

November–December 2004

Population Power: Another Transatlantic Divergence?

By Nicholas Eberstadt

The European Union is set to enter into a prolonged period of demographic stagnation and population aging—trends that will affect prospects for economic prosperity and an increased role in global politics. An even greater challenge to European security and stability, however, lies in fully assimilating immigrants—and Muslim immigrants in particular—into European societies.

Over the past decade and a half, pundits, politicians, and prognosticators the world over have gradually awakened to the fact that the “Cold War era” has been followed by a time of extraordinary and unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of a single state actor: namely, the United States. For the time being, the tremendous disproportion between America and every other potential global competitor in respective capacities to exert influence abroad is a basic reality of the current international order—and has come to be recognized as such around the world.

In Europe, as we all know, this new fact of international life has been received with a certain measure of ambivalence. As voices across the political spectrum have noted,¹ it is America’s newly attained status as an *hyper-puissance* or an *einzig verbleibende Supermacht*—that is to say, America’s unrivaled international primacy—that lies at the heart of much of the recent friction in the transatlantic partnership between old allies.

Does Demography Favor American “Unipolarity”?

Just how long America’s “unipolar moment” may last is, naturally, a matter of speculation. The latest version of the *National Security Strategy of the*

United States, released by the White House in September 2002, implies that the moment could continue indefinitely—and that U.S. policies could facilitate its indefinite continuation. Some analysts, on the other hand, believe that the moment is likely to be fleeting,² while others argue with equal vehemence that “structural factors” in the international security equation favor the maintenance of American pre-eminence for many years to come.³

For those who envision an impending end to U.S. international pre-eminence, a principal candidate for restoring “multipolarity” to the world system is a Europe genuinely whole and free—i.e., a Europe united under the aegis of the ongoing European Union (EU) project. (The other oft-bruited candidate is China.)

Yet even those who talk of a possible future European *Supermacht* point to a number of stumbling blocks that could complicate or forestall Europe’s ascendance on the world stage, and one of the factors most often discussed in this regard is the region’s demographic trends. Charles A. Kupchan, for example, warns that “the EU’s demographic problem is no doubt a serious one,” and explicitly identifies Europe’s population problems as a factor that might prevent the region from evolving into a force that could counterbalance the United States in the global arena.⁴

He is hardly the only current commentator to describe the population question as an underbelly

Nicholas Eberstadt (eberstadt@aei.org) is the Henry Wendt Scholar in Political Economy at AEI.

TABLE 1: Basic Indicators of Population and Power: The United States and Europe, 2000

	U.S.	EU-15	EU-25	Russia
GNI (gross national income, US\$ billion) ^a	9,700	8,880	9,667	942
GNI per capita (current US\$) ^a	34,370	25,238	19,945	6,480
Exports (US\$ billion) ^b	966	1,251	1,430 ^c	121
Population (million)	282	378	453	147
Population growth (annual percentage)	0.96	0.31	0.24	-0.44
Total fertility rate	2.06	1.49	1.46	1.19
Life expectancy at birth	76.6	78.3	77.5	65.4
Median age	35.3	38.6	38.2	36.8
Percentage of population age 65 and above	13	16	15	13
Percentage of population under age 15	21	18	18	18
Military as percentage of GDP	3.1	1.8	1.71	3.6
Military expenditures (US\$ million) ^b	329,616	168,137	175,490	48,040
Military manpower (thousand) ^b	1,414	1,606	1,924	988

SOURCE: World Trade Organization Statistics Database, available at <http://stat.wto.org/Home/WSDBHome.aspx?Language=E> (accessed September 27, 2004); The World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2003*, CD-ROM; U.S. Census Bureau International Database, available at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html> (accessed September 23, 2004); *The Military Balance 2003/2004*, Christopher Langton, editor (London and Oxford: Institute for Strategic Studies and Oxford University Press, 2003).

NOTES: a. Using purchasing power parity. b. 2002. c. Does not account for exports of the ten new EU members to the EU-15 (data not available).

of potential strategic vulnerabilities for tomorrow's Europe. Contemporary Europe's troubling demographic particulars are by now well-known:

- Europe's birthrate is the lowest ever recorded during peacetime for any major part of the planet, and the continent's current fertility rate reaches only two-thirds of the level necessary for long-term population replacement;
- Europe's population is also the world's "grayest", with a median age of nearly forty years and nearly one in six citizens sixty-five years of age or older;
- and on current trajectories, absent massive new influxes of immigrants, Europe's population is set to age still further and to enter into an indefinite decline.⁵

To be sure, worried talk about Europe's "demographic weaknesses" (low fertility, enervated oldsters, and incipient population decline) is not exactly a new theme in European history.⁶ But how realistic are concerns for Europe today? Do demographic trends significantly handicap European prospects for mobilizing—and projecting—economic and political power in the years immediately ahead? Will population disadvantage Europe in its (mainly friendly) long-term competition with the United States?

A brief survey of the demographic evidence offers a somewhat mixed answer to these questions: on the one

hand, the bleak foreboding that so often colors discussions of the population question within Western Europe itself these days is almost surely misplaced. Demography has by no means consigned the European Union to Spenglerian twilight—at least, not yet. (Russia, however, is another story.) Yet there are some demographic trends that could directly compromise Europe's geopolitical prospects; these have not been examined nearly as carefully as they deserve to be.

Slowly but surely, population trends are changing the realm of the possible for Europe—and unless these changes are appreciated, Europeans will not be able to capitalize upon the opportunities and minimize the risks that they pose.

The Population and Power Ledger: Europe and the United States

Basic and traditional—perhaps old-fashioned⁷—indicators of economic, demographic, and military potential for the United States and Europe are presented in table 1. By these metrics, one brute fact stands out above all others: EU-Europe is already a global giant.

