

The Desired and Actual Effects of Social and Family Policies on CEE Economies



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MACIEJ
CHMIELEWSKI

Among the many social challenges Europe is currently facing, the issue of demography seems to be the most populist topic. Populism at the level of both political demagoguery and performance is often undertaken by decision-making bodies. Why are demographics so important? The reason is quite simple: the functioning of all public services depends on it; hence completely different infrastructures are needed for a hundred people and 500 million people. Meanwhile, the fundamental demands of young people and the elderly differ.

It is, therefore, vital to understand that the surroundings (from roads, means of transport, schools to hospitals, and the structure of their branches) must be adapted to the characteristics of the population and the resulting needs. In European states, these universal problems are accompanied by a social security system based on financing the current commitments of the elderly by younger people who are active in the labor market. In return, they receive the promise of similar funding by future generations in their declining years. The system works as long as the proportion of generations is kept within safe limits.

THE WESTERN WORLD

Demographic changes in the so-called European 'Western World' are a fact, both in terms of population size and structure.¹ The latter issue seems to be more important from a long-term perspective. In the period after World War II, the population of Europe grew dynamically until approximately the 1990s, it began to slow down towards the end of the century. In recent years, however, the trend has reversed [See: Table 1 and Figure 1].

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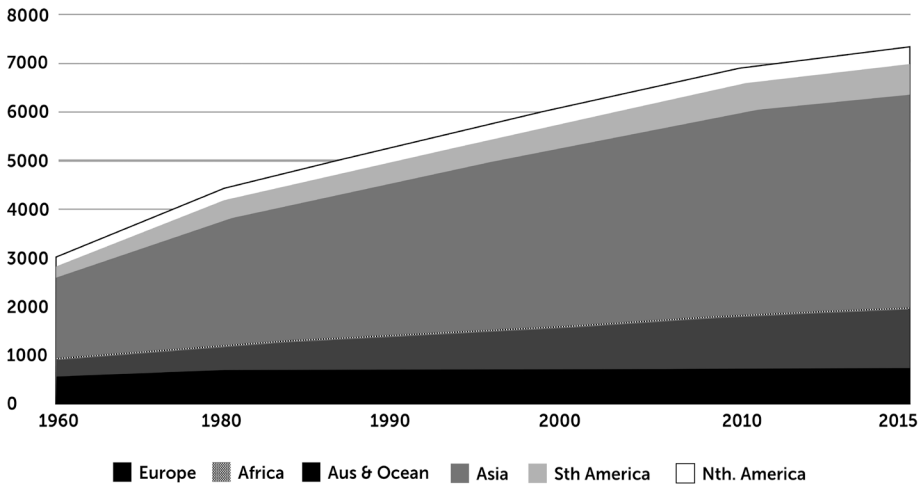
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Among individual countries, an identical pattern may be observed, with a noticeable delay in the countries of the eastern part of the European Union. Migration events have a clear impact on the population and social structure. For example, the migration of citizens of the eastern EU to the west of the community after the EU 'Big Bang' enlargement in 2004, and a decade later migration from the countries of Eastern Europe and Western Asia – which somehow complements the earlier outflow from the countries of the eastern EU. At the same time, there is a noticeable decrease in the fertility rate and, as a natural consequence, the aging of the population.

ASIA AND AFRICA

The thought of a high population was natural for most Chinese people – yet Mao threatened the world that he would reverse the Copernican breakthrough, pushing all Chinese citizens toward a certain direction. Obvious nonsense, but it shows the Chinese awareness of the scale of its greatness. The fact is that in the middle of the 20th

¹ Rajendra K. Sharma, *Demography and Population Problems*, Atlantic Publishers & Dist, 2004, p 48.

Figure 1: World population in the 21st century [in million people]Source: PAN²Table 1: World population in the 21st century [in million people]

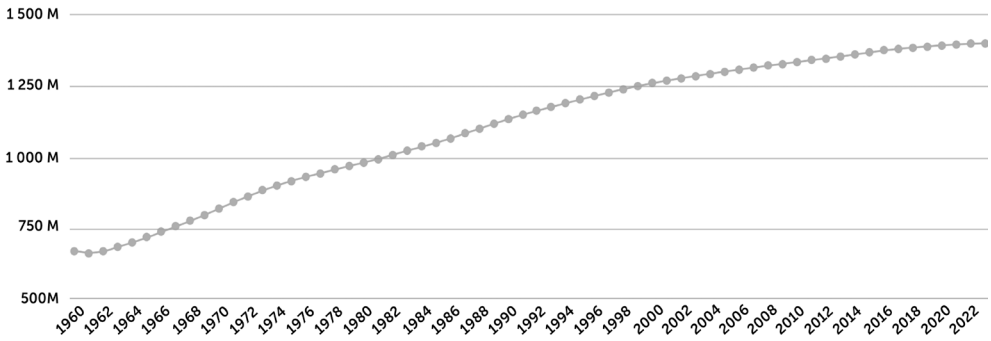
	1960	1980	1990	2000	2010	2015	2015 to	
							1960	1990
World	3,038	4,440	5,310	6,127	6,930	7,349	4,311	2,039
Europe	608	694	721	726	735	738	130	17
Asia	1,708	2,626	3,202	3,714	4,170	4,393	2,685	1,191
Africa	287	478	632	814	1,044	1,186	899	555
North America	204	254	281	314	344	358	154	77
South America	220	365	447	527	600	634	414	187
Australia and Oceania	16	23	27	31	36	39	23	12

Source: PAN³

² Stanczak, J. et. al. (2016) "Potencjał ludnościowy Unii Europejskiej", [in]: *Ekonomiczna pozycja Unii Europejskiej*. Available [online]: https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5468/29/1/1/potencjal_ludnosciowy_ue.pdf [in Polish]

³ Ibid.

