

## WHAT ROLE CAN IMMIGRATION PLAY IN SHAPING EUROPE'S FUTURE?

BY

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**WHAT ROLE CAN IMMIGRATION PLAY IN SHAPING EUROPE'S FUTURE?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Europe is experiencing a steady population decline, sharpened by the aging phenomenon, and nothing is more important for its future than the question of whether the Old Continent will be able to solve this growing demographic crisis, and if so, how. This project will examine this topical issue and will try to explain the main problems related to the subject, and present a possible future scenario that addresses it.

In the near to midterm, the most promising solution to mitigate population decline seems to be immigration, supported by a concerted effort to make the European Union a more attractive destination for immigrants through a fair and proactive integration policy. The migration context in Europe has changed significantly over the last few decades and many Member States have converted from countries of emigration to countries of immigration. Immigration alone will not resolve Europe's demographic and economic problems, but it may help mitigate the phenomenon. If European citizens perceive immigration as an opportunity to be seized, rather than a burden to be shouldered and a threat to their security, culture and nations, Europe will have a greater chance of maintaining its economic power and its relative geopolitical status.





## WHAT ROLE CAN IMMIGRATION PLAY IN SHAPING EUROPE'S FUTURE?

Not so long ago, worried about the rising global population, Paul Ehrlich wrote apocalyptically in his 1968 worldwide bestseller, *The Population Bomb*, "In the 1970s and 1980s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date, nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate." Fortunately, Ehrlich was not a good clairvoyant and his predicted holocaust, which assumed that the 1960s global baby boom would continue, didn't happen. Instead, the global growth rate dropped from 2 percent in the mid-1960s to roughly half that today, with many countries no longer producing enough babies to avoid falling populations.<sup>1</sup> Among these countries, European nations are experiencing the most alarming and clear decline due to low fertility rates and rising longevity. As the combination of these two factors is set to have drastic consequences in the long term, nothing is more determinant for Europe's future than the question of whether the Old Continent will be able to solve this acute demographic problem, and if so, how. This project will examine this topical issue through the lens of critical thinking, explain the main problems related to the subject, and propose policy options.

Europeans should tackle this strategic issue without further procrastination because if urgent measures are not taken, their aging societies will create severe problems for their social and economic systems, undermining economic competitiveness and causing a decrease in Europe's power and influence. Numerous initiatives are under examination. The European Commission (EC) has already provided interesting responses to this crisis, inviting the European countries to harmonize their efforts and policies and offering, through a Communitarian Communication presented in

2006, a reference framework to help Member States develop their specific policies, the success of which will be in the interest of the European Union as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Among the initiatives, and not only from a symbolic point of view, is the EC plan to designate 2012 as the European Year on Active Ageing. Its goal is to promote better participation of aged people in society, “which includes the recognition that people, as they age, should enjoy active participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their societies as a main development objective”.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the numerous initiatives and the different fields of possible action, in the short-medium period, the most prompt and promising answer seems to be immigration, supported by a concerted effort to make the European Union (EU) a more attractive destination for immigrants including a fair and proactive integration policy. Immigration alone will not resolve Europe’s demography problems, partially because its volume and its characteristics cannot be easily manipulated by governments. Also, immigration does not address the alarming problem of low birth rate. But a more substantial and legal flow of immigrants and a common integration policy may help mitigate the demographic crisis. Certainly, more immigrants could also mean more social, security, and economical problems and both European authorities and communities will face new challenges in managing relations with a growing Muslim population. But, if the European citizens, upon becoming aware of the steady and negative trend, are able to perceive immigration as an opportunity to be seized, rather than a burden to be shouldered and a threat to their culture and Nations, Europe will be able to harness the benefits that immigration can trigger and will have a greater chance of maintaining its economic power and its relative geopolitical status. If they fail to do so, immigration could harm

Member States' long-term social and economic prospects or create dangerous social divisions.

The Aging Population Phenomenon

The total population of the 27 EU Member States grew from 404 million in 1960 to around 497.8 million in 2009; of these, almost 32 million were foreigners, accounting for 6.4% of the total.<sup>4</sup> In addition to this and according to a European Commission's assessment, about eight million illegal immigrants are also living in the EU.<sup>5</sup> In this context, it is necessary to highlight that immigration is the real basis of this increase; in fact, 82% of the EU population growth between 2000 and 2008 is the result of immigration, while the natural increase remains very low (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> By comparison, in the U.S.A. only one-third of current population growth is estimated to be caused by net immigration.<sup>7</sup>

