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The path to “controlled” immigration

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Europe needs to change its immigration policy completely. It must move from being a ‘fortress Europe’ to a Europe that organises its immigration, so that it is conducive to its economic development. It must do so in order to rediscover the human values that have underpinned its construction for nearly seventy-five years. The sight of thousands of people drowning in the Mediterranean Sea, the English Channel and the Atlantic Ocean, or abandoned in the desert or in the cities, hunted down by the police and at the mercy of traffickers and smugglers of all descriptions, is a daily affront to our consciences.

In the midst of this hell in which tens of thousands of young Africans find themselves, there may be a solution. It involves organising ‘controlled immigration’ in the countries from which this immigration originates. This would mean a complete change in the European policies pursued to date. But migration is a practically insurmountable force, built into human nature. History is ample proof of that! Opposition to the free movement of people - and to the way it is currently practised - is doomed to failure. If it is possible to change the situation, then let us do it.

EUROPE, AN EMBATTLED “FORTRESS”?

Over the last few years, and in particular with the Syrian situation in 2014-2016 and Chancellor Angela Merkel's policy of openness in Germany, Europe's citizens have witnessed the transformation of Europe into a ‘fortress continent’ in the face of a surge in migration from the South and East.

In France, the debate during the European and then legislative elections of 2024 revolved around uncontrolled mass immigration. The effects on the composition of the European and French Parliaments, where far-right parties exceed 30%, will have consequences for future policies on migration. For example, the slogans of certain extreme right-wing parties suggest that immigration is the main cause of crime

and insecurity in Europe, and that it must be combated more effectively.

Measures to combat illegal immigration have been stepped up recently, as demonstrated by the Immigration and Asylum Act passed in France in December 2023, the [European Pact on Immigration and Asylum](#) adopted in April-May 2024, the attempted agreement between the United Kingdom and Rwanda, the agreements on immigration between Italy and Tunisia, and even the agreement between Italy and Albania, challenged by the Italian courts.

Numerous measures have been tried out, such as the deployment of European police forces in countries of departure (Mauritania-Spain-European Union) or financed by European funds (for example in Tunisia), with very limited success and, above all, the fundamental rights of migrants have been violated. International maritime law, which obliges people to come to the aid of anyone threatened or in danger, has often been flouted when boats chartered by certain NGOs have been prevented from carrying out their tasks.

Governments seem to ‘freeze up’ as soon as there is a tragic incident involving an illegal migrant, or when faced with the electoral rise of the extreme right. They do not hesitate to challenge the Schengen free movement agreements. This in turn affects all citizens in their daily lives, as was recently the case with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision

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to reintroduce border controls. On the pretext of reducing France's ‘supposed’ attractiveness in terms of health care for migrants, Bruno Retailleau, then French Home Affairs Minister, planned to abolish state medical aid (AME).

And what were the results? Despite all of these measures, it is estimated that 380,000 people entered Europe illegally in 2023. This is a significant figure, but it needs to be put into perspective if we compare it with the population of the European Union, estimated at 447 million, or 0.8 migrants for every 1,000 inhabitants. Why is this flow of several hundred thousand migrants continuing? Because there is an irresistible surge in migration on the part of young Africans!

European leaders like Ursula von der Leyen, Giorgia Meloni and Pedro Sanchez are stepping up their missions to the countries of origin to negotiate plans with the authorities of these countries to reduce the migrant flow. The ‘outsourcing of borders’ in Mauritania, Niger, Chad and Tunisia are costly and often ineffective operations.

So it is time to give the floor to demographers, sociologists and economists to study their projections for the future of European nations up to 2050, or even the end of the 21st century.

EUROPE'S SHRINKING POPULATION

They believe that the ‘ageing’ of populations will revolutionise the societies of rich countries, including the United States of America, over the course of this century. The term ‘ageing’ combines longer life expectancy and a falling birth rate. Thanks to medical progress, the proportion of elderly people is increasing. Japan is the oldest country in the world, with 29.1% of its population aged over 65, ahead of Italy (22%).

At the same time, the birth rate has plummeted in all developed countries. In 2023, France will have 678,000 births, 20% fewer than in 2010. Almost everywhere, the number of children per woman of childbearing age is below the 2.1 needed to ensure the renewal of a country's population. In France, it has fallen to 1.68. It is 1.2 in Italy. Schools are being forced to close classes. Half of European countries

are in a state of ‘demographic decline’. More generally, the population of developed countries as a whole has peaked at 1.3 billion and has begun a gradual decline. By the end of the century, it will have lost around 100 million inhabitants, according to the UN, and 450 million, according to James Pomeroy, an economist at HSBC. ‘Longer life expectancy is good news. It means we're living longer, including in good health, but we still have to manage the consequences of this’, says Vincent Touze, economist at OFCE.

