

# Europe's Arab Future

by Donald Hugh Smith  
and Leon Bouvier

In the next ninety years the population of the Middle East and North Africa (M.E.N.A.)<sup>1</sup> is likely to grow from 338 million to 1.16 billion (an increase of 224 percent) while Europe's population will fall from 419 million to 382 million (a decrease of 8.83 percent). This dramatic and disproportionate change provides the setting for the inevitable population shift, or migration from south to north, from North Africa-Middle East to Europe. While one might debate the absolute numbers, and factors that might slow or speed the population growth, the relative growth is indisputable. Clearly this migration has already begun and to date it has not gone particularly well. Arab populations moving into Europe are consistently greeted with patronizing behavior and, far too often, outright racism. Given the probable growth rates and migration pressures Europe increasingly will become ethnically Arab for the foreseeable future. Europe can embrace these immigrants, encourage them to assimilate and maintain much of the cultural status quo. If they continue to challenge the immigrants with racism, the bombings in Madrid and the current crises in parts of Paris only hint at the potential for conflict. If Europe does not allow substantial immigration and assimilation, the potential for direct conflict and violence will be even greater. In the end these population shifts will likely produce a Europe that is

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substantially Arab. Whether it is good or bad is in large part dependent on Europe's reaction to the immigration and the newcomers' willingness to adapt their new surroundings.

To be more country-specific, Italy's population could fall from 57 million today to 37 million by 2050; Germany's from 82 to 65 million. In contrast growth among M.E.N.A. countries is the norm. Iraq's population could increase from 24 million today to 60 million by 2050. Palestine's population, now 3.6 million, will likely reach 12 million by 2050. In most M.E.N.A. countries women will bear, on average, between 4 and 6 children in their lifetime.

Worldwide population projections are staggering, with the less developed countries expected to double their population in approximately forty years. These projections are especially troubling when one considers the burden on natural resources; consider air and water pollution; consider food supplies including potable water; consider waste disposal; consider security; consider urban sprawl in Mexico City, in Calcutta, in Lagos. Sadly, many Americans and Europeans might simply say: "So what. That's their problem." We need to be constantly reminded that we live in the same world and eventually other people's environmental problems become ours.

Most of the growth will create populations in M.E.N.A. that are extraordinarily young. The median age in Europe today is 39.2 – in M.E.N.A. the median age is 22.4. This disparity will grow over the next ninety years. Focus on the specific population ages 15-24 in two countries, Iraq and Palestine, to begin to understand the magnitude of the problem. Iraq's 15-24 age group will double from 4.6 to 9.2 million. Palestine's will grow from 600 thousand to 2.6 million. Young populations in countries without economic opportunities are a clear destabilizing force

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and also suggest that the population growth and momentum will be sustained for long periods of time.

Population momentum is an important concept in understanding these population changes. Populations like those in many less developed countries (LDCs often referred to as the south) are very young, with a disproportionate number of people under the age of 18. These countries will continue with dramatic population growth even if their young people have fewer children on average than their parents. The same is true in reverse for Europe. There are proportionately very few young people, and even if they have more children than their parents their population will decline before eventually leveling off. Think of population momentum like that of a large ocean liner – once moving it is very difficult to stop and if the engines are shut down the liner will continue under its momentum for miles. Conversely, it is difficult to regain the momentum once lost.

Given the magnitude of the disparity in growth between Palestinians and Israelis, can we realistically hope for peace in the Middle East? Independent of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, can M.E.N.A. countries support such growth and provide human services to their populations, preventing social and political instability? Can lower fertility be achieved or will it be necessary to encourage massive emigration to restore some sort of balance to the world population? Syria is an example of a M.E.N.A. country that cannot continue to support the rapid population growth it is experiencing without social instability, revolution or, alternatively, without the government becoming more oppressive. Their population growth is so rapid that it consumes any ability to improve the quality of life. One percent of population growth consumes four to ten percent of the potential economic growth. Syria is losing the ability to sustain its health and education systems.

