish Times*, a weekly publication for the Polish community there.

"People are saying to get rid of the migrants – it's rubbish," he said. "Hotels, restaurants, factories and farming would collapse in two weeks! Covered in dust and dirt."

It will get harder to make a case for keeping them out, too. A report on ageing by the European Commission projects that in 2060 the EU will have more than twice as many elderly than children, so having working-age immigrants to plug the labour gap seems like a perfect solution.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple because migrants are more than just work drones, said Antonio Cruz of Brussels-based Migration Policy Group and the editor of *Migration News Sheet*, a monthly publication that covers issues on immigration and asylum.

"If you import a machine, the machine works and that's it – it does not bring cultural baggage," he explained. "Whereas the migrant is not only bringing labour, he is also bringing his traditions, customs, and habits."

However, many nations have turned a blind eye to this. Now, they face a sizeable immigrant population, making integration trickier than ever.

"It was a matter of laziness and incompetence," said Cruz bluntly. "Europe is reaping what it sowed – years of regrets."

Belgium is one such country. Foreigners flocked there as guest workers back in the 1950s. And those who decided to stay for good – Italians are the largest group, followed by Moroccans, French and Dutch – were left to their own devices until the 1990s, when policymakers finally decided to take action.

But it may be a case of too little, too late. The lack of adaptation programmes, such as language classes, meant that many new arrivals over the years have remained disassociated from the mainstream society, said Severine de Potter, a policy officer at the Centre of Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism in Brussels.

And even those who did take part in integration courses may find themselves none the wiser. "The courses may not be well-adapted to their reality, in terms of different languages and cultures," she said.

Faced with language limitations, many migrants have resorted to doing undeclared work, said Sabine Craenen, who runs the Organization for Undocumented Workers in Brussels.

Policy restrictions haven't helped, either. In Belgium, a job is considered legal if it pays at least €1,400 per month ($2,800), the national minimum wage. But that would be an unusually high salary for the low-skilled work that inexperienced newcomers tend to go for, said Craenen, so they fall beneath the 'legal' threshold.

Sociologist Sylvie Carbonelle, a senior researcher at the Free University of Brussels, identified another grim future impact: migrants may end up retiring without sufficient pensions.

"Migrants age, like everybody else," she said. "So, the important question is, how can these migrants live when they age?"

This is yet another pertinent issue for Belgium, where almost half its population has migrant roots. De Potter also notes that immigration is gaining ground with the induction of new member states Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. In recent years, arrivals from these countries have exceeded those from Morocco and Turkey.

Add the 40,000-odd arrivals for family reunification and the 43-percent rise in asylum seekers last year, and it seems that Belgium, like many of its neighbours, is set for an identity shift.

"We cannot escape from other cultures," said de Potter. "National identity has become a very hot topic, and a sensitive one."

The Changing Face Of Europe

Identity is certainly a subject of heated debate in the maritime city of Marseille, France. Its distinct Mediterranean or Provencale culture has faded in the past century with the influx of north African immigrants from former French colonies, such as Algeria and the Comoros. Today, less than half of its population is indigenous French.

Last November, Algeria's qualification for the World Cup was marked with such jubilation that Marseille's usually quiet roads were clogged with honking vehicles when Algerians took to the streets *en masse*.

"There were Algerian flags everywhere, and traffic jams – for a moment, I thought, where was France?" said Nimesh Kumar, a resident who witnessed the scene.

Yet, by today's modern standards, such events shouldn't be that surprising.

"We live in a globalised world, what do you expect?" said Craenen. "Immigration is a fact of life – we just have to deal with it."

Building Bridges, From Within

The good news is, some are already doing so. Christine Kulakowski, director of Brussels Intercultural Action Centre, is taking the first step to eradicate prejudices that hamper immigrants from settling into their new homes.

"Prejudices make it more difficult for migrants to find jobs, to find places to stay," she said.

Hence, the centre offers courses to kickstart intercultural interaction, such as by training people how to launch their own intercultural initiatives. Such a typical class consists of 15 people, including migrants from war-torn African nations like Djibouti and Congo.

Theonille Kaytesi, 49, from Rwanda, has no regrets taking up the two-year course. Speaking in halting English, she said: "When I arrived here, I had so many difficulties with integration; I cannot do so many things. This course can help me to help someone else."

Immigrants chipping in to guide fellow newcomers is also a feature in the Berlin suburb of Kreuzberg, which has a large proportion of Muslim immigrants, particularly from Turkey.

There, 10 bilinguals from countries such as Turkey, Lebanon and Morocco visit the homes of about 360 immigrant families to help them with problems encountered in their everyday lives.

Examples include translating government letters, sorting out landlord disputes, and addressing questions related to job searching, banking and health.

They are part of a project called Muslims help Muslims with Integration that operates under Nachbarschaftshaus Urbanstrasse, or Neighourhood House – a centre that aims to improve public welfare in the district.

Roping in long-time migrants into integration projects has its advantages.

"People trust us more," said Scham Najimi, 55, a Lebanese who has been in Germany for more than 20 years. "We talk to them in their mother tongue, and we can relate to them, having also gone through similar experiences."

Fellow project member, 50-year-old Keti Qafmolla from Slovenia, added that helping others has also helped her to feel more at home.

"I feel more integrated – for example, I can speak German better now," she said with a smile.

Natives, too, are beginning to warm to outsiders. Lasse Loose, 22, has gone the extra mile to learn how

to speak Turkish. He attends weekly lessons at Humboldt University in Berlin, and most of his classmates are also Germans.

"I play soccer, and have a lot of Turkish teammates," said Loose, who lives in Kreuzberg. "But I don't understand them, so I don't talk to them.

"Everybody is asking the immigrants to integrate, but we should also make the step too – and language is the strongest bridge."

Starting Early, Staying Ahead

These are certainly sterling examples for new EU state Poland to follow. Since gaining European membership, at the same time as enjoying the benefits of its own citizens working in wealthier EU countries and bringing that wealth home, the country is seeing more immigrants, for its position at the fringes of the EU makes it an attractive destination for bordering and poorer nations such as Ukraine and Russia.