These demographic phenomena are already leading to three outcomes: a slowdown in growth, an increase in public spending, and political and social risks. The slowdown in growth is linked to the decline in the working population. In France, the working population is stagnating. Many sectors are short of paid labour, particularly in the catering, construction, craft and personal services sectors. The working population is set to shrink further from 2040 onwards, and the financing of pensions by the working population is under threat.

The rise in public spending is due to the increase in the number of pensioners, healthcare costs and the cost of caring for dependents. Political and social risks are to be feared due to the increase in taxation, the possible reduction in the level of pensions or the increase in the retirement age. To increase the working population, we need more older people who can work, or we need labour migration. Migrants are rushing to Europe's gates in search of work, taking all the risks.

IRRESISTIBLE MIGRATORY PRESSURE

This irresistible migratory pressure does not dissuade the smugglers, who demand astronomical sums for their services. It does nothing to reduce the number of deaths that are likely to occur during the desert crossing, or the number of people who perish at sea on lifeboats, or the atrocities experienced, or the vexations suffered in the transit countries. The most resilient and reckless make it, even if their journey takes several months or even years.

Abdoulaye Ngom, a Senegalese sociologist, sums up the state of mind of young people in his

country: ‘Young people would rather die at sea than die socially back home! They see no future for themselves in their own countries.

If we take a step back, we can identify the reasons for this. Firstly, poverty in the countries of departure. GDP per capita is between 1/10th and 1/20th that of European countries. By way of comparison, the Senegalese minimum wage is €0.55 an hour, while the French minimum wage is €11.65.

Secondly, Africa's ‘galloping’ population has increased almost fivefold between 1960 and 2023, from 283 million to 1,384 million, according to the United Nations.

Thirdly, the political instabilities and conflicts affecting several African countries (Sahel countries, Ethiopia, Sudan, Eritrea).

Fourthly, unemployment among young people, who see their future blocked on the spot, particularly among educated young people, and the hope of a better life (three out of ten young Senegalese say they are unemployed or looking for work).

Fifthly, there are the families who, hoping for remittances from the emigrant once he or she is working in the country of arrival, contribute to pay for his or her passage: a sort of ‘return on investment’.

The authorities in the countries of departure respond only half-heartedly, while accepting European funds intended to combat illegal immigration. In fact, remittances from their diasporas are equivalent to foreign investment and official development aid.

Europeans have a short memory when it comes to immigration: millions of people emigrated from Europe to the United States at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, motivated in part by the same reasons.

THE WAY TO “CONTROLLED” MIGRATION

There was a precedent for this in the 1960s and 1970s, when the directors of Renault, Peugeot and Citroën went to the Maghreb countries to find the labour they needed for their assembly plants. Paris City Hall, for its part, recruited the staff it needed to

clean the streets of the French capital from Mali. In 2006, Nicolas Sarkozy, then Minister of the Interior, advocated ‘selective immigration’ for trades that were ‘in short supply’. Germany and Kenya recently signed a migration agreement under which bus drivers are trained locally for jobs in Germany.

A training system tailored to employment requirements

All African countries have a large number of vocational training centres that train staff for many sectors of the economy. European aid has helped to set them up and equip them.

Is it not possible to design and implement a vast vocational training programme in twenty or so countries from which immigrants depart? The aim would be to intensify existing training, the quality of which leaves something to be desired. Priority would be given to certain fields corresponding to sectors in short supply in European countries: construction, transport, tourism, hotels, catering, crafts, agriculture, personal assistance, health, security, IT, etc. In addition to technical training, young ‘would-be emigrants’ would be given language, legal and host-country knowledge courses.

Downstream of this vocational training, job applications would be processed in response to offers made by European companies via recruitment agencies linked to diplomatic posts.

The advantage for African countries, which are unable to create enough jobs for the millions of young people entering the labour market every year, would be to offer some of them a job. The costs of the programme (training, recruitment, transport) would be shared between the interested parties, the employers and the financial backers. European companies would be able to find their missing staff, some of whom had already been trained. The labour needs estimated by European companies currently amount to several hundred thousand people per year, which would correspond to the training of several thousand young people per country of departure. It is not unreasonable to think that the young Africans who come to work in Europe could, after a few years, return to their country with a little money and set up a business there.

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A vast vocational training programme needs to be devised, which would appeal to nearly twenty African countries. Once they have completed their training, the trainees could move on to most European countries. Who better than the services of the European Commission and their local delegations to design and implement such a project?

This programme can only be decided and carried out within the framework of a vast diplomatic agreement between the countries of departure and

arrival under the authority of the European Union. This economic emigration, officially accepted by the countries concerned, would be offset by a reduction in illegal immigration. The mutual benefits could be numerous and it could be a win-win process.

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