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### **Ethnic and religious changes in Western Europe in the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

#### **1. Introduction**

Demographic outlooks on Western Europe that have been constructed in the recent years indicate that in the long term its population will reproduce at a level below replacement. Consequently, the population will decrease and the share of seniors will grow larger. The advancing aging of the population linked with demographic implosion will entail mass immigration, an influx of young people capable of strengthening the continent's economy that will have to cope with a shortage of workers in the future – particularly workers ready to take the low-skilled and low-paid jobs. Given the limited potential resource of immigrants in other European countries and in overseas countries mainly populated by people of European descent, most immigrants are likely to come from other regions of the world.

This mechanism arises from the logic of the long-term demographic changes that can be compared to the so-called transition of spatial mobility associated with the demographic transition. The model assumes that in periods of fast expanding populations international migration becomes one of the effective solutions to the problem of overpopulation – moreover, at some stage it is obviously the major solution. At present, high dynamics of population growth can be found in the South American, Asian and, above all, African countries, where demographic transition is still going on. These regions of the world have a „surplus” of people and so they try to “export” at least some of them, one of the destinations being the continent of Europe. In the coming decades, this tendency will have a huge effect of unimaginable consequences on Europe's ethnic composition.

This article aims to present the magnitude of the changes that will affect the ethnic and religious composition of the Western European society in the coming decades, as well as the probable social consequences of the changes. A direct intellectual impulse that led to the preparation of this article was produced by the expert report „The demographic vision of Europe in 2050 (*Wizja demograficzna Europy 2050 roku*)” which was compiled for the Forecast Committee, Polish Academy of Sciences [Szukalski, 2007]. Some aspects discussed in the report's final version induced more reflections, thus providing a starting point for this article.

#### **2. Changing ethnic structure of Western Europe in the coming decades**

The section below presents several variant outlooks on the ethnic composition of the European population to the year 2050 that were prepared by the UN forecasters [UN, 2001] and several European states [Coleman, 2006]. A more detailed discussion of the outlooks has to be preceded, though, by several comments on the methodologies underlying the estimations.

Firstly, the term „population of foreign origin” as used in the outlooks refers to the immigrant population that is ethnically different from that living in the given area and to the immigrants’ children. Accordingly, their grandchildren are considered to be the native population, regardless of how strongly they identify themselves with their country of residence. Because of that, the estimations undervalue the degree to which immigration shapes the ethnic picture of our continent. The relevant question concerns integration (or simply assimilation) between the immigrant and native populations.

Secondly, the sizes of ethnic minorities in particular Western European countries are considerably at variance, likewise the countries’ shares and structures of the immigrant populations. Because of the different starting points the countries have, forecasts produce dissimilar results even if migration balances are relatively the same.

Thirdly, immigrants are usually characterised by higher fertility rates than populations<sup>119</sup> living in the receiving countries. Owing to the factor and the much younger age profile of the immigrant populations, natural increase becomes another engine driving their growth.

With the above comments in mind, let us examine several independently compiled reports.

The computations that the UN forecasters made several years ago [UN, 2001] were intended to determine the magnitude of migration that was necessary to provide European countries with demographic stability<sup>120</sup>. I wish to underline that the results of outlooks built upon particular objectives/desiderata are shocking and scary, using the terms that have become so popular among the Polish politicians. This opinion especially applies to two objectives concerning the values of the potential support ratio, whose fulfilment in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> c. would require, if one wished to maintain the ratio’s maximal values for Europe and EU-15, 1,386 million and 701 million immigrants, respectively (its not a mistake, in the first case the order of magnitude is 10<sup>9</sup>). A cursory look at the above values is enough to understand that the scenario is not feasible. However, even a more „realistic” variant (requiring lower inflows) estimating the potential support ratio at 3.0 in 2050 indicates that Europe would need 235 million immigrants and the EU 154 millions; for some European countries the numbers would be 35 millions (Italy) and 40 millions (Germany)<sup>121</sup>. Let us note that the numbers of

119. For instance, around the year 2000 the non-European immigrants accounted for 66% in the UK, in the Netherlands it was 62% and in France 59%; in Belgium and Sweden these immigrants represented „only” 40% of the immigrant population [Coleman, 2006: 405].

120. The publication interprets the notion of economic and demographic stabilisation in several ways. It considers the numbers of immigrants necessary to maintain the following values until the year 2050: 1) the largest number of inhabitants achieved after 1995 assuming no migration; 2) the largest number of the working-age population (15-64 years) achieved before mid 21<sup>st</sup> c., assuming no migration; 3) a potential support ratio of 3.0 (calculated as the number of people aged 15-64 years divided by the number of people aged 65+); 4) the highest potential support ratio that will be achieved to the year 2050 without migration. The produced estimates of the number of immigrants and of the size of the population that the country needs in the given scenario are compared with the baseline data derived from the 1998 UN population outlook (the most probable variant and the same variant assuming no migration).