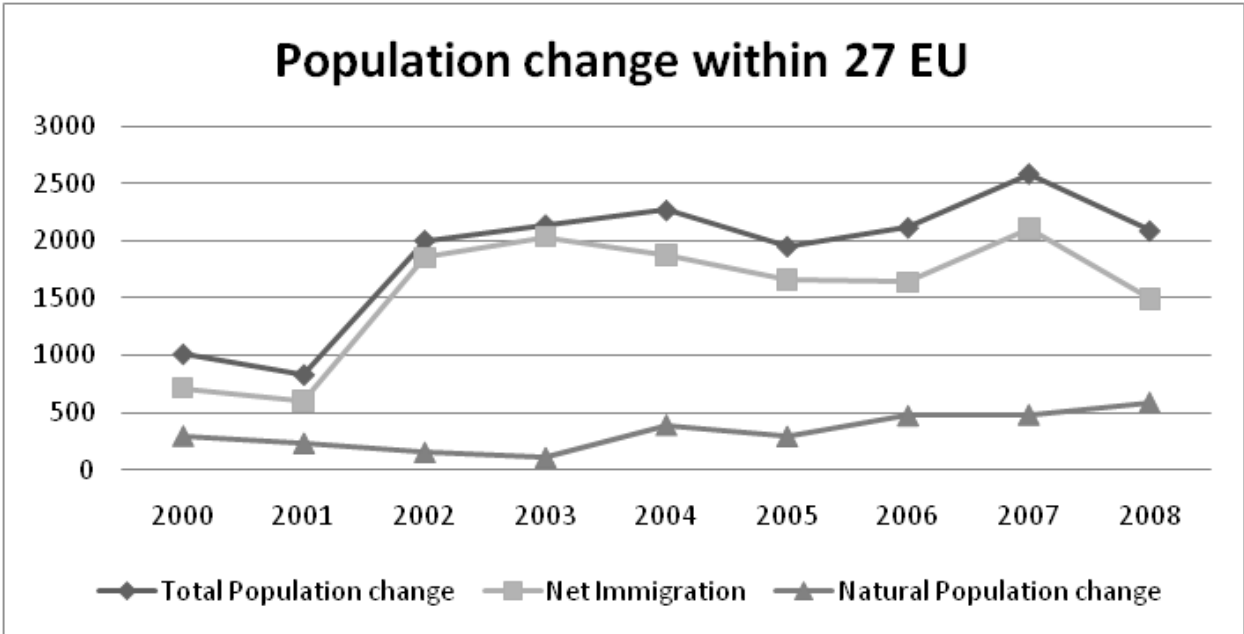


Figure 1. Eurostat Statistical books: Europe in figures.  
Population change from 2000 to 2008

The latest UN projections suggest that the pace at which the world’s population is expanding will slow in the coming decades, even though the total number of inhabitants is projected to reach more than 9 billion by 2050. This relative stagnation will be particularly evident for developed economies (especially Europe), whose inhabitants are expected to reach a peak around 2035, followed by a slow decline until 2050. In contrast, we can observe expectations of 27 percent growth for the United States and Canada, 24 percent for Latin America, 26 percent for Asia and 93 percent for Africa (Figure 2).

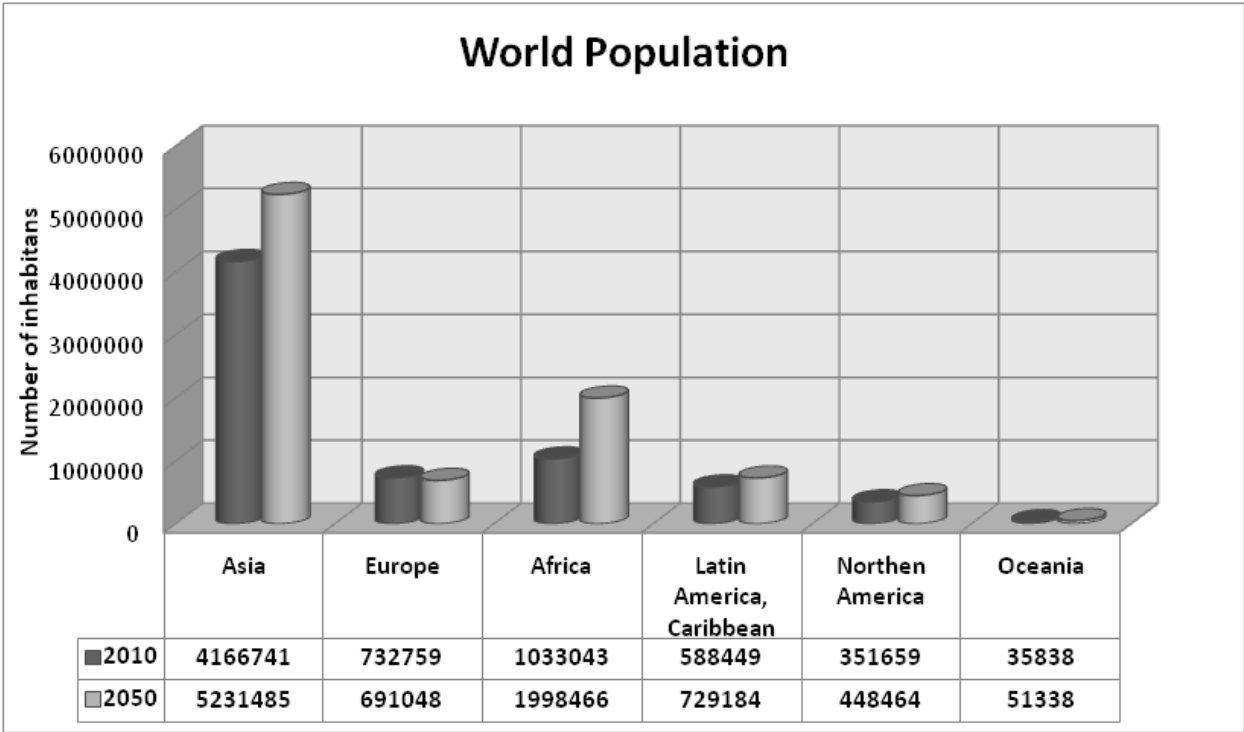


Figure 2. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs: World Population in 2010 and prospects for 2050

In this changing context, aging society represents a major demographic challenge for a wide range of developed world economies. Western Europe will be hit particularly hard by this phenomenon and the median age of the total population is likely

to increase in all its countries. Unfortunately, this is not a transitory wave like the baby boom that many nations went through in the 1950s, but it is a major demographic shift with no precedent in recent history.<sup>8</sup> This is due to the combined effect of the existing age structure of the population, a growing number of people who are living longer, and persistently low fertility. In other words, the Old Continent combines the extremes of very high longevity and very low fertility.