In terms of economic potential, for example, the European Union is the world's leading export power: export levels for the newly enlarged union (twenty-five members strong as of May 1, 2004) are roughly 40 percent higher than America's and about three times greater than either China's or Japan's. Total output for the EU-25, furthermore, nearly matches the American level when we use

the “purchasing power parity” (PPP) adjustments that are now often preferred in such comparisons—and if we compare instead exchange-rate based gross domestic product (GDP) levels, the EU-25 just edges out the United States for the world’s top slot in 2003.⁸ America’s main economic advantage is in per-capita output: by this measure of productivity, the United States is currently 35 percent ahead of the EU-15 and 70 percent ahead of the EU-25 (eight of the ten new accession countries being post-Communist “transition” economies.)

Demographically, the EU constitutes the world’s third largest population, after only China and India. The EU-15 encompasses fully a third more people than the United States, and the EU-25 has nearly eight citizens for every five in the United States.

From the military standpoint, the EU-25’s combined defense budgets totaled roughly \$175 billion in 2002—barely half of America’s \$330 billion that same year, but far more than the figure for China—the world’s next highest military spender, which spent an estimated \$48 billion.⁹ With combined armed forces of over 1.9 million, the EU-25’s military manpower exceeds U.S. manpower by 36 percent and stands second only to China’s 2.3 million.

To the extent that these crude measures convey geopolitical information, they would seem to suggest a very rough parity in overall potential for the United States and the European area. The numbers, indeed, back up German foreign minister Joschka Fischer’s plaintive assertion last year that the EU is “*eine echte Macht*”—“a genuine power.”¹⁰

No less striking than this rough similarity is the utter disparity between the European Union and Russia. Even if we just consider the “old,” pre-enlargement union (EU-15), it still dwarfs Russia, with a population over twice as large and nearly ten times the gross national income (GNI). And despite generous PPP adjustments, Russia’s per-capita output stands at barely a third the level of the enlarged EU-25. Simply stated, the European Union and Russia are not even in the same league. Viewed through the prism of table 1, the old Cold War contest—wherein Moscow managed to vie for decades with Washington over the future of Europe—looks nothing short of astonishingly mismatched today and may thus strike future viewers as a curious and improbable historical puzzle.

Basic numbers on raw economic and demographic potential can help explain the lopsided differences between the European and the Russian roles in world affairs today. But they cannot satisfactorily account

in any similar manner for the tremendous current difference between America’s and Europe’s influence internationally.

If this seems an obvious point, it is nevertheless one all too often overlooked in contemporary commentary. Some European analysts, however, understand the situation clearly. Thus, for example, Professor Werner Weidenfeld of the University of Munich wrote:

In essence, Europe lacks not only an operative center, but [the] strategic thinking, to be capable of acting on the world political stage. The major powers of Europe have all forfeited the components that made them would-be world political actors. None of these states have developed the will to lead, to compensate for the loss of a world political horizon. . . . The deficit in strategic thinking is proving itself to be the Achilles’ heel of Europe.¹¹

Needless to say, this kind of “deficit” cannot be filled by a surfeit of material resources—either economic or demographic.

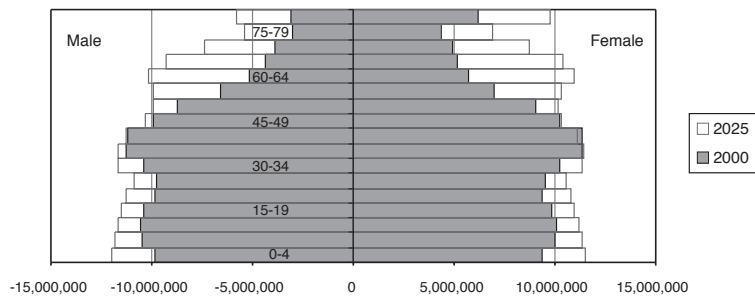
The Shape of Things to Come

What about the impact of purely demographic forces on Europe’s economic and strategic outlook in the years ahead? Crystal balls for the year 2025 are usually cloudy—but we already have a fairly good sense of what the population profiles of Europe and the United States will look like twenty-one years hence. Given the low death rates and low birthrates in both Europe and America, there will be relatively little demographic “turnover” between now and then: absent catastrophe, about three-fourths of the people in the EU today will be alive in 2025, and roughly two-thirds of the people who will inhabit America in 2025 are already citizens there today.

Figures 1 and 2 show the U.S. Census Bureau’s estimates of U.S. and EU-15 population for 2000 and its projections for the year 2025. The contrast is between modest growth in the United States and stagnation or incipient decline in the European Union.

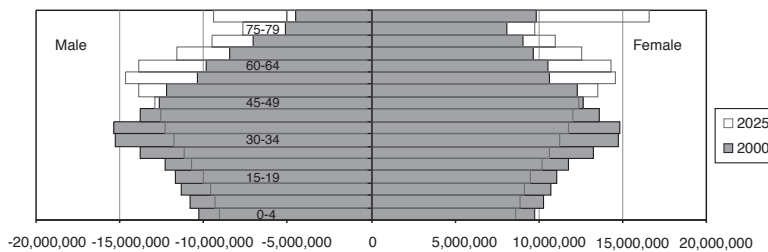
Between 2000 and 2025, by Census Bureau projections, U.S. population is seen as increasing by about 67 million: in the EU-15, by just 9 million. All of the EU’s anticipated increase comes from immigration. In four of the EU-15¹² and eight of the ten new accession states,¹³ death rates currently surpass birthrates; the Census

FIGURE 1: U.S. Population Structure, 2000 versus 2025 (projected)



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau International Database, available at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbacc.html> (accessed September 23, 2004).

FIGURE 2: EU-15 Population Structure, 2000 versus 2025 (projected)



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau International Database, available at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbacc.html> (accessed September 23, 2004).

Bureau projects deaths to exceed births for the EU-15 by about 2007 and for the EU-15 to record nearly 10 million more deaths than births over the following eighteen years. In the United States, by contrast, natural increase is projected as the primary engine of demographic growth: between 2000 and 2025, the United States is expected to celebrate almost 45 million more births than deaths.