Justyna Frelak, head of the Migration and Development Policy programme at the Institute of Public Affairs, a public policy think-tank in Warsaw, likens Poland to a "bus-stop on the way to richer EU countries".

And while Poland can look to its more experienced neighbours for solutions – and mistakes – to learn from, Frelak points out that it's not that easy to adopt their measures.

"The challenge is that our social policy in general, not just for immigrants, is very limited," she said. "Also, awareness of the special needs of migrants is still quite low – many Poles are still not that aware of the difference between migrants and refugees."

It's no wonder that Krzysztof Finlinski, a board member of the Polish Association of Legal Education (PSEP), fears that Poland may end up repeating the mistakes of others.

He describes how PSEP, an organisation that helps excluded groups, had to step in when teachers hired by the government failed to turn up for classes to teach refugees Polish.

"No one was interested in monitoring those teachers," he said. "This administration is living in a paper reality – on paper, people are joining the classes; on paper, everything is perfect."

In addition, Frelak thinks that the government needs to rethink its integration programmes for non-EU citizens, because they simply "don't work".

"The integration programme is very limited in terms of getting new qualifications," she explained. "For example, some of the training is in Polish – so if you don't know Polish, it's useless."

One bright spot here is that the government is set to revamp its integration policy this year.

"The new policy will cover all things related to immigration, such as entry and exit of migrants, integration and re-integration of returning Polish migrants," said Katarzyna Oyrzanowska of the Migration Policy Department, Ministry of Interior and Administration. Sipping a cappuccino in a newly opened café in the heart of Warsaw city after work, she added that the department will also take into account feedback from organizations and the public.

The next step would be for Europe to recognize that migrants are transnational – a unique entity that calls for regional measures, added Carbonelle.

"Migrants have two 'mothers'," she said. "The law has to adapt to that reality, for example, to enable people to get retirement benefits even when they are back in their home country."

This would ease the problems of caring for elderly Muslims, which is another emerging source of conflict. Not only must elderly homes be refurbished to include prayer rooms, they need to hire Muslim nurses and cooks who can prepare halal meals – issues that many organisations are not familiar with.

More importantly, immigrants will have greater freedom to choose where to spend their twilight years.

"When you are old, it's the time when you try to reconnect all the periods of your life and perhaps this is more difficult for people who come from another country. They ask themselves, do I stay or do I go back to my country? It's probably a dilemma for a lot of them," said Carbonelle. "I think that the politics must give them the possibility to choose where they want to age."

Caught Between Two Worlds

Still, these actions to embrace immigrants into and within the European fold may not be enough to win over their hearts.

Indeed, even what defines an integrated citizen is ambiguous, as Demirkan points out: "By integration, what do you mean? Through language? Blending in? Doing your work? Paying your taxes? Forgetting all roots? Read, eat and dress like Germans?"

And if fitting in means they have to give up their original cultures, many will be reluctant to do so.

"Preserving our culture is important," said retiree Mustafa Yildmaz, 65, who came to Germany 41 years ago. "In Turkey, we have a saying that if you know your past, you will know your future."

Such dilemmas toss up conflicting sentiments on whether Europe could truly be their home.

"I don't know where my heart is," admitted Demirkan. "Where you feel accepted – that's where your heart is."

The problem is this acceptance is hard to find even in their home countries.

"In Turkey, I also don't feel accepted because people are jealous of my economic status," she said. "People are saying, you left, you took another culture, you're German now."

But for Yildmaz, it's simple. "We'll never be German - always Turkish," he said.

Volkan Timur Seyhan, 26, believes that it's possible to be both. "I'm German but with a Turkish spice," he said with a laugh.

The football player often finds himself caught in the middle from time to time – for a good reason.

"My wife is German, my parents were born in Turkey, I was born in Berlin," said Volkan, who has a six-month-old son. "Sometimes, my mother is a little bit confused when my wife doesn't call her every day – but that's because Germans raise their children differently, to be independent."

But not everyone can juggle multiple cultures. In fact, staying true to one's roots can be a hindrance to establishing a future, as it leads to vicious circle of always having to put Turkish language and practices first, said Demirkan.

To her, finding a home overseas is a battle that can no longer be won.

"Five years ago, I couldn't imagine going back to Turkey – but now, I can," she said solemnly. "Because I don't feel comfortable here any more."

Establishing self-identity

Vietnamese DANG THU HUONG and Indian ILANKUMARAN SOUNDARYA went opposite ways to come to terms with who they are today. Dang chose to embrace the host nation's culture, while Soundarya sees the importance in staying true to his roots.

Communist no more

When Vietnamese immigrant Dang Thu Huong attended school in Poland for the first time in 1991, she was shocked that her teacher asked for her opinion.

Having been schooled under the communist regime in Vietnam where no lessons went by without reciting the philosophies of communist leader Ho Chi Minh, she was used to being told what to think.

“If we have some poems, we can’t say what we think about them. Usually the teacher tells us that we have to think this way, that this poem means this,” said Dang, 28, now a general practitioner living in Warsaw, Poland.

“I was shocked that I was someone important and my opinions were valued as a human,” she added as she recalled the time when her family migrated to Poland when she was 10.

But the former class chairman in Vietnam who once led her class in singing the communist, or 'red' songs, quickly used her experience to her advantage.

She topped the class in Mathematics, a subject that most Vietnamese are good at as it involves techniques that one can learn by heart. Soon, her Polish classmates were asking her to solve sums, while they helped practise her Polish.

Similarly, her transition into adulthood was smooth sailing. She gets along with her Polish colleagues and is now dating a 31-year-old Polish political scientist.

“They don’t do anything that makes me different. Even if they do, they are curious of my culture and see me as someone interesting, and not as an alien,” she said.

But Dang’s story is a unique one. Gesturing to the café where she was having dinner, she said in resignation: “Many Vietnamese in Poland are afraid to sit in such restaurants because they are afraid of being caught by the police for being illegal migrants.”