121. For the sake of comparison let me add that the national reports on Italy and Germany produced in the mid-1990s indicated that immigration amounting to 12-15 million people was necessary to keep the same numbers of their working-age population by mid 21<sup>st</sup> c. (see [Bosworth, Burtless, 1998]).

immigrants are assumed to be evenly distributed in time and that the new population will contribute to higher numbers of births in the receiving country.

A huge influx of immigrants (100 millions in Europe, 47 millions in EU-15, and 18 millions in Germany) would be necessary, even if efforts were made to keep the size of the European population at its maximal level recorded during the 55-year-period (being the desired state involving the lowest level of immigration). Although the magnitude of the necessary influx is embarrassing for many reasons, most countries are probably doomed to receive immigrants. Without immigrants and with the UN outlook's predictions of fertility rates coming true, in 2050 the potential support ratio would reach worryingly low values in many countries (1.52 in Italy and 1.75 in Germany).

According to the UN forecast of 1998, by 2050 immigrants arriving after 1995 and their descendants will constitute for instance 6.2% in EU-15 and 19.8% in Germany. An influx of immigrants fulfilling any of the four objectives formulated by the UN forecasters would mean rapidly growing percentages of ethnically foreign populations. Omitting at this point the most pro-migration variant (with the potential support ratio maintaining its maximal value), where none of the analysed countries and regions has the percentages below 68%, even the variant that only aspires to keep the total numbers of populations at a constant level produces surprising values for some of the studied countries. In the variant, 28-29% of people living in Italy and Germany, 18% in Europe and „only” 17% in EU-15 would be either immigrants or their descendants. The political incorrectness of the question prevented the authors of the report from asking about the countries of origin from which the prospective immigrants could come. However, even a cursory look at the numbers explicitly shows that in the case of the European countries the eastern parts of the continent would not be the only or primary source of immigrants, as every sixth person living in Europe in 2050 would have their roots – directly or via their parents – in other regions of the world (the rate today is ca. 5%). Is, therefore, allowing the possibility (or necessity, as some claim) of immigrants substituting domestic fertility not a prelude to ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts that could erupt, as the recent years have shown<sup>122</sup>, in the countries affected by the problem? Given that the labour market shows both surplus and shortage of workers and increasingly reveals the duality of its character, perhaps other solutions protecting from social conflicts should be sought, especially considering the advancements in labour-saving technologies and techniques and the more and more commonly asked questions about the possibility of providing the present citizens with jobs and wages that will enable them to live decent lives, and particularly with fair pensions paid by the capital-based systems?

The results of demographic projections prepared by the statistical authorities in several European countries and discussed in a very interesting article by D. Coleman [2006] make the above questions even more relevant. The projections of the ethnic composition tend to assume that the coming decades will have relatively constant

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122. The immigration problem is, however, more complex than that, because a shortage of workers is found for the low-skilled and low-paid jobs and for the high-skilled jobs involving the knowledge of technical, exact, biochemical and medical sciences. It is so, because young Europeans are reluctant to study subjects requiring intellectual effort and discipline.

levels of immigration and that the immigrant population's fertility exceeds that of the native population. Table 1 presents the projections' outcomes that are the most relevant to the subject matter of this article.

Tab. 1 Shares of populations of foreign origin in selected European countries as estimated in the national demographic projections spanning the years 2000-2050

Country	Year	Total population (millions)	Share of foreign population (%)		
			total	HDI+ countries	HDI- countries
Austria	2000	8.10	9.31	5.39	3.92
	2050	7.80	28.00	7.94	5.07
England and Wales	2001	52.0	11.3	2.7	8.7
	2051	63.1	36.1	11.6	24.5
Denmark	2004	5.4	8.74	2.40	5.96
	2050	5.45	14.76	3.30	11.45
Germany	2000	82.20	9.90	3.28	6.57
	2050	68.30	23.56	5.40	18.16
The Netherlands	2004	15.90	17.50	8.60	8.90
	2050	16.90	29.70	13.20	16.50
Norway	2005	4.55	7.50	4.10	3.40
	2060	5.58	23.50	9.20	14.30
Sweden	2004	9.01	15.90	9.66	6.25
	2050	10.63	32.30	10.46	10.71

The italicised values in the last two columns concern the year 2030

HDI+ developed countries with the Human Development Index above its average value

HDI- underdeveloped countries with the Human Development Index below its average value

Source: [Coleman, 2006: 414]

In Western European countries trying to predict their ethnic compositions, people of foreign origin account for 10-15% of the population already today. In each of the analysed cases, the structural ratios grow to the year 2050, reaching from 1/4 to 1/3 of the total population<sup>123</sup>. At the same time, in the mid 21<sup>st</sup> c. Austria and Germany will have much smaller populations than at its outset, despite the fast growing sizes and shares of the immigrant populations, while in the other countries populations will not expand without immigrants, because the assumption about net international migration not being positive leads to lower numbers of populations in every instance.