Figure 2: The Population of China between 1960 and 2023



Source: <https://www.populationof.net/pl/china/>

century, the Chinese population began to grow rapidly [See: Figure 2] to the extent that the authorities were concerned about economic development. To limit it, having more than one child was subject to penalties and fees, while the desire to have male offspring was dominant in Chinese culture⁴.

As a result, there have been cases of female infants being killed, often to no avail⁵. After 38 years of the law being in force, not only was the natural increase itself limited, but it also led to an excess of men as compared to women, hence limiting the number of births for the next few generations. As a consequence, Chinese society is aging at an unprecedented rate; it is estimated that by 2050 a third of the population will be older than 60, and the country's total population will fall by half over the 21st century.

The entirety of the phenomenon is excellent proof of how tragic the consequences for society can be when there's an attempt

to manage and rebuild it into one's ideology. Wherever central control of both the population and the economy is undertaken, it always ends in disaster⁶.

INDIA IS OVERTAKING CHINA

While China, which is developing economically at an impressive pace, expects significant demographic changes, a different situation is observed in India – a country of unimaginable poverty and extremes. Based on official data on the population of both countries, in 2023 India will become the most populous country in the world – compared to 1960, it is a more than threefold increase, while the population of China has slightly more than doubled. In 1960, China's GDP per capita was USD 90, now it is over USD12,000. At the same time, in India, it increased from USD 82 to less than USD 2,200. Of course, this comparison is distorted by the government's control of the population in China, but it clearly shows that poverty is not an opponent of high fertility, nor is wealth its guarantor.

⁴ Jihan, M. (2013) "China's Barbaric One-Child Policy", [in]: *The Guardian*. Available [online]: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/06/chinas-barbaric-one-child-policy>

⁵ Xinran (2012) *Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother: Stories of Loss and Love*, New York: Scribner.

⁶ Jihan, M. (2013) "China's Barbaric One-Child Policy", [in]: *The Guardian*. Available [online]: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/may/06/chinas-barbaric-one-child-policy>

AFRICA

Although the population of Africa as a whole is not equal to India alone, its level of poverty, economic development, and extremes are comparable. The population of Africa has increased from about 0.3 billion people in 1960 to 1.2 billion today, which is very similar to the change in India. In most African countries, GDP per capita does not exceed several hundred US dollars, and the highest birth rate is observed in Central African countries, which are also the poorest on the continent. Stricken with poverty, famine, and war, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia have achieved a 5-6-fold increase in population over the past 60 years.

EFFECTS OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES ON THE ECONOMY

The major reason for concern in terms of the demographic changes appeared in the countries of Western European countries a decade ago, when the shortage of workers on the labor market began to be felt, with a simultaneous increase in the number of elderly citizens. As a result, more people were drawing funds from the system than paying into it.

In principle, regardless of the country in my view, the European model of social security is a socialist menace that haunts its societies from adulthood to death. Of course, there are countries where it works better and those where it works worse, but the idea is the same – the state deprives the citizens of freedom to order them how to live. In addition to all ideological discussions, this model is burdened with two major flaws – susceptibility to current policy decisions and demographic fluctuations in the market.

A century of unrestrained expansion of state social security structures led to a situation where, in the face of demographic changes, this system does not adapt to reality, but is rather adapting reality to its limitations. As a personal example, at age 31 in Poland, I pay

contributions or pension taxes, and I am aware that the current political decision-makers probably will not last until my retirement – for purely natural reasons. Meanwhile, their decisions are motivated not by concern for the shape of the system in 30-40 years, but rather by the upcoming election result.

These decisions are also a response to the needs of elderly citizens who expect the state to fulfill the promise given many years ago when they were still working and providing for pensioners at that time. At the level of transparent justice, these expectations are hardly surprising, and, at the same time, no one can break the vicious circle of turning the system on its head.

Given the obvious change in the demographic environment, counteracting unfavorable demographic changes was adopted as a dogma of social policy. Successive governments in individual countries are racing for ideas to encourage citizens to have as many children as possible. In all this madness of socialist populism, no one is asking the fundamental question: What is the role of the state in all of this? By what right does the government – the property and not the owner of its citizens – mean to model the way of life of people and the shape of society in any way at all?