“But I am free, I can do everything I want. I am legal. So I am happy compared to most of the Vietnamese who are illegal.”

Hence she sees the need to help the underprivileged Vietnamese. When she's off-duty, she is a volunteer translator at a migrant centre set up by Catholic group Divine World Missionaries in southern Warsaw. Most of her work involves accompanying Vietnamese migrants to hospitals to translate the doctors’ diagnosis.

Born French, feels Indian

Ilankumaran "Kumar" Soundarya, 29, tugs at his hoodie jacket, picks up his cricket bat and takes his spot on the barren hilltop field. Three rusty white metal rods are erected in the rocky soil as replacements for wickets to demarcate a makeshift cricket pitch. Gusty winds tear at the broken nets that lie in a limp pile between goalposts, though no one seems to notice. Instead, all 10 men have their eyes on the bowler, who is about to bowl the worn-out ball.

The scene is repeated every Sunday in Acidic, a half-hour bus ride from Marseille's city centre. The players? Ethnic Indians who came to the French town to work. "They are like family," said Kumar, who hails from former French colony Pondicherry.

The father of two girls aged four and two, also admits that he feels more at home in India than in

France, where he has been living for the past 10 years. But fate had the last word. His parents opted for French citizenship when India reclaimed Pondicherry, and he kept that status by default.

"Maybe it's my destiny; when I was born I was automatically French so there was no option for me," said Kumar, who is unemployed.

But that's about as French as he gets. Scents of curry fill the rooms of his modest flat in the city centre, while a Bollywood show plays on his 30-inch television. A narrow wall cabinet in the living room reveals shelves of colourful Hindu religious artefacts. His 26-year-old wife, Sudha, her long hair in a single braid against a reddish-brown sari, stirs a large pot of dhal on the crowded stove in their airy kitchen.

"We haven't forgotten our culture; we were brought up in India," said Kumar. "Till now, the kids haven't learnt anything about the French culture – once they start to go to school at around five, six years old, then they'll start getting in it."

True enough, both children only speak Tamil. Moreover, neither parent has any French friends. Instead, they are surrounded by fellow Tamils who gather to celebrate Indian festivals like Deepavali, the Festival of Lights.

"There are many Tamil families here," he said. "We will go to one person's house and we will celebrate."

With a strong sense of community in Marseille, both husband and wife were able to settle down in no time. "I missed India a little bit at the beginning, but now I have settled down. My friends are Tamil mothers; it's easy to integrate. Marseille is good," said the soft-spoken Sudha, who arrived four years ago.

Her husband agrees. "The government takes care of people, even when you are unemployed," said Kumar, who receives social benefits of €1,200 per month ($2,400), as well as €170 per child. His family also gets free medicine and free public transportation, and they only pay about €20 to €30 per month for rent. They do pay taxes though, he added.

But the couple does not wish to live solely on government benefits. "It's still better to work or the government won't give pension," said Sudha, who is planning to learn French and get a job as an accountant or a teacher to utilise her economics degree, which she obtained in India.

"European countries, France is better than any other," she added.

Educate to integrate

At a university's bar in London, the usual merrymaking and clinking of glasses was silenced by an angry voice.

"Oh my God, how can you do this? How can you provide alcohol at a nightclub to children who are learning?" exclaimed a man from the ethnic minority community.

He was part of 21 ethnic minority parents, together with their children, on a tour conducted by the Ethnic Minority Achievement Services (EMAS), an organisation that helps minority students excel in their studies.

As part of EMAS' Aim High project, which advocates the importance of higher education to ethnic minority parents, parents are invited to tour the universities so that any misconceptions could be addressed.

It was observed that many ethnic minority children, especially the girls, did not enrol in universities due to low aspirations and parents' fear of their child being led astray.

This puts the children at a disadvantage as they do not have the qualifications to compete in the job market and often end up on the lower rungs of society.

Back at the bar, Rahma Samater, the manager of parental involvement and targeted projects at EMAS, broke the silence: "If a child doesn't have everything here, obviously they will travel to somewhere else. When you provide it here, you are limiting the traveling. So by the time he walks from the bar, the dorm room is there, he can have enough sleep, and wake up fresh."

Eventually, the parent accepted her reasoning.

"With parents visiting universities, we can preempt the assumptions they have, said Samater as she recalls the incident which took place a few years ago. "Particularly for those who are foreign to the country, they won't feel that their child might lose their identity, culture and everything they have."

EMAS's concept mirrors one European solution to integration: Overcome all barriers to education.

Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government agencies like EMAS have rolled out intensive programmes to reach out to migrant parents, educating them about education systems and equipping them with the knowledge to coach their children using their mother tongues.

Children are given help in both their studies and in boosting their self-esteem – which helps to raise confidence in their abilities to excel.

For example, London-based project, Our Languages, promotes learning of mother tongues to reinforce minority students' cultural identity and pride, while EMAS also has an Ambassador's Project that helps African and Caribean student develop leadership skills.

The story repeats itself all across Europe as countries do their best to integrate immigrants, using education as a key.

In Berlin, Germany, the Association for New Education mails regular letters packed with information to migrant parents on how to raise a child from an infant right up to school-going age, in their specific mother language.

At the same time, German retiree Martha Bockstette lends a helping hand to migrant children by teaching them how to read German books after classes.

Over in eastern Europe, the Office of the Ombudsman in Poland drafts recommendations to education ministers on how to deal with diversity in the classroom—brought about by the influx of migrants from neighbours Ukraine and Belarus, and returning Polish migrants from the UK.

And in the heart of Europe, the European Commission's (EC) education department in Brussels has projects informing migrant parents the importance of preschool.

"It's important for migrant children to go to preschool, to learn the language of instruction - especially if their parents don't speak it - and their own mother tongue. It also helps children develop social skills and links to the native children," said Gelu Calacean, the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of EC.

