The Stranger at the Gate: Demographic Decline, the Politics of Projection, and the Case for a Uniform European Route to Belonging

Orhun Bergel (Aaron Bergel), BA, LLB, MSc, LLM

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION PURPOSES ONLY

Abstract

Europe is ageing into a fiscal and economic crisis of the first order, and at the very moment it most needs newcomers it has made the newcomer its enemy. This article joins two literatures that are usually kept apart: the hard demographic and fiscal statistics of a continent whose fertility has fallen to a record 1.34 and whose old-age dependency ratio is set to climb past fifty per cent, and the political philosophy and depth psychology that explain why publics turn on the very people who could rescue them. Drawing on Camus, Kafka, Jung and Freud, and on five centuries of political thought from Machiavelli and Hobbes to Arendt, Schmitt, Popper, Habermas and Bauman, it argues that the European turn to the radical right has converted immigration from the engine of post-war recovery into a scapegoat — a projection of the continent's own anxieties about decline. It marshals the evidence that immigrants are, on the whole, net fiscal contributors who smooth the decline of the working-age population and lower the debt-to-GDP ratio; it contrasts Germany's wager on the refugees of 2015 with the United Kingdom's post-Brexit experiment in subtraction; and it exposes the Kafkaesque patchwork of twenty-seven national immigration regimes, the broken promises of the golden-visa schemes, and the repeated failure to realise the EU Blue Card and now EU Inc. It closes with a concrete proposal: a single, uniform European route to residence and an expedited, certain path to citizenship, on the conviction that a continent which has made a boogeyman of the stranger has mistaken its cure for its disease.

Keywords: European Union; immigration; demography; ageing; pensions; golden visa; EU Blue Card; citizenship; political philosophy; populism

I. Introduction: The Cure Mistaken for the Disease

There is an old cruelty in the human story whereby a people, frightened of its own decline, fixes upon a stranger as the cause of it. The stranger has not caused the decline; very often the stranger is the only thing standing between the people and a faster decline. But the fear is real, and fear seeks a face. Europe in the third decade of the twenty-first century has found that face in the immigrant, and in doing so has performed one of the more remarkable feats of collective self-harm in its recent history: at the precise moment when its demographic arithmetic has turned against it, when its workforce has begun to shrink and its pension promises have begun to outrun the people who must pay for them, it has resolved to keep out, expel, and demonise the newcomers who are, on the cold evidence, its most plausible remedy.[1]

This article is about that contradiction, and about why it has proved so politically durable. It is written in the conviction that the contradiction cannot be understood by economics alone, because it is not, at bottom, an economic mistake. The statistics are not in serious doubt, and they will be set out at length in the pages that follow: a total fertility rate that has fallen to its lowest level ever recorded; an old-age dependency ratio on course to double within the lifetimes of people now living; a debt burden in the southern Member States that is among the heaviest in the developed world; pension systems whose much-advertised "sustainability" turns out, on inspection, to rest on quietly making future pensioners poorer; and a body of careful, repeated empirical work showing that immigrants, taken together, pay in more than they take out and slow the very fiscal deterioration that the populist right blames them for. If the question were merely one of arithmetic, the answer would have been adopted long ago. That it has not been adopted, that the politics run hard in the opposite direction, tells us that something other than arithmetic is at work.

What is at work, this article contends, is a politics of projection. The continent's anxieties about its own ageing, its lost dynamism, its diminished place in a world it once dominated, are too painful to be owned directly, and so they are displaced outward onto a figure who can be made to carry them — the migrant, the asylum-seeker, the "foreign national criminal" of the recent intergovernmental letters. This is the mechanism that Carl Jung called the projection of the Shadow and that Sigmund Freud, in a phrase that has never been more apt, called the narcissism of minor differences.[2] It is the mechanism that Albert Camus dramatised in *La Peste*, where a town visited by plague reaches first for denial and then for someone to blame, and in *L'Étranger*, whose nameless victim is killed precisely because he is the Other and therefore, in some sense, no one at all.[3] And it is the mechanism that Carl Schmitt, the most dangerous and most clarifying of twentieth-century political theorists, made the very definition of the political: the distinction between friend and enemy, the drawing of a line between *us* and *them*, which a community in crisis will draw ever more sharply the more frightened it becomes.[4]

The argument proceeds in five movements. The first (Parts II–III) is diagnostic: it traces how immigration was reconceived, between the post-war decades and the present, from the engine of European recovery into the enemy of European identity, and it charts the political turn — the elections of 2024 and 2025, the parties now in government, the letters and laws — that has institutionalised the reconception. The second movement (Parts IV–VI) is demographic and fiscal: it goes country by

[1] Mario Draghi, *The Future of European Competitiveness* (European Commission, September 2024) Part A, 11–17, describing the demographic reversal as an "existential challenge" and noting that by 2040 the EU workforce is projected to shrink by close to two million workers each year.

[2] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) ch V; and *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), on the libidinal economy of group cohesion and the externalisation of aggression onto out-groups. The phrase "the narcissism of minor differences" (*der Narzissmus der kleinen Differenzen*) recurs across both texts.

[3] Albert Camus, *La Peste* (Gallimard 1947); *L'Étranger* (Gallimard 1942). The motif of the Other as the bearer of a community's disowned fears runs through both.

[4] Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (1932, tr George Schwab, University of Chicago Press 1996) 26–37, defining the political by the friend–enemy (*Freund–Feind*) distinction. Schmitt is invoked here as diagnostician, not as authority; his own politics were monstrous.

country through the ageing of the continent, the pension obligations that ageing entails, and the consequences for growth, innovation and the public finances, drawing on the most recent figures from Eurostat, the European Commission's 2024 Ageing Report, the European Central Bank and the Draghi report. The third movement (Parts VII–IX) is the empirical heart of the case for immigration: the evidence that migrants are net contributors and that higher immigration lowers rather than raises the debt-to-GDP ratio, illustrated by two natural experiments running in opposite directions — Germany's reception of more than a million refugees from 2015, and the United Kingdom's deliberate post-Brexit reduction of inflows. The fourth movement (Parts X–XII) is institutional and Kafkaesque: it examines the patchwork of twenty-seven national regimes, the labyrinth of permits and renewals and the two-year wait for the papers that confer certainty, the broken promises of the golden-visa schemes, and the repeated stymieing of the EU's own harmonising instruments, the Blue Card and now EU Inc. The fifth and final movement (Parts XIII–XV) is constructive: it proposes a single, uniform European route to residence with an expedited and certain path to citizenship, answers the obvious objections, and closes with a reflection, by way of Camus and Karl Popper, on the difference between a politics of fear and a politics of measure.