As taxpayers, we pay salaries to civil servants and politicians – we do not pay them to tell us how to live, only to adapt the surrounding reality to demands of the population, which, in turn, are not easily and clearly defined and politics influence the desires of citizens. Meanwhile, in light of Europe's shrinking and aging population, instead of adapting to these phenomena, most European governments are still wasting time and a lot of money⁷.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Government_expenditure_on_social_protection#:~:text=In%20the%20EU%20in%202020,relates%20mainly%20to%20pension%20payments



WHEREVER CENTRAL CON- TROL OF BOTH THE POPULATION AND THE ECONO- MY IS UNDERTAK- EN, IT ALWAYS ENDS IN DISASTER

THE ATTITUDE OF GOVERNMENTS TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

In theory, the role of the government should be to adapt the public sphere of life to the changing world. In practice, we often observe falsification of reality or attempts to adapt the world to the existing political need. The Polish governing party Law and Justice has a cash distributing system in place for the disadvantaged members of society, but increases taxes for the general public. Hence, the easiest way to referee would be to quote Winston Churchill's famous statement, "*Socialism is the philosophy of failure.*" Unfortunately, what sounds funny in an interview is not as funny in reality, especially when the silence of serious people creates room for populists.

It is easy to have simple solutions and quick answers. It is nice to hear that every problem can be solved, especially in Europe, which has been consumed by the menace of socialism for decades. The state will solve every problem, it will take care of everyone – all solutions must be nice, pleasant, and good. To the eyes and ears.

Most people prefer candy to bitter medicine, and there is no serious voice of reason across political divisions. When the decision was made in Poland to raise the retirement age by only two years back in 2014, the largest opposition party promised to return to the old level. This National Socialist party then won the elections with its populism and has been destroying Poland for seven years. Although we live longer and longer, people are still stuck at the retirement age invented almost 100 years ago. What is worse, this age is shorter for women who live longer on average⁸. Consequences? Lower and lower pensions, higher contributions, and the inevitable problem with financing the system in all of Europe.

Unfortunately, the populism described above is used by both the left and the right. While the ideology is different, the result in both cases is a waste of money, essentially paying your constituents for their votes. An element of right-wing populism is the cult of the family as the basic social unit – the family must be protected, and the family must be helped; man exists only to start a family, and to have children, there is no room for a different model. The reality is that, regardless of the opinions expressed and pious wishes, the aforementioned model seems to become civilizationally obsolete.

Having a family long ago became one of, not the main aspects of life. Marriages are being contracted at an increasingly later age, and still, almost half of them end in divorce⁹. Unmarried couples with children are a normal part of the social landscape, as is remarriage after divorce or single parenting. The fact is that the current lifestyle of Europeans is dif-

⁸ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263736/life-expectancy-of-women-in-the-united-states/#:~:text=The%20life%20expectancy%20of%20women,remained%20at%20around%2080.2%20years>

⁹ <https://www.wf-lawyers.com/divorce-statistics-and-facts/>

ferent from that of 50 or 100 years ago, and what used to concern a small percentage of citizens today is an inseparable part of it. In this context, it is difficult to find other than conservative ideology.

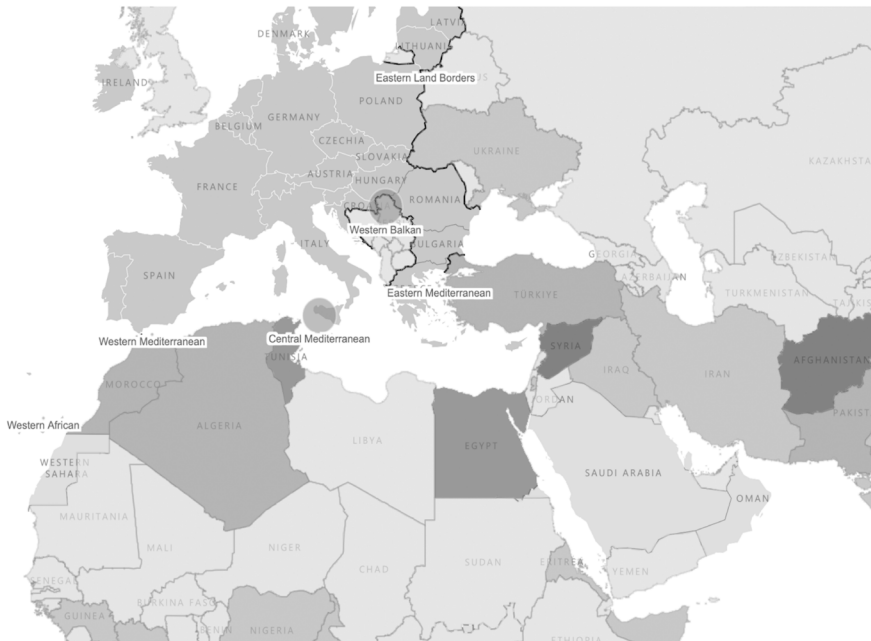
The populism of politicians has many faces, but, in my view, they have two common denominators. The first is to explain all actions with its ideology – the left distributes prosperity to everyone, fights inequalities, and spreads the right to a dignified life. How can you not support such noble causes? The right wing defends us against the invasion of evil lurking in our culture, fights against sexual and religious degeneration, and cherishes racial purity. The second denominator is a complete lack of common sense and a sober assessment of reality.