This also indicates the scale of the challenge - many migrant families do not want to send their children to local schools for fear they will lose their identity; or even simply do not know how to send them there even if they wanted to.

The Poverty Barrier

Help has to come fast. Already, Calacean noted there are twice as many migrant drop-outs as local ones across Europe.

With no education, there will be no integration, said Arnold Mengelkoch, the migration representative in the district office of Neukölln, Berlin - a majority Turkish district: "The only change is to push kids into schools, to help them make the jump from low to high-skilled jobs. It's better to educate the kids, rather than integrating the adults - without a job, there is no talk of integration. We should look at the next generation."

To accomplish that, socio-economic issues need to be tackled, says Friederike Terhechte of the Network on Integration by Education in Berlin.

"It's not just about the language background, but also their social rights. Germany is one of the worst countries where success of education depends on your societal situation. If you are rich, you will have a good education. If you are poor, you will have a bad education. Migrants usually belong to the lower half," she said.

The problem stretches to the next generation. "Parents don't have a perspective on education because there is high unemployment. It is not a high priority for them," Terhechte added. "So if a child's grandparents and parents did not have a proper job, he will not have proper aspirations."

For some, the streaming system in Germany also marks a death penalty on their futures at the fourth grade. At the tender age of 10, the students' path to either a university degree or a vocational education is decided when they are streamed into three different types of secondary schools—*Hauptschule, Realschule and Gymnasium.*

Hauptschule is the lowest level secondary school which leads to vocational education, while the *Realschule* leads to apprenticeship or if the student is outstanding, an eventual university education. *Gymnasium* is the best form of secondary education as it prepares students for university.

Most migrant students end up in lower-level schools, said Safter Cinar, spokesman for the Turkish Berlin-Branderburg Union (TBB).

Based on the 2006 International Primary Literacy Survey which assesses reading and comprehension capabilities of fourth graders in Germany, he noted that "teachers were giving more recommendations for children from academic families for higher level schools than for children from worker's families."

Hence, while all parents want the best for their children, their social background can hold them back, said Terhechte.

Balanced Mix In Schools Helps Academic Performance

This social disadvantage perpetuates through segregation of schools. Since most European Union countries do not place restrictions on the migrant-native ratio, school intake is determined primarily by neighbourhood demographics. It becomes de-facto that schools in poorer districts will have more migrants.

"Segregation starts happening through default," said Zrinka Bralo, executive director of London-based Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum. "Immigrants buy cheaper housing, or are living in social housing clusters, so through economic means, they start clustering. And if you have many Asian families and one white family, the white family tends to move out. Hence, you get a neighbourhood that is predominantly Asian, and a school that's Asian too."

According to EC-supported research unit Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training's 2008 report on education strategies for integrating migrant children, the socio-economic background of fellow students influences the learning of minority and low-income students. Conversely, the more advanced their peers are, the better the minority students did.

So it becomes a vicious circle of poverty, immigration and low academic expectations.

That is why Turkish mother Cemile Aktürk, 28, sees the importance of sending her five-year-old son to KOMSU, an intercultural childcare centre in Kreuzberg, Berlin, where there is an equal ratio of Turkish and German children aged five months to six years old.

“There is a big problem in Kreuzberg where there are only one or two schools with a balanced mix of Turkish and Germans. Hence, students speak mostly Turkish in school. Their German will suffer. So I like KOMSU,” said Aktürk, who came to Berlin to marry to a German-Turk in 1998.

KOMSU’s concept is to expose children to diversity. For instance, religious festivals like Ramadan and Christmas are both observed. Halal food is served to Muslims, while games are played in different languages. Two preschool teachers - Turkish and German - are attached to each class of 17 children.

“The basis of the concept is that no group can be more than 50 percent. There’s a balance and it is very important. In some schools, you can have 90 percent Turkish children, and they will speak in their native tongue. If it is 50-50, they will need German to talk to one another, yet speak in Turkish too,” said director of KOMSU Gerd Ammann.

The result is racial tolerance. “It’s a chance for kids to see the world in another way. It’s very important to get to know that others can be different. We promote

When your culture offends

What do you do when you arrive in a new country with totally different cultures and beliefs? Some assimilate by learning the language, dressing the same way and practising the host culture while some retreat to their security ghettos. Integration is an individual choice. Government policies have opened doors, but will the migrants step in?

When Vietnamese Tran Thi Ngoc Diep arrived in Brussels in 2001 to marry her Flemish husband, she had a culture shock. Not only were Belgians speaking in Dutch - which rendered her French lessons in Vietnam useless - they greet each other with three kisses on the cheeks.

"I felt weird giving three kisses to people," said the 34-year-old mother of two sons aged seven and two who came from a conservative Asian background, "but I have to do it because I live in Brussels. I feel accepted when I accept their culture."

She also signed up for Dutch language and social orientation courses with local integration office Brussels Onthaalbureau, and through the office's help, she obtained a diploma in early childhood education in 2006. She now works as a kindergarten teacher and speaks Dutch, English, German and French - as well as Vietnamese.

Her outgoing personality has earned her many Belgian friends. Truus Roesems, 38, her neighbour and godmother of her younger son said: "If I have any problem, the first person I will call is Diep."

Tran's success is an act of will. Many migrants, like Tran, face alienation when they arrive in a foreign country. Their cultural practices accentuate their differences from the natives.

This has been heightened by the surge in migration from both the European Union (EU) and non-EU states in the last decade. According to EU's statistical office Eurostat 2008 population report, there are 30,779,000 non-nationals out of the total population of 497,431,000 or 6.2 percent living in the 27 member states, a 42 percent increase since 2001. Migrants - including their descendents - from non-EU states made up 19,476,000 or more than half of the foreign population.

Out of these, Muslim migrants from Turkey and Morocco constitute the largest population of foreigners, with Turks making up 7.9 percent and Moroccans at 5.6 percent. Most of them live in Germany, France and Spain.

This floodgate of migration has provided greater grounds for cultural friction as migrants import their cultures into the host nations, which may be at odds with the natives'.

