

Europe's Fading Cosmopolitan Dream

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In headier days, Europe's leaders dreamed of a multicultural continent, its aging cities saved by millions of new migrants eager to join a stable, prosperous urbanity. This was the promise behind former U.K. prime minister Tony Blair's Cool Britannia, the multicultural fervor of Herman Lebovics's Bringing the Empire Back Home: France in the Global Age, and the early enthusiasm that greeted Germany's refugee influx in 2015—estimated now at 1.6 million.

That dream has faded, with Europeans now opposing new migration by wide margins. Once-peaceful German and Swedish cities have seen a spike in crime, a resurgence of anti-Semitism, and growing political unrest—all associated with the migrant influx. In 2016, Pew Research found that 59 percent of Europeans thought that immigrants imposed a burden on their countries. In addition, less than a third believe immigration has improved their countries, with 63 percent of Greeks and 53 percent of Italians, respectively, stating that immigrants have made things worse in their economically challenged countries. As the British political thinker Kenan Malik acknowledged in a 2015 Foreign Affairs essay, “multiculturalism” has devolved from “an answer to Europe's social problems” to a fraught reality of “fragmented societies, alienated minorities, and resentful citizenries.”

In most places, the welcome wagon has been sent out for repairs. Nearly all European countries—even progressive ones like the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Norway, and Germany itself—have imposed stricter immigration controls over the last two years.

Unlike the United States, Canada, Australia, or New Zealand, modern Europe never produced melting pot societies. Though French Protestants and Jews, for example, played important roles over the centuries in the development of contemporary financial centers—first in Amsterdam and later in London—immigrants still were relatively marginal in most of the continent's economic advancement.

What migration did occur, though, proved mostly successful. France, for instance, benefited as far back as Charlemagne from enclaves of Syrian and Jewish merchants, who served as intermediaries with the wealthier and advanced Islamic civilizations of that age. Later, Armenians, eastern European Jews, Spaniards, Italians, Iranians, and Vietnamese settled in the country, each group largely integrating into the mainstream culture and economy.

More recently, in the 1950s and 1960s, the mass migration of Turks into Germany, as well as North Africans into France in the 1990s and 2000s, brought in a new workforce—but this one didn't integrate. Today, vast slums dot parts of the urban and suburban landscape in French and German cities. As a recent OECD study notes, immigrants in Europe have a harder time with

socioeconomic assimilation than those coming to the U.S. This is particularly true for Muslim immigrants, who are employed at lower rates in Europe than in America, according to R Street and the Cato Institute. The absence of social cohesion has created cultural tension—discrimination against nonwhite applicants, notes one recent study, is far worse in France or Sweden than in the “racist” U.S.

Part of the problem lies with economic change. In Europe’s deindustrializing economy, new immigrants have more difficulty finding higher-wage, entry-level work than in the past. Similar to the U.S., Europe’s economy has become largely stacked against both the working class and those aspiring to enter the middle class. Many countries favored by immigrants, notably Germany, have among Europe’s lowest economic-growth rates, while the fastest-growing countries—like Hungary and Poland—are also ones with strict immigration restrictions.

Many observers tie economic decline to rising crime, a trend widely associated with migration. For most of the past half century, European cities were remarkably crime-free, but in today’s immigrant hubs—notably in Germany and Sweden—crime rates have jumped dramatically in recent years. Most migrants continue to reside in European cities. In France, observes demographer Michèle Tribalat, the percentage of foreign-born youth in rural towns has barely changed over the past half century, but in cities, their cohort’s population share reaches 35 percent. In London, immigrants—mainly non-European—account for 37 percent of the city’s total population. The foreign-born percentages in Brussels, Zurich, and Geneva hover over 40 percent.

The discussion of crime remains highly politicized. Though the liberal Austrian government saw little connection between immigration and crime, a 2016 report by the country’s new rightist government claimed that, out of the 500,000 crimes in Austria that year, 40 percent were committed by “foreigners.” According to official data from the BRA, Sweden’s crime-prevention agency, immigrants are twice as likely as natives to be listed in criminal databases, though critics dismissed this finding as a sign of greater police scrutiny.

In Germany, getting an accurate snapshot of crimes committed by immigrants is extremely hard because each state has a different definition of immigrants or crimes. According to German Federal Police (BKA) statistics, however, immigrants comprised 3 percent of suspects in 2014 but 8.5 percent of suspects in 2016—coinciding with the latest wave of immigration. The BKA found that crimes attributable to immigrants increased by 79 percent between 2014 and 2015, but mostly for nonviolent crimes such as theft, forged documents, or transportation fraud.

In Europe, as in America, attitudes about immigration are closely tied to class. Migration is much more popular among those whom British author David Goodhart calls the “anywheres”—largely cosmopolitan in outlook—but less welcome by many less educated European “somerwheres.” The anywheres predictably dominate the European press, which often downplays jihadism and crimes associated with refugees because it threatens the preferred narrative of a post-national, secularized world. Most mainstream European politicians also belong to the anywhere camp, regardless of their constituents’ views. “The arrival of refugees is an economic opportunity,” suggests French president Emmanuel Macron. “And too bad if [it] isn’t popular.”