IMMIGRATION

Most European countries offer their inhabitants extensive social security systems. This should be understood not only as social programs in the strict sense, but also as free educational and medical benefits, state pensions, or legal systems that make it difficult to dismiss an employee or evict an illegal tenant from an apartment. In essence, this system boils down to the idea that hard-working citizens are to support themselves and those who do not want to or are unable to work.

For obvious reasons, this system requires an appropriate ratio of the working to the non-working. When the proportion becomes unfavorable for the system, the first potentially attractive reaction for the economy is to invite immigrants to the country. By choosing

Figure 3: Migratory directions



Source: <https://frontex.europa.eu/we-know/migratory-map/>



SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS IN INDIVIDUAL COUNTRIES ARE RACING FOR IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE CITIZENS TO HAVE AS MANY CHILDREN AS POSSIBLE

professions with a market shortage, one can balance the market quickly and cheaply. In theory, this is an easy and safe solution. However, in practice, it can be different.

Most European countries are more or less national, relatively ethnically homogeneous, with a specific identity for their societies. The introduction of a large number of different people into such a community will cause social turmoil to a degree proportional to the number and degree of the cultural diversity of the immigrants¹⁰ [See: Figure 3]. This seems obvious, but in most European countries, no serious attempt to reform the system has been made – in France, Belgium, or the United Kingdom, the market has been opened to former colonies. People brought up in Arab and Hindu cultures were brought in on a massive scale.

Cultural differences and integration difficulties appeared immediately – immigrants were isolated from the social mainstream, and they could only perform the lowest-paid jobs. On the one hand, they were hindered by social integration, on the other hand, it is difficult to say whether they were interested in this integration themselves or not. In districts called immigrant ghettos, crime flourishes to this day at a level incomparable to the rest of the country, on the occasion of sports events there are serious riots or acts of terrorism carried out by people most often born and raised in Europe.

Apart from the social impact, the economic benefit is also debatable. From today's perspective, it can be seen that the countries with the highest level of social protection are the most attractive in the eyes of African immigrants. As a result, instead of working and creating the product of the economy, immigrants are an additional burden on the system. At the same time, within the framework of political correctness, there are no broader debates on limiting social support or deporting problematic immigrants in the systemic sense. At the same time, the problems created by culturally different immigration are breeding grounds for extreme nationalist movements.

This is not to say that we should be opponents of immigration – it is a very profitable means of filling the gap in the labor market. Nevertheless, it is difficult to agree to uncontrolled immigration and immigration other than that which is worthwhile for the host country. Yes, it is selfishness, but romanticism cannot influence the decisions made. The heart never has the right to win over the mind, and this mind commands to act selfishly. One cannot accept the lowering of our standard of living, the violation of public safety, or ordinary social turmoil resulting from the large cultural differences between immigrants and the host country. Of course, there are exceptions,

¹⁰ Kunz, P.R. et al. (1968) "Immigrants and Socialisation: A New Look", [in]: *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 16(3). Available [online]: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1968.tb01303.x?journalCode=sora>

such as refugees, but this term is misused in the context of Arab immigration.

Firstly, there are very few refugees fleeing persecution in this mass of people, and secondly, most of them stop being refugees in the safe countries through which they travel to Europe. Fleeing from regions distant from Europe, they pass through countries which are close to their culture and safe, where they could settle – they choose Europe for purely economic reasons. Let us remember that the salaries of European politicians and officials are paid by European taxpayers. In their decisions, they cannot be guided by anyone's interest other than the taxpayers who finance the contents of the pots for them.

It is not my intention to reproduce unacceptable racist slogans in this article. However, political correctness cannot replace reason and a sober judgment of the situation and should not distort reality. The effects of multiculturalism leftist demagoguery about 'love for everyone' and the reconstruction of national societies into multicultural ones can be seen today in the countries of southern Europe – most affected by immigration from Arab countries¹¹. Social tensions, racism, discrimination, or a dramatic increase in crime. Reality can be easily distorted – one can see the effects of this distortion – in France, nationalist Marine Le Pen receives over 40% of the votes in the presidential election, and the new Prime Minister of Italy is her Italian colleague Giorgia Meloni.

Among left-wing activists or politicians like Angela Merkel or Nicolas Sarkozy, there is of course no civil courage to apologize to Europeans for letting in millions of illegal immigrants from Africa. None of the border guards will even think about giving up their salaries



AN ELEMENT OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM IS THE CULT OF THE FAMILY AS THE BASIC SOCIAL UNIT

for the time when, instead of defending the borders, illegal immigrants were smuggled to Europe on board the ships of these services, fishing out the pontoons when they barely left the shores of Africa¹².

The history of Europe and the effects of racial tensions should teach us how to prevent phenomena that, at a certain stage, can no longer be controlled. From today's perspective, this comparison seems downright ridiculous, but every European knows the word 'Holocaust'. The enormity of this crime obliges us to preserve it in the memory of future generations – the memory of both the victims and its causes – so that a similar crime will never happen again. Preventing a similar tragedy in the future requires not only a reminder of its scale and cruelty, but also an emotionless sociological analysis of the social movements that led to it. In direct terms, it is of course the Nazis who incited German society by blaming the Jews for all the problems of the world at that time.