123. Interestingly, if the present immigration trends and fertility differences continued in the long term, immigrants and the first generation of their children would become majority populations in Sweden and the Netherlands before the 21st c. ended. D. Coleman believes [2007] that the situation may appear in a larger number of western European countries.

A particularly interesting aspect is the countries from which immigrants come. In the table above, only indirect information on the subject can be found. Although particular countries differently specify minority groups in their estimations, the latter allow identifying comparable categories of the developed countries (where the Human Development Index exceeds the average – HDI+) that can be equated with the European countries and those where most of the population is of European descent and of the developing countries (HDI-). From the perspective of this division, it is notable that the shares of people having foreign origin will mainly increase (Austria being an exception) driven by the growing numbers and shares of the non-European people whose outward appearance makes them different from most of the country's population, which will certainly be an additional roadblock to their assimilation.

### 3. Immigrant fertility

The changes outlined above will be induced by the combined influence of immigration and higher fertility of populations arriving from other continents. Let us illustrate the second factor using France, where the ethnic studies point to different fertility of the native French women and those belonging to ethnic minorities – for instance, the total fertility rate as calculated for all female population in the country has been oscillating around 1.9 in the recent years, but for the foreign females it stands at around 2.6 [Coleman, 2006]. The more specific analyses show, however, that when the immigrant females' age at their arrival to France is taken into account, the difference between the immigrant and native fertility clearly decreases. For instance, in the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century females born in metropolitan France had 1.7 children on average, while immigrant females 2.16. In this context, the substantial variations in females' propensity to have children determined by their country of origin are worth stressing – while the Turkish women had 3.21 children on average and the Moroccans 2.97, for the Spanish and Italian females the rates were only 1.52 and 1.6, respectively. The African females were found to be very special (Moroccans – see above, Tunisians – 2.9, Algerians – 2.57, other African countries – 2.86) and very different in fertility terms from the native population [Toulemon, 2004].

In France, likewise in other countries pursuing „family-friendly” social policies offering an extensive choice of benefits, high fertility in the immigrant population is encouraged by family allowances that frequently constitute its major source of livelihood, and quite often the primary one<sup>124</sup>. The rightist groups in France, alarmed by the high fertility of the Muslim families, openly called some time ago for reducing – or even liquidating – family allowance granted to the fourth and next children and to children born by the second wife<sup>125</sup>, proposing instead to use the funds saved to increase family allowances for families with fewer children, which was intended to encourage the native French to take reproductive effort [Kieżun, 2007].

Generally, researchers studying this subject area point to the fact that the newcomers

124. In France, an additional inducement for female immigrants to have many children is the awareness that mothers that have raised at least five children are entitled to minimum pensions, even if they have no episodes of gainful employment in their lives.

125. Getting a family allowance for the second wife's children is easy in France. Although the French state rejects polygamy, it practically grants benefits to children born by successive wife that shares the abode with her husband, thus theoretically forming a monoparental family.

absorb the native family model with its number of children very quickly, as a result of which most differences between the fertility levels diminish within the lifetime of one generation.

#### 4. Changes in the religious composition of the Western European population

The described changes in the ethnic structure of the population will affect its religious composition as well. The statistics of religions has never been very credible, because people (small religious groups and especially non-believers) are reluctant to reveal their religious beliefs, particularly if different from those predominating in their society. After the matters of conscience were recognised as belonging to the personal sphere, the questions about individuals' religion were gradually withdrawn from population censuses and from the records of different demographic events in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Accordingly, this type of information provides in Europe an outline rather than a precise picture of the continental populations' religions.