A word on method and on honesty. This is a work of argument, and it takes a side; but it tries throughout to take the strongest version of the opposing case and to report the evidence as it is, including where the evidence complicates the argument. The fiscal contribution of immigration is real but it is not unlimited, and it depends heavily on labour-market integration; the golden-visa schemes were in several respects bad policy that deserved to be reformed; the housing pressures that drove their abolition were genuine; and the demographic projections, like all projections, carry wide margins of uncertainty. None of this is concealed. The claim is not that immigration is a panacea, but that a continent which has made a boogeyman of the stranger has mistaken its cure for its disease, and that the institutional architecture through which Europe admits and integrates newcomers is, at present, almost perfectly designed to repel the very people it most needs.

II. From Engine to Enemy: The Inversion of the Post-War Consensus

A. What the post-war decades knew

For roughly three decades after 1945, the western European economies grew at rates that have never been matched since, and they did so in part on the backs of people who came from somewhere else. The *Wirtschaftswunder* in West Germany drew in *Gastarbeiter* from Italy, Greece, Turkey and Yugoslavia; France recruited from the Maghreb and from its former colonies; Britain looked to the Caribbean and to South Asia. The labour was needed because the continent was rebuilding and because its own demographic base, scarred by war, could not supply the hands. The arrangement was often exploitative and almost always premised on the fiction that the workers would one day go home; many did not, and the societies that had imported labour discovered, to their frequent discomfort, that they had imported people. But the underlying economic logic was never seriously contested at the time: a growing economy needs growing inputs of labour, and where the domestic supply falls short, it must be found abroad. This was not a controversial proposition. It was, more or less, the conventional wisdom of the age, and it had a long pedigree in economic thought, reaching back to Adam Smith's account of the division of labour and the extent of the market, and to the elementary observation that the wealth of nations rests on the number and productivity of their workers.[5]

There was, too, a more hopeful strand in the European tradition that saw in the movement of peoples not merely a labour input but a civilising force. Montesquieu's *doux commerce* — the idea that trade and contact between peoples softens manners and tempers the passions that lead to war — found a natural

[5] Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) bk I, chs I–III, on the division of labour and its limitation by the extent of the market.

extension in the movement of persons, not only of goods.[6] Immanuel Kant, in *Perpetual Peace*, went further and grounded a *cosmopolitan right* of hospitality — the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives peaceably on another's soil — in the simple fact that the Earth is a sphere and its surface finite, so that human beings cannot ultimately disperse beyond all contact but must, in the end, learn to tolerate one another's presence.[7] The post-war European project, with its four freedoms and its progressive dismantling of internal borders, was in part the institutional embodiment of that Kantian intuition: that the movement of persons across the lines drawn by states is not a threat to be policed out of existence but a condition of peace and prosperity to be channelled and protected.

B. The reconception

That consensus has been inverted. Immigration, once understood as the engine of recovery and growth, is now widely figured as a threat to security, to welfare, to cultural identity, and to the very survival of the nation. The reconception did not happen all at once, and it had many causes — the oil shocks and the end of the long boom, the securitisation of migration after 2001, the financial crisis and the austerity that followed it, the asylum movements of 2015 and the political shock they delivered, and the slow erosion of the centrist consensus that had managed these questions, however imperfectly, for decades. But the result is a near-complete reversal of the terms of debate. Where the post-war state asked how much labour it needed and where it might be found, the contemporary state asks how migration may be reduced, deterred, and reversed. Where the migrant was once a worker, he is now, in the dominant political grammar, a burden, an interloper, or a criminal.

The reversal is not explained by the underlying facts, which, as the later parts of this article will show, point the other way. It is explained by the function that the figure of the migrant has come to serve in the political and psychic economy of a continent in decline. Zygmunt Bauman, in the last of his books, named the phenomenon with painful precision: the stranger at our door has become the screen onto which a society made anxious by what he called "liquid modernity" — the dissolution of stable work, stable communities, stable identities — projects its diffuse and otherwise unmanageable fears.[8] The migrant is a convenient enemy precisely because the real sources of insecurity — global capital flows, automation, the hollowing-out of industrial regions, the ageing of the population itself — are diffuse, abstract, and resistant to the kind of decisive action that frightened electorates demand. The migrant, by contrast, has a face and can be stopped at a border. He is, in the most literal sense, a scapegoat: the bearer of sins that are not his, driven out so that the community may feel, for a time, cleansed.

C. The Shadow and the scapegoat

It is here that depth psychology earns its place in an argument that might otherwise seem the proper preserve of economists and demographers. Carl Jung's account of the Shadow — the disowned, inferior, and frightening aspects of the self that the conscious personality refuses to recognise and therefore projects onto others — describes the mechanism of anti-immigrant politics almost too neatly.[9] A society that cannot face its own decline — its failure to have children, its inability to sustain its own institutions, its fading dynamism — will tend to locate the source of its discomfort outside itself, in a figure who can be blamed and expelled. The immigrant becomes the carrier of the collective Shadow: lazy and yet somehow also stealing all the jobs; a parasite on welfare and yet also a ruthless competitor; weak and

[6] Montesquieu, *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) bk XX, ch 1–2, on *le doux commerce*; the thought that commerce "polishes and softens barbarous manners" is extended here, as it was by many Enlightenment writers, from goods to people.

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Zum ewigen Frieden* (1795), Third Definitive Article, on cosmopolitan right (*Weltbürgerrecht*) and the right of hospitality (*Hospitalität*), grounded in the "common possession of the surface of the earth".

[8] Zygmunt Bauman, *Strangers at Our Door* (Polity 2016); and *Liquid Modernity* (Polity 2000), on the migrant as the embodiment of insecurities generated by forces — globalisation, deregulation, technological change — that are themselves too abstract and too powerful to be confronted directly.

[9] C G Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (1951, tr R F C Hull, Collected Works vol 9.2) paras 13–19, on the Shadow and its projection; and *The Undiscovered Self* (1957), on the projection of collective evil onto the out-group.

contemptible and yet also a mortal threat. The contradictions are not accidental; they are the signature of projection, which is never constrained by the requirement of coherence because its function is not to describe the world but to discharge an intolerable feeling.

Freud's contribution is complementary. The narcissism of minor differences — the observation that communities reserve their most intense hostility not for those who are wholly alien but for those who are nearly the same, and that the policing of small distinctions is essential to the cohesion of the in-group — explains why anti-immigrant feeling so often fastens on the most assimilable newcomers, and why the rhetoric of difference must be continually manufactured and amplified even as the actual differences shrink.[10] The migrant who learns the language, takes the job, pays the taxes, and sends his children to the local school is more threatening to the narcissism of the in-group, not less, because his success dissolves the very distinction on which the group's sense of itself depends. This is why integration, which ought on any rational account to dissolve hostility, so often inflames it.