¹¹ https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/library-document/muslims-germany_en#:~:text=Roughly%20four%20million%20Muslims%20live,second%20most%20followers%20in%20Germany

¹² <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/african-migrants-rudder-ship-rescued-spanish-coastguard-11-day-voyage-rcna59196>

But did Anti-Semitism start at the beginning of the 20th century? No, its history spans several hundred years everywhere in Europe. The Holocaust was the bloody culmination of centuries of conflict between the ethnically dominant population and the Jewish minority. Throughout Europe, it was preceded, with greater or lesser intensity, by centuries of Anti-Semitism and pogroms against the Jewish population. Depending on the period and region, the persecution of Jews gained the approval of a large part of European societies.

By imposing the German death machine on the map of Europe, we will see concentration of extermination camps in Poland. This organization is purely logistical, and its causes go back several hundred years. It was in Poland at that time where the largest number of Jews in Europe lived – from the Middle Ages they settled on the Vistula River, aware that it was the only country that guaranteed them freedom and tolerance.

Where does the memory of the Holocaust come from in the commentary on immigration? The Nazis did not start with the Holocaust, they ended by it. It began almost two decades earlier with Anti-Semitic rhetoric, setting some citizens on others, hooligan attacks, restrictions on civil rights, stigmatization, labeling, resettlement. The Holocaust came when the appropriate social attitudes towards it were developed. The shameful truth is that in most cases it took place with, at the very least, the tacit approval of European societies.

The described events began only 100 years ago – today we can see the renaissance of National Socialism on the streets of Europe more and more often. Contempt for immigration, nationalist marches, racism, and phobias of anything different. All evil is to blame for aliens, implicitly immigrants with a different skin color. Horrible? Yes, but these regrettable slogans have always been present in every society, to a marginal extent. The fact that today

they come out of the margins, gaining support not from a percentage, but from a dozen or more percent of the society, should make us think not only about how to fight them, but what happened that more and more people are beginning to agree with them.

Preventing such phenomena is not only the fight against scandalous demands, but also a reasonable immigration policy that will not create a favorable ground for such xenophobic demands. Unfortunately, the current migration policy of European governments towards Africa and the Middle East looks as if someone wanted to set Europe on fire on purpose.

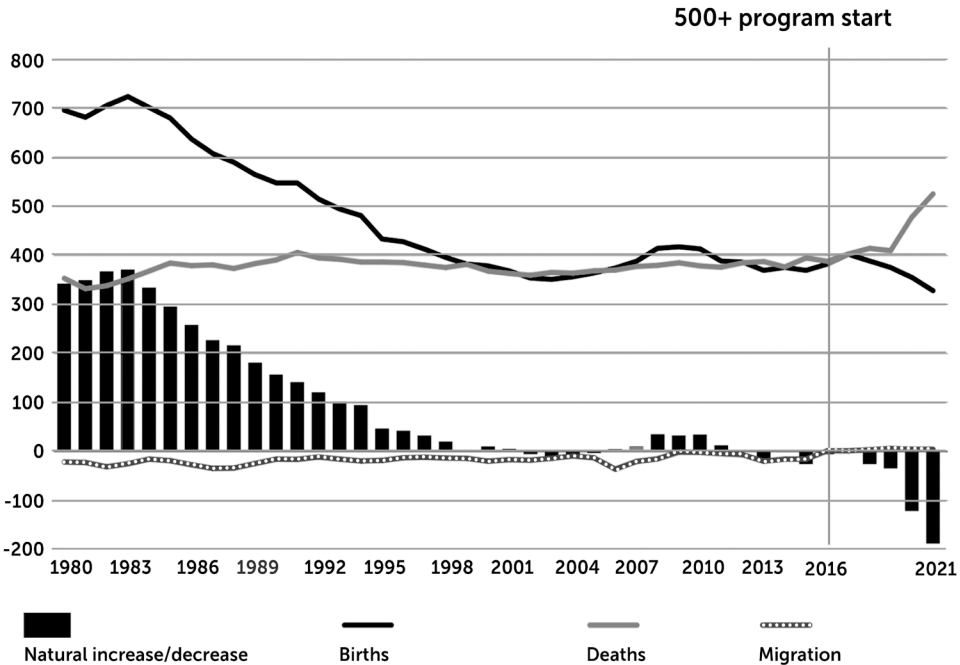
THE BIGGEST WASTE OF MONEY IN WORLD HISTORY

Apart from (and sometimes slightly in opposition to) immigration, a part of the political scene put forward a thesis about the economic cause of the low fertility rate of citizens. Solution? Let us pay for a child – that is what various programs seemingly pro-procreation come down to. In all EU countries, there are lower or higher cash benefits for parents with children¹³. From one-off birth grants to tax credits, to monthly allowances.

Of course, it would be naive to say that the real purpose of all these programs is to translate into procreation. One does not need to do any research to know that no one will decide to have a child because of the possibility of receiving a few hundred euros at its birth from the government. Similarly, no one will be motivated by such a relatively low regular benefit. Even by slightly increasing the amount, the opponents of the excessive childcare benefits are only able to persuade people from the margins of society, for whom this benefit will often be the only source of income.