As figures 1 and 2 illustrate, it is not only projected population totals for America and Europe that diverge over the coming generation, but population composition. To begin, Europe's population is slated to experience much more rapid and extreme aging than America's. Between 2000 and 2025 the U.S. median age is projected to rise by about three years—to reach in 2025 the level already registered in the EU-15 today. For its part, between 2000 and 2025 the EU-15's median age will jump by over seven years—to an anticipated forty-six years. By 2025, about 23 percent of the EU-15 population would be sixty-five or older—a substantially

higher fraction than the 18 percent projected for the United States in 2025. Older people outnumber children in this EU-to-come: by 2025, if these projections hold, the EU-15 would have only two-thirds as many kids under fifteen as seniors over sixty-five—and in fact would have more people over the age of eighty than under the age of five.

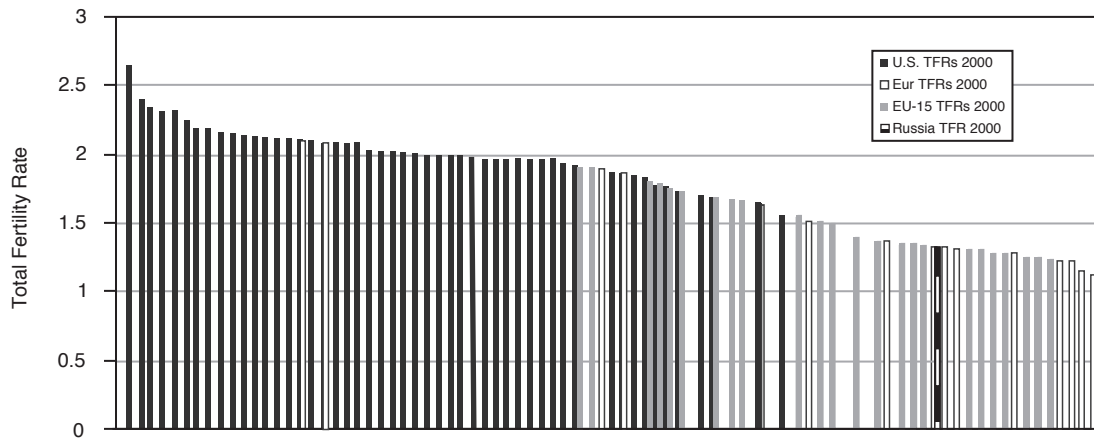
Given Europe's marginal anticipated increase in total population numbers over the coming decades, this shift in population structure means an absolute decline in the size of many EU-15 age groups between 2000 and 2025. Over that time span, the EU-15's population aged fifty or older would experience growth—while the population under forty-five would shrink markedly. In 2025, this Europe would have 14 percent fewer children under fifteen than twenty-five years earlier, and its fifteen to sixty-four cohort—the group described as “economically active ages” by current convention—will shrink by about 3 percent. (For the United States, these same age groups grow by 15 percent and 16 percent, respectively.) As for Europeans eighty and older, their ranks are projected to be growing at a “population explosion”-style tempo of 2.5 percent per year.

What do these demographic trends portend for European prosperity and power? We can try to answer the question by looking more closely at some of the components propelling Europe's overall population changes.

Fertility and Family Formation

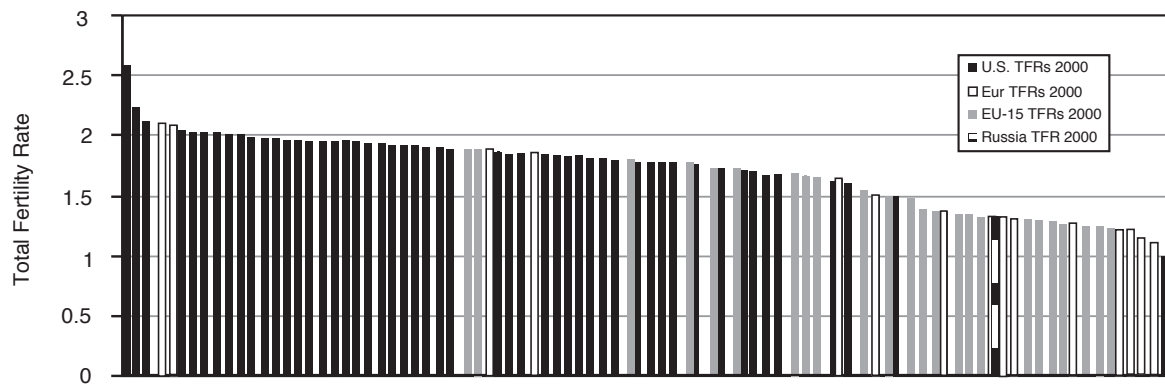
At the moment, the lowest fertility level for the population of any nation or equivalent administrative area would probably be that of Hong Kong, where current childbearing patterns are on a course for 0.94 births per woman per lifetime.¹⁴ Against this standard, European fertility levels do not establish the absolutely lowest levels of human fertility reported today. But Europe's are nevertheless the lowest levels for any large population grouping on the planet—now or at any previous point in recorded history.

FIGURE 3: Total Fertility Rate: Europe, U.S., and Russia



NOTE: U.S. TFR includes the fifty states and the District of Columbia; the bars in bold indicate TFRs for European countries outside of the EU-15.
SOURCES: Institut National d'études démographiques, "Population en chiffres," available at <http://www.ined.fr/population-en-chiffres/pays-developpees/index.html> (accessed August 4, 2004); *National Vital Statistics Report* Vol. 52, No. 19 (May 10, 2004).

FIGURE 4: Total Fertility Rate: White America versus Europe



NOTE: U.S. TFR includes the fifty states and the District of Columbia; the bars in bold indicate TFRs for European countries outside of the EU-15.
SOURCES: Institut National d'études démographiques, "Population en chiffres," available at <http://www.ined.fr/population-en-chiffres/pays-developpees/index.html> (accessed August 4, 2004); *National Vital Statistics Report* Vol. 52, No. 19 (May 10, 2004).