The point of invoking these thinkers is not to pathologise those who worry about immigration — many such worries are reasonable, and a politics that dismisses them as mere prejudice will lose, and will deserve to lose. The point is to explain a puzzle that the rational-actor models of economics cannot: why a continent confronted with overwhelming evidence of its need for newcomers should turn against them with such ferocity, and why the turning should intensify rather than abate as the evidence accumulates. The answer is that the hostility is not, in the main, a response to the evidence at all. It is a response to a fear for which the migrant is the available symbol, and against which no quantity of fiscal tables will avail unless the underlying fear is also addressed.

D. Five centuries of the stranger

The quarrel over the newcomer is not new, and the canon of European political thought has circled it for five hundred years, offering by turns warnings and resources. It is worth tracing the line, because the contemporary debate so often imagines itself to be original when it is in fact replaying arguments that were old when the nation-state was young.

Machiavelli, writing at the opening of the sixteenth century, drew from the history of Rome a lesson that the closure-minded forget: that the greatness of the Roman republic rested in no small part on its openness to outsiders — its willingness to enrol foreigners, freed slaves and defeated enemies as citizens and soldiers — whereas the jealous exclusivity of Sparta, which guarded its citizenship as a closed inheritance, condemned it to brittleness and decline.[11] The republic that grows, Machiavelli saw, is the republic that admits; the republic that hoards its membership shrinks into irrelevance. It is a diagnosis that the demographic tables of Part IV render uncomfortably literal.

Thomas Hobbes supplies the psychology of the present moment more than its remedy. The *Leviathan* is built on fear — the fear of violent death in the state of nature that drives men to erect a sovereign power for the sake of security — and the contemporary politics of migration is, above all, a politics of fear, in which the sovereign's promise to secure the border becomes the central transaction between state and citizen.[12] But Hobbes also reminds us that security is the *means* to commodious living, not its substitute; a sovereign that delivers the appearance of security while impoverishing its subjects has mistaken the instrument for the end. John Locke, by contrast, offers a resource: his *Letter Concerning Toleration*

[10] Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (n above); and *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919), on the disturbing return of the familiar in unfamiliar guise — a structure that maps onto the figure of the migrant who is at once foreign and, in his aspirations and ordinariness, unsettlingly like oneself.

[11] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio* (*Discourses on Livy*, 1531) bk II, ch 3, contrasting Rome's growth through the incorporation of foreigners with Sparta's and Athens's restrictive citizenship, and attributing Rome's strength in part to its openness to newcomers.

[12] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651) chs 13–14 and 17, on fear of violent death in the state of nature and the erection of a sovereign power to secure peace and security. The point here is diagnostic: the securitisation of migration trades on precisely the Hobbesian exchange of liberty for the promise of safety.

grounded civil peace in the refusal of the magistrate to persecute difference, and his account of property located its origin in the mixing of labour with the world — a labour theory that, taken seriously, makes the working newcomer a creator of value rather than a thief of it.[13]

Rousseau marks the danger. His doctrine of the general will, for all its emancipatory power, contains the seed of exclusion: a community that defines itself by a shared will may experience the outsider not merely as a stranger but as a solvent of the very unity that constitutes it, and may be tempted to purchase cohesion at the price of expulsion.[14] Edmund Burke, the great theorist of inherited order, is more ambivalent than either his admirers or his detractors allow: his vision of society as a partnership "between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born" can be read as a charter for closure, but equally as an injunction to consider the generations to come — and the generations to come, on the demographic evidence, will be fewer and poorer unless the present admits the newcomers who might sustain them.[15] Alexis de Tocqueville, observing the young American republic, identified both the genius of a society built by newcomers and associations and the standing danger of the tyranny of the majority — the very danger that a plebiscitary politics of anti-immigration now exemplifies.[16]

The twentieth century, which produced the catastrophes Arendt anatomised, also produced the sharpest tools for understanding the present. Michel Foucault's analyses of biopolitics and governmentality reframed the modern state as a manager of populations — of birth rates, death rates, health, and the optimisation of life itself — and the demographic anxiety that animates European migration politics is biopolitics in its purest form: the state contemplating the failing fertility of its population and reaching for the levers of control.[17] Giorgio Agamben pressed the analysis to its limit: the figure of *homo sacer*, the human being reduced to "bare life" and placed outside the protection of law, and the "state of exception" in which sovereign power suspends the very rights it claims to guarantee, describe with eerie precision the legal limbo of the detained asylum-seeker, the rejected applicant, the person held in the camp at the edge of Europe.[18] Benedict Anderson's insight that nations are "imagined communities", constructed through shared narratives rather than given by blood, carries a hopeful corollary that the nativist resists: what has been imagined inclusively in the past can be imagined inclusively again, and the boundaries of the "we" are made, not found.[19] Isaiah Berlin's value pluralism cautions against the monism that would force a single conception of the good upon a diverse society, while Martha Nussbaum's cosmopolitanism revives the Stoic and Kantian intuition that the boundaries of moral concern do not stop at the border.[20] Saskia Sassen, finally, names the structural violence of the present

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[13]John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), on toleration as the basis of civil peace; and *Second Treatise of Government* (1689) ch 5, on the origin of property in the mixing of one's labour with the world — an account on which the labouring immigrant is a maker of value.

[14]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du contrat social* (1762) bk II, on the general will and the unity it presupposes; the exclusionary potential of a politics of collective self-identification is drawn out here, not endorsed.

[15]Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), on society as a partnership across generations; the intergenerational framing is turned here toward the demographic obligation to the unborn, whose prospects depend on present openness.

[16]Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique* (1835–1840), on the vitality of associational life in a society of newcomers and on the tyranny of the majority as the characteristic pathology of democracy.

[17]Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended* (lectures of 1975–76, tr David Macey, Picador 2003) and *Security, Territory, Population* (lectures of 1977–78), on biopolitics and governmentality — the state's management of the population's vital processes, of which contemporary demographic anxiety is an instance.

[18]Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (tr Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford University Press 1998) and *State of Exception* (tr Kevin Attell, University of Chicago Press 2005), on bare life and the suspension of law — a frame for the legal limbo of detention and the externalised processing of asylum.

[19]Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso 1983), on the nation as an imagined political community — a construction that can, in principle, be reimagined to include the newcomer.