¹³ https://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/work/unemployment-and-benefits/family-benefits/index_en.htm

Figure 4: Poland's natural population change



Source: Statistics Poland (GUS)

A separate question is whether we want such people to raise the next generation of citizens of our countries. Meanwhile, only in Poland, about 8% of the annual state budget is allocated to the 500+ program. Poland's expenditure for 2022 is PLN 41 billion for the 500+ program, while the state allocated PLN 28 billion for science and higher education, PLN 15 billion for road construction, and PLN 134 billion for health care. What effects on the development of the state would be the redirection of the 41 billion from the spirits industry and the import of Chinese junk for the development of science, infrastructure, or health care?

We can only guess. And this is only Poland – where in the world would Europe be without this wasting of money? There is no doubt, however, that the impact of this program on the fertility rate of Poles is negligible – if there was any, it was only in the first year of its operation and it resulted in the acceleration of births, not their growth. Those who would have decided to have a child did it earlier, after a while everything returned to normal¹⁵.

So that the carrot does not lack a stick, the right joins the left and also shares its financial ideas. The right-wing respects money, and

¹⁴ Statistics Poland (GUS) (2022) *Demographic Situation in Poland up to 2021*. Available [online]: https://stat.gov.pl/files/gfx/portalinformacyjny/pl/defaultaktualnosci/5468/40/2/1/sytuacja_demograficzna_polski_do_2021_r_w_formacie_pdf.pdf

¹⁵ Tyrata, M. (2020) „Wpływ populizmu na funkcjonowanie demokracji w Polsce na przykładzie partii PiS w latach 2015–2018”, [in:] *Polski system ochrony praw człowieka w dobie kryzysu demokracji liberalnej*, (eds.) J. Jaskiernia and K. Spryszak, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek. [in Polish]



MOST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES OFFER THEIR INHABITANTS EXTENSIVE SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEMS

usually respects the most sacred of human rights, which is the right to property. Unfortunately, they forget that the right to freedom is nothing more than a specific form of property right. The right likes values, after all, a citizen must know how to live. A man to have a wife and a woman a husband. And if they do, they must have a child. They won't? Then let them pay a tax! Taxes for childless bachelors have not disappeared from Europe – true, they do not exist directly. But what is the difference between the tax for not having children and the tax credit for having so? The result is the same – you do not have a child? Pay!

Ensuring the availability of crèches or even evening care, especially on weekends, is something the state could do which I believe would eliminate most of the economic brakes on pregnancy planning. Meanwhile, the actions taken took on a quasi-religious dimension to a thesis that is not disputed. The thesis is put forward by political decision-makers aged 40-60, for whom planning a child is a memory of youth, and for whom this problem no longer applies. A thesis that is completely detached from the needs of young people and the implementation of which has no chance of success nowadays.

The omission of the aspect of the comfort of life and the understanding of the use of life other than in previous generations

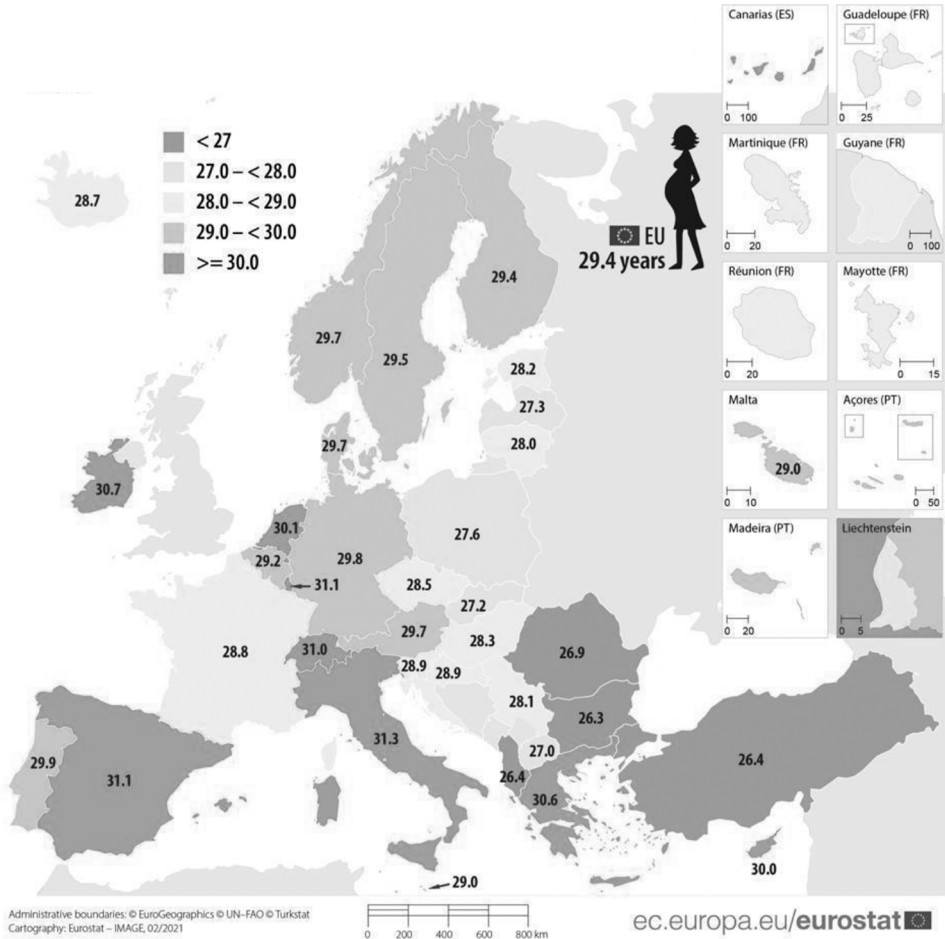
is reflected in other social policies implemented by governments at various levels. The state as a system, from the guardian of the common sphere of life, consistently becomes an attacker attacking subsequent spheres of citizens' lives. Under the laudable pretext of concern for ecology, further restrictions on transport are introduced. In the city, people will ban cars, and to ensure you are not driving long distances, electronic cars will be introduced that will not go further than the suburbs. Air travel is undesirable too, which leaves only trains, which are always late. Transport in Europe goes back to the early 20th century.