To appreciate just how low Europe's birthrates are in comparison with America's, it is best to compare them state-by-state: that is to say, the fifty U.S. states and the District of Columbia against the forty European states with readily available fertility data for the year 2000. Figure 3 shows that, despite regional variations, birth levels in America and Europe barely intersect. The European continent's highest fertility level notoriously belongs to historically Muslim Albania—but Albania's fertility level in 2000 was lower than South Dakota's. France may have the highest level of childbearing among the EU-25, but in 2000 it ranked below forty U.S. states, including Washington, Wyoming, and Wisconsin. The

U.S. state with the lowest fertility—Vermont—would qualify as a relatively high-fertility European country today, ranking above nineteen of the EU-25.¹⁵

The United States, of course, is a famously multiethnic country; do America's fertility rates for its swelling "minority" communities skew the results in figure 3? The answer seems to be yes, but not terribly much. The U.S. "non-Hispanic white" fertility level in 2000, if continued indefinitely, would have conducted to 1.87 births per woman per lifetime—a level roughly 30 percent higher than continental Europe's that same year. By this same metric, France's "high" fertility level would still have ranked below twenty-eight of America's fifty states'

“Anglo” rates, and America’s lowest “white fertility” state—Rhode Island—would still have ranked above eighteen of the EU-25.¹⁶

Conventional demographic thinking today presumes that EU fertility levels will be rising over the coming generation from today’s unprecedented lows. (Projections by both the UN Population Division and the U.S. Census Bureau, for example, are predicated on this hypothesis.) In the event, this hunch may prove correct, but there are also good reasons to imagine it might not. Foremost among the latter are the tectonic shifts currently underway in European family structure and family formation patterns. These trends have been neutrally described as “the second demographic transition” by Belgian demographer Ron Lesthaeghe,¹⁷ and more acidly by French demographer Jean-Claude Chesnais as a transition to “the autistic society,”¹⁸ but the diagnosis is the same: a sharp shift toward less stable marital unions and concomitantly, toward lower childbearing norms.

In the United States, the parlous straits of the American family have been a topic of worried political conversation for over a generation, and not without reason—yet few Americans seem to be aware of just how rapidly, and shockingly, the functional definition of “the family” is changing in modern Europe. While Scandinavia’s broadmindedness on the marriage and legitimacy questions are famous internationally, what is perhaps less well-known is that the odds of a woman’s getting married and staying married to age fifty are currently just about 40 percent in staid Portugal; and under 22 percent in conventional, bourgeois Belgium; and those odds run as low as 20 percent in some of the new EU accession states (for example, Estonia).¹⁹

Thanks largely to this withering away of marriage, out-of-wedlock birth ratios throughout Europe are soaring. Whereas nearly one in three American babies is an extramarital birth, the corresponding fraction in Britain is over two-fifths. Roman Catholic cultural tradition, furthermore, has not exactly inoculated local European populations against the spread of illegitimacy. Over a quarter of Portugal’s babies are currently born to unmarried mothers, while in Austria, Ireland, and Hungary the corresponding share is now above 30 percent, and in France the most recent figure is just under 44 percent.²⁰ (The corresponding current number for America’s “non-Hispanic white” population is about 23 percent.)

One-parent families—or conditional, temporary two-parent families—are simply less well equipped to bear

and raise large numbers of children, irrespective of state guarantees. Unless the European “second demographic transition” is radically reversed in the years immediately ahead, the pressures militating for ever smaller sub-replacement families will be exceedingly difficult to countermand over the coming generation. Which is to say, so long as that “revolution” marches more triumphantly in continental Europe than continental America, the gap in childbearing between the United States and the EU may turn out to be even more dramatic than figures 1 and 2 suggest.

Does the impending demographic divergence between Europe and the United States have an identifiable bearing on the power potential of the two regions? From a purely demographic standpoint, it seems difficult to make such an argument—at least, over the coming generation. Babies and young children are an outright economic expense—they contribute nothing to a modern economy’s potential; from that crabbled calculus, one might argue that a lower birthrate actually confers some potential advantage upon a state, at least in the short run.

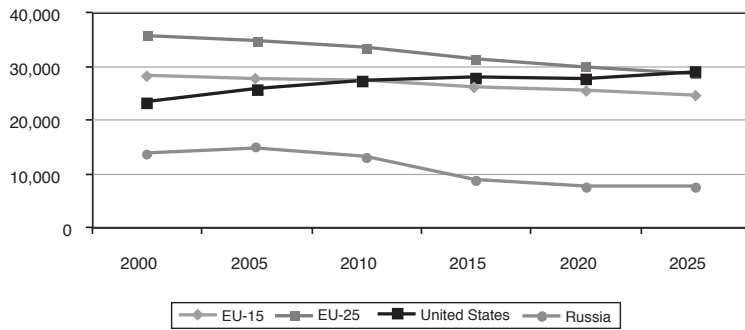
But of course, the calculus is not that simple. And one of the many factors to be weighed is the outlook of the sentient adults that are opting today in droves in Europe for steep sub-replacement fertility—or for mass childlessness. Despite their differences in exposition, both Lesthaeghe and Chesnais identify a “self-focus” on the part of grownups and prospective parents as the key to Europe’s newly anemic birthrate. If these adults are unwilling to accept material “sacrifice” for something as concrete as their own issue, how are they likely to regard something as removed as the call to duty for their country?

The Youth Factor and Military Capabilities

Military capabilities remain a matter of consequence in the international power equation—much to the discomfort of many modern Europeans. For this reason—but not this reason alone—trends in youth manpower come into consideration in a survey of power potential.

Figure 5 indicates projected trends for total numbers of young men aged eighteen to twenty-three—the prime military ages—for the United States, Europe, and Russia. As is evident, U.S. manpower totals are slated to rise, while European totals decline—and projected U.S. totals match the EU-25’s numbers by 2025. (Not a lot of guesswork is embedded in these projections—we are dealing with boys who are to be born between the

FIGURE 5: Male Population Age 18–23: EU, U.S., and Russia
2000–2025 (medium variant projections, in thousands)



SOURCE: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects*, available at <http://esa.un.org/unpp> (accessed September 24, 2004).

years 2002 and 2007, rough orders of magnitude for which we already possess.) Brute numbers, however, once again distinguish between the United States and the EU on the one hand, and the Russian Federation on the other. While the projected numbers of military-age men rises between 2000 and 2025 by 23 percent in the United States and declines by 22 percent in EU-25, it plunges by nearly half in the Russian Federation—leaving Russian male manpower in these age groups in 2025 at roughly one-fourth the level of either the United States or the EU-25. Russia’s demographic changes are of a different magnitude altogether from America’s or Europe’s.