[20]Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" (1958), on value pluralism and the dangers of monism; and Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country?* (Beacon Press 1996) and *The Cosmopolitan Tradition* (Harvard University Press 2019), reviving the Stoic and Kantian conception of moral concern that transcends the boundaries of the polity.

order: the "expulsions" — of people, of livelihoods, of belonging — that a globalised economy generates and that the politics of the border then recodes as a problem of unwanted arrivals rather than of systemic displacement.[21]

Across five centuries, then, the canon offers a consistent if contested counsel: that the open polity grows and the closed one withers (Machiavelli); that fear is a poor foundation for policy (Hobbes); that the labouring newcomer creates rather than consumes (Locke); that the unity of the community is a construction that can include or exclude (Rousseau, Anderson); that obligation runs to the generations to come (Burke); and that the reduction of the human being to a rightless body at the edge of the law is the characteristic crime of the modern state (Arendt, Agamben). The contemporary turn against immigration is, in this long light, not a fresh insight but an old temptation, and one against which the deepest currents of European thought have repeatedly warned.

III. The Rightward Turn: Elections, Governments, and the Politics of Expulsion

A. The electoral record

The reconception of immigration has found its political vehicle in the rise, across almost the whole of the Union, of the populist and radical right. The pattern is no longer a matter of forecast or fear; it is a matter of record. In the European Parliament elections of June 2024, populist radical-right forces won close to one hundred and eighty seats, roughly a quarter of the chamber, with the largest contingents drawn from France's Rassemblement National, Italy's Fratelli d'Italia, the Polish Law and Justice party, the German Alternative für Deutschland and Hungary's Fidesz.[22] In Italy, Giorgia Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia — a party that traces its lineage to the post-war neo-fascist movement — took close to thirty per cent of the vote, more than four times its share in 2019.[23]

The national results have run in the same direction. In Germany's federal election of February 2025 the AfD took 20.8 per cent of the vote and 152 seats, becoming the largest opposition party and the strongest showing for a force of its kind since the Second World War; it had already come second in the 2024 European elections, ahead of the governing Social Democrats.[24] In Austria, the Freedom Party (FPÖ) came first in the September 2024 legislative election with 28.8 per cent.[25] In France, the Rassemblement National took 33.1 per cent in the first round of the snap parliamentary election of July 2024, an outcome that brought the prospect of a far-right government to the threshold of the Élysée.[26] In the Netherlands, Geert Wilders's Freedom Party had already won the general election of November 2023 on an explicit programme of clamping down on asylum and immigration.[27] By 2024 there were far-right parties in government in seven Member States — Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovakia — a fact that would have seemed scarcely conceivable a generation earlier.[28]

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[21] Saskia Sassen, *Expulsions: Brutality and Complexity in the Global Economy* (Harvard University Press 2014), on the systemic expulsions produced by the contemporary global economy, which the politics of migration recasts as a problem of arrivals.

[22] "The Populist Radical Right in the New European Parliament" (European Center for Populism Studies, 2024), reporting that populist radical-right forces won nearly 180 seats, around 25% of the chamber, in the June 2024 European Parliament elections.

[23] "E.U. Far-Right Parties Dominate 2024 Parliamentary Elections" (Bridge Initiative, Georgetown University, June 2024), reporting Fratelli d'Italia at nearly 30% in the June 2024 European elections, more than quadruple its 2019 result.

[24] "The far-right and migration politics in the aftermath of the 2024 'year of elections'" (Mixed Migration Centre, January 2026), reporting the AfD at 20.8% and 152 seats in the February 2025 German federal election, building on earlier gains in the Thuringia and Saxony regional elections.

[25] ibid, recording the FPÖ in first place with 28.8% in the September 2024 Austrian legislative election.

[26] ibid, recording the Rassemblement National at 33.1% in the first round of the July 2024 French snap parliamentary election; in the United Kingdom, Reform UK took 14.3% in the July 2024 general election.

[27] "Far-right surge or status quo? Understanding the 2024 European elections" (Peoples Dispatch, July 2024); and contemporaneous reporting on the November 2023 Dutch general election won by Geert Wilders's PVV.

[28] "The year of elections: The rise of Europe's far right" (International Bar Association, 2024), identifying seven EU Member States — Croatia, the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands and Slovakia — with far-right parties in

B. From rhetoric to law

The consequences have not stayed at the level of rhetoric. In June 2025, nine EU Member States signed an open letter calling for a reinterpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights to make it easier to expel "foreign national criminals" — an extraordinary intervention by serving governments against the interpretive authority of the Strasbourg Court, and a sign of how far the centre of gravity has shifted.[29] Individual states have moved in parallel: Sweden doubled the minimum salary requirement for labour migration in October 2024 and tightened the routes to residence and citizenship; France adopted a law in January 2024 simplifying the expulsion of foreign offenders.[30] Meloni, having reached office, has openly sought to make Italy's restrictive model — externalised processing, accelerated returns, the criminalisation of rescue at sea — the template for EU migration policy as a whole, and has been courted rather than rebuffed by the Commission's leadership.[31]

C. The paradox of tolerance and the right to have rights

Two thinkers frame the danger of this turn more sharply than any contemporary commentary. The first is Karl Popper, whose "paradox of tolerance" — that a tolerant society which extends unlimited tolerance even to the intolerant will be destroyed by them, so that the defence of an open society sometimes requires limits on those who would close it — is usually invoked, rightly, as a warning against the enemies of liberal democracy.[32] But it cuts in a direction that the anti-immigration right rarely acknowledges: the open society is threatened not by the newcomer who wishes to join it but by the movement that wishes to close its borders and, with them, its mind. The second is Hannah Arendt, whose analysis of statelessness in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* identified the deepest stake of all. The condition of the stateless person, Arendt saw, is the loss not of this or that particular right but of "the right to have rights" — the right to belong to a political community in which one's rights can be claimed at all.[33] Every policy that strips status, that withdraws residence, that consigns a person to the limbo of the unprocessed application, edges toward that condition. The argument of this article is, in part, that Europe is manufacturing, through its patchwork of permits and its appetite for expulsion, exactly the rightlessness that Arendt warned was the precondition of catastrophe.

IV. The Demographic Reckoning: A Continent Growing Old

A. The aggregate picture

The demographic facts are the ground on which the whole argument stands, and they are stark. According to the EUROPOP2025 projections released by Eurostat in April 2026, the population of the European Union, which stood at 451.8 million in 2025, will peak at 453.3 million in 2029 and then decline — to 445.0 million by 2050 and to 398.8 million by 2100.[34] The shrinkage is not, in itself, the problem; a smaller population can be a richer one. The problem is the change in the *structure* of the

government.

[29]"The far-right and migration politics" (n (n 24)), reporting that in June 2025 nine EU Member States signed an open letter calling for a reinterpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights to facilitate the expulsion of "foreign national criminals".

[30]ibid, recording that Sweden doubled the minimum salary requirement for labour migration in October 2024 and restricted residence and citizenship rights, and that France adopted a law in January 2024 simplifying expulsion procedures.

