Europe between the Stirrup and the Ground

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Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen.

May I begin by thanking you for this invitation to speak on a topic that is perhaps the single most important one in the politics of Western countries. Most people in the political and media elites don’t agree with that statement, but the voters seem to believe it across three continents. And though opinion surveys have their ups and downs on this topic as on others, mass immigration is never out of the minds of the electorate for long. Even elite opinion is reluctantly coming around to the view that immigration is a topic that has to be seriously addressed, if only to quieten voter anxiety. Yet such anxiety persists because the policies needed to soothe it, as distinguished from the political rhetoric intended to arouse it, are delivered very slowly, if at all. What is now frustrated anxiety is reflected in the number of best-selling books on the topic that have been published in recent years—by Christopher Caldwell, Douglas Murray, my National Review colleague Reihan Salaam, and by my colleague on this panel, Mark Krikorian, among others, none of them exhibiting the Panglossian optimism that used to characterize almost all conservative writing on immigration.

And since I’m addressing a Free Market Forum hosted by Hillsdale, a home to all strands of conservative opinion, I should say at once that migration is a topic on which free marketeers, classical liberals, and libertarians within the larger conservative family have been traditionally optimistic while traditionalists, national security hawks, and social fabric conservatives have been more skeptical. Those divisions still exist. My own position can be stated best by borrowing a distinction laid down by the founder of Christianity and applying it both to this topic and to wider economic questions “Remember that the market was made for Man, not Man for the market.”

Mass migration is about much more than the labour market, gross domestic product, getting and spending, or even the satisfaction of human wants conceived in economic terms. It has an impact on such different questions as our national security, social peace, freedom of speech, the rule of law, the survival of constitutional democracy, and the effective working of a free market economy. Those consequences are clearer in Europe than in the US, but they can be seen in embryo even in the United States. If many of these consequences are malign, as I shall suggest, however, why has immigration worked so well in the past?

So my point of departure must be to point out—as Mark pointed out in his book—that two things have changed: migration has changed and we have changed. An entirely different intellectual context has grown up around the immigration de­bate since the end of the Cold War. In effect, this new thinking transferred the obligation of change from immigrant to host nation.

The first eruption of such thinking was multiculturalism, which opposes the argument that immigrants should assimilate to the culture and practices of their new nation. Assimilation into a collective melting-pot is now depicted as oppressive. In a just and multicultural society, the feeling is, all ethnic groups should retain their distinctive cultural personalities. This way of thinking about immigration has now ex­tended further into law and constitutional philosophy, where it is unhappy about making any distinctions between citizens and non-citizen immigrants. Some years ago a prominent American exponent of international law (Louis Henkin) called for largely eliminating “the difference between a citizen and non-citizen permanent resident” in all US federal laws. These claims would have astonished international lawyers a generation ago. They would astonish the ordinary voters of most democracies today. Where do they come from? What social and economic developments lie behind them

Tthey reflect in part certain practical developments in the real world. I would point to four:

1. The vast surge in migratory flows that has taken place since the end of the Cold War. People tend to adapt their ideas to new realities, and in the last few years we have be­come accustomed to the “invasion” of the advanced world by poor people from the Third World seeking either to flee tyranny or to obtain prosperity. We have seen the organised smuggling of people from Turkey and Afghanistan into Western Europe — often for very large sums of money and often with deadly consequences. We have seen ships containing asylum seekers deliberately run aground off Vancouver, New Jer­sey, Nice and Italy’s Adriatic coast in order to take advan­tage of the laws and practices that in effect allow migrants to stay once they have succeeded in sneaking in under the barrier. All these persuade many people that there is no stopping such arrivals and we need to change our thinking to accept them.

2. Political structures and institutions now exist that en­courage asylum seeking, immigration and even illegal im­migration — sometimes against the wishes of voters and the laws of governments in the host nations. International con­ventions on refugees, the family reunification provisions of US immigration law, rules of bodies like the European Union and NAFTA that specify free movement of labour, networks of immigration lawyers and NGOs that interpret these rules in ways that favour immigrants — all of these provide incentives to immigrants to evade restrictions on entry and border controls.