Lowering fertility is also problematic. The government of Syria, as is true of most M.E.N.A. countries, lacks moral authority over its population. When a recent Syrian prime minister was asked why they don't have a population policy he replied, "if the government told people to stop having so many children they would go home today and conceive a child." Clearly, the government can control many things but not private acts that create serious problems

for the government, i.e. high birth rates. In the end, Syrians and others, with or without government encouragement, will emigrate in large numbers. For many years skilled citizens of economically weak M.E.N.A. countries have found some economic refuge in the Gulf States. But in the present situation, Europe's need for labor and its strong economy make it the next obvious target for migration.

Worldwide, we are faced with three demographic problems: (1) rapid population growth in less developed countries (LDCs); (2) population decline in most more developed countries (MDCs often referred to as "the north"); (3) potential massive shifts in population distribution from LDCs to MDCs. Our main concern is to focus on the consequences of such massive population shifts. What happens when millions of people from countries without any democratic traditions migrate into the World's great democracies?

By the end of the century, when the probability exists for Europe to have a majority of its population composed of immigrants and their children from M.E.N.A., what forms of government will emerge from this rapid population shift? Creating democracies with concern for human rights, the rights of women and the rights of minorities are not easy tasks. Maintaining democracies, with their valid concern over these issues, while welcoming populations that have no democratic traditions, would seem to be very problematic and fraught with conflict. This conflict would be exacerbated if the receiving countries greet the new arrivals with racism.

All European countries exhibit fertility below the level needed to replace their population in the long run. While the fertility level could rise again to replacement level, there is no indication that this is about to occur. Many, like Spain and Italy, average close to one child per woman. If fertility remains below replacement<sup>2</sup> in the MDCs, but stays well above replacement in LDCs, should immigration from the latter to the former be considered? Or more likely, will there be any choice in the matter? Recent history indicates that there will be a flow of immigrants from south to north until some population and socio-economic equilibrium is achieved. The words of the late Premier Boumedienne of Algeria are appropriate if perhaps a little scary: "No quantity of atomic bombs

could stem the tide of billions...who will some day leave the poor southern part of the world to erupt into the relatively accessible spaces of the rich northern hemisphere looking for survival.”

A recent UN report comments: “In many countries, additional large volumes of immigrants are likely to face serious social and political objections, even as a means of slowing population decline and population aging.”

By any measure, the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be a critical period that will redefine humankind for centuries to come. The more developed nations are faced with some difficult choices. Is Germany to remain German? Is France to remain French? Even in the US, we must accept the fact that within 30 years,

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no ethnic group will comprise the majority. This is already true in California.

For Italy to maintain its year 2000 population, almost 15 million immigrants would be needed between then and 2050. By 2050, 18 million persons, or 23.0 percent of the population, would be post-2000 immigrants or their descendants. Other European countries, as well as Japan, could be cited as vivid examples of this potential shift. This shift in population balance may be a very painful and controversial process, especially in those countries where homogeneity has been the rule. Already

interracial conflicts have erupted in several European countries. One merely has to stroll down the Champs Elysee to note the racial and religious changes occurring in Paris. This has resulted in the racial rioting noted in recent months. The British will soon be an ethnic minority in England and already are in London. Here too we have seen dangerous disturbances. Journalist Frances Sellers writes that in the northern London Borough of Brent, “More than 100 different languages are spoken... Fifty-two percent of the population of 250,000 is Asian or Black...” A few years ago, John Tanton asked: Will Vatican City eventually be surrounded by a Muslim Italy?

We are witnessing a tectonic change in the population distribution and eventually in the power distribution of our planet. It rivals, if it doesn’t surpass, the fall of the Roman Empire, the “discovery” of the Americas, and the Industrial Revolution. We may be witnessing the onset of the end of western civilization’s dominance over the rest of the world. However, solutions are available though they will require paradigmatic changes in our thinking. The residents of the receiving countries must accept the fact that their society is changing. Newcomers must be accepted willingly; however, it is equally important for the newcomers to express their desire to become members of that receiving society. Both the host and the new members of the society must follow a process of cultural adaptation.