[31]"A broadening agenda? Southern European far-right campaigns in the 2024 European Parliament elections" (2025) Journal of European Public Policy, on Meloni's aspiration to set Italy's restrictive immigration policy as a model for the EU, and her cultivation of relations with the Commission presidency.

[32]Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (Routledge 1945) vol 1, ch 7, n 4, on the paradox of tolerance.

[33]Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Harcourt 1951) ch 9, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man", on statelessness and "the right to have rights".

[34]Eurostat, "Population projections in the EU" (Statistics Explained, based on EUROPOP2025, released 16 April 2026), projecting an EU population of 451.8 million in 2025, peaking at 453.3 million in 2029, declining to 445.0 million in 2050 and 398.8 million in 2100.

population — the collapse in the ratio of workers to dependants — and here the figures move from sobering to alarming.

The total fertility rate of the EU fell in 2024 to 1.34 live births per woman, the lowest level ever recorded since comparable EU-wide data began in 2001, down from 1.38 in 2023 and 1.46 in 2022.[35] The replacement rate — the level required to keep a population stable without migration — is around 2.1. The EU is thus reproducing at well below two-thirds of replacement, and the gap is widening, not closing. In 2024 there were 3.55 million births in the Union, 3.3 per cent fewer than the year before; the 2023 figure had itself been 5.4 per cent below 2022, the largest annual fall since 1961.[36] The crude birth rate, which stood at 16.4 per thousand in 1970, has fallen to around 8.2. Figure 1 sets the long decline against the replacement line.

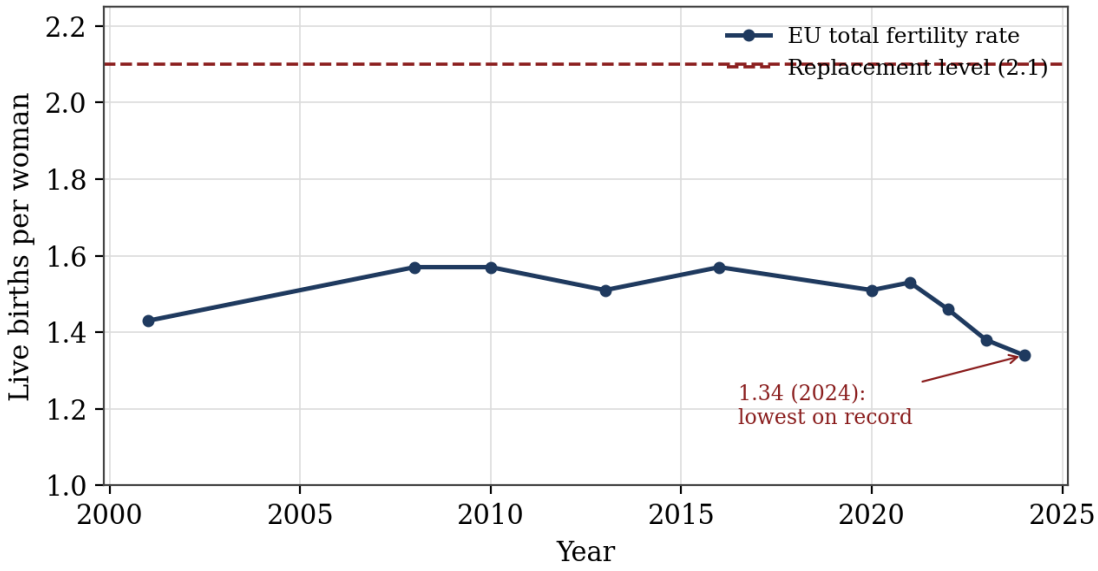

Figure 1. EU total fertility rate, 2001–2024, against the replacement level of 2.1. Source: Eurostat.

The consequence, compounded over decades, is a population that is not merely shrinking but inverting its age structure. The median age of the EU population reached 44.9 years in 2025 and is projected to rise by a further 6.6 years by 2100, passing fifty.[37] The share of the population aged eighty and over is projected to triple, from 6.1 per cent to 15.3 per cent, by the end of the century.[38] Most consequential of all is the old-age dependency ratio — the number of people aged sixty-five and over relative to the working-age population aged twenty to sixty-four. It stood at 26.8 per cent in 2004 and at 34.5 per cent on 1 January 2025; it is projected to climb past fifty-six per cent by 2050 and to approach sixty per cent by 2100, at which point there will be fewer than two working-age adults for every person of pensionable age, and in some Member States barely more than one.[39] Figure 3 traces that trajectory.

[35]Eurostat, "EU fertility rate at 1.34 live births per woman in 2024" (News, 6 March 2026), recording the 2024 total fertility rate of 1.34, down from 1.38 in 2023, the lowest since the series began in 2001; 3.55 million births in 2024, a 3.3% fall from 3.67 million in 2023.

[36]Eurostat, "Record drop in children being born in the EU in 2023" (News, 7 March 2025), recording 3.67 million births in 2023, a 5.4% fall from 3.88 million in 2022 — the largest annual decline since 1961 — and a crude birth rate of 8.2 per 1,000 against 16.4 in 1970.

[37]Eurostat, "Population structure and ageing" (Statistics Explained, 2025), recording an EU median age of 44.9 years in 2025, up from 42.8 in 2015, projected to rise by a further 6.6 years by 2100; the old-age dependency ratio was 34.5% on 1 January 2025.

[38]Eurostat, "Ageing Europe — statistics on population developments" (Statistics Explained), projecting that the share of people aged 80 and over will roughly triple by 2100 and that the old-age dependency ratio will rise toward and beyond 56% by mid-century.

[39]Eurostat, "Old-age dependency growing across EU regions" (News, 1 October 2025), recording the old-age dependency ratio rising from 26.8% in 2004 to 37.0% on a regional measure on 1 January 2024; and Eurostat projections that the EU-wide ratio