Policy makers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have reacted by offering help in assimilation. For instance, the European Commission has the Integration for Third Countries Nationals funding programme that helps in integration programmes for migrants from non-EU states. In Neukölln, a majority Turkish-populated district of Berlin, Germany, over 70 NGOs deal with migration. Most of the language classes in Europe are also offered to migrants for free.

So much for the help at arrival. What do migrants do when their culture offends?

While some quickly assimilate by learning the language and adopting the host culture, others retreat into the security of their ghettos, insulating them from contact with the native society. This highlights the popular idea that it is the migrant's responsibility to integrate, and not the natives' job to adapt.

As Sabine Craenen of Brussels' migrant workers' rights group Organisation for Undocumented Workers explained: "Europe still does not see itself as a migration country. So we have to protect our culture.

"It is very much a European idea that we have one culture and it always has to stay the same. People can come, but they need to adapt to our culture. We don't need to adapt to them."

Sing The Same Tune

Learning the language is one way to adapt. "How can you blend in if you don't speak the language? It's like if I were to go to Singapore, and I can't speak English or Mandarin, how can I do anything?" said Idriss Aurane, 26, an English-to-French instructor at the Centre of Innovation for Work and Social Changes (CIERES), an NGO that provides free language and social orientation courses to migrants referred by a job centre in Marseille.

"Obviously I have to get trained, learn the language, and motivate myself to learn properly so that I can eventually find a job," he added.

Chinese migrant Ivy Fang Hong plans to improve her French by taking lessons and applying to a university by September this year. "If I want to live in France, I'll definitely have to adapt to everything about it. If not I will not be able to integrate," said the 29-year-old who relocated to her French husband's hometown in Marseille after tying the knot in 2009.

They met while her husband was working in China in 2005. Her husband, who loves Chinese culture, also communicates to her in Chinese and learned Chinese cooking from her.

Yet the reality is that the migrants can never be French. "The French will always employ a French person who can speak English, but never an English person who can speak French," said 30-year-old CIERES student Kim Littler, who has a hard time finding a job in Marseille. "It's just the whole French pride thing. They are very proud and they like to protect themselves."

Littler used to be a chef in Australia, but he relocated to Marseille to be with his French girlfriend. The two met while working for the same company in London last year and decided to move to her hometown in Marseille last July after their work contracts ended. He is currently unemployed and is not receiving any social welfare benefits.

Dress Like Us

To minimise the physical differences, some migrants chose to disassociate themselves from visual symbols of their culture. For example, some immigrant Muslim women choose not to wear the *hijab*, or headscarf.

"The headscarf in Germany is associated with religious radicalism. It is not compatible with a democratic society, and this is how the German society feels," said Ulrike Seay, 48, a German research laboratory assistant. "If you wear a headscarf, it demonstrates that you do not want to be a member of a democratic society."

But personally, the Hamburg native does not see any issues with the headscarf. "They can wear whatever they like. It doesn't matter," she said with a laugh, adding that she has a lot of interaction with Turkish students in her university laboratory and enjoyed a Turkish wedding she once attended.

Krzysztof Finlinski, a board member of the Polish Association of Legal Education in Warsaw is even more direct. "Everyone is afraid of an Osama bin Laden next door," he said.

Turkish language teacher Rezan Jenaiz, 40, does not wear her headscarf and considers herself a modern Turkish woman. She is also dating a German. She migrated to Berlin in 2001 as she did not want to be confined to the traditional roles of a Muslim woman in Turkey; and wearing the headscarf is one.

"In Turkey, it is still a closed society. It is really hard to say whatever you want and discover yourself, especially if you are a woman," said dark-haired, bespectacled Jenaiz, who is dressed in jeans and a grey sweater, like any European woman of her age.

Deeper Into Their Comfort Zones

There seems to be safety - and confidence - in numbers, too. Antonio Cruz, editor of the monthly *Migration News Sheet* published by Migration Policy Group, a think-tank in Brussels, said migrants who form the majority tend to stick to themselves. They also display ostentatious signs of their religion and culture in search of an alternative identity.

The Muslims are usually cited in these cases since they form the largest group of migrants in Europe, a result of policies that allowed waves of migration through family reunification. Muslim men tend to prefer marrying women from their home countries as they are seen untainted by the western culture.

There are 15-20 million Muslims among some 497 million people living in the EU, and this number is expected to double by 2025, according to the National Intelligence Council, a United States-based public policy think-tank.

"When I first came here 30 years ago (from Macau), I hardly saw women in the streets with veils. Maybe it was because they were numerically very weak, so there was pressure on them to integrate," Cruz said.

It is a different story now. "The attitude to accept the host country's way of life is not taken up by immigration populations that are numerically very strong. They set up their own communities, create their own lifestyles and even form their little ghettos. This is not something that is characteristic of Asians, blacks or Muslims. It's human nature," said Cruz.

The ghetto phenomenon is also prevalent among descendents of migrants who were born and raised in the host countries.

“It is a serious identity crisis because the migrants don’t feel that they belong here, or the home country of their parents,” Cruz added, “so they try to form a group and wearing a veil is a form of identifying themselves to a particular group.”

Arnold Mengelkoch, the migration representative in the district office of Neukölln, Berlin, frowns upon such behaviour. “Immigrants should adapt to German society- not isolate themselves - while keeping their own language and culture,” he said.

But integration is a two-way street, said Zrinka Bralo, the executive director of London’s Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum, an organisation coordinating dialogues and partnership with migrant NGOs in London.

“People are pushed into isolation, and that has happened in Northern England where you have Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities that did not integrate. When you are integrating, you have to be integrating into something. If the host community is closed to you, you can’t integrate,” she said, adding that it is very difficult to blame one party for the culture clashes.

“It’s like divorce, there’s always two sides to the story.”

Time Is The Best Mediator

Yet cultural clashes are mere teething problems while both parties adjust to the alien cultures. Time will smoothen the friction. Once the natives accept that immigration will not stop, and that immigrants are vital in sustaining Europe’s aging population and work in menial jobs shunned by locals, they may be more tolerant.