Thanks to an excellent quality of life, more than adequate quality of the environment and easy access to health care, the longevity rate in Europe is currently 75 years for men and 82 for women. The existing fertility rate is incredibly low and stands at 1.4, a value which is beneath the replacement rate of 2.1 children per woman.<sup>9</sup> This is because, after a period of stable marriages with many children (the baby boom in the 1950s is the best example), there was a shift throughout many European countries toward fewer marriages, fewer children, and much higher divorce rates. Moreover, women's changing social and economic expectations as well as the wish to maintain a high standard of living have led to better education and increased their labor force participation. Finally, difficulties to reconcile professional and family life delayed their age of first marriage and childbirth.<sup>10</sup>

If this trend continues, Europe will suffer a clear reversal of the “pyramid of age” and, according to the European Commission, the number of people aged over 65 compared to those aged 15 to 64 will double from 24 percent now to 45 percent by 2050 (Figure 3).<sup>11</sup>

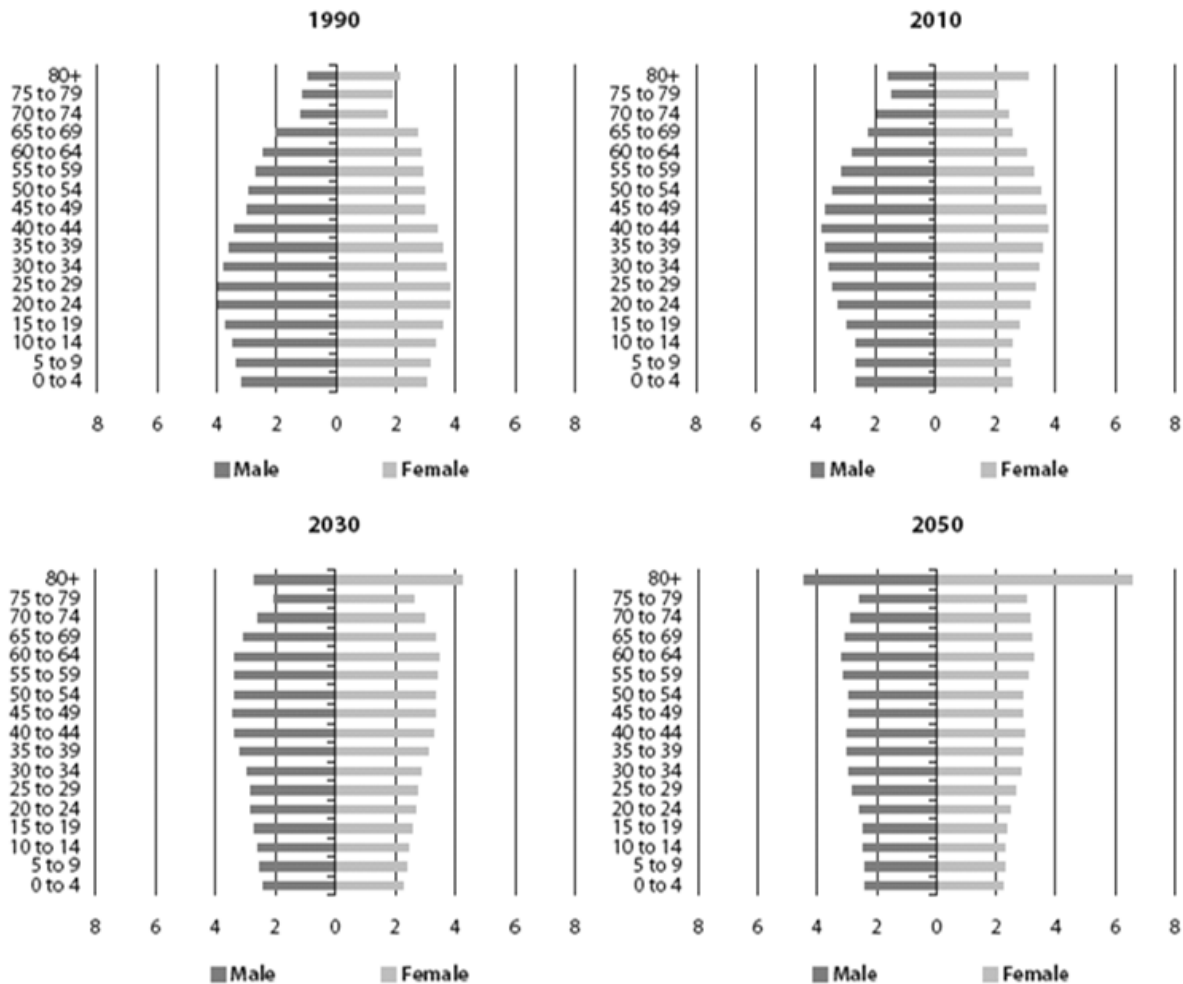


Figure 3. Moving age pyramids, EU-27 (% of total population). Source: Eurostat

In the long term, this phenomenon will have not only a direct impact on the size and the composition of the population, and on economic development and security, but also may indirectly affect capabilities and perspectives of the main countries involved by altering culture, social temperament, economic performance, and national values and goals.

### Economic And Demographic Implications

First of all, demographic aging results in a decrease in the economically active population. The proportion of people of working age is shrinking while the relative

number of those retired is expanding. In 2007, 67.2 percent of the EU's population were of working age (15 to 64 years old). "A series of population pyramid predictions, up to 2050, suggest that this relatively large proportion of the population may shrink gradually to about 57 percent of the total."<sup>12</sup> This more restricted working base will be asked to support a growing population of people aged 65 years or more, i.e. nearly 29 percent of the population. In addition to this, it is worth pointing out that the economic and social "weight" of the very old (80 years or more) will be considerable by 2060, when this segment of the population may account for 12.0 percent of the EU's population.<sup>13</sup>

As a result, under the current circumstances, throughout the European countries the economy may stagnate or even decline, employees may become less adaptable and mobile, innovation and investment may fall, and the budget deficits will balloon as the elderly population will be entitled to social contributions and pensions, and governments will be asked to provide appropriate assistance, build new and suitable infrastructure and guarantee greater health care support. Furthermore, an older society will become more conservative and older voters will have more political power. Consequently, for political leaders it will be more difficult to manage this new gerontocracy and justify welfare cuts. Likewise, they may feel forced to safeguard old-age interests and programs that are economically unsustainable in the long term.

In the developed world, the United States is the only Western country whose population ranking will remain unchanged and whose aggregate economic size will keep pace with that of the other important world economies.<sup>14</sup> Conversely, driving this demographic decline, the European Union's economy could not only lose competitiveness with the United States, but also fall behind growing market-oriented

economies such as Brazil, India, and China, which may wish to challenge the existing global order by expanding their influence.

In order to meet the geopolitical challenges posed by this trend, European leaders must prepare timely and effective responses on both economic and demographic fronts. To the extent that it can, they should try to make sure that their economies remain flexible, open to new innovations, and competitive. Furthermore, they should try to modify their national demographics through family-formation, incentives and immigration policies that are consistent with their economic goals and deeply held liberal democratic values.