The inevitable population pressure building in North Africa and the Middle East will need to find a rational social and economic outlet and it is clear that the only meaningful target that can accommodate this population transfer is Europe. This population pressure is occurring in a period of unique opportunity presented by the confluence of socio-economic and structural change that is just beginning in Europe. To be specific, it is the emergence of globalization, the development of the European Union and the consequent breakdown of ethnic and national identity that sets the social agenda for young Europeans.

European nations have serious choices to make. In balance, a slight negative or replacement growth rate is a good thing for many environmental and quality of life issues. Given Europe’s current negative growth, immigration will be necessary to maintain population and labor forces. The task is to find some

reasonable rate of growth. Will nations in Europe allow immigrants to assimilate and will the immigrants from M.E.N.A. wish to assimilate? If both the receiving nations and the immigrants do not desire assimilation, eventually, many of these European nations will become *de facto* Arab cultures. The process will be the same one by which many southwestern American communities have become *de facto* Latino cultures.

Europeans do have a choice as to the eventual size of their populations. Quality of life is generally improved with smaller, managed populations as opposed to larger out-of-control populations. Scenario one and two, above, will produce larger unmanageable populations. Scenario three would produce smaller managed populations which have been the subject of government concern and manipulation through education. It is not necessary that people suffer more traffic jams. There is no need to build more and more for the sake of growth. Continued destruction of the environment is not inevitable. There are obvious advantages to smaller managed populations. If and when populations fall below a desired size, then increased immigration could be encouraged.

Alternative growth models cannot be discussed without mention of globalization. Globalization, which has been the primary setting for the development of the European Union, the advent of the Euro and the diminishing of nationalism, will need both labor and markets for the foreseeable future. This needed labor can be provided by the new residents from M.E.N.A. Markets for Europe can be provided by the dramatically growing M.E.N.A. populations. The cash flow from new and old immigrants, moving from Europe to M.E.N.A. countries, should make these markets relatively affluent. These demographic shifts will occur at a time when the young in both Europe and M.E.N.A. will see their futures not within national borders but in the developing global economy and the opportunities that it provides. Multilingual young persons who have grown up in a multicultural Europe with diminishing nationalism will find the migration from south to north much less threatening than their parents and grandparents might have experienced. The situation could be analogous to the migration of Latinos into the United States. While the immigration of Latinos has met some resistance it continues to

grow and the economy of the United States has accepted these immigrants.

But here too overpopulation must be considered. Is a U.S. population of 400 or even 500 million a good thing? While economists and corporations may embrace such growth, what about the environment and the quality of life of all Americans? Ironically, a coalition of liberal organizations and conservative "think tanks," like the Heritage Foundation, have embraced immigration as a positive phenomenon for the United States, albeit for different reasons. Fairly or unfairly, business and industry have come to rely on Latino immigrants as a major source of inexpensive labor. The agricultural and food processing industries have been particular beneficiaries of these immigrants as have the American consumers with the resultant lower food prices. American and global markets have grown since the flow of cash from these populations moved south into Latin America, increasing the consumer power of their populations. Governments have worked to accommodate the flow of cash by allowing legal and illegal immigrants alike to have American bank accounts and ATM cards so that their families in Mexico and Central America can withdraw and spend cash the day it is deposited in the American bank.

Here again, we are confronted with a major decision: Is what is good for big corporations necessarily good for middle and lower class Americans, Europeans, or inhabitants of M.E.N.A.? And what about the American workers already plagued by high levels of unemployment and increased outsourcing? Should they be forced to compete with more newcomers most of whom will accept lower wages?