3. These non-military invasions have brought so many people into societies like the USA, the UK, Germany, and Australia in so short a time that large ethnic enclaves have been created in these societies in places like Miami, Bradford, the suburbs of many French cities, and Sydney. In these enclaves the language of the immigrants is spoken and their cultural and religious values are domi­nant. They therefore act to retard the assimilation of new­comers to the host society; to act as magnets for further immigrants; and to sharpen the sense of ethnic difference throughout the society. And as xxxx has revealed reluctantly, they reduce trust in society, not merely between ethnic groups but even between members of the same group. Think of that as making Tocquevillian societies impossible.

4. And, finally, cheap air travel, the internet, and other improvements in mean that immigrants no longer feel the necessity to cut their ties with their original homeland. They do not say goodbye to it forever. They go back twice yearly. They stay in touch with it in telephone talks with friends and by reading its newspapers on the internet. They marry wives and husbands from there, sometimes in arranged marriages, and sometimes in coerced marriages—the UK police have a department officers in Pakistan whose job is to prevent young British citizens of Pakistani descent from being forced to marriage older spouses against their will. As a result of these changes, many migrants never experi­ence the psychological immersion into the cultural life of the home society that used to be the first step towards ac­quiring a new national identity fifty years ago.

Taken together, these developments promote constant mobility in which people can move back and forth between homeland and adopted country, or live in an enclave of their new country that mimics the cultural conditions of home. They therefore give plausibility to the idea that political institutions within and between societies should reflect this dilution of boundaries and the possibility of mul­tiple political identities. They seem to justify mass immigration.

But how have they worked out in practice, especially in Europe? In the first sentence of his book, The Strange Death of Europe, Douglas Murray asserts bluntly: “Europe is committing suicide.” How do he and others—Caldwell, Ed West—reach this conclusion?

Murray traces the stages in the postwar migration to Europe by which we went from a largely mono-cultural Europe to one in which large non-Western immigrant communities live alongside their native-born neighbors. The raw figures of this demographic change are remarkable. London was an overwhelmingly “white British” city in 1955; by 2011, white British people accounted for only 45 per cent of its population. This massive demographic change began very modestly with guest workers coming over to fill labor shortages in German car factories or in Britain’s NHS on a temporary basis. But they never went home and were soon joined by others, family and friends, who now had points of contact when they arrived in a strange German or British city. That’s a key point: a little immigration leads to more immigration and that leads naturally to mass immigration—unless it’s halted by deliberate government action.

Legal attempts to regulate it *were* made by governments, but they were half-hearted and a relentless rise in immigration continued until in 1997 in the UK the Blair government adopted a policy of positively encouraging migration—to boost economic growth, official documents argued (to swamp the Tories electorally, admitted a Blair policy-maker, Andrew Neather.)

That decision accelerated the transformation of Britain into a multi-cultural society with a long list of problems: racial and religious tensions; terrorist murders, bombings, and beheadings; physical attacks on gays and “immodest women” in parts of East London; the extraordinary epidemic of the rape and sexual grooming of under-age girls by Pakistani Muslim gangs in Rotherham and in two dozen other provincial cities; hostile demonstrations against British soldiers returning from Afghanistan; an estimated (by the British MedicalAssociation) 74,000 cases of female genital mutilation by 2006 and since almost no legal action taken has been taken against it, many more since then; forced marriages, sometimes of under-age children, and honor killings of rebellious young Muslim women; an increasing segregation of young people as schools become majority migrant and the migrant children invited home their native-born friends less frequently; and the final consequence of mass migration, as Murray drily remarks, echoing the enthusiasm of pro-migration polemics, we got more good ethnic restaurants.

Now, by listing together all these poor consequences of mass migration in Britain, I have painted a bleak picture. It is also true that most migrants and in particular most Muslims in Britain live lives of work and respectability alongside their neighbours. *The problem, however, is not one of single crimes and outrages. It is that migration can create a climate in which some otherwise law-abiding people don’t see these things as crimes.* Opinion polls show that substantial minorities of migrants, in particular of Muslims, think female genital mutilation justified. Still larger numbers have firmly illiberal attitudes to anti-Semitism, homosexuality, blasphemy, and apostasy. Societies then become divided on the basic attitudes that formerly were the very things that united them.