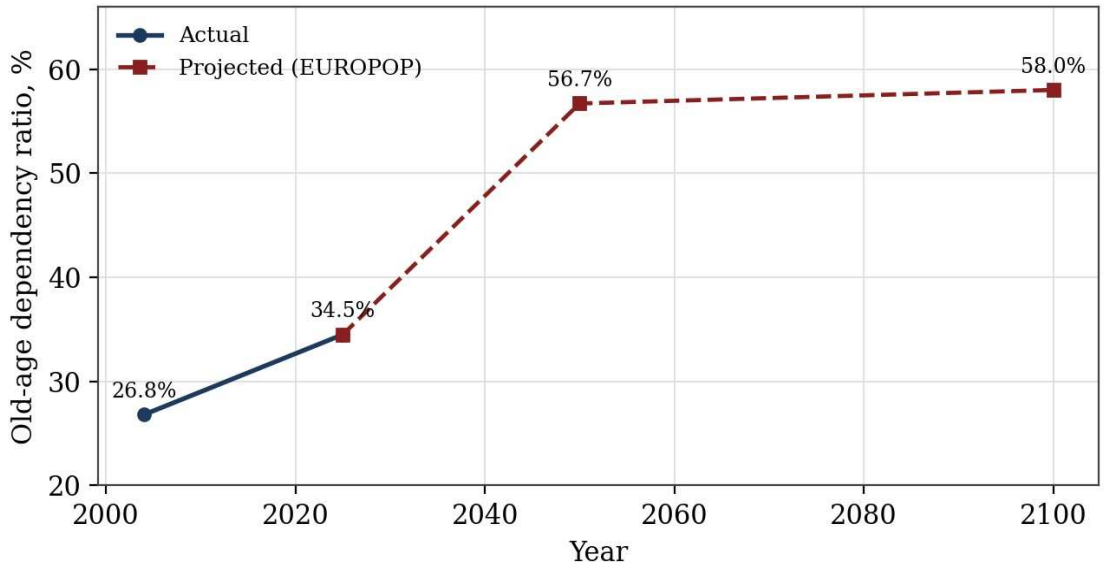

Figure 3. EU old-age dependency ratio (65+ / 20–64): actual and projected. Source: Eurostat (EUROPOP).

B. Country by country

The aggregate conceals enormous variation, and the variation matters, because it determines which Member States face the sharpest adjustment and which have the most to gain from a common solution. Table 1 sets out the key indicators for a representative range of countries.

Table 1. Selected demographic and fiscal indicators, by Member State.

Member State	TFR 2024	Debt/GDP (Q4 2025)	Key demographic pressure
EU-27	1.34	81.7%	Median age 44.9; old-age dependency 34.5% (2025), projected toward ~57% by 2100
Italy	1.18	137.1%	Population fallen below 60 million; six births for every eleven deaths
Greece	—	146.1%	Highest debt ratio in the Union; sustained emigration of the young
Spain	1.10	100.7%	Median age above 46; pension spending projected to rise 13.1% → 16.7% of GDP
France	1.61	115.6%	Highest TFR in the EU after Bulgaria, yet still well below replacement
Germany	—	—	Workforce would shrink ~209,000/yr without migration; median age above 46
Portugal	—	—	Net migration 13.4 per 1,000; old-age dependency projected near 70% by 2100
Bulgaria	1.72	29.9%	Highest TFR in the EU; steepest natural decline (−7.3 per 1,000)
Malta	1.01	—	Lowest TFR in the EU; highest net migration (18.7 per 1,000)
Lithuania	1.11	—	Baltic/eastern pattern: working-age population to fall >20% by

(65+/20–64) will reach approximately 56.7% by 2050 and approach 57–60% by 2100, with Portugal near 70% and Croatia near 72%.

Member State	TFR 2024	Debt/GDP (Q4 2025)	Key demographic pressure
			2050

The debt dimension deserves separate emphasis, because it is in the southern Member States that demographic decline and fiscal fragility compound most dangerously. Figure 2 shows the spread of general government debt across the Union at the end of 2025.[40]

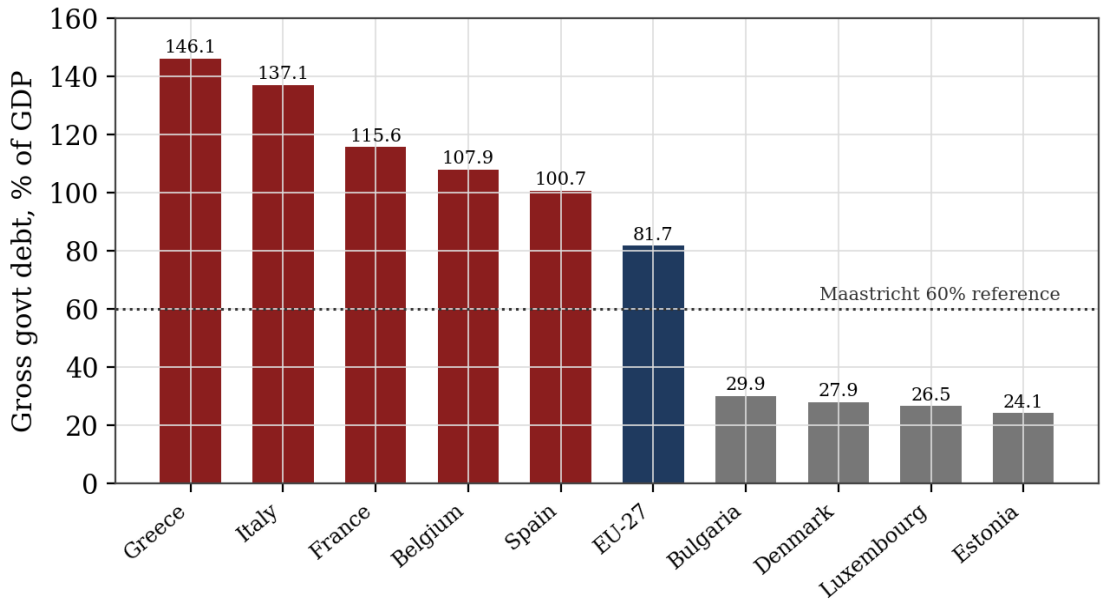

Figure 2. General government gross debt, selected Member States, Q4 2025. Source: Eurostat.

Consider the southern tier first, because it is where the demographic and fiscal crises intersect most acutely. Italy is the paradigm case. Its fertility rate fell to 1.18 in 2024, among the lowest in the Union; according to the national statistical office ISTAT, only six children were born for every eleven people who died, and the population has fallen below sixty million and continues to decline.[41] Only net inward migration of some 166,000 in 2024 slowed the contraction; without it, the decline would have been steeper still. Spain's fertility rate, at 1.10, is lower yet, and its median age has passed forty-six.[42] Greece, the most indebted state in the Union, combines very low fertility with sustained emigration of its young and educated, hollowing out the working-age base on which its pension and debt obligations depend.

The eastern and Baltic states face what one analysis has called a demographic "triple threat": low fertility, an already-aged structure that generates negative momentum, and the emigration of the young to the richer west.[43] Between 2023 and 2050 the working-age population is projected to fall by more than

[40]Eurostat, "Government debt at 87.8% of GDP in euro area" (Euro indicators, 22 April 2026), recording the highest general government debt-to-GDP ratios at end-2025 in Greece (146.1%), Italy (137.1%), France (115.6%), Belgium (107.9%) and Spain (100.7%), against an EU average of 81.7% and lows of 24.1% (Estonia), 26.5% (Luxembourg) and 27.9% (Denmark); Greece's ratio had peaked at around 207% in 2020.