Yet at current levels of military manpower disposition,²¹ future projections would imply only a slender fraction of the young male cohorts of 2025 might be requisitioned for defense: less than 5 percent for America, less than 7 percent for Europe, and even for Russia less than 15 percent. The United States, Europe, and Russia could all field much larger forces in the future than they deploy today without any appreciable demographic strains.

In any case, for a country of any size the critical determinants of military potential in the “revolution in military affairs” era are probably investments in military capital stock and information and communications technology (ICT).²² At the moment, America’s spending on these quantities totally overshadows Europe’s (to say nothing of Russia’s). According to a study for the French prime minister’s office, for example, the United States invested over twice as much in ICT

research and development from 1997 to 2003 as the EU-15 (\$427 billion vs. \$194 billion)—and the differential appears to be widening.²³ The United States likewise maintains a military capital stock many times larger than that of all the EU countries combined,²⁴ and, thanks to the American ICT edge, that stock is superior in quality as well as quantity.

To belabor the obvious, there is nothing inevitable or inexorable about the American lead in these areas. To the contrary, with a consistent and relatively small reallocation of Europe’s vast annual expenditures on goods and services, the EU could easily overtake the United States in both stock and flow of these military-related investments. Very rough calculations, in fact, suggest that simply redirecting the

equivalent of a week or so of the EU population’s annual vacation spending over the coming years would be more than enough to accomplish such an objective.²⁵

There may be perfectly good reasons for Europe’s evident reluctance to embark upon any such reallocation, to be sure. But it is important here to emphasize that current and prospective military disparities between the United States and the EU are not a matter of demographic or material constraints, but rather a faithful reflection of the choices and priorities expressed by free peoples under their own democratic governments.²⁶

Mortality, Health, and the Aging Problem

Over the past decade a tremendous volume of analysis and commentary on the economic implications of population aging has flowed from tributaries on both sides of the Atlantic. Almost all of this literature treats the prospective “graying” of the West as a major economic problem; in some accounts, the aging of the industrialized countries raises the specter of pervasive fiscal crises and prolonged, age-induced recessions.²⁷ Without denying the importance of the aging phenomenon, it is still possible to suggest that much of this “gray dawn” literature is a bit overwrought. It is hardly self-evident, after all, that the modern health explosion (the primary engine driving this shift in population structure) should necessarily result in national bankruptcy.

It is true that population aging presents OECD countries—those of the European Union more so than

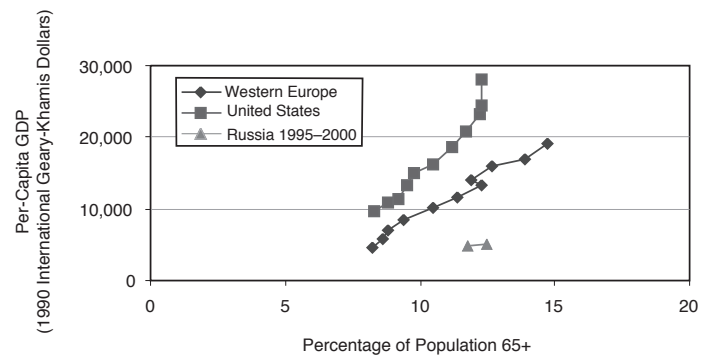
the United States—with a number of terrifying future economic scenarios if absolutely nothing is done in the decades ahead to adjust arrangements of work, savings, and public finance to the gradually evolving new realities. But this is akin to warning that picnickers enjoying lunch on the beach at low tide will be drowned within six hours. In both cases, doom can be averted through common-sense behavior long before a relatively slowly advancing problem arrives.

The key concept in meeting the economic challenges posed by population aging in Western societies is “healthy aging.” With the extension of life expectancy—and attendant improvements in the quality and availability of medical services and creature comforts—older people in the United States and Europe are healthier and more vigorous today than in the past. Every indication is that they will be healthier still in the decades ahead. “Healthy aging” offers the promise of very substantially extending the productive potential of Western populations in their later years of life.

As has been widely noted, the paradox of Western population aging in the postwar era has been the progressive drop in the average age of retirement in conjunction with continually increasing life expectancies. For the OECD grouping as a whole, male life expectancy increased by eight years between 1960 and 2000, while over the same period the average duration of working life fell by almost a decade²⁸—and in much of the EU the decline in retirement age has been even sharper. (By 1998, for example, nearly three-fifths of French men between the ages of fifty-five and sixty-four—and over three-fifths of their counterparts in Belgium—were already out of the labor force.) One need not be an actuary to appreciate that a radical lengthening of the retirement years—together with foreshortened working lives, marked declines in ratios of younger to older citizens, and pay-as-you-go pension systems—is something less than a winning formula for shoring up public finances or stimulating economic productivity.

The outlines of the reform package required for capitalizing on “healthy aging” in Europe are straightforward: a transition to self-financed retirement, an increase in labor force participation rates at older ages, a re-examination of vacation and work-year rules, implementation of effective lifelong learning systems, the

FIGURE 6: Per-Capita GDP versus Population Ages 65+: Western Europe, U.S., and Russia, 1950–2000

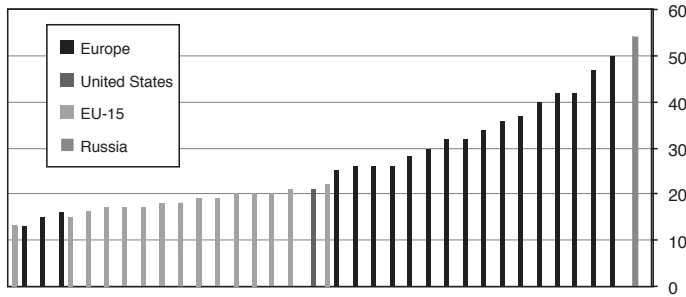


NOTE: Europe data for thirteen countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the U.K. SOURCES: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2002 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects*, available at <http://esa.un.org/unpp> (accessed April 25, 2003); Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: Historical Statistics* (Development Centre Studies, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development: Paris, 2003): Tables 2c, 3c and 7c; U.S. Bureau of the Census, International Database, available at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbacc.html> (accessed August 5, 2004).