The aforementioned inflows of people of foreign origin to Europe will change the continent's religious composition. For instance, in the mid-21<sup>st</sup> c. Austria is predicted to have – depending on the assumptions – from 14% to 26% of Muslims in the total number of its population, compared with only 4% it has today (in 1980 Muslims constituted only 1%, and the 1971 rate was only 0.3%) [Goujon et al., 2006]. Between 1975 and 2005, the percentage of persons declaring themselves Muslims increased in the UK from 1 to 3%, the shares of persons indicating religions other than Islam and Christianity growing in the same way [UKCH *Religious Trends*, 2005/2006]. The religious composition can be generally expected to be more diverse, with the most common non-Christian religion being Islam, which already has millions of practicing believers in the UK and France. The power of Islam is strengthened by strong religious homogamy characterising its followers, whereby children smoothly accept their parents' religion. High fertility<sup>126</sup> and the structural factor (larger proportion of young people being either in the peak fertility period or approaching it in the Muslim population than in the Christian population) – will exert a similar influence. Even then, R. Buttiglione was right to ask [2005: 20]: „can we blame Islam for taking over our land, if childless Europe voluntarily decides to give up her people and disappear from history?”

Many Western European researchers studying the issue are fearful of the outlined course of events already today, because some estimates show that around the mid 21<sup>st</sup> c. in France the adult Muslims will probably outnumber the adult non-Muslims, with all consequences of the phenomena, such as the possibility of the former legally assuming power in the country in line with democratic procedures [Kiezun, 2007: 20]. The estimates on Austria show that in 2051 Muslims may predominate in the age group to 15 years [Goujon et al., 2006].

It has already been mentioned that the shares of people following other religions, quite exotic from the European perspective, will also grow. This process will be accompanied by a decreasing proportion of the Christian population, the reasons being not only the growing numbers of the followers of other religions, but also secularization multiplying the ranks of individuals declaring their atheistic outlook or treating religion as a very personal matter. In the Czech Republic that besides the Netherlands

126. For instance, in 1981 the Austrian TFR for the Muslim females was 3.09, in 1991 it was 2.77 and 2.34 in 2001, whereas for all females living in the country the rates were 1.67, 1.51 and 1.33, respectively [Goujon, 2006: 13]

is commonly believed to have the most secular society in Europe, the share of non-believers increased from 7.1% in 1921 and 5.8% in 1950 to 59% in 2001<sup>127</sup>. A UK study made in 2005 surprised its authors, as the share of all believers they identified, irrespective of their religions, was 76%, although a rate lower by 5-15 percentage points was expected<sup>128</sup>. It is worth emphasising, though, that among the members of the youngest age groups whose religion was determined by their parents the share of the non-believers was rising fast between younger and younger age groups, from 15-16% among teenagers to 23% for children aged 0-2 years, being an indication of the likely direction and pace of future changes.

## 5. Consequences of the future ethnic changes

The coming decades will certainly witness growing ethnic and religious differentiation in Europe, followed by cultural, social and identity changes. It is very likely that the changes will spark escalating ethnic conflicts fuelled by different economic, social and political goals pursued by the native and foreign populations. The following are examples of potential problem areas:

- a. regional policy (native populations usually live in rural areas and small and medium-sized towns, while immigrants are overrepresented in large cities);
- b. social policy (because the natives predominate in the older population and the immigrants in the younger age groups, particularly among teenagers and children, the first group will opt for more effective policy addressing old-age problems and the elderly, while the other group will push for school systems and family benefits – an ethnic conflict may partially overlap an intergenerational conflict);
- c. foreign policy (the „soft” approach to the problem of Iraq or Iran that some European governments present today arises from large groups of Muslim voters).

At the local level, these problems can be particularly painful, as the immigrants tend to gravitate to larger towns. For instance, around the year 2000 40% of the Amsterdam, Rotterdam and London populations and 28% of the populations inhabiting Brussels and Frankfurt had foreign roots. Further inflows of immigrants forming densely populated areas may lead to residents of foreign origin becoming the majority in smaller administrative units<sup>129</sup>.

As far as the advantages of the situation are concerned, the only ones seem to be larger population living on the continent and above all the continent's more sizeable working-age population, because the hopes that some researchers express that a new nationality – a European – will develop from the growing ethnic diversity – mainly due to mixed marriages and the resulting indefinite ethnic identity of their offspring

127. Data source: [http://www.czso.cz/eng/edicniplan.nsf/t/F80039F946/\\$File/40320119.xls](http://www.czso.cz/eng/edicniplan.nsf/t/F80039F946/$File/40320119.xls). Similar numbers can be found for East German Länder, where the self-declared non-believers accounted for 63.5% at the turn of the 1980s compared with 7.6% in 1950 [Therborn, 1998]

128. It was so, because the proportion of people declaring themselves Christian was higher than expected (70%). Earlier studies identified a much smaller share of Christians – the European Value Study of 1999 found 66% and the British Social Attitude Report of 1998 53% of persons that considered themselves Christians. At the same time, the percentage of baptised babies dropped between 1991 and 2001 from 51% to 45% [UKCH Religious Trends, 2005/2006].