It is important to note that leftist extremists who are fighting motorists are also consequentially fighting parents of small children, who depend on car travel. Traveling even short distances with a small child, needing to pack everything from a stroller to a change of clothes, is hard enough as it is, let alone going away for several days using public transport, having to transfer, change platforms, wait for delayed trains all while looking out for the needs of the child(ren). It is paradoxical that leftists who claim to want to aid parents and want the state to make life easier for all, also condemn the very thing (automobiles) that made life with children so much easier.

The same paradox is present in the right wing thinking as well. Claiming that the most important thing is family and ensuring a healthy labor market while banning abortion, therefore forcing many young women not to pursue a career, while kicking out immigrants who could substitute, and even taxing the childless, on the basis of a Christian-conservative ideology.

Sometimes it is hard not to get the impression that Lenin and Kim Il Sung are laughing from beyond the grave. Not only is Europe implementing their ideas, but also to the joy of the crowd, which, like a frog, enjoys being

Figure 5: Mean age of women at birth of first child (2019)



Source: Eurostat

unaware of its cooking. The beautiful idea of a united Europe, one of the greatest civilizational achievements of our continent, is being destroyed by bureaucrats interested only in extending their power and depriving people of their humanity.

Instead of a global pattern of unification and freedom, we get a monstrosity regulating the curvature of a banana, types of light bulbs, smartphone plugs, or how to smoke sausage. We receive totalitarian dictates of how to

move, systems of alleged safety in cars, and finally, we are taxed for what we have produced – to keep millions of freeloaders on benefits and clerical jobs.

CULTURAL SHIFTS

Is there any basis for the thesis about the economic reasons for the low fertility rate of young Europeans¹⁶? On a personal note, the

¹⁶ <https://4liberty.eu/polish-governments-demographic-strategy-2040-will-not-help-with-demographic-crisis/>



ESCAPING THE PAINFUL TRUTH INTO POPULISM WILL DO NO GOOD

author of this article lives in a big Polish city, is 31 years old, has a university degree, and more than a good economic situation – he has everything that socialists believe should bring him a bunch of children. Meanwhile, there is none.

What is more, his attitude is that he wants to have children, but someday, in a few years, certainly not today. My attitude to the subject would not matter if it was not for the fact that I am a typical representative of my generation's mentality – instead of diapering a child, I prefer to enjoy life and youth. I would rather go on a vacation than a nursery interview. This is our right and we use it.

Meanwhile, successive governments in Europe, instead of ensuring the development of our future, prefer to waste the money we have earned on further support programs for those who do not want or who, at best, do not need this support. Of course, it is not that economic factors have no influence.

We live at a certain level of development, we have completely different expectations towards life than the inhabitants of Central African countries, and we also have different obligations. The lack of life stability may discourage you from having children when you must think about providing your child with a roof over their head or babysitting for the time of work. Not everyone has the comfort of entrusting their children to their grand-

parents or another family – either due to the distance from home or the time availability of these people – who are still active in life and professionally.

Current social trends go against biology. While the best female reproductive age is 18-25, the average age at which women in Europe get pregnant for the first time is increasingly delayed, reaching 30 years [See: Figure 5]. Observing this on the map of Europe coincides with the general demographic trends, which are somewhat delayed in the countries of the Eastern European Union.

The fact is that lifestyle and expectations are changing. For example, traveling in the 21st century is not only easy, but also an obvious part of young people's lives. Comparing the expectations of successive generations among generations X and Y, one can see a noticeably different approach to family relations than in previous generations – there is no social pressure or other expectations to start a family in their twenties. Representatives of these generations also show a higher tendency to migrate, they do not become attached to one place. People are also living longer, and the relative age of youth, maturity, and motherhood is shifting in time. Today's 50-year-old is not the same 50-year-old one's grandfather was.

Lifestyle changes affect not only young people themselves, but also older generations and intergenerational cooperation. Today's grandparents are working people, they do not participate in raising children to the extent that took place 1-2 generations earlier. In a dynamic life focused on fulfilling dreams, there might not be room for a child.