Such tolerance is already taking place in Brussels, the heart of Europe. “10 years ago, the authorities would not announce over the radio that Ramadan has started and Muslims need to fast,” said Christine Kulakowski, the director of Brussels Intercultural Action Centre.

“Now the media is talking about it when before that, nobody knew. People were scared of the killing of sheep during Eid too. But now they understand that it is part of Muslim culture. The authorities have also given them space to do the sacrifice, so they don’t have to do it in their houses any more,” added Kulakowski.

Descendent of Turkish migrants to Berlin Imge Tak, 15, thinks that cultural clashes and discrimination is a thing of the past.

“I’ve never felt discriminated. There was never a person who said to me you’re a Turkish and it is a bad thing. People at my age find it normal to have more people who are not Germans in their class,” said the spunky teenager who spots shoulder-length blonde hair and attractive blue eyes. With her looks, she could be easily mistaken for a German.

“So I think the cultural clash is more with the older people, and this generation now is more comfortable with differences. It’s not that they have accepted it, it’s just that it is so normal that they don’t think about it,” said Imge, whose best friend is Chinese-German.

Hasan Togrulca, a German-Turkish deejay and political activist based in Berlin, believes that the fourth generation of migrants will be assimilated.

“Migrants had to take three steps to be where we are now. For the first generation it was working in the factories; for the second, it was going to school, and maybe to open businesses; the third is to develop a new culture. And by the fourth, it will be integrated,” he said.

Cross-cultural learning

Organizations across Europe, such as BRUSSELS ONTHAALBUREAU and the POLISH ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL EDUCATION, have created programmes to help new arrivals get up close and personal with the host nation's culture, paving the way for them to settle in their new homes.

BON with a new society

Disco lights dazzle a crowd grooving to pop music at a Brussels community club on a cold December afternoon, while a symphony of foreign tongues plays in the background.

A Tibetan woman in a turquoise silk dress embossed with dragon motifs shyly claps her hands to the rhythm. Next to her, a bespectacled Muslim woman in jeans and headscarf dances with two Caucasian women. In the centre, an Iraqi man charms the crowd with his sleek Persian moves.

But this is not a typical nightclub scene in Brussels.

The people are among 250 migrants celebrating their graduation from a six-week social orientation course by the Brussels Onthaalbureau (BON), an organisation that provides integration programmes for migrants on the Brussels society, Dutch language, career advising and social participation.

“We help people integrate under the notion of civic integration,” said director of BON, Eric de Jonge.

“I think everybody in Brussels should be equal. You can’t be equal if you are a newcomer and you don’t know how this region functions,” said de Jonge.

Started in 2004 in accordance with the Belgium integration decree which mandates migrants to join integration courses, BON’s vision is to help migrants function as independent and useful members of the society.

Using a three-step approach, migrants are recommended to attend a six-week social orientation course followed up a Dutch language course. Simultaneously, a counsellor is attached to them to help them with practical issues such as housing and career advice for a year. When they have finished both the Dutch language and social orientation course, they will be matched to a career course that will prepare them for work in a suitable industry.

The impact of BON is far-reaching. In 2009, 625 people were awarded the integration certificate for regularly participating in the full integration programme, which are held in 11 different languages. The migrants are grouped according to their language and level of education to make sure illiterates are not left behind.

Back at the graduation party, Tibetan refugee and BON participant Thupten Dhundup, dressed in traditional Tibetan garb of white high-collar shirt and *chuba*, a wrap-around cloth tied at his waist, takes the stage to perform a Tibetan folk song.

Hitting high notes with ease, the 26-year-old is a crowd favourite. After all, he is the lead singer in a self-produced album called *The Rays of Sun and Moon*, a compilation of politically charged songs on hopes for Tibet’s independence. After his performance, he changes into baggy jeans and t-shirt, accessorised with a metal chain and cap, a far cry from the yellow robes he wore when he was a monk 12 years ago. As a monk, he faced persecution from the China authorities and fled to India in 1998 to seek political freedom.

“I believe in Dalai Lama, and always pray to him. If the China police sees his photograph with me, they will ask me why and arrest me,” he said, “Tibet is not free.”

In India, he gave up his monkhood for pleasures of love. Yet, he had no legal status there. He sought asylum in Brussels and arrived in 2008.

Dhundup is grateful for BON’s help in his settlement needs. “I like BON so much. I learned the law of Belgium, what you can do and cannot do,” he said.

Though he feels that the natives may look down on him, all that matters is that he is legal now. “I don’t care how the public view me, as long as the authorities have accepted me as a refugee.”

Wasabi Warsaw

It's 11am, and a sign on Japanese restaurant Sushi Momo's glass doors says "closed". But a glance into the warmly lit interior of the Warsaw restaurant tells a different story.

Children roll and slice sushi under the watchful eye of a black kimono-clad chef. Across the room, another group folds miniature origami cranes using plain notebook paper. The five boys and three girls, aged between nine and 14, make a din as they do so, oblivious to the snowy weather outside that has temperatures dipping below -10 °C.

Every now and then, someone dashes to the kitchen sink with an awful look on his face (after unknowingly wolfing down too large a chunk of fiery *wasabi*). Chopsticks are just about everywhere as

the children fight to get a firm grip on them. Most end up eating their lunch – cucumber sushi, fried chicken and rice – either with their fingers or with an improvised method of holding the chopsticks.

It's a strange sight, and it gets even stranger – the children aren't Polish, but Chechen refugees from Russia. Yet they are speaking Polish, albeit imperfectly, as they try to complete the tasks.

This excursion on December 21 last year was organised by Marina Hulia of Polish Association of Legal Education (PSEP) to allow refugees to get to know Warsaw better.

Called I Hate Tomato Soup – in reference to Poland's well-loved dish that many refugees find unpalatable – the project helps to put a smile on the faces of refugee children, who are too poor to splurge on such outings.