promotion of technology-driven innovation in health care, and a strengthening of the framework for the financial markets that will intermediate new flows of personal retirement savings.²⁹ None of those changes is likely to be socially painless or politically popular. But they offer the promise of viable and sustainable economic arrangements for an aging Europe. At the moment, the annual number of hours worked per capita is currently over 40 percent higher in the United States than in Germany or France;³⁰ given current social arrangements and prospective demographic trends, that gap stands to widen still further in the next two decades. Economic “convergence” between the United States and the EU simply cannot occur under such circumstances—but convergence can and will take place once Europe begins to narrow the transatlantic employment divide.

If this somewhat contrarian assessment of the outlook for aging in Europe sounds excessively optimistic, let us assure the reader this is not a tale with a happy ending for everyone. In particular, population aging for the Russian Federation threatens to come as another heavy burden on an already beleaguered population. As figure 6 illustrates, the European Union and America got rich before they got old—Russia is doing things the other way around. Today Russia must sustain its elderly population on one-third the income level that Western Europe earned—and one-fifth the level the United

FIGURE 7: A 20-Year-Old Man's Odds of Dying Before Age 65: Europe, U.S., and Russia, 2000



NOTE: Calculations based upon current “life tables” for the year 2000. “Europe” includes countries outside of the EU-15.
SOURCE: World Health Organization Life Tables, 2000, available at http://www3.who.int/whosis/life_tables/life_tables.cfm?path=evidence,life_tables&language=english (accessed on September 20, 2004).

States enjoyed when a comparable share of their populations were over sixty-five. To make matters worse—much worse, in fact—Russia’s population will “gray” rapidly over the next two decades (current projections suggest that a fifth of all Russians may be sixty-five or older in 2025), but without the benefits of “healthy aging.” Adult mortality levels in Russia today are appallingly high. On current survival schedules, a twenty-year-old Russian man has less than even odds of making it to age sixty-five. For reasons detailed elsewhere, moreover, significant improvements in Russian health patterns are going to be exceptionally difficult to achieve any time soon.³¹ How Russia is to cope with its impending “gray wave” remains an unanswered question. None of today’s options look terribly attractive.

Immigration and the Assimilation Question

The United States is long used to considering itself “a nation of immigrants,” but that same designation now fits much of Europe almost equally well. Thanks to their postwar policies toward former colonial possessions, guest-workers, and international asylum-seekers, many European states today include appreciable and growing foreign-born populations.

In the American 2000 census, 11.1 percent of the population counted was born abroad.³² In Germany as of 1998, by way of comparison, 8.9 percent of the country’s population consisted of foreign citizens; in Belgium and

Austria the share was also about 9 percent.³³ In France, the 1999 census identified 7.1 percent of the population as foreign citizens.³⁴ (An additional proportion of all those populations was made up of foreign-born but now-naturalized citizens.) In the Netherlands, the 2000 census identified 9 percent of the population as foreign born—and fully 17 percent as first—or second-generation Dutch.³⁵

Since immigrants tend to be youthful, immigrant groups account for an even larger share of EU youth. In 1998, for example, foreign nationals accounted for about 15 percent of the Germany’s boys under eighteen.³⁶ With net migration into Western Europe currently moving at an estimated tempo of about 750,000 a year³⁷ and the demand for newcomers possibly intensifying in the face of incipient workforce decline, the odds are that a steadily growing share of the EU’s population in the years ahead will be first- and second-generation immigrants.

For any modern state, immigration necessarily begs the question of assimilation and social integration for the newcomers. In contemporary Europe, this question looms largest for the EU’s disparate but growing populations of Islamic religious heritage—immigrants originally hailing mainly from communities in the Maghreb, the former Ottoman Empire, the old British Raj, and the erstwhile Dutch West Indies.

As a practical matter, it is impossible to know exactly how many Muslims³⁸ live in the EU today: as U.S. State Department official Timothy M. Savage points out in a recent essay, seven members of the EU-15 (populous France, Italy, and Spain among them) “actually bar questions on religion in censuses and other official questionnaires.”³⁹ There is no doubt, however, that the ranks of the EU’s Muslim minorities are swelling—and rapidly. In the early 1990s, Oxford University demographer David Coleman offered the surmise that “nearly 5 million Muslims” lived within the borders of the EU-15.⁴⁰ By 2003, the U.S. State Department’s Annual Report on International Religious Freedom was estimating that the EU-15 was home to over 15 million Muslims—about 4 percent of the region’s total population.⁴¹ While specialists may quibble with the method underlying these two different guesstimates, they cannot contest the general trend implied.

Furthermore, given this population's relative youth, people of Muslim background account for a disproportionate share of the EU's young. Earlier this year, journalist and commentator Barbara Amiel startled readers by declaring that "many demographers estimate that as much as 20–30 percent of the [French] population under 25 is now Muslim."⁴² Actually, no serious demographers suggest anything like that—at least, not yet.⁴³ But given the tendency of EU Muslims to concentrate in affinity communities, the genuine and increasing Muslim presence within the EU is readily evident in many cities across Western Europe today.

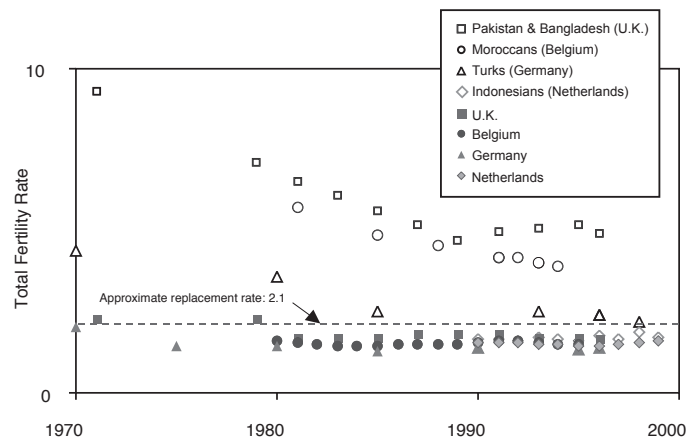
Affinities are the critical issue here: can Europe's new Muslims be absorbed into society and the body politic like the earlier waves of postwar migrants, or are they instead somehow "un-meltable"? Without directly addressing that charged question, Coleman's research has offered an admittedly imperfect but nonetheless revealing demographic yardstick for measuring progress toward assimilation in contemporary Europe.