One can deny this phenomenon or try to prevent its effects. Actions taken in Europe are aimed at reversing the trend and, *de facto*, changing the lifestyle of young people. In the current study, we determine the trend of

population development, but it is difficult to take for granted a purely mathematical calculation based on regression lines. Why? Apart from extreme phenomena, trends, fashions, and lifestyles change. Population trend studies performed 60 years ago produced different results than current studies. Thus, it is difficult to assume that the tendency and lifestyle of people in 50 years, also in the context of having children, will be the same as today. In a dynamic life focused on fulfilling dreams, there is simply no room for a child.

Regardless of the naivety behind the claim that a small monthly cash benefit will encourage a large number of people to give up their dreams, ethical and ideological questions arise.

1. The first concerns the role of the state and the permissibility of the government to influence people's way of life.

I would ask a fundamental question here – like a clerk – someone living only because I pay taxes – in general, how dare someone like that tell me how I should live. The role of the government is to adapt the public sphere to the existing reality, and any attempt to create this reality should be treated as a serious crime.

2. The second question concerns the ethics of spending billions on programs with no guarantee of success.

If nothing changes, there is no doubt that the population will get older and smaller. As a result, the current social system is unsustainable – fewer and fewer people will be of working age. At the same time, we live longer and longer, medicine allows us to enjoy health and strength for longer. Either the trend or the system we live in must change. Money spent on trying to reverse the trend would allow for the necessary changes in the system – raising the retirement age, and gradual reconstruction of the infrastructure.

Hence, among the decision-makers and leaders of public opinion, an almost identical narrative about the need to counteract the inevitable changes in the population is dominant. It is very nice to say, but why are we lying to ourselves? Why is the drive to protect the social base of state systems so strong as to displace reason? The old saying about socialism is that it ends when the money runs out. Money will inevitably run out as demographics change.

With the end of money, we will find ourselves in a different society – different in age, but also in needs. An older society means different needs, different infrastructure, and different services. Such prosaic things as fewer playgrounds and more benches also mean fewer schools and more hospitals, fewer employees, and more benefits and pensions. There are also other diseases, different drug production, or other transport needs. When building large cities, one should bear in mind that today young people with children have to get to school from a young housing estate – in a few dozen years the same people will have to be transported to the hospital. People who can use public transport and run around the floors of subway stations today will need a lift to the entrance of the building tomorrow.

However, these aspects are not just hard infrastructure. A hospital or a school is not only a building that can be built in a few years – it is also staff that needs to be provided and for whom work needs to be provided. Educating thousands of teachers today with the prospect of their functioning in the labor market for the next 30 years is, firstly, a waste of money, and secondly, cheating these people. We educate them today, knowing that many of them will not get a job in the profession – they will simply not be needed.

At the same time, when the demand for education decreases, the demand for medical services will increase – we must work today to increase the number of nurses and doctors. These are decisions for decades, which will not be made up for in a few years by building a building.

KEEP THE WOLF (POPULISTS) AWAY FROM THE DOOR

Escaping the painful truth into populism will do no good. One can naively believe that a miracle will happen and suddenly more children will appear. We can bring millions of immigrants to Europe. Apart from all other aspects, this solution is short-term – we have no guarantee that the problem of low fertility will not affect immigrants in 1-2 generations, when they will already be native citizens of the countries that welcomed their parents or grandparents. At best, we are postponing the problem without getting any closer to solving it.

The actions undertaken today in Central-Eastern Europe are not new solutions. In the same (or a very similar) form, they have been functioning for years in Western countries. Their disadvantages, advantages and, above all, effects have been examined – we know that they do not work, or at least do not bring effects in the form of reversing demographic trends¹⁷. So why do we reinvent the wheel instead of learning from the mistakes of others?

The only solution that resolves anything is to openly debate the coming future and prepare for it. Prevention is always cheaper than cure, and to prevent social events 20-30 years from now, we need to start preparing today. Already today we need to forecast the nec-

essary quantities of relevant professions and openly communicate what we expect to potential students. Already today we must talk honestly about pensions – it is impossible to work shorter hours, draw longer pensions, and have a high one. The politician who promises this is simply lying.

It is impossible to shorten working time believing that it will be made up for by efficiency or automation. The mythical automation of everything may one day come, maybe someday people will not have to work, robots will do everything for us. However, so far, there is no indication that this will happen in our lifetime. In addition, each industrial revolution in the past eliminated some jobs, but at the same time created other, better ones. Why should it be any different now?

It is also impossible to function on credit indefinitely, maintaining that the money will be found somewhere. The lack of fair debate and the populist promises of both socialists and the right wing are leading to an inevitable catastrophe, the greatest consequences of which will be suffered by the coming generations rather, all generations following, with each one having it worse off than the last if the trend continues.

¹⁷ Tyrata, M. (2020) „Wpływ populizmu na funkcjonowanie demokracji w Polsce na przykładzie partii PiS w latach 2015–2018”, [in]: *Polski system ochrony praw człowieka w dobie kryzysu demokracji liberalnej*, (eds.) J. Jaskiernia and K. Spryszak, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek. [in Polish]



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MACIEJ
CHMIELEWSKI

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Manager specializing in commercial and business transformations for the most recognizable brands on the Western market