And speaking Polish is part of the game. "There is one rule – they must speak only Polish. If a child asks a question in his own language, I will not answer," said Hulia, who is from Russia.

By making the children practise speaking Polish outside the classroom, these activities have the added benefit of helping them adjust to Polish society, she added.

With rose-tinted spectacles and short blond hair beneath a multicoloured striped beanie hat, the energetic Hulia explained that Japanese restaurants suit the Muslim Chechens as halal restaurants are a rarity in Poland, where traditional dishes include pork dumplings and sausages.

PSEP volunteer Monika Golebiowska added that children also get to learn about international cultures in an interactive way. In addition to hands-on activities, they sit through a brief lesson at the start of each session. For this outing, they were shown pictures about Japan, such as its famous landmarks, traditional costumes and cuisine.

"It's good for them to know this, because some kids initially thought that sushi was a Polish national dish!" she said with a laugh. "Today, all of them are trying sushi for the first time; for some, it's the first time they ever saw sushi."

This explains why they mistook the wad of green *wasabi* as an innocuous garnish. Ramzan Abdurahmanow, 14, was one who fell victim. "I only took a pinch, but it's too strong – my whole face is burning!" he said, much to the laughter of the other children.

New life in Brussels triggered depression

For most cheery Filipinos, the word 'depression' does not exist in their vocabulary. So 53-year-old Leonida Beligon found it hard to accept that she was suffering from depression when she came to the capital of Belgium in 1988.

She and her two daughters came to join her husband, who was working as a butler in an ambassador's residence.

Faced with mounting problems of loneliness, unemployment and dashed dreams, Beligon often fell ill. She had hallucinations of working in her old job as an accountant in Manila. Her doctor suspected she was suffering from depression and put her on anti-depressants for about two years.

The unhappiness started in the first few weeks in Brussels. “I was very happy to be together as a family, but after a few weeks, the happiness and excitement disappeared,” said Beligon, “I felt as if I was left alone in the middle of a desert. I became so lonely. I could not understand what people were saying. I could not even go to the supermarket because I was always fearful.”

This was aggravated by her illegal status in Belgium. Beligon overstayed her tourist visa and as a result could not get subsidy for her hospital bills when she gave birth to her third child a year later.

Her status also barred her from employment as an assistant accountant at one of the embassies. Though she passed the interview and was offered a monthly salary of €800 ($1,600), the offer never materialised. “They told me that they should offer the work to a Belgian national first,” she said.

Forced by financial constraints, especially with the arrival of their third child, Beligon had to work as a domestic helper at an ambassador’s residence instead to supplement her husband’s income of €600. The mismatch of qualification became the catalyst to her depression.

To overcome it, she had to constantly remind herself that her salary in Brussels is much more than what she would have earned as an accountant in Manila. She also kept herself busy by learning French and joining a migrant’s association where she found support from people who were in the same boat.

Her determination paid off when her application for regularisation was granted in 1999. She and her three children – aged between 21 and 25 – are now Belgian citizens while her husband is a permanent resident. She is also cured of her depression.

Though the ordeal of being a vagabond is over, Beligon still does not know much about Belgium culture. “I am not really integrated. I only know about Belgium culture through my children,” she said. She still works as a domestic helper at an ambassador’s residence.

Ironically, she worries that her children are too integrated and uses Filipino movies to remind them of their roots. “My children don’t know where they come from and this will affect their self-identity,” she laments.

Survivors

War survivors HEDA DEBIROWA, 43, and ZRINKA BRALO, 41, fled their home countries of Russia and Bosnia in search of a better future – only to be met with a flood of unexpected obstacles. The women recount how they picked up the pieces to start anew and rebuild their lives in a foreign land.

“My eldest son, who was 14 at that time, was killed. I simply didn’t want to stay there any more.”

– Heda Debirowa, 43, from Chechnya, Russia.

My village in Chechnya was bombed during the second Chechen war in 1999. When my house was hit, I managed to escape. I found a wooden box, and I was collecting some of my possessions that were on the ground when the Russian soldiers shouted, "Go away, woman, there is a bomb!"

When the soldiers set the bomb off, I had nothing left. Even the single wall of my house that remained standing after the first bombing was completely destroyed. I didn't even have a place to start rebuilding.

But of course, the fact that my house was gone was not the only reason I left Russia. My eldest son, who was 14 at that time, was killed. I simply didn't want to stay there any more. My brother and sister also died. There was a huge feeling of loss.

And I wanted to protect my other children. I have four daughters who are now aged 17,16,12 and 11 years old, as well as a nine-year-old son.

So, I decided to leave and came to Poland.

I came to Poland without my husband, who beat me all the time. In fact, there was violence against me every day of our marriage. So I simply paid to get a certificate that he's dead. The man doesn't exist for me any more. I've bombed my memories of him, like how those people bombed my home.

It's tough as a refugee in Poland. Each time I leave the house and am on the bus or the tram, or on the street, I'm being called "dirty gypsy" due to my outfit. Because in Chechnya, the tradition is that if you're married, you have to cover your head. Once, in another town in Poland, two Chechen women were beaten up and called "Taliban terrorists", all because of this headscarf.

It's also difficult to find a flat to stay. Even if you can, the landlord would charge three times more – because the Polish people, they don't want to rent their flats out to us. Getting a legal job was a problem. Many Chechens, even if they are allowed to work because they managed to get refugee status or tolerated status, are working illegally.

In Chechnya I never cried, but here, I felt so hopeless. No one wants to help.

Last December, I got my own room for the first time. Before that, I was living with my friends on goodwill.

It's just one room, very tiny – only eight square meters. And I live there with my three youngest children. There's no kitchen, only a small oven in the hall. There's a bathroom, but it's also very tiny. But it is good enough.

"I felt injustice, and injustice is very difficult to bear."

– Bosnian Zrinka Bralo, 41, in London, UK

I'm a refugee from Bosnia, and I came here to London in the middle of the war in 1993. Because my city was under siege, I didn't have a choice as to where I was going. So, I came here with one suitcase, with my brother and his wife and child. But they later left for the USA, so I was here by myself. I was 24 years old.