Other European countries—in particular Germany, France, and Sweden—are now experiencing much the same problems with migrant community attitudes to what used to be considered the customs of the country. Their problems have become more severe and more widespread since Chancellor Merkel “welcomed” a million Syrian refugees into Europe and accepted many hundreds of thousands of them on the basis of, at the very least, suspect refugee credentials.

How could this happen? Murray’s answer is that it happened because we told ourselves lies to justify each stage of the process:

1. *There aren’t many migrants and it’s no big deal*. That argument showed an unawareness of the demographic truth that large percentage increases insmall numbers add up to a lot quickly. (Think compound interest.) And as we shall see, numbers count in the migration debate.
2. *They contribute more to the economy and the welfare state than they receive.* In fact immigration does not raise a nation’s per capita income and it imposes heavy net fiscal costs on national and local treasuries.
3. *They will help preserve the welfare state and pay for our old age.* in fact, as shall see, immigrants provide little or no alleviation of social security costs.
4. *They make our dull societies more diverse and thus more exciting.* But many people like home to be familiar and comfortable, and cultural change can be destructive as well as vibrant as the London stabbings and other terrorist atrocities demonstrate.
5. *They’ll soon assimilate to our liberal values*. Really? How soon? All of them? At the same rate? In France and Britain, some inthe second and third-generations in the migrant communities often have more hostile attitudes to the nations in which they were born because they lack the gratitude of the first generations for the chance of a better life.

One key point that emerges from Murray, Caldwell*, et al.* is that in all these questions numbers are of the essence. If a minority amounts to one or two per cent of the population, it realizes (without thinking much about it) that it can’t demand the wholesale reconstruction of society to reflect its own cultural values. Over time it will likely reach an easy accommodation with its neighbors.

Once migrants reach a certain percentage of society, however, they cease to think in terms of assimilating to the rules and standards of their hosts and instead to demand that society accommodates to them. What percentage? Some statisticians have argued that the figure is as low as five per cent which, if so, would mean that France, Germany, and Britain long ago exceeded that number—and can long forward to a future in which the laws and customs of the country become matters of contestation between the native-born and migrant communities. America still has the ability to implement such policies. Is is too late for Europe to do so with hope of success? Murray thinks so.

So let’s look at these things more closely. Why has Europe gone down the road of mass migration despite the fact that at any time most of its peoples and most of their voters have been opposed to it? Here is a brief and partial list of the arguments promoting and validating this course — together with reflections on whether they are valid or not.

*Argument One:* Immigration is essentially inevitable or unstoppable. If you build it — a prosperous economy, that is — they will come. Resistance is useless. The immigrants will circumvent any border restrictions you erect and any internal controls you construct. But, like most appeals to inevitability, this argument is an attempt to cow opponents into defeatism rather than to persuade them — and it is therefore open to the suspicion that there are no better arguments to deploy.

What the argument omits is that people will not bother circumventing your restrictions if they cannot get jobs afterwards and if there is a strong chance that they will be deported when caught. Neither applies in the USA or in EUrope. If illegal migrants are unfortunate enough to be caught, they are only deported if they have been guilty of an unrelated criminal offence (and often, not even then). So they reason, accurately enough, that once they get in, they will be secure from deportation, and that if they try enough times, they will eventually cross the border. So they naturally try to cross the border.

Porous borders are not the cause of uncontrolled immi­gration — they are its result. If this sounds like a paradox, remember Chesterton’s definition: a paradox is a truth standing on its head to attract attention.

*Argument Two:* Immigration is economically necessary — for future prosperity in general and to counterbalance the effects of population decline in particular. How does this argument stand up to scrutiny? Not very well. Almost all claims about migration are contested, but three are robust: immigration does not raise per capita income for a nation and thus does not benefit the native born; second, it reduces the incomes and opportunities for the low-paid; third, it redistributes income perversely from capital to labor. Proof? Japan had the highest rate of economic growth in the world for almost forty years during which it had zero immigration. Bertrand Russell said that the existence of a thing is absolute proof of its possibility. Japan exists: therefore economic growth without immigration is possible. It is not, of course, certain. You also have to pursue sensible economic policies.

