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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Multiculturalism is a sham, says Angela Merkel



By [Rick Noack](#)

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel's refugee policy has attracted praise from all over the world. Time magazine and the Financial Times newspaper recently named her Person of the Year, and delegates applauded her for so long at her party's convention on Monday that she had to stop them.

The speech that followed, however, may have surprised supporters of her policies: "Multiculturalism leads to parallel societies and therefore remains a 'life lie,' " or a sham, she said, before adding that Germany may be reaching its limits in terms of accepting more refugees. "The challenge is immense," she said. "We want and we will reduce the number of refugees noticeably."

Although those remarks may seem uncharacteristic of Merkel, she probably would insist that she was not contradicting herself. In fact, she was only repeating a sentiment she first voiced several years ago when she said multiculturalism in Germany had "utterly failed."

"Of course the tendency had been to say, 'Let's adopt the multicultural concept and live happily side by side, and be happy to be living with each other.' But this concept has failed, and failed utterly," she said in 2010.

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Repeating those ideas on Monday was meant to calm her supporters who have grown increasingly weary of the influx of refugees. Newcomers, Merkel stressed, should assimilate to German values and culture, and respect the country's laws.

Merkel emphasized that despite her commitment to limit the influx of refugees, she was standing by her decision to open the borders earlier this fall. "It is a historical test for Europe," she said, adding that other countries in Europe should accept more refugees to take some of the burden off Germany.

Refugees in need should be helped, she said, but she also suggested that not everyone who has come to Germany fulfilled those criteria. German authorities are expected to ramp up deportations in the coming months.

Merkel's party, the Christian Democratic Union, overwhelmingly approved of her refugee policy, with only two out of about 1,000 delegates voting against a resolution in support of it.

Merkel's comments may also reflect a particular understanding of assimilation. Many Germans expect immigrants to quickly learn the German language and to contribute to their communities and work life.

Multiculturalism usually has a positive connotation, but to Merkel it symbolizes the emergence of isolated societies within Germany – and ultimately a failure of assimilating immigrants. Her policy toward the issue is supposed to avoid the creation of suburbs such as the areas around Paris, for instance, where young immigrants are isolated from the rest of society.

However, her speech comes at a sensitive time. Germany has opened its borders to approximately 1 million refugees this year, many of whom are still being accommodated in makeshift housing. Fights have broken out in multiple reception centers, raising fears about the country's ability to deal with the influx.

Local disputes have caused tensions in national politics as well. Last year, Germany's influential Christian Social Union party proposed that everyone in Germany should be required to speak German "in public and in private with their families." The public backlash forced the party to retract the draft resolution.

Compared to 2010, when Merkel first voiced her criticism of multiculturalism, there was little reaction Monday. The applause following her speech lasted nine minutes and again had to be interrupted by Merkel. "Thanks, but we have work to do," she said.