129. This problem can be found in the UK, where people of foreign origin exceed 50% in 9 areas of the country (in large cities with quarter million populations). In the UK, all people who previously resided in the Commonwealth territory are automatically allowed to vote.

– should be considered too high. There are many indications that the non-European immigrants and their descendants build their identity not around the secular notion of citizenship or there being part of the entire society, but around their relatives, local communities (enclaves of people sharing the same ethnic origin) and religion [Coleman, 2006: 426].

From the standpoint of social cohesion theory, the immigrants' acceptance of their acculturation that in the contemporary world mainly works through the school system is vital for their children being easily able to adjust to the receiving country and for their chances of success. The relevant studies point out that the various countries' school systems have different effectiveness in forming immigrants' children (e.g. Switzerland and Germany) and that the time of parents' arrival to the new country as well as their country of origin are of importance. Generally, the offspring of the Europeans and Far Easterners that have resettled in the recent years are better educated than the receiving societies. For other migration areas the educational attainments are poorer, frequently because of the immigrant parents' reluctance or unawareness that they could choose better, free elementary and secondary education for their children and due to problems arising from such decisions (e.g. the need to bring the child to a better school that is located in a different part of the town). Notwithstanding the less favourable position that some immigrants have, the difference between the levels of education characterising the immigrant children and the native children is declining in the long term. The situation of the immigrant children is improving owing to the better performing economies and relatively low levels of unemployment in most European countries, and because of their parents' growing aspirations that materialise as increasingly sophisticated educational strategies. The strategies are formulated based on the finding that a market segment demanding higher qualifications from its potential workforce discriminates the descendants of immigrants more rarely. However, the educational successes of the European immigrants' children are relatively new and point to evolving motivation for changing one's place of residence. As recently as 20-30 years ago, the situation was different – the social status of most immigrants was relatively low, whereby their children's were less educated than their native peers<sup>130</sup>.

The western European studies show, however, that the level of unemployment among the immigrant populations and their children is usually twice as high as that recorded for the native population, while the level of economic activity is slightly lower [Coleman, 2007].

## 6. Conclusion

The history of humankind has never seen in times of peace such immense changes as those that will shape the Western European ethnic and religious structures in the coming decades. Because of that, some researchers go as far as calling the changes „a third demographic transition” [Coleman, 2006]<sup>131</sup>.

130. Writing these words I am primarily drawing on the papers presented at the session on immigrants that was held during the conference European Society or European Societies. Euroconference on the Causes and Consequences of Low Education in Contemporary Europe, Granada, 18-23 September 2004.

131. However, the term was used for the first time during the meetings of the UN's demographic experts in the late 1990s to describe the coexistence of high levels of economic activity among women of fertile age and relatively high fertility levels in some European countries (Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands). The phenomenon was viewed as a symptom of „a third transition” enabling work / life balance.



Already today, the fear of excessive shares of immigrant populations makes some European countries pursue anti-immigration or selective immigration policies, depending how they estimate the gravity of the situation. The tendencies are likely to become even more distinct in the coming decades, one indication of which is the slowly growing awareness that migration issues (concerning both internal and international migration) must be made part of the EU's agenda [Vignon, 2005].

It is very certain that by 2050 Western Europe will redefine – from the perspective of particular regions – its attitude to citizens' rights and duties with respect to nationality and citizenship. The present debate concentrates on immigrants' rights, while all voices pointing to the rights of the native populations are treated as the manifestation of xenophobia or even racism. The future years will probably witness – along with the shrinking shares of the native populations (or even their marginalisation in some regions) – the native residents' efforts to preserve their lifestyles, languages, religion and cultural heritage, which will inevitably lead to the redefinition of the rights and duties that the minority and majority groups have. In formulating EU's official documents, the opinions of people uninvolved in the traditional political, normative and morality debates are taken into account more and more often. The reason is the necessity of considering immigrants' opinions that are sometimes very untraditional [Gąsior-Niemiec, 2006].

So, what will the Western European society be like? György's opinions [2006] on the progressing – also because of the ethnic and religious factor – social segmentation (a breakdown into groups pursuing completely different life programmes) seem to be very true. The Hungarian researcher believes that some reasons behind this process are the inability of the traditional European culture to assimilate immigrants, its unattractiveness and a growing number of Europeans believing that quite many immigrants – especially those coming from the culturally different regions of the world – are „social parasites”.

The article shows that in view of the expected influx of immigrants the continent's future will depend on the perception of multiculturalism and on the possibility of building a single identity, „unity in diversity”, despite all differences.

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