As for the economic and fiscal problems that supposedly follow from population decline, these are just not amenable to being solved by higher immigration. Using immigration to bail out social security programs is an official bureaucratic version of a Ponzi scheme. Cambridge economist Robert Rowthorn compares the idea of using im­migration as a way of bailing out social security to the esca­lating demand for virgins from the Countess Elizabeth Bathory, who needed a regular supply to retain her own youth. She eventually ran out of virgins. So I tip my hat to Professor Rowthorn — and I will add only a few footnotes to his argument.

In the first place, the age profile of immigrants is generally younger than the existing US or European populations — but not dramatically or sufficiently so. As a result, immigra­tion improves the ratio of providers to dependants in enti­tlement programs only slightly. If what you need is enough immigration to cancel out the effects of an ageing popula­tion altogether, it would have to rise to extraordinary levels. As David Coleman, Reader in Demography at Oxford University, noted about the UN report for Europe, “To keep the support ratio constant will require 13 million im­migrants a year (almost half the population of Canada) or 701 million people by 2050, by which time 75 per cent of the European Union (EU) population would be of post-1995 immigrant descent.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

The UN calls such a policy “replacement” migration. And it speaks truer than it knows. For this would amount to the replacement of historic nations such as France and Ger­many with entirely different cultural and ethnic populations in the same territory. That is what worries the Hungarians. A nation of ten million people cannot look on the non-military invasion of one or two million Middle Easterners with quite the same complacency as a nation of 330 million people. The Hungarians reasonably fear that mass migration would change the national and religious character of their nation. And they don’t want that.

Finally, in addition to being impracticable, a policy of replace­ment migration is also unnecessary. Official policies much less drastic than that can help nations adjust to declines in population and population growth — the latter of which has, after all, now been going on in Europe for about a century. In the last hundred years the European support ratio has gone from nine workers to one dependant to a fig­ure of three to one. Yet this has been accompanied by rising prosperity. Today, if all the European nations had the same work patterns as Denmark, Coleman points out, that would effectively add 30 million people to the EU’s workforce. And a pro-natalist policy could raise the US and European birth rates substantially by changing work, tax and welfare arrangements to enable women to have more than one child without making an undue sacrifice in their career choices and work lives. These would seem more reasonable solu­tions, even if they offer no guarantee of success, than re­placing several European nations.

*Argument Three:* That immigration will bring much-needed diversity to our otherwise culturally narrow and sterile societies. Julian Simon, until his death the leading US advocate of open borders, used to say that he wanted more immigrants because he liked the exotic variety of life in a multi-ethnic society. As it happens, I entirely share Julian’s taste here — that is one reason I chose to live in New York city for twelve years. But it is not instantly obvious that government should impose Julian’s and my aesthetic tastes on the rest of society through changes in immigration policy.

And moral diversity creates real dilemmas that cannot be wished away. Since a community is a group of people held together by a moral consensus, there will always be some legal and social limit to the expression of diversity in a living political community. In a large democratic multi-faith soci­ety that moral consensus will be an elastic one — but it can still be stretched to breaking point if it has to accommodate warring religions and incompatible moral philosophies. Events in Holland a decade ago drive this lesson home. Pim Fortuyn emerged as a political celebrity there because he criticised immigrant Muslim communities in Holland for their oppo­sition to the liberal standards of Dutch society on such mat­ters as homosexuality and women’s rights. (He was himself . . . ) He also advo­cated a halt to immigration because he feared that it was fuelling an upsurge of anti-liberal bigotry in Dutch society. Other political leaders had remained silent out of multicul­turalism: they were both expressing tolerance for Islam’s distinctive values and rejecting a nativist intolerance of “the Other” symbolised for them by immigration restrictions. Without apparently realising it, however, they were also tolerating Muslim “intolerance” of Dutch liberalism — an intolerance they would never have accepted from Christians or Orthodox Jews — and ignoring the need that even (or especially) a liberal society has for prudence and self-interest. These are contradictions within liberal multiculturalism that liberals in effect refuse to address.