Popular it is not, particularly among working- and lower middle-class voters who are more likely to compete with newcomers for jobs, benefits, and social services. The rapid rise of migration,

notes British political scientist Eric Kaufmann, has spawned movements that embrace quasi-racist ideologies, as well as others, less odious yet firmly opposed to the elite's multicultural vision. The shift in opinion has even occurred in Sweden, long proud of its tolerance but now coping with a social enmity unfamiliar to a historically homogeneous country. The academic, media, and corporate establishments hope to crush these movements, whose adherents they regard, says Henry Olsen, as "medieval peasants."

Cultural differences mainly drive the conflict between native Europeans and the new arrivals. Unlike earlier waves of immigrants, who arrived when secularism was broadly ascendant, even in the Middle East, the recent Muslim refugees typically come from countries with much more conservative views on homosexuality, women's rights, and even female genital mutilation.

Cultural conflict is not primarily the result of the migrants themselves. Earlier migrant waves arrived in Europe when the continent felt confident about its culture. Today's newcomers enter European societies where many people—notably in the intellectual classes—reject core values, rooted in Christianity and liberal democracy, that shaped their culture. Filling this void is a campaign to replace the current colorblind republic with a "multicultural and post-racial republic" that embraces an "erasing of identities" from the past. This endeavor conflicts with the values of Muslim migrants, who, notes Arabist Gilles Kepel, often possess "a keen sense" of identity shaped by religious beliefs. Rather than defend their values, Kepel suggests, Europe's leaders have told their citizens that "they must give up their principles and soul—it's the politics of *fait accompli*."

Ironically, the progressives most committed to multiculturalism and migration are also responsible for bringing in new residents who reject secular Europe's liberal values. Rather than confront this societal threat, some European politicians and figures like the Archbishop of Canterbury have even suggested that Muslim sharia law—at least as it applies to banning blasphemy—could supersede national law.

Another distressing development tied to the new migration is the resurgence of anti-Semitism. Ever since the Holocaust, Europe's Jewish communities have struggled to remain viable; today, nearly 75 years after the defeat of Nazi Germany, the continent's Jewish population is less than half of what it was at war's end in 1945.

Despite the much smaller Jewish footprint, anti-Semitism in Europe is intensifying. Some 90 percent of European Jews, according to recent surveys, have experienced anti-Semitic incidents. Some of this trend can be traced to the far Right, the historic incubator of anti-Semitism, the rise of which is tied to concern over migration. Some groups, such as the Austrian Freedom Party—founded by former SS officers—and the Swedish Democrats, have clearly racist roots.

Europe's intelligentsia sees these familiar villains as the primary culprits behind the anti-Semitic resurgence, but a detailed survey from the University of Oslo found that in Scandinavia, Germany, Britain, and France, most anti-Semitic violence comes from Muslims, including recent immigrants. Similarly, a poll of European Jews found that the majority of anti-Semitic incidents came from either Muslims or from the Left, where the motivation is tied to anti-Israel agitation; barely 13 percent traced it to right-wingers. Violence against Jews, moreover, is worst not in right-wing hotbeds but in places like the migrant-dominated suburbs of Paris and Sweden's Malmö.

It's the centers of European progressivism—Paris and Berlin, for example—where Jews are urged not to wear kippah or a Star of David. And in Great Britain, it's figures like Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn who have links with jihadi groups. Corbyn's political rise constitutes for Britain's Jews what former chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks calls “an existential crisis.”

By contrast, in authoritarian and anti-migrant Hungary, Jews appear much safer from persecution. Even Jews who detest Viktor Orbán—scorned as a fascist in the West—credit him for making Budapest one of the safest and most welcoming cities for European Jews. The Hungarian government maintains close ties to Israel—a rarity in Europe. Orbán's regime has also made Holocaust denial illegal, established an official Holocaust Remembrance Day, and refused to cooperate with the anti-Semitic, far-right Jobbik party.

Europeans are reconsidering, with good reason, the multicultural future being thrust on them. Their dilemma: how to handle the developing world's inevitable migration pressures while dealing with their own continent's dismal demographic picture, the result of decades of low birthrates.

The disparity between Europe, even in its present weakened state, and its neighbors to the south seems certain to boost migration. Sub-Saharan Africa, according to a Gates Foundation study, will be home to 86 percent of the world's population living in extreme poverty by 2050. Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo will account for half that number. For residents of those countries, even a dangerous escape to Europe seems worth the risk.

Meantime, most European countries—even with current rates of immigration—are looking at a future of shrinking and rapidly aging populations. In Hungary, for example, the overall population continues to drop, down from 10.8 million in 1980 to 9.7 million today, and it could fall to 6 million in 50 years. Europe's cities, even with the infusion of migrants, have grown only slowly, at half the U.S. rate, and will soon begin to shrink. Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Italy, and most of eastern Europe also must contend with declining demographics, with populations aging far faster than the U.S. This will result, over the decades ahead, in more severe fiscal pressures as the workforce declines and the numbers of elderly soar.

Ultimately, Europeans will be compelled to learn how to attract promising migrants and successfully absorb them. This means promoting, rather than relinquishing, their own cultural and political traditions. Yes, the continent needs new blood, but it cannot remain a center of modern civilization if it abandons its past, its family structure, and its values. Without addressing these issues, Europe and its cities—the crown jewels of global urbanity—could face a bleak future.