On the economic front, specifically, at the moment the main governmental initiatives to mitigate the negative impact of this phenomenon focus on the reduction of the projected cost of old-age benefits (pensions and health care)<sup>15</sup>, increasing retirement savings by introducing new and innovative solutions, the raising of the eligibility ages for public pensions, and increasing opportunities for more young people to work. On the other hand, it is evident that “working conditions and pension systems should be adapted to create a labor market for 50-70 year-olds by making recruitment and employment of older workers easier and more attractive”.<sup>16</sup>

Moving to the demographic field, the policy actions are equally decisive, especially in an attempt to increase the birthrate. Among the numerous initiatives, policies that help parents balance jobs and children are the linchpin of any strategy supporting fertility. To encourage families to have more children, some European countries are introducing more flexible career patterns that allow both women and men to move in and out of employment to accommodate the different cycles of family life. In



addition to this, they also reward families for having more children, for example by building prenatal incentives, and increasing the per capita amount of cash payments with the number of children that families have, or reducing taxes. Furthermore, as young families are having a harder time getting established in the labor market, and are finding that affordable housing, child care and other supports are not easily accessible. Many European governments have introduced interesting measures like mortgage housing credits, income security programs that provide benefits to support the extra costs associated with raising children, and stronger social service and community infrastructures. All these initiatives and policies are starting to show some results, but are not easily sustainable in the long term, especially because they reduce productivity, exposing European companies to unacceptable risks.

Nevertheless, while there are evident margins to increase labor force participation, notably of women and older workers, it can be expected that within about ten years, the decline of the working-age population will be such – notably due to the retirement of the baby-boomers – that rising employment rates will no longer be sufficient to compensate for this decline. Thus, in the short-medium term, the most likely answer and more useful and effective tool to support the labor market, sustain the European economies, as well as to replace below-replacement fertility rates, seems to be immigration. But immigration is not only tightly connected to the challenges of demographic change and economic growth, but also to the welfare-state reform and the building of a common social and political system. Both academic observers and European citizens are increasingly convinced that Europe's future will largely turn on how it will be able to admit and integrate immigrants. They also recognize that

European countries are asked to reconcile protection of national borders and cultural identity with the need to relieve growing demographic and labor market imbalances. And this is a very demanding task. However, Europe can maintain its size and dynamism only by “importing” non-Europeans. Whether the Old Continent will successfully succeed in accommodating immigrants will depend on whether natives and newcomers perceive Europe as a prosperous civilization or a declining one.

### History Of Migration Into The EU

Europe was from the early 1800s until the 1950s a continent of emigration<sup>17</sup> and a large number of emigrants left the native lands to reach South and North America, Australia or South Africa. During the 1960s, many European nations still had a negative migration balance. It was only after this that the Old Continent decreased from 400,000 emigrants per annum in the early 1950s to less than 100,000 per annum in the early 1990s and became a land of immigration. Part of this drop can be explained by the resurgence of migration within Europe.<sup>18</sup> In fact, in 2009, 37 percent of the foreign citizens living in the EU27 were citizens of another EU27 Member state.<sup>19</sup>

To better understand immigration in Europe, it is necessary to consider the different waves, from the end of World War II until now, that characterized this impressive phenomenon, whose roots were more about economics than politics. In fact, immigration was particularly influenced by economic conditions in both the native country and host land, leading in most cases to the movement from less developed to more economically advanced regions. The contribution provided by immigrants was a determining factor in reviving the postwar economies of Western Europe.

The first wave started during the early postwar period, gathered pace through the 1950s, reached its zenith during the 1960s, and faded in the 1970s. This latest period is

largely due to the first Arab oil embargo and the subsequent economic downturn which produced unemployment, and motivated governments to restrict severely the immigration of foreign workers. This initial phase was characterized by the mass movement of workers from the less developed states of the Mediterranean, Eastern Europe and specific areas from outside (because of colonial links) to the major countries of Western Europe.<sup>20</sup> In the same period, some countries (for instance Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Spain) lost a “substantial number of their citizens emigrating for economic reasons overseas, as well as to other European countries.”<sup>21</sup> The main characteristic of this first wave of migration was a huge need for manpower: this was the key demand factor which saw migrants recruited to work in industry and other sectors where there was a shortage of indigenous workers. In particular, there were jobs which were undesirable by the native labor force, for instance in heavy industry, big factories and construction.

Although some scholars underline the costs related to this wave, specifically the circumstance that the abundant availability of foreign workers discouraged Western European industry from introducing capital-intensive production methods, most of them agree that the economic impact was beneficial because the continuous supply of foreign labor was determinant to the success of the advanced industrial European economies.

Another essential feature of this first wave is that it largely started and continued in an “apolitical context”.<sup>22</sup> Not only European public opinion was ignorant of the details and objectives of state immigration, but immigration policy was not an electoral issue and the result was a serious lack of public debate over the direction of that policy. Under those circumstances, central governments encouraged or tolerated the

immigration without first having a democratic discussion with their fellow citizens. Moreover, they did not take the necessary initiatives to facilitate the integration of immigrants, improve their life conditions and guarantee their security. A glaring and historical example is the terrible mining disaster that happened in Belgium in 1956 because of poor safety standards. In that circumstance, “262 miners were burned to death in an underground fire, more than half of them Italians.”<sup>23</sup>

There are several reasons why European policy-makers did not regulate the phenomenon by introducing suitable laws, and targeted interventions. Mainly, lack of foresight and strong protection of the internal labor market represent incontestable evidences. They also assumed that foreign workers would not settle permanently and would voluntarily return to their country of origin. But, in many cases the immigrants’ decisions were completely different and in several countries they penetrated nearly all sectors of the domestic economy, with the employment of foreigners often growing faster than that of employment of nationals in some sectors.<sup>24</sup> In addition to this, in spite of significant migrant outflows in the late 1970s, the number of foreigners in Western Europe, especially in Germany, “continued to increase as a result of family reunification, creating the conditions for a new wave.”<sup>25</sup> In retrospect, this politically naïve approach, often combined with a “defensive” attitude towards foreigners, not only did not meet the urgent and essential needs of the postwar generations of immigrants, who suffered a deep and irreversible social marginalization, but it also did not create the necessary social conditions for the future waves.