Coleman looked at rates of intermarriage and at differences between immigrant and host-country fertility levels as indices of integration and assimilation ("social inclusion," in current EU parlance). Commenting on trends from the 1970s and 1980s, he wrote that the data suggest that integration for some immigrant populations with the host population is proceeding fast, while others remain isolated almost irrespective of the kind or intensity of integration policy by government. *This applies particularly to the younger generation brought up in the host country.*⁴⁴ Those "others" to whom Coleman referred were, invariably, Euro-Muslims of one variety or another. Coleman's inquiry into fertility differences between immigrant and host populations can be extended into the 1990s for certain predominantly Muslim communities within Europe.

To go by these data, the picture is far from uniform. In the Netherlands, for example, fertility levels of Indonesian immigrants are today practically indistinguishable from "native" Hollanders. Within Germany, Turkish fertility dropped by over half between 1970 and 1998—and while still high by comparison with the local Germans, now falls a little below the levels currently reported in Kansas.

On the other hand, Moroccans in Belgium were bearing an average of nearly four children in the late

FIGURE 8: Total Fertility Rates for Selected EU Immigrant Groups versus Native Populations, 1970–1999



SOURCE: *The Demographic Characteristics of Immigrant Populations*, Werner Haug, Paul Compton, Youssef Courbage, ed. (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2002): 102, 227, 281–82, 534.

1990s—two and a half times as many as local Belgians, and indeed substantially more than their counterparts in Morocco itself. And then there is the case of Britain: whereas fertility for the predominantly Indian migrants from East Africa had converged to within 20 percent of the local UK level by 1996, Pakistani/Bangladeshi birthrates remained almost three times higher than their host nation's.

Without in any way idealizing current European patterns of childbearing and family formation, one can nevertheless suggest that the yawning gap between those very patterns and the ones embraced by various Muslim communities within Europe speak to a conspicuous failure of assimilation, at least to date—and at the same time raise the stakes by fueling the steady future growth of these "socially excluded" groups.

Olivier Roy and others have warned of the advent of "EuroIslam"—a "supranational ideological Islam in Europe" that radicalizes disaffected elements within the rising generations of EU Muslims.⁴⁵ They argue Muslims born in Europe may be particularly susceptible to the "Euro-Islamist" temptation. Their reading tracks, in its way, with Coleman's comments about the limited degree of integration of European second-generation Muslim populations. And their grim prognosis may ultimately prove all too accurate. Yet even if it does not, the project of fostering the successful assimilation of the EU's marginalized (or self-marginalized) Muslim communities would appear to be utterly essential to ensuring Europe's future social cohesion.

It is not too much to suggest that the greatest demographic challenge facing Europe today lies not in population aging, or population decline, or the many other woes routinely mentioned in the standard litany of European “population problems,” but instead in the unfinished and historic task of making loyal and productive European citizens out of all its immigrants—including its Muslim immigrants. This challenge, indeed, will bear directly on European stability and security—perhaps even on European capabilities to function as a power at all.

How Europe fares with this historic challenge remains to be seen. The outcome as yet looks highly uncertain.

Notes

1. This is a point upon which so-called neo-cons and so-called realists are able to agree. Cf. Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); Stephen M. Walt, “The Imbalance of Power: On Prospects for Effective American-European Relations,” *Harvard Magazine* (March–April 2004).
2. For example, Charles A. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
3. William C. Wohlforth, “The Stability of a Unipolar World,” *International Security* 24, no. 1 (Summer 1999): 5–41; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, “American Primacy in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs* 81, no. 4 (July/August 2002).
4. Kupchan, *The End of the American Era*, 145.
5. The most authoritative projections of international demographic trends currently available are produced by the U.S. Census Bureau (see <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbagg.html>) and the UN Population Division (see <http://esa.un.org/unup>).
6. Quite the contrary: Europe’s “demographic alarm” is a tocsin that has been recurrently sounded for nearly 2,000 years—ever since an expanding but increasingly dissolute (and low birthrate) Roman Imperium began to encounter serious resistance from a then-youthful and highly prolific German nation along its frontiers. For more details, see Martin Bang, “The Expansion of the Teutons (to A.D. 376),” in H. M. Gwatkin and J. P. Whitney, *The Cambridge Medieval History*, Volume I (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1957): 183–217.
7. For a more “modern” take on the sorts of indicators that should be used to measure national power, see Ashley J. Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power in the Postindustrial Age* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000).
8. Total derived from OECD, Main Economic Indicators, (August 2004): 259; and World Development Indicators 2004, CD-ROM.
9. Military estimates in this paragraph are drawn from *The Military Balance 2003/2004*, Christopher Langton, editor (London and Oxford: International Institute of Strategic Studies and Oxford University Press, 2003): table 33. Specialists will note that China’s estimated military budget may understate Beijing’s true defense effort.
10. “Interview: ‘Europe ist eine echte Macht,’” *Die Zeit*, no. 20 (May 8, 2003), available at http://www.zeit.de/2003/20/J__Fischer (accessed October 1, 2004). Fischer added an important caveat: he only claimed the EU to be a power in those areas where “it is already integrated today.”
11. Werner Weidenfeld, “The Strategic Deficit: Europe’s Achilles Heel” (March 1, 2003), available at http://www.cap-lmu.de/aktuell/positionen/2003/strategic_deficit.php (accessed September 24, 2004).
12. Germany, Greece, Italy, and Sweden.
13. Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, and Slovenia.
14. Official data for 2003 available at http://www.info.gov.hk/censtatd/eng/hkstat/fas/pop/vital_event_index.html (accessed October 1, 2004).
15. Some readers may object sotto voce that we have not included the would-be EU member Turkey in these comparisons. It is true that Turkey’s childbearing patterns are for the moment higher than the U.S. average—but they are not at all off the American scale. In the year 2000, Utah’s total fertility rate was slightly higher than Turkey’s (2.63 versus 2.57), although the levels in both places have been dropping in recent years.
16. Council of Europe, *Demographic Yearbook 2003*, CD-ROM. We exclude the District of Columbia in the United States from these comparisons—not because it lacks statehood, but because its fertility levels for the “white” population are based upon a statistical artifact. (Pregnant “white” women tend to move to adjoining jurisdictions in Maryland and Virginia, thus depressing the calculated fertility rates for D.C. “whites.”)
17. Ron Lesthaeghe, “Der zweite demographische Übergang in den westlichen Ländern: eine Deutung,” *Zeitschrift fuer Bevölkerungswissenschaft* 18, no. 3 (1992): 313–354.
18. Jean-Claude Chesnais, *La démographie* (Paris: Press Universitaires de Paris, 1990): 72–74.
19. Calculated from Council of Europe, *Demographic Yearbook 2003*, CD-ROM.
20. Ibid.

