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Consequences of Mass Arab Immigration to Europe

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Two recently released reports by the European Commission and the United Nations evaluate current demographic characteristics and future trends and suggest that Europe faces a potential Arab immigrant onslaught perhaps as great as that America endured during the European immigration of the 19th and early 20th centuries. And an American report projects future stagnation of Middle Eastern economies, one major factor causing Arab restlessness. If Arab supply meets European demand over the next twenty years, what are the implications?

European immigrants to the United States altered American culture and urban demographics, spawned nativism, and changed the nature of domestic politics. There is no reason to believe that an Arab migration of such magnitude will not similarly alter Europe's political, social, and cultural landscape over the next quarter-century. In the meantime, chances are remote that the European Union will embrace a master plan to restructure Arab societies in order to stem the desire of Arab youth to emigrate.

At the end of May, the EC published its [Social Situation Report 2002](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2002/jun/inbrief_en.pdf) (http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2002/jun/inbrief_en.pdf). The Report predicts that before 2015, Europe's population growth will be stagnant or even negative in most EU regions.

But the age structure of the EU's population will change more quickly than will its size. By 2015, one in three Europeans of working age will be over 50, while the number of those between 20 and 29 will fall by 20% and the 50-64 age-group will grow by 25%. Immigration already accounts for 70% of EU population growth in the past five years, with most of the immigrants going to Italy, Britain, and Germany. Three or four working people are needed to support each retired person, and this will become impossible if current trends continue. Finally, the report concludes that immigration even at current levels will not satisfy EU labor requirements.

Released in July after 18 months of painstaking work by a team of Arab

scholars and intellectuals, the UN's Arab Human Development Report 2002 (<http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/PR2.pdf>) notes that a "mismatch between aspirations and their fulfillment has in some cases led to [Arab] alienation, apathy and discontent." The population of the Arab world is 280 million, and that number is likely to grow to 400-450 million by 2020. 38% of the current Arab population is under the age of 14; in the U.S., with about the same total population, the corresponding figure is only 14.1%. The report points out that in 1999, the combined GDP of all Arab countries stood at \$591.2 billion, less than the GDP of Spain. Israel, with a population of six million, enjoyed a GDP equal to one-sixth of the entire Arab world. Over the past decade, per capita income growth in the Middle East was lower than that of any other region in the world except for sub-Saharan Africa. Significantly for Europe, "more than 15% of the Arab labor force is unemployed...with few job opportunities at home, just over half of the young people in the Arab world (13-20 year olds) want to emigrate to industrialized countries, with Europe, the UK, and the U.S. as the most desirable destinations. Moreover, it is precisely the most literate and talented Arabs who are most likely to emigrate, raising the threat of a "brain drain" that will leave behind the poor and un(der)educated in the Middle East. Given great disparities among Arab states, "poverty and deprivation in their many forms remain real in many Arab societies."

Finally, the December 2000 CIA Report, Global Trends 2015 (<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/globaltrends2015/#link13d>) notes that by 2015, "Middle East populations will be significantly larger, poorer, more urban, and more disillusioned...job placement is compounded by weak educational systems producing a generation lacking the technical and problem-solving skills required for economic growth...Attracting foreign direct investment will also be difficult: except for the energy sector, investors will tend to shy away from these countries, discouraged by overbearing state sectors; heavy, opaque, and arbitrary government regulation; underdeveloped financial sectors; inadequate physical infrastructure; and the threat of political instability."

Will the EU try to stem the tide of massive Arab immigration by pushing to change the economic and political status quo in Middle Eastern and North African states? Are there Middle Eastern autocrats with the vision required to open up their societies beyond minor reforms in human rights, civil society creation, privatization, etc? Can the EU, along with others, insist that conservative ruling elites institute economic and political liberalization? Will EU countries take the risk of pushing for revolutionary change in the ways Arab states operate (by curbing bloated bureaucracies, encouraging and protecting a free press and free speech, and reducing the pervasive presence of the security services)?

Chances are slim that the EU and other outside powers like the U.S. will

deviate from a century-long policy preference to protect what the well-known Middle Eastern historian, Albert Hourani, called "the politics of notables." Apart from American plans for Saddam Hussein – which EU leaders vigorously resist -- Western politicians generally oppose any effort to change the status quo. Such change raises the prospect of temporarily destabilizing vital commercial relations and trade in Middle Eastern energy resources at reasonable prices. Europeans, in particular, generally prefer constructive dialogue with the Middle East. Thus, external initiatives for revolutionary change in Arab governance are highly unlikely. And Arab leaders, terrified of economic and political liberalization, are unlikely to institute such massive changes in governance on their own. Besides, even comprehensive structural changes would not guarantee either a decrease in the desire of Arab youth to emigrate or a quick halt to the current Arab demographic explosion.

So what happens when European labor demand meets Arab supply over the next two decades and beyond? In Europe, effects will come in national and local elections, delivery of health care, urban growth, pressure on infrastructure, real estate prices, labor issues, cultural changes, and demands for social protection packages. Externally, mass immigration will influence common or separate policies toward immigration, asylum, exiles, and foreign policy choices with respect to Israel, individual Arab and Moslem states, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. Population-rich Arab states will again bolster sagging economies through foreign remittances, just as they did during the period of high oil prices in the 1970s and early 1980s. Then what?

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