

For another viewpoint on the effect on Europe of open borders between itself and the burgeoning populations of North Africa we present an editorial comment from the August 4, 1990 issue of THE ECONOMIST. In the new European Community the border of each nation-state will be only as secure as the most lax border-control of any member-state. The author takes it for granted that assimilation into European culture will be a necessity. Not only the United States is confronted with the three fundamental questions of immigration policy: How many to admit, who gets these visas, and how to enforce the rules humanely.

THE WOULD-BE EUROPEANS

How Western Europe Should Respond to the Immigrants at Its Doorstep

Trainloads and Trabants forced the pace of German unification. That was just a foretaste of how the mass movement of people, or the mere threat of it, is about to drive European politics. Rich Western Europe is about to face an invasion from its poorer neighbors. This will not only confront governments with painful choices about whom to let in, and on what terms. It could crash through the cozy frontier-free European Community planned after 1992.

Rich Europe, for centuries a net exporter of people, is now an importer, attracting immigrants from two main areas. From the East come the fellow-Europeans, those whom communism has kept poor. Now that their own government lets them travel freely, Poles have been flocking to the West, where they can earn as much in a month as they do in a year back home. Not far behind will be millions of Russians, eager to flee economic misery when they are free to travel.

Bigger by far is the potential influx from the south. Just across the Mediterranean are North Africans who are even poorer than the Poles and Russians, so all the more attracted to western Europe's wealth. And their numbers are growing fast. The population of the three Maghreb countries--Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia--may double to 120 million or more over the next 30-40 years. For many of these huddled millions, prosperity will seem just a boat trip away.

As it happens, more young people are exactly what rich Europe will need. Low birth rates are turning the old continent grey. Unless some ingenious alternatives are found--automated builders, numerically controlled nurses, robotized cleaners, packers and waiters--there will be a huge demand for imported labor to do the jobs the natives leave vacant. Demand-pull in greying Europe plus supply push from baby-booming North Africa: it sounds like a perfect match.

Wait. It is already plain that many people in rich Europe will not relish the invasion. Are they welcoming the new migrants from Europe's own East? Hardly. Some governments, having urged the former communist regimes to let people out, are now

making it inexcusably hard for East Europeans to come in. In Germany, where so much effort is having to be spent on finding jobs and homes for fellow-Germans, it is becoming no joke to be a migrant Pole, let alone a Turk. East Europeans can be forgiven for feeling that they have demolished their Iron Curtain only to see the ramparts of a Fortress Europe rising up on the other side.

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As for newcomers from North Africa, they often face downright hostility. A lot of Europeans already think they have taken in too many. They dislike the competition for jobs and homes, they feel threatened by the arrival of large numbers of people with a different skin color, different habits, and, most often, a different religion, Islam. In France, which has taken in the most North Africans, from its ex-colonies, the backlash shows in 15 percent support for the anti-immigrant National Front. In Italy, race attacks are making regular headlines. All over Western Europe, politicians wonder how to build barriers against the expected flood.

They are starting from the wrong basic presumption. Like goods and ideas, only more so, people bring great benefits when they move across borders--energy, enterprise, fresh blood and (usually) youth. Rich countries that allow their economies and societies to draw in people from elsewhere enrich themselves further in the process.

Certainly, people coming in to settle (as distinct from those coming in simply to work for a few years and then go back) will successfully do so only if they assimilate themselves to the culture of their new home. But the absorptive capacity of West European countries, though not as great as that of America or Australia, is still bigger than timid people think. European politicians who run scared of racist or anti-immigrant feeling will be doing their countries no favors. Their guiding principle as they map out

Europe's immigration plans should not be "How few can we get away with letting in?" but rather, "How many can we possibly take without creating unbearable social strain.

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COPING WITH PEOPLE POWER

Even with that as its starting-point, Europe is going to find more people knocking at the door than it thinks it can comfortably admit, at least in one great rush. It will therefore throw money at the problem in the immigrants' home countries. West Germany is already doing that with East Germany, and a united Germany seems sure to pump more money into Poland. Southern European countries--France, Italy, Spain and Portugal--are starting to discuss ways of responding to the North African challenge; they will presumably lobby for more generous aid to the region from Brussels. [Ed. note: See the companion piece, "*Can Europe Keep Them Down On the Maghreb?*"]

Yet even when the money is used efficiently--which handouts seldom are--it will rarely reduce the flow of immigrants by much. And many of the jobs these people come to fill cannot be done elsewhere: car-assembly plants can go abroad, but not construction sites, hospitals or restaurants.

For good reasons and bad, Western Europe will no doubt be more hospitable to immigrants from the east than to those from the south. It will find fellow-Europeans easier to assimilate (they are culturally closer, and the numbers are smaller). And several East European countries will almost certainly be asking to join the European Community. When Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia pass the club tests, they will be eligible for membership, and for the freedom of movement that would bring.

North Africa and the half-Asiatic Soviet Union will have a rougher time. But, though Western Europe's door may be less open to these immigrants, it cannot be slammed shut. That would leave Europe short of (legal) labor, and with justifiably angry neighbors. Managing the flow, however, will be hard. Some people should be able to come as permanent settlers. For others, there could be a system of work permits: let them come to work legally, but only for a limited period.

This would not be problem-free, as Germany's experience with its "guest-workers" shows. Once they are in, they tend to stay; their families join them, their

children go to the local schools. In recession time, resentment against them can quickly grow. Permits will not eradicate illegal immigration, but they can limit it. They can usefully control the flow of economic migration from the south and the Soviet Union.

As the EC erases its internal frontiers, a workable immigration policy will increasingly require all members to agree on it, and then to trust each other to police it. That is asking a lot: an over-leaky system will arouse old-fashioned nationalism and, especially if the immigrants are entering mostly through some other EC country's door, could tempt some governments into reimposing their own national frontier checks. That is not supposed to be the trend in the seamless post-1992 Community. But then Europe's would-be new invaders, perhaps more than anything else, will test the hardiness of the great frontier-free idea.

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