

## EXPAT

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### The British Dream?

by [Lucas Laursen](#)

They're speaking Russian in London. In fact, they're speaking it all over England, since the 2004 accession of Poland and the Baltic states to the European Union. My own housemate, an Englishman, has learnt enough from his co-workers and Lithuanian girlfriend to curse at the locked door in Russian when he stumbles home without his key. England is **not used to this much immigration**, and it is starting to tell on longtime residents. One Englishwoman recently shared her worries with me during a posh candlelit dinner at Downing College, Cambridge.



I already knew that immigration is a hot topic in Europe now. Human waves flatten fences around Spanish possessions in North Africa. New EU citizens from eastern states flood the rich labor market of the western states. Of course there are some parallels to the United States, and until I met this woman I thought Europe might even benefit from observing a couple hundred years of our experience.

But she unexpectedly insisted that, “immigration is so much smoother over there.” I wondered if she knew about our **Minute Men** (and their **predecessors**). She elaborated, “there’s a blank slate over there, and new immigrants just blend into the melting pot. But here the English people face being replaced.”

I suspect it isn’t immigrants like me that worry her. My Lithuanian housemate Rasa may be a better example. She moved here without a word of English to work in a chicken-processing plant. “Is hard work. Chickens all the time! No fun!” she scrunches up her face and shakes her head at the memory. Since then she’s gotten a job at a printing plant and is happily seeing a Polish guy. She stares blankly when I ask if they’ve found a house with a white picket fence yet.

But it is no joke to my dinner companion and others here. She confides that “this government is bending over backwards to accommodate outsiders. They live separately; make no effort to be English. There are whole cities of foreigners in England, now!” I refrain from asking if she’s heard of Chinatown—any of them—in the rosy-colored States of her imagination.

But apparently **the British government is nervous, too**. When Romania and Bulgaria accede in January 2007, they will be the only EU nations with restrictions, albeit temporary, on immigration to the UK.

Europeans like my dinner companion are welcome to look to America for immigration lessons, but I hope they'll realize they may be in for a rough ride, and that the melting pot has lumps. As a lump myself, I think it's worth it. Where I grew up in California, I told her, you can drive miles without seeing an English-language billboard. I pointed out that, "integration always takes time, and even in the States it can be pretty rocky." But she must have caught the edge in my voice. "Oh, I know you've had some difficulties, too," she fluttered airily, "I'm not stupid about it."