The fact is that immigration and diversity change the community and thus alter and perhaps undermine the stan­dards that define it.Aa Nor­wegian sociologist said recently, in response to a rash of rapes by young Muslim men, that Norwegian women should recognise that they now live in a multicultural soci­ety and dress more modestly. This remark is an expression of diversity quite as much as Julian Simon’s street fiesta. And as between rape and sterility, sterility does not seem the worst of sins — especially when the rape is real and sterility metaphorical.

*Argument Four:* Immigration is a right — maybe a human right, maybe a civil right, but in any event a right.

Stated so baldly, this sounds implausible. Does any European really think that foreigners have a right to come to France, Germany, and Austria? But three influential groups think just that — the Catho­lic Church, political libertarians, and advanced progressive. And though they are unlikely to succeed in persuading others to adopt their opinion in full measure, it subtly pushes the debate towards acceptance of more moderate versions of the right to immi­gration.

The Catholic Church asserts a right of immigration in order for people to better themselves economically or escape unjust regimes. In principle this right is qualified by the right of nations to defend their special characteristics of culture and political community. In recent years, however, most church statements on immigration have simply ig­nored national rights and proceeded as if the right to immi­grate were an unquestionable and unqualified good binding on all. And the present Pope issued calls unqualified calls for mass immigration into Europe even before Angela Merkel—he stood in a ship inviting North African migrants into Italy. On the othe hand, following the lead of secular intellectuals, the Church usually refrains from applying this right in cases where Americans or Europeans corporations might be seeking, say, to enter a small primitive tribal culture in the Borneo jungle.

Libertarians have even smaller logical obstacles than Catholics in arguing that immigration is a right, since they either deny or downplay the notion of political community as such. As long as the rights of property holders are pro­tected, they are happy to admit immigrants into the coun­try. What this argument ignores, of course, is that immi­grants are arriving not at a place but into a political com­munity with all manner of rights. And immigrants entering a modern democracy such as Seden or Germany instantly acquire the right to welfare — which, among other things, means that they have a claim on the property and income of existing citizens.

The libertarian argument for immigration is then modi­fied into “Immigration yes, welfare no.” That was for some years the mantra of the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page. It even persuaded the Republican Congress to reduce and remove various welfare benefits from legal immigrants in the mid-1990s. But that change ignored a point in fact if not in libertarian theory: immigrants strengthen those groups favouring high welfare benefits. And if their arguments for welfare are disregarded because they have no votes, it gives them a not very admirable incentive for acquiring citizen­ship and the vote as quickly as possible. That is exactly what happened, with the result that the welfare benefits removed by the Congress wer restored quite quickly. In practice the immigration right is an­other example of a libertarian right that, if taken seriously, would gradually destroy anything approaching a libertarian society.

Progressives, of course, would have no difficulty with such a result. In fact their support for mass migration arises in part from the fact that the proletariat ceased to be a revolutionary class opposed to capitalism some time back and they need some new revolutionaries to fill the gap.

If a human right to immigrate is something that we pos­sess by virtue of being born, then plainly it is a right so heavily qualified by other rights and other interests that we can conclude no such right exists. But there are various legal rights relating to migration that have been created by legis­lative intent, or by judicial review, or by the unintended consequences of both. These include the right of asylum for political refugees under international conventions and the virtual civil right of immigration enjoyed by the relatives of recent immigrants to the USA and certain other countries under the “family reunification” provision of immigration law. Some of these rights were consciously granted by leg­islatures. But others have been created by accident or by the courts. And when we take into account these unintended impacts, we must recognise that in some instances something like a legal right to immigrate has been created. This right could be removed or reduced by legislative action. But the combination of activist immigration lawyers, NGOs agitat­ing for the extension of such rights, and courts seeking to extend their political authority suggests that it would be hard to make such repeals stick either legally or politically. And the difficulty of repeal is made thornier still by the fact that Catholic and libertarian notions of immigration as a human right act as a bulwark for even the shakiest structure of legal immigration right.