21. And taking the politically incorrect leap to presume all such “manpower” is male!

22. Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power*.

23. Conseil Stratégique des Technologies de l'Information, Research and Development in Information Science and Technology in Large Industrialized Countries: Summary Report (October 2003), available at <http://www.gfii.asso.fr/documents/synthese-eng.pdf> (accessed September 20, 2004).

24. For some estimates of “military capital stock” in the United States and Europe, see the work of Charles Wolf and his colleagues at RAND Corporation.

25. Estimates indicate that earnings in the EU-15 from tourism had already exceeded \$1 trillion by 1995. The overwhelming preponderance of these revenues comes from EU vacationers. Georges Cazes, “Tourism: Major Economic Stakes,” *Japan Railway and Transport Review* (March 1998): 4–9.

26. Daniel Goure has made the subsidiary point that Europe’s low fertility and rapid population aging tends to compromise security readiness by heightening casualty-aversion and pressing military budgets into a disadvantageous competition against social spending. See his “A White Paper on Defense for the Global Aging Initiative,” Center for Strategic and International Studies (December 2000), available at <http://www.csis.org/gai/intlsecaging.pdf> (accessed July 24, 2004). The point sounds plausible, but one might not wish to press it too far: in the 1930s, for example, the nation with one of the world’s very lowest birthrates, and also one of its “grayest” populations, was none other than Nazi Germany.

27. Peter G. Peterson, *Gray Dawn, How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America and the World* (New York: Times Books, 1999); Robert Stowe England, *The Macroeconomic Impact of Global Aging: A New Era of Economic Frailty?* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2002); Philip Longman, *The Empty Cradle: How Falling Birthrates Threaten World Prosperity and What To Do about It* (New York: Basic Books, 2004).

28. OECD, *Reforms for an Aging Society*, (Paris: OECD, 2000): 14–15.

29. Quite a bit of policy research has already been done on the issue of preparing for population aging in affluent societies. One indispensable source of such research is the OECD’s “Ageing Society” Project, available at http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,2686,en_2649_37435_1_1_1_1_37435,00.html. Population aging will also increase the importance of productivity-enhancing economic reforms for Europe in other areas as well; for a thoughtful exposition on some of these unfinished tasks, see Martin Neil Baily and Jacob Funk Kirkegaard, *Transforming the European Economy* (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 2004).

30. Baily and Kirkegaard, *Transforming the European Economy*, 52; data are for 2002. Economic historian Angus Maddison has estimated that the level of annual per-capita hours worked was 20 percent higher in Western Europe than in the United States as of 1950, but 17 percent lower as of 1998. Derived from Angus Maddison, *The World Economy: A Millennial Perspective* (Paris: OECD, 2001): 354.

31. Nicholas Eberstadt, “The Russian Federation at the Dawn of the Twenty First Century: Trapped in a Demographic Straitjacket”, *NBR Analysis Series 15*, no. 2 (September 2004), available at <http://nbr.org/publications/analysis/vol15no2/v15n2.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2004).

32. Nolan Malone et al., “The Foreign Born Population: 2000”, Census 2000 Brief C2KBR-34, U.S. Census Bureau (October 2003), available at <http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/c2kbr-34.pdf> (accessed October 4, 2004).

33. Werner Haug, Paul Compton, and Youssef Courbage, eds., *The Demographic Characteristics of Immigrant Populations*, (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, December 2002): 33.

34. Institut National d’Etudes Démographiques (INED), “Population en chiffres: France,” available at <http://www.ined.fr/population-en-chiffres/france/index.html> (accessed September 26, 2004).

35. Haug, Compton and Courbage, eds., *The Demographic Characteristics of Immigrant Populations*, 254 and 263.

36. *Ibid.*, 221.

37. U.S. Census Bureau projection for 2004, available at <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/idbnew.html> (accessed October 3, 2004).

38. In the following pages we use the term “Muslim” to describe people with a Muslim cultural heritage or background (as opposed to active and observant worshippers).

39. Timothy M. Savage, “Europe and Islam: Crescent Waxing, Cultures Clashing,” *The Washington Quarterly* (Summer 2004). Savage also quite correctly notes that U.S. statistical authorities are although enjoined against gathering data on religion from interviewees.

40. David A. Coleman, “Fertility and Immigration among Immigrant Populations as Measures of Integration,” *Journal of Biosocial Sciences* 26 (1994): 107–136.

41. Savage, “Europe and Islam.”

42. Barbara Amiel, “Is France on the Way to Becoming an Islamic State?” *Daily Telegraph* (January 26, 2004): 18.

43. Those numbers would imply a population of 4 to 6 million Muslim youths for France today. That range is probably several times too high—for now.

44. Coleman, “Fertility and Immigration.”

45. Olivier Roy, “EuroIslam: The Jihad Within?” *The National Interest* 73 (Spring 2003).