The second wave of postwar immigration also started immediately after the end of World War II and consisted of the family members of the original economic migrants,

who, attracted by the favorable circumstances available within the host countries (high standard of living, better quality of education, efficient social services), decided to join their relatives and settle permanently. This phase became more intense when Western European countries decided to restrict labor immigration because of the oil crisis in 1973. For instance, as a consequence of the French government's labor recruitment curtailment, approximately 75 percent of new foreigners who migrated to France between 1974 and 1978 were family members of previously settled foreign workers.<sup>26</sup> Worried about the negative developments that might result from this restrictive change in the immigration policy, thousands of foreigners reacted by settling more permanently in their host nations.<sup>27</sup> Confronted with this growing and relentless phenomenon, European governments reluctantly started tolerating more foreign citizens. Later, by facilitating the process of family reunification, they tried to anticipate the stabilization of the domestic immigrant population and reduce as much as possible social isolation, illegality, and deviancy among immigrants. The result was that large immigrant communities established a permanent presence within the major immigrant-receiving European societies, creating conditions to regenerate themselves over time.

The third wave of immigration which predominantly consists of legitimate and illegitimate refugees and asylum seekers and illegal alien workers unfolded from 1980s until the present. The main factors affecting this new phase were initially a lack of control along the European borders and afterwards the decision of Western countries to restrict legal immigration. The growing presence of illegal immigrants was accelerated by the initiatives of the immigrant-receiving states to regulate the difficult situation by making legal entry more difficult and selective. With many labor markets locked against

newcomers, aspiring immigrants, mainly from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, increasingly chose alternative and irregular ways to enter into the host nations, like France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and Portugal, where the demand for illegal workers was robust and the underground economy became more and more significant. Very often they tried to enter through the “back door” of Europe with the help of criminal networks. “By 1991, 14 percent of all foreign residents, or some 2.6 million persons, in Western Europe were believed to be irregular.”<sup>28</sup>

The severe rules and restrictions on legal immigration adopted by many EU Members also encouraged the explosion of asylum seekers and refugees. In fact, these new potential immigrants recognized that permanent immigrant status could be obtained more easily via the route of asylum than through traditional channels. During the 1980s, the number of people applying for asylum increased dramatically. In 1984 there were only 104,000 applications in Western Europe and the figure grew to 692,000 in 1992, and then declined during much of the 1990s.<sup>29</sup> European countries tried to discourage this worrisome phenomenon. Nevertheless, despite their efforts and even though 80 percent of requests were denied between 1983 and 1990, a large number of asylum seekers succeeded in residing in the host country “while their applications were pending and often even after they had been officially rejected.”<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, the postwar immigration successfully satisfied the demand for cheap, unskilled labor within the Western countries, producing positive economic effects on the booming economy, and serving the political interests of the immigrant-receiving nations. On the other hand, it posed, and still continues to pose, a political threat to the traditional prerogatives of European governments and a social and cultural threat to the

native populations, “who, despite their ethnic and religious diversity, reside in societies dominated by a single social model.”<sup>31</sup> The permanent and highly visible presence of millions of new ethnic and racial minorities within the European nations has challenged the state’s attempt to promote a sort of “monocultural” structure upon which the national identity has been built. Moreover, a growing population reduces natural resources, produces more density problems (Europe has already a high density, about 134 people per square mile compared to 76 in the U.S. and 73 in South America)<sup>32</sup>, while increasing pollution, traffic congestion, and sprawl.

Driven by such concerns and often unable to regulate the immigration process as well as to manage the domestic social and political fallout they precipitate, European governments sometimes preferred to present the mass immigrant settlement as a danger to public order, domestic and labor market stability, and cultural identity. In some circumstances, both central and local political representatives simply rode the wave of popular discontent and protest. In other cases, this attitude favored the surge of anti-immigrant movements and groups whose rhetoric can influence popular perception of threat and exercise political influence under very specific circumstances. Fortunately, the majority of these groups are on the fringe of societies and political parties, and most European governments are immune to their political pressures.<sup>33</sup>

### The Current Situation

Between the end of the last century and the beginning of the new one, the improving economic conditions within Europe, a more flexible labor market and some significant initiatives introduced by the EC in order to better regulate the immigration and facilitate the integration of foreign citizens, had made the Old Continent an even more attractive region for immigrants.

As reported above, on January 2009, almost 32 million foreign citizens lived in the EU27 Member States, alias 6.4 percent of the total EU27 population. Among these, 11.9 million were citizens of another EU27 Member State. The largest groups were from Romania (2.0 million or 6 percent of the total number of foreign citizens in the EU27), and Poland (1.5 million or 5 percent). The remaining 19.9 million were non-EU citizens, specifically from Asia (4.0 million), Africa (4.9 million), the American Continent (3.3 million), and other European countries (7.2 million). Among these foreigners, the largest groups were from Turkey (2.4 million or 8 percent of the total number of foreign citizens in the EU27), Morocco (1.8 million or 6 percent) and Albania (1.0 million or 3 percent).<sup>34</sup> In particular, while the flow from Asia and Eastern Europe seemed to slow down, “the number of African migrants attempting to enter Europe has increased during the past few years”, due to geographical proximity and colonial ties, but also to violence and poverty which are usually considered the most significant “push” factors in that Continent.<sup>35</sup>

“Push” factors constantly press people to leave their native countries because of difficult conditions of life (in particular, suppression of individual rights, violence, abject poverty, and lack of freedom). But, these impressive numbers show that also many “pull” factors continue to trigger mass immigration, drawing people to Europe to search for something safer and better. Even if the presence of immigrants is already important in terms of numbers, workers of different skill levels in general are still needed in Western European countries, and their demographic and economic contribution is not likely to decrease in the short-medium term. In fact, the demand for foreign workers has been and continues to be significant in advanced industrial economies because they



provide a flexible, inexpensive, and malleable workforce. Moreover, the mass immigration is boosting population growth, thus attenuating the negative effects of demographic aging and population decline.<sup>36</sup>