*Argument Five:* Continuing large-scale immigration is the vital building block of a new international order. And it is much more significant that the first four, because it comes with its own powerful political coalition attached.

On this view, we are moving forward from the West­phalian system of sovereign states to a new post-national order of world governance. In that order nation-states will lose power both upwards and downwards. Upwards they will lose it to the new trans-national and supra-national structures — such as the European Union, institutions es­tablished under the Kyoto Treaty or the Law of the Sea Treaty, the United Nations, various international conven­tions, the International Criminal Court, and so on. These will not merely regulate relations between states, as the old international law did; they will also directly intervene in the lives of individuals, corporations and NGOs. For instance, as Professor Peter Spiro argues, human rights conventions will now protect individuals against discrimination, replac­ing the need for states to offer diplomatic protection to them and therefore devaluing states in their citizens’ eyes. And NGOs will be on hand to assist these processes.

There is, of course, a glaring problem with all these arguments. It is not at all clear where democracy fits into any of these proposed new structures. . If people dif­fer seriously on moral fundamentals, they cannot live along­side each other in the same democracy, for they are likely to place a greater stress on gaining their political aims than on accepting the rules of the game and their own occasional defeat. Nor do the propo­nents of this post-democratic outlook seem especially interested in finding out how to preserve democratic freedoms. In all the post-national verbiage, no one has proposed a democratic substitute for the nation-state. All the proposed alternatives are essentially bureaucratic instruments and make power remote and less accountable to the people. Brexit and populism are democratic responses to that

But that does not quite end the matter. For some of the practical realities mentioned earlier — the surge in interna­tional migration, the cheap air travel that allows the immi­grant to remain closely in touch with his homeland, the cultural interpenetration between different countries — have not disappeared. They will continue to shape law and politics. But they are increasingly supplemented by other technical developments and market pressures which may reduce and soften the mass migration of recent years.

The first is the spread of automation to more and more tasks that will reduce the demand for labor in advanced countries and thus reduce also the demand for most forms of migration. Importing people to do jobs that will shortly disappear will seem increasingly unattractive to both capital and labor—and increasingly dangerous to government and social order.

Second, the development of technologies that replace trade by foreign direct investment will create jobs in third markets (where also labor is cheap) and discourage bringing workers (and their social costs) to Europe and America.

Third is the related development of technologies that overcome what Geof­frey Blainey has called “the tyranny of distance.” Trade, investment, capital flows, political dialogue, and cultural exchanges have all been revolutionised by it. Its most dramatic effect in this contest has been to reduce the importance of geography and to raise the importance of culture. A few examples make the point:

If the cost of a telephone call is the criterion, then London is closer to Australia and the USA than to Russia or the Middle East. Why? People in Britain are far more likely to place calls regularly to Australia than to Moscow, whether to talk to relatives or for commercial reasons. Immigration patterns too reflect cultural links rather than administrative or political rights. Such examples might be multiplied almost indefinitely — all of them testifying to the likelihood of growing links between different nations within the same cultural tradition as the information revolution deepens and spreads. Nor can one forecast the final political destination of this evolution­ary process.

For such ideas are hardly original in response to such cir­cumstances. Over a hundred years ago, the distinguished historian Goldwin Smith, living in the liberal civilisation of the Canadian branch of an empire on which the sun never set, argued for what he called “the moral federation” of the English-speaking world. Under such a regime immigrants from one English-speaking country would enjoy limited political rights (and some preferential treatment such as an immigra­tion preference) in the rest of the Anglosphere on a recipro­cal basis. They pose no problems of assimilation, being largely assimilated before they arrive. And, for that reason, they are unlikely to demand the reshaping of the host country’s customs and institutions.

It is a vision of immigration without tears.

Today it would be available not only to the Anglosphere but also to the Sinosphere, the Hispanosphere, the Lusosphere, and the Francosphere—which the French with their admirable linguistic patriotism insist on calling the *francophonie.* Given the changes above, it might come back into fashion.

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)