There's always a sadness, and a loss, about leaving by force. The situation of starting from zero – it's liberating, in a sense – was difficult in many aspects. Because you lose all your reference points. You don't know anything, or anyone. And nobody knows you.

Refugees are also not allowed to work, so they are dependent on state benefits, which are very basic. Currently, one gets about £35 per week ($74) – which is horrific. For many people, it's also very humiliating to be verging on poverty.

To start off, I applied for political asylum. I was refused. I had to put up a fight for three years and in the end I won.

Personally, this made me feel very rejected, because I had to struggle to stay here. I felt I wasn't believed. I felt isolated. And angry, because I felt injustice, and injustice is very difficult to bear.

It left me with a lack of trust in people. On a personal level, it did a lot of damage. At the same time, it is survival.

I went on to complete a master's degree in media and communications at the London School of Economics, and worked as a broadcast journalist for three years. I made a documentary on companies engaging in illegal doings, filming undercover. We had to get lawyers to look at what we filmed to make sure there wasn't any libel – it was a complete nightmare. I decided I didn't want to be a journalist any more.

At that time, I was also working with the Bosnian community in London. Most of them came here as wounded, or from concentration camps. I started as a translator for them, but I was also fast learning about the system of this country.

Coupled with my own experience, I understood that the system was more about legalities, rather than the truth of what had happened. Lots of people get refused on technicalities. They tell the courts about their suffering and injustice, but they failed to focus on legal reasons.

Hence, I made the switch to help migrants, which I have done for the past 15 years. Currently, I am the executive director of Migrant and Refugee Communities Forum. The work is much tougher because you tend to see a lot of suffering, and it's extremely frustrating when you can't help them.

But at the same time, if you manage to help somebody, it's extremely rewarding. The difference you make is a very powerful intervention in these people's lives.

Community leaders

Leading by example can be as effective as any other methods of integration, as two successful migrants, Polish editor MIECZYSLAW CEZARY OLSZEWSKI in London and Berlin-based Turkish deejay HASAN TOGRULCA demonstrate.

The accidental Londoner

With dreams of owning a flat in Poland, a young Mieczyslaw Cezary Olszewski packed his bags and went to London for work in 1989. Like many young Poles that time, he had heard of fortunes to be made there. Though he started out as an electrician, he had his sights set on becoming a financial advisor. He read finance books and soon picked up shrewd investment skills and landed a job in the

finance sector.

After saving enough money, he bought a flat in Poland. But he never returned home.

The political transition in Poland at the turn of the decade meant he was returning to high unemployment and instability.

"Even my family told me not to return," said Olszewski, 49, who is now the editor of *The Polish Times*, a free weekly magazine for the Polish community in London with a circulation of 40,000.

Instead, 2009 marked the 20th anniversary of his stay in London.

"When you have short-term goals to earn money, you may settle for something small. But when the machine starts rolling, you can't stop. After five to six years, you feel like a Londoner, and when you return to Poland, you don't recognise it anymore," he said.

While the facade may change, Poles are still stuck in the communist mentality, lamented Olszewski, who is the father of two children aged 20 and 16. They were born in Poland but joined him in London in 1990.

"Communism is just crap. It is not an option," he said and complained that many Poles view migrants like him as tax evaders and do not respect him.

The situation in London is more accepting.

"They don't approach us with a huge magnifying glass to see our faults. London is easy-going and cosmopolitan. I don't feel like a foreigner."

With the ascension of Poland into the European Union in 2004, London soon became a magnet for more migrants and an enterprising Olszewski saw a need to provide information to young migrants.

From a struggling black-and-white four-page magazine, he successfully revamped it – with the help of newly-hired journalists and graphic designers – into a sleek 84-page full-colour magazine in 2005.

Defending the influx of Polish migrants, he said: "We don't dilute the British culture. We enrich it. For instance, we brought in Polish sausages. The sausages here are like rubbish."

However, he stressed respecting other cultures. "If you want to achieve something, whether you are a migrant or not, you have to believe in yourself and respect other cultures because in 20 years' time, migrants will have trouble getting along with each other here," he warned.

Mixing in Berlin

The dance floor at Cake Club in the lively Berlin district of Kreuzberg erupts with energy as the partygoers raise their arms and groove to a new Turkish-German fusion song.

Over at the deejay console, a Turkish man with wild, chin-length brown curls pumps his fists in the air and closes his eyes to appreciate the music he has just mixed. He punches a few keys on the console skillfully and turns up the music volume.

It is hard to imagine that Hasan Togrulca, better known as DJ Aldi, is a self-taught deejay who had never seen a television or radio or used electrical appliances until he was 14.

Sick of a life as a nomad roaming the mountains of southeast Turkey, Togrulca came to Germany to live with his uncle when he was 14. He was dazzled by the city charm.

“In my home village, we had no electricity, no television, no radio. But here, there were cars, television, and development of everything. I felt like I was in wonderland,” said Togrulca who does not know his real age, or even his real name.

When his uncle registered for his passport, he had 15 other children to fuss over so he forgot Togrulca’s real name and birth date. He simply registered his birth date as 10th November, the day when founder of modern Turkey Mustafa Kemal Atatürk died. His uncle also gave him a random name.

“Every day is my birthday,” said the deejay, who estimates his age as somewhere between 35 and 50.

The moniker DJ Aldi represents a political cause. Aldi is a supermarket frequented by Turkish migrants. During the 1980s, people used ‘Aldi’ as a derogatory term for Turks, a mockery of them being poor. Now, Logrulca uses the name to convey the sarcastic message that Turkish migrants can be successful too.

“There are migrants with big success stories. Some of them became very wealthy businessmen. Some writers and filmmakers also developed a new culture here,” he said.

“We came as guest workers and brought a lot of culture such as music and food with us. It makes Germany richer. Now, the winning point for Germany is its diversity. You can meet people from all cultures and go to restaurants of all countries,” he added.