The same cash flow trends are beginning to develop between Europe and the Middle East. With the dramatic population growth in M.E.N.A. providing labor for European industries, the cash that flows back to M.E.N.A. provides growing markets for the global European industries that employ inhabitants of M.E.N.A. The economic relationship between the north and south in both North America and Europe is symbiotic. Almost everyone benefits except the low skilled American and European workers who are now competing for minimum wage jobs with immigrants from weaker economies. Here again lies the

conundrum. Should nations be more concerned about increasing business opportunities than with the health and welfare of its poorest citizens?

In Europe, if this population transfer is achieved in a proper fashion, it has the potential to move the Arab populations into the expanding modern secular world where extremism will be less likely to get an economic, political, religious, or social foothold. If the receiving European populations and a patronizing of the immigrant Arab populations greet the transfer with grudging hostility, there will be a social and cultural backlash that could create a hostile environment and the occupying populations of Arabs may treat the demographic changes as the next Crusade in reverse. If immigrants are not allowed to participate fully in the receiving societies or nations they will not assimilate into a global European Union. Instead they are likely to maintain their cultural, ethnic and religious identity.

If current patterns of demographic behavior continue, by the middle of this century Arab populations could represent an absolute majority of some European countries. If Arab immigrants are not encouraged to assimilate into the European nations and become "new" Europeans, most European states will eventually be Arab states. It should be obvious to the reader that there are clear national security implications to population policies, or more directly, the absence of any population policy. Population policies can improve national security or they can create hatred and terrorism. It is important to remember that exclusion breeds separatism and balkanized societies. Inclusion, generally, creates blended, integrated societies.

If migration is not smooth and cooperative, the Arabs are likely to seek social, cultural and economic revenge on their European hosts. Instead of being a symbiotic relationship, it will have become a parasitic relationship that will most certainly kill the host. Remember that assimilation means that the immigrant population is allowed and wants to become part of the new blended society as opposed to maintaining cultural pluralism where everyone lives in his or her own segregated section of cities. Pluralistic assimilation could be the answer. Each segment of the society would maintain its own identity but all would participate equally in the economic and political structure of the society. An alternative more attractive

scenario would be the industrial development of M.E.N.A. with the help of the global and European economy. This scenario would keep more of the Arab populations at home and at the same time integrated into the world economy. In North America this model has not worked. However, one can argue that there has been no serious attempt to implement it. NAFTA, and other steps designed to provide opportunities for economic development of Mexico and Latin America, have helped some but have not stopped the flow of people from a relatively weak economy into a stronger economy. The same scenario is likely to follow in Europe. The pressure of population growth forces movement from weak economies, with high unemployment and low wages into economies with high wages and low unemployment.

We are prepared to bear the inevitable charges of racism that emerge with the discussion of these issues. We simply state that these population shifts are likely to occur. The data presented here are not likely to change appreciably. What we can influence and what we can change is how we respond to what we believe are inevitable and irreversible changes. We can accept and work with the demographic changes so the effects are not draconian on any society or peoples or we can behave badly and pay the consequences. We are committed to allowing Arab populations to enter the global economies as genuine partners and participants, not exploited victims. Too many young Arabs are currently not being allowed to realize their full potential by their own governments. Too many authoritarian Arab governments are blocking economic development because they realize that every dollar invested from the outside diminishes their internal domestic control.

In sum, the major changes in the demographic picture of Europe (i.e. very low fertility and increasing immigration) are leading to some serious questions regarding the future of the continent. Put an end to immigration, and the European populations will eventually reach a level where they cannot maintain current and desired levels of economic viability. Allow unfettered growth and the new societies will no longer be French, German or Italian as we currently know them. The final question is how the host people will react to such massive shifts – with acceptance or with reluctance, and how will the newcomers accept the

new cultures? The answers to these questions will tell what kind of Europe and World will result from these changes. ■

NOTES

1. The countries included in this analysis from Europe are: Germany, France, United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Poland, Switzerland, Netherlands, and Belgium. The countries included from the Middle East and North Africa (M.E.N.A.) are: Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Gaza-West Bank, and Sudan.

2. Replacement fertility is approximately 2.1 children per woman.