[41]"Road to extinction? Europe's birth rates hit rock bottom" (Euronews, July 2025), reporting Italy's 2024 fertility rate of 1.18 (ISTAT), with six births for every eleven deaths per thousand, a population fallen below 60 million, and net inward migration of some 166,000 in 2024 slowing but not reversing the decline.

[42]Eurostat (n (n 35)), recording Spain's 2024 total fertility rate at 1.10, among the three lowest in the EU together with Malta (1.01) and Lithuania (1.11); and IESE/Draghi data placing the median age in Spain and Germany above 46, against 38.5 in the United States.

[43]Bruegel, "The demographic divide: inequalities in ageing across the European Union" (Policy Brief, 2024), finding that between 2023 and 2050 the working-age population will fall by more than 20% in Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, Croatia and Poland, and that the very-old-age dependency ratio in Southern Europe will rise from about 6% to roughly 18.3% by 2070.

twenty per cent in Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania, Portugal, Croatia and Poland — a contraction of the productive base of a fifth or more in a single generation. Latvia was the only Member State to record negative net migration in 2024, compounding a natural decrease that, at minus 7.4 per thousand, was the steepest in the Union.[44]

C. Migration is already the only thing holding the line

The single most important fact in this section, and the one most systematically ignored in the political debate, is this: the natural change of the EU population — births minus deaths — turned negative in 2012 and has remained so ever since, and in 2024 twenty of the twenty-seven Member States recorded more deaths than births.[45] Net migration has been the principal determinant of EU population growth since the 1990s; in its absence the population would already be falling, and falling fast. Net migration rose from 1.2 million in 2021 to 2.3 million in 2024, and it is this inflow, not any recovery in the birth rate, that has kept the aggregate population from declining before the end of this decade. The highest rates of net migration in 2024 were recorded in Malta (18.7 per thousand), Portugal (13.4) and Ireland (12.8) — three of the Union's better-performing economies, a juxtaposition to which this article will return.

The implication deserves to be stated without euphemism. The European Union does not face a *choice* between immigration and demographic stability; it has already, through the facts of fertility and mortality, lost the option of stability without immigration. The only remaining choice is between managed, legal, economically purposive immigration on the one hand, and, on the other, a chaotic mixture of irregular flows, labour shortages, fiscal strain and accelerating decline. The radical right presents itself as the party of control; in the one respect that matters most for the survival of the European social model, it is the party of an impossible nostalgia.

D. The success stories and the boxed-in

There is a final pattern in the data that deserves to be drawn out, because it speaks directly to the claim that countries which grow and admit newcomers outperform those which close themselves off. The three Member States with the highest rates of net migration in 2024 — Malta, Portugal and Ireland — are also among the Union's strongest recent economic performers, and the juxtaposition is not coincidental.[46] Ireland, whose population has grown rapidly through inward migration, has posted growth rates that are the envy of the continent; Portugal, even amid the golden-visa turbulence examined in Part XI, has sustained both high net migration and a recovering economy; Malta has combined the highest migration rate in the Union with rapid expansion. The mechanism, developed at length in Part VII, is straightforward: inflows of working-age people enlarge the labour force, broaden the tax base, and raise the rate of growth relative to the cost of servicing debt.

The contrast with the countries that have made immigration the central object of their fear is instructive. A state that responds to demographic decline by closing its doors does not thereby arrest the decline; it accelerates it, while forgoing the growth that newcomers bring. This is the sense in which so many European states have, in the phrase that animates this article, boxed themselves in: having made the immigrant the boogeyman of their politics, they have rendered themselves unable to adopt the one policy that their demographic and fiscal predicament most urgently requires. The politics that promises

[44]Eurostat, "Population and population change statistics" (Statistics Explained, 2025), recording that 20 EU countries had negative natural change in 2024, the steepest being Latvia (−7.4 per 1,000), Bulgaria (−7.3) and Lithuania (−6.4); that net migration rose from +1.2 million in 2021 to +2.3 million in 2024; and that all Member States except Latvia recorded positive net migration in 2024, the highest rates being Malta (18.7 per 1,000), Portugal (13.4) and Ireland (12.8).

[45]ibid. Natural change in the EU became negative in 2012, when deaths first exceeded births, and has remained negative; net migration has been the main determinant of EU population growth since the 1990s.

[46]Eurostat (n (n 44)), recording the highest 2024 net-migration rates in Malta (18.7 per 1,000), Portugal (13.4) and Ireland (12.8); these are among the EU's stronger recent growth performers, illustrating the association between inward migration and economic dynamism that the fiscal literature in Part VII explains.

to protect the nation from the stranger ends by depriving the nation of its most plausible source of renewal — a self-inflicted wound dressed up as self-defence. The post-war decades understood that growth and openness travelled together; the present generation has unlearned the lesson, and the data in this Part and the next measure the cost of the forgetting.

V. The Fiscal Time-Bomb: Pensions and the Sustainability Illusion

A. The arithmetic of pay-as-you-go

Most European pension systems are, in their core, pay-as-you-go: the contributions of today's workers finance the pensions of today's retirees. Such a system is a bargain between the generations, and like any such bargain it depends on there being enough of the younger party to honour the promises made to the older. The demographic figures set out above are, from this angle, a slow-motion breach of contract. As the ratio of retirees to workers rises, either contributions must rise, or benefits must fall, or the retirement age must climb, or the state must borrow — and in practice all four happen at once, unevenly and with much political pain.

The European Commission's 2024 Ageing Report, prepared with the Economic Policy Committee, is the authoritative projection. It finds that aggregate age-related public expenditure in the EU — pensions, healthcare, long-term care and education together — stood at 24.4 per cent of GDP in 2022 and is projected to rise by 1.2 percentage points to 25.6 per cent by 2070; in the euro area the rise is from 25.1 to 26.5 per cent.[47] Public pension spending alone is projected to rise from 11.4 per cent of GDP in 2022 to a peak of 12.1 per cent around 2045 before falling back to 11.8 per cent by 2070; healthcare rises from 6.9 to 7.3 per cent, and long-term care — the cost most directly driven by the ageing of the aged — from 1.7 to 2.6 per cent. Table 2 collects these figures.

Table 2. Projected age-related public expenditure, EU, 2022–2070 (2024 Ageing Report).