Despite this evidence, political decision makers, particularly at the national level, continued to demonstrate only limited ability to view immigration as a part of social and economic reality. This tendency has been accompanied by disagreement on the necessity of immigrants and the extent their integration should be facilitated, while other countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia have adopted more flexible and far-sighted immigration policies and enjoyed an immediate and positive payoff. A significant example of this endless indecision and lack of confidence towards immigration is the heated political debate began last August in Germany after the publication of a book by Bundesbank official Thilo Sarrazin in which he warned against the growing Islamization of his country.<sup>37</sup> Few years before, Friedrich Merz, the Christian Democrats' parliamentary leader, said that foreigners who want to come and work in Germany must adopt German "Leitkultur" (leading culture)<sup>38</sup>, provoking the firm reaction of the moderate Chancellor Angela Merkel, who said that "Leitkultur" was not in her policy paper.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the lack of confidence in the positive role immigrants could play, we can observe that many old and new fears and some stereotypes typically associated with immigration increase native European citizens' distrust and often discourage the necessary political initiatives which could enable legal immigrants to permanently settle and actively participate in the host society through equality of opportunity and absence of discrimination. An evident example could be considered the rising resentment against

Muslim immigrants who are increasingly being considered as Islamic fundamentalists and potential terrorists. This is especially true after the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 and in London in 2005, where young people from Eastern and Northern Africa with Islamist backgrounds were involved.<sup>40</sup> But, even before September 11, the situation was critical and the violent attack against labor migrants from Morocco in the Spanish region of Almeria on February 8, 2000 represents a striking consequence that can result from these fears and lack of integration.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, driven by the fear that Europe risks losing its religious and cultural identity and by the concerns of their citizens, who believe that foreign, unskilled workers may threaten their domestic economies and employment rates, several states introduced tighter immigration policies. These generally discourage newcomers to come and settle, and further alienate immigrant minorities living within the host countries. It is true that many European citizens, even within the most traditionally tolerant EU nations, express xenophobic feelings toward minorities, rooted in nationalist, economic, and cultural justifications.<sup>42</sup>

According to the nationalist approach, immigrant minorities, especially Muslims, are prone to isolate themselves because of different and incompatible cultural norms, particular religious practices, and linguistic barriers. In Europe, this phenomenon is more evident than in America, due to the massive presence of migrants coming from Islamic countries. In fact, the percentage of Muslim migration to the United States (about 2 million, 0,6 percent of the total population)<sup>43</sup> is far less than the percentage to Western Europe, where there are already about 20 million Muslims,<sup>44</sup> and a substantial number of native citizens argue that Islam cannot be reconciled with European values.<sup>45</sup>

“Many Europeans and Muslims in Europe remain convinced that their respective values are not only incompatible with each other but also that the other’s values directly challenge their own identity”.<sup>46</sup> Yet many reluctant European citizens argue that Muslim immigrants resist assimilation and often prefer to maintain their own Islamic identity. Even worse, polls conducted in Germany and France found that second and third generation Muslims are less integrated into host societies than their parents or grandparents were.<sup>47</sup>

The economic concern mainly comes from the risk of a growth in unemployment and an increase of the costs of state-provided social services. Supporters of restrictive immigration measures argue that high level of unemployment in some countries is only due to low salary, which does not attract skilled and well educated people. If the wages were higher, the rate of employment should increase. Regarding the welfare system, many European citizens stress the fact that in most Member States “social services are partly free for consumers, yet in reality, these services are paid for by the taxpayers. Cheap-wage immigrants may bring some benefits for entrepreneurs but at the same time they burden the budget”.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, cultural justifications bring out the real possibility that differences of habits, customs, languages, and religion may dilute the historical European national societies.<sup>49</sup> In this last case, the situation is more complex and difficult to define because the Old Continent is going through an identity crisis. The identity of European States is in fact not only obscured by supranational forces, primarily the EU and its political apparatus, but also “threatened” by the rise of internal regionalism, micro-nationalisms and separatist forces, and by a widespread “loss of national cultural and

traditions in favor of an undefined multiculturalism”.<sup>50</sup> “Europeans would like to exit from history, from la *grande histoire*, from the history that is written in letters of blood”, wrote the French political writer Raymond Aron as early as the 1970s.<sup>51</sup>

### The Evolution Of Immigration Policy In Europe

Over the last few years, several EU States have introduced integration programs for immigrants or announced structural and innovative plans and initiatives. In addition to this, immigration-related issues have risen to the top of the public policy agenda of EU Members. Nevertheless, we are far from marking a decisive turning point and national governments are still reluctant to plan and implement a more harmonized immigration policy. Therefore, to date, the most significant and promising impulses come only from the European institutions, even though much remains to be done and some weakness and paradoxes reduce the effectiveness of the current political initiatives. The most evident of these paradoxes is that EU nations are still so obsessed by the regulation of immigration flows and the task of controlling their external borders that they forget to consider that immigrants need full integration into society. A significant example is the creation in 2005 of the European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (FRONTEX), whose main mission consists in strengthening external border security by preventing irregular migrants from entering European countries.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, in all European countries we can observe a considerable gap between policy statements and commitments, on the one hand, and practice on the other.

From the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, immigration policies were exclusively designed by the Member countries. Then, national governments began to coordinate their efforts and EU institutions increasingly assumed the lead in fostering new efforts to

facilitate cooperation and share information among the Member States. Building upon the intergovernmental measures, the most significant agreements “that have been forged on immigration-related issues during the past two decades include the Schengen Agreements (1985, 1990)”,<sup>53</sup> which were primarily concerned with the rules governing the entry of non-EU nationals into the signatory countries;<sup>54</sup> the Dublin Convention (1990), whose main aim was to control the movement of asylum seekers and harmonize most asylum procedures within the territory of the Union;<sup>55</sup> the Maastricht Treaty (1992) that “effected a compromise between the principles of intergovernmentalism and supranationalism on matters of immigration;”<sup>56</sup> and the Amsterdam Treaty (1997), which discussed the changes concerning freedom of movement within the EU and established a common set of standards including controls at the Union’s external borders, visa regulation, asylum policy, immigration flows, and other policies linked to the free movement of persons.<sup>57</sup> Then, on the occasion of the European Council Summit in Tampere, Finland, in 1999, the EU set forth the elements for a comprehensive immigration policy that would address the phenomenon in all its main dimensions (integration of immigrants, legal and illegal immigration, cooperation with the countries of origin).

It is rather evident that, as the majority of immigrants come from Muslim countries, the events of September 11, 2001, marked a considerable turning point in how EU Member States deal with the immigration issue. External and internal controls have been strengthened and both policy-makers and public opinion started to see migration less as a useful phenomenon and more as a potential security threat. Consequently, more restrictive laws and rules have been introduced in order to regulate

asylum, visas, and external borders, and governments have begun to control illegal migration and human trafficking as well as to share information across borders.<sup>58</sup>

More recently, the focus seems to have returned to the economic considerations and the labor market. In fact, the Hague Program 2005-2010 recognized the important role played by migration in advancing economic development in the EU and asked the Commission to present a Policy Plan on Legal Migration able to define a roadmap and a set of actions and legislative initiatives for the coherent development of EU legal migration policy.<sup>59</sup> It suggests establishing EU rules on specific channels of legal migration (highly skilled migrants, seasonal workers, remunerated trainees) and a general directive on the rights of third country workers on the other. The proposal, regarding highly qualified workers, was adopted by the Council in May 2009. Moreover, the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, endorsed by the October 2008 European Council, expressed “the commitment of the European Union and its Member States to conduct a fair, effective and consistent policy for dealing with the challenges and opportunities which migration represents.”<sup>60</sup> Finally, the Stockholm Program, approved by the EC in December 2009, recognizes that “with an increased demand for labor, flexible immigration policies will make an important contribution to the Union's economic development and performance in the longer term.”<sup>61</sup>

In sum, looking back over the past decades, it is clear that migration climbed successively higher on the European agenda and both European citizens and policy-makers are more and more conscious that we need immigrants in order to secure our demographic and economic survival. There has certainly been some move forward in the development of a comprehensive, root causes approach within the European

Union's external relations. Progress has, however, been much slower than expected. Policy initiatives have to a large extent been event-driven and sensitive to national media and public opinion concerns regarding security issues. Consequently, more efforts have been made in facing near term issues (control of borders, illegal migration), than in drawing and implementing an effective integration policy for both newcomers and minorities already within Europe and on policies addressing the migration in cooperation with origin countries. In addition to this, only few European governments have introduced immigration policy that would specify levels of legal immigration, disregarding the European directives and maintaining strong national control over the policy process to the detriment of the European institutions' initiatives.

#### What To Do In The Future

In the last few years, whether Europeans like it or not, immigration to the Old Continent has increased so much that the EU has clearly overtaken the United States as the first destination in the world for immigrants. In the last two decades, 26 million migrants entered Europe, compared with 20 million in America.<sup>62</sup> In this framework, a growing number of Eastern European workers are helping Western European countries fill job vacancies and attenuate the shrinking and graying population phenomenon. However, neither the significant intra-EU migration nor the general number of newcomers reported so far are sufficient to meet all of the labor demand, sensibly reducing the job vacancy rate (percentage of posts that are vacant)<sup>63</sup> and, at the same time, to invert the demographic "negative momentum". Thus, the EU should further attract new migratory flows by looking at the positive role of immigration from third countries, mainly from North Africa and Western Asia, which can provide the industrialized European nations with abundant and valuable human resources.

European governments, which so far have been rather reluctant to translate this growing awareness into concrete actions, are asked more than ever to look at the immigration with more attention and interest and develop a forward-looking and harmonized migration policy, which should be responsive to the priorities and needs of Member States. Furthermore, as global migration is bringing people from diverse religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, an innovative and consistent integration policy is essential to facilitate the newcomers' settlement, guarantee social cohesion, and avoid ethnically or religious based violence. To achieve this goal and better manage the internal social and political fallout resulting from poor integration, it is crucial that the EU understand and address the needs of immigrants. Indeed, European governments should particularly focus on integration of immigrants into their societies, which may represent the most sensitive and, at the same time, the most decisive effort. But, regardless of the formula (multiculturalism or assimilation), to strongly favor integration of immigrants and improve the general situation, European institutions as well as national and local authorities must adopt more incisive initiatives and a holistic approach which takes into account not only the social and economic aspects of integration but also issues related to religious and cultural diversity, citizenship, and political rights. Only through an intense commitment by the host communities, a participative involvement of the public and an active participation of foreign citizens in all aspects of economic, political and social life, can the integration process be shared, effective and durable, and avoid cultural clashes.



According to the policy and directives introduced by the EC, among the initiatives that should be adopted by single countries for facilitating integration, we can consider the following essential areas:<sup>64</sup>

- integration into the labor market: build upon their previously acquired experience already obtained outside the EU with employers aware of diversity and its advantages and willing to eliminate any discriminatory practices;
- education and languages skills: recognition of their academic attainments and qualifications and improvement of the ability to speak and understand the language of the host country, through language training;
- housing problems: need of comprehensive urban and regional planning strategies in order to facilitate access and reduce marginalization. “Ethnic residential concentration or so-called ghettos tend to isolate communities and prevent their participation in the wider society;”<sup>65</sup>
- health and social services: need of easier access to services, which must take account of cultural barriers. “A number of issues need to be addressed including making available adequate information for migrant communities and providing additional training for the personnel responsible for delivering the services;”<sup>66</sup>
- social and cultural environment: more active participation in civil life and need of a more positive attitude in the public towards immigrants. In this field politicians and mass media can play a determinant role by emphasizing in public the value of the contribution immigrants make;
- nationality and civic citizenship: the long-term legally resident immigrants should be offered the opportunity to obtain the nationality of the Member State in which they

reside. In fact nationality is a means of facilitating integration and, at the same time, encourages a sense of belonging in national life.

At the same time, it is important not to forget the origin countries of immigrants. Building mutually beneficial relationships with them could be very useful not only to properly address the migration flows, but also to better monitor concerns and expectations of foreign workers. In the past, international cooperation has not always been constructive, but nowadays it is essential. In particular, due to the growing flows of African immigrants, Europe should mainly focus on the African Continent and, besides the economic support and military interventions to stabilize the most critical areas, Brussels should revive the political dialogue, as a starting point to build more confidence and stimulate constructive cooperation on demographic issues and migration flows.<sup>67</sup>

In perspective, Europe has not only the necessary experience and familiarity with this phenomenon, but also all the resources it needs to preserve the interests of the native European citizens, address the needs of immigrants, and harness the benefits that immigration can produce.

### Conclusion

As the above-mentioned social, demographic and economic factors are likely to sharpen in the short term, and several indicators already show the gravity of the current situation, it is crystal clear that Europe is at a crossroads. It is time to pass from words to action, because the longer European institutions delay in tackling the issue, the bigger the difficulties they will have to face. Europeans can yield to the anti-immigration groups' threats, and to their fears and doubts, and slam the doors of immigration. Or they can overcome domestic concerns, anxieties and prejudice and open the doors, which seems the most rational and desirable solution. In fact, while attracting and

accepting more immigrants might seem a hard choice today, EU cannot afford not to.<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, all the restrictive policies adopted in the past to reduce the phenomenon paradoxically resulted in increasing flows of illegal migrants and illicit traffic of human beings, making things worse.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, the European population is aging so fast that it would be irresponsible not to think about and prepare for the future. What is happening demographically today, unless unexpected and catastrophic events occur, will have serious consequences for the future. Europe urgently needs young people to increase birth rates or face the attendant challenges and the risk of an undesirable decline. At the same time, all the European countries will increasingly rely on foreigners to fill labor shortages and generate “the tax base upon which the provision of future social welfare benefits will rest”.<sup>70</sup> In fact, regardless of the initiative mentioned earlier, labor markets throughout the continent are coping with a deep shortage of skilled workers, considered essential to boost innovation, and unskilled workers to perform work for which few native citizens are available. “Even in times of economic weakness, many of these needs remain – particularly the need to attract and retain the most talented immigrants”.<sup>71</sup>

If the EU assumes the necessary responsibilities and is able to alter the current course, negatively marked by the lack of a strong European plan and by disconnected national initiatives, the whole European economy will be in condition to maintain its first-rate world position and its geopolitical influence in a global stage.

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<sup>2</sup> In October 2006, the Commission presented its views on the demographic challenges the EU faces and on opportunities for tackling them in the Communication “The demographic future of Europe —from challenge to opportunity”. The document expressed confidence in Europe’s ability to adapt to demographic change and notably population ageing, but also stressed the need to act in five key areas: better support for families, promoting employment, reforms to raise productivity and economic performance, immigration and integration of migrants, sustainable public finances. Commission of the European Communities, *Demography Report 2008: Meeting social needs in an Aging Society* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2008).

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

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<sup>58</sup> Marcella Parker, "New Generations of Europeans: Demography and Families in the enlarged European Union", *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, Autumn 2007, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_hb3248/is\\_200710/ai\\_n32250171/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb3248/is_200710/ai_n32250171/) (accessed November 24, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Five years after the European Council's meeting in Tampere, the European Council has adopted a new multi-annual program, known as the Hague Program. “The objective of the Hague program is to improve the common capability of the Union and its Member States to guarantee fundamental rights, minimum procedural safeguards and access to justice, to provide protection in accordance with the Geneva Convention on Refugees and other international treaties to persons in need, to regulate migration flows and to control the external borders of the Union, to fight organized cross-border crime and repress the threat of terrorism, to realize the potential of Europol and Eurojust, to carry further the mutual recognition of judicial decisions and certificates both in civil and in criminal matters, and to eliminate legal and judicial obstacles in litigation in civil and family matters with cross-border implications.”The Hague Program, Strengthening Freedom, Security and Justice in the European Union”, Presidency Conclusions – Brussels, 4/5 November 2004, 12, [http://www.europol.europa.eu/jit/hague\\_programme\\_en.pdf](http://www.europol.europa.eu/jit/hague_programme_en.pdf), (accessed November 24, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Council of European Union, “Presidency Conclusion”, Brussels, October 15/16, 2008, 8, [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/103441.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/103441.pdf), (accessed November 26, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> European Commission, *Summary of the impact assessment accompanying the Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of seasonal employment* (Brussels: European Commission, July 13, 2010), 14.

<sup>62</sup> Stefan Theil, “Europe’s big choice”, *Newsweek International*, February 19, 2010, <http://www.newsweek.com/2010/02/18/europe-s-big-choice.html> (accessed November 26, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> The job vacancy rate “is calculated as the proportion of the number of job vacancies relative to the total number of posts, where the latter is composed of the number of occupied posts plus the number of job vacancies. It is expressed as follows:  $JVR = \text{number of job vacancies} / (\text{number of occupied posts} + \text{number of job vacancies}) * 100$ ”. On the basis of



information available, the JVR in the EU was 1.9% in 2008. Eurostat European Commission, *Europe in figures. Eurostat Yearbook 2010*, 310-311.

<sup>64</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on immigration, integration and employment* (Brussels: European Commission, June 3, 2003).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>67</sup> Gebrewold, *Africa and Fortress Europe. Threats and Opportunities*, 175.

<sup>68</sup> Theil, "Europe's big choice", *Newsweek International*, February 19, 2010, (accessed January 22, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> Ariane Chebel d'Appollonia and Simon Reich, *Immigration, Integration, and Security. America and Europe in comparative perspective* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 2008), 336-337.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 330.

<sup>71</sup> "Improving EU and US Immigration Systems' Capacity for Responding to Global Challenges", 2010, linked from the *European University Institute Home Page* at "Research Themes," [http:// www.eui.eu/ Projects/TransatlanticProject/Home.aspx](http://www.eui.eu/Projects/TransatlanticProject/Home.aspx) (accessed December 1, 2010).