Indicator (EU, % of GDP unless stated)	2022	2070	Note
Total age-related expenditure	24.4	25.6	+1.2 pp; euro area 25.1 → 26.5
Public pensions	11.4	11.8	Peaks at 12.1% around 2045
Healthcare	6.9	7.3	Rises in almost all Member States
Long-term care	1.7	2.6	Fastest-rising component (+0.8 pp)
Benefit ratio (pension/wage)	45.0	38.2	"Sustainability" bought by thinner pensions
Economic old-age dependency	46%	70%	Inactive 65+ per employed 20–64
Spain — pensions	13.1	16.7	Largest upward revision (~+6.5 pp)
Italy — pensions	15.6	13.7	Falls only if careers lengthen and employment rises

B. Why the headline numbers understate the strain

On its face, a rise of just over one percentage point of GDP across half a century looks manageable, and some commentators have drawn precisely that comforting conclusion.[48] But the comfort is an illusion,

[47] European Commission and Economic Policy Committee, *2024 Ageing Report: Economic and Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States (2022–2070)* (Institutional Paper, 2024), projecting aggregate EU age-related expenditure rising from 24.4% of GDP in 2022 to 25.6% by 2070 (euro area 25.1% to 26.5%); public pension spending from 11.4% (2022) to a peak of 12.1% (2045) and back to 11.8% (2070); healthcare from 6.9% to 7.3%; and long-term care from 1.7% to 2.6%.

[48] "The EU's Updated Projections of Age-Related Expenditures" (American Enterprise Institute, June 2024), observing that the projected aggregate increase of 1.2 percentage points of GDP is modest and attributing the restraint to three decades of pension reform; noting Italy's projected fall in pension spending from 15.6% (2022) to 13.7% (2070) and Spain's rise from 13.1% to 16.7%.

and understanding why is essential to the argument. The headline restraint in pension spending is achieved not because the demographic pressure is mild — it is severe — but because Member States have spent three decades passing reforms that contain the cost by the simple expedient of paying future pensioners less and making them work longer. The 2024 Report makes this explicit: the average benefit ratio — the value of the average pension relative to the average wage — is projected to fall from 45.0 per cent in 2022 to 38.2 per cent by 2070.[49] In plain terms: the system is kept "sustainable" on paper by quietly making each future pension some fifteen per cent less generous, relative to wages, than it is today, and by requiring people to work years longer to receive it.

This is the sustainability illusion. The fiscal projections do not show that ageing is affordable; they show that governments have chosen to make it affordable by transferring the burden onto the old people of the future, who will receive thinner pensions later in life. Whether that choice is politically durable — whether electorates will in fact accept the benefit cuts and later retirements that the projections assume — is precisely what the projections cannot tell us, and the recent history of pension politics in France, where an increase in the retirement age provoked months of unrest, suggests that the assumption is heroic. The economic old-age dependency ratio — the number of inactive people over sixty-five relative to those actually employed — tells the unvarnished story: it is projected to rise from 46 per cent in 2022 to 70 per cent in 2070.[50] For every ten people drawing a pension and not working, there will be roughly fourteen people in employment to support them, down from more than twenty today.

C. The national divergences

The aggregate also conceals divergences that bear directly on the case for a *common* European response. Spain is the great outlier on the downside: its pension spending is projected to rise from 13.1 per cent of GDP in 2022 to 16.7 per cent by 2070, an upward revision of some six and a half percentage points relative to the previous projection, reflecting the partial reversal of earlier reforms.[51] Italy, by contrast, is projected to see pension spending *fall*, from 15.6 to 13.7 per cent, almost entirely because its reforms assume Italians will work longer and in greater numbers — an assumption that itself depends on reversing the very labour-force decline that the demographic projections predict. The circularity is instructive: the fiscal projections are kept benign by labour-market assumptions that can only be realised if the working-age population is replenished, which is to say, by immigration. Remove the immigration, and the assumptions fail, and the "sustainable" projections become unsustainable. The pension arithmetic and the migration question are, in the end, the same question.

VI. Growth, Innovation, and the Productivity Gap

A. The first shrinkage in modern history

The demographic decline is not only a fiscal problem; it is a growth problem, and the growth problem is, if anything, the graver of the two, because growth is what makes every other obligation bearable. The Draghi report of September 2024, the most influential official diagnosis of European economic decline in a generation, put the matter with unusual bluntness: the EU is entering "the first period in its recent history in which growth will not be supported by rising populations", and by 2040 its workforce is

[49] *2024 Ageing Report* (n (n 47)), projecting a fall in the EU average benefit ratio (gross public pensions relative to average wages) from 45.0% in 2022 to 38.2% by 2070, and recording that "containment" of pension costs is achieved largely through reforms that reduce replacement rates, raise effective retirement ages and lengthen careers.

[50] *2024 Ageing Report* (n (n 47)), projecting a rise in the economic old-age dependency ratio (inactive persons aged over 65 relative to employed persons aged 20–64) from 46% in 2022 to 70% in 2070.

[51] *2024 Ageing Report* (n (n 47)) and European Central Bank, "Ageing cost projections – new evidence from the 2024 Ageing Report" (Economic Bulletin, 2024), recording Spain's projected pension spending rising from 13.1% (2022) to 16.7% (2070), the largest upward revision in the EU at roughly +6.5 to +7 percentage points; and Italy's projected fall from 15.6% to 13.7%, largely through higher employment and longer careers.

projected to shrink by close to two million workers every year.[52] A shrinking labour force does not merely slow growth; in the absence of extraordinary productivity gains it can extinguish it, turning the compounding magic of economic expansion into the compounding misery of contraction.

B. The productivity gap and the innovation deficit

Compounding the demographic drag is a productivity gap that has been widening for two decades. The Draghi report records that EU labour productivity, which had converged from 22 per cent of the US level in 1945 to 95 per cent by 1995, has since fallen back below 80 per cent; that the GDP gap between the EU and the United States widened from minus 17 per cent in 2002 to minus 30 per cent by 2023, with the productivity differential the principal cause; and that the gap is "largely explained by the tech sector", in which Europe is conspicuously weak — only four of the world's top fifty technology companies are European.[53] The innovation deficit has a demographic dimension that bears directly on immigration: Europe produces fewer of the people who drive frontier innovation, and it loses many of those it does produce. The EU graduates around 203 ICT specialists per million inhabitants against 335 in the United States, and around 845 STEM graduates per million against 1,106; and its talent pool is further "depleted by brain drain overseas" to markets that offer better pay and faster advancement.[54]

The point for present purposes is that innovation is, to a substantial degree, a function of talent density — of the number of highly skilled, ambitious, mobile people a society can assemble and retain. A continent that is both producing fewer such people and repelling those who might come is choosing, in effect, to fall further behind. Immigration is not a sufficient condition for closing the innovation gap; the regulatory fragmentation that the Draghi report identifies as a barrier to scaling firms must also be addressed, and Part XII below argues that the two failures are connected. But immigration is very close to a necessary condition, and a policy that treats skilled newcomers as a threat rather than a resource is, in the precise language of the Draghi diagnosis, a policy of managed decline.

C. The median-age divergence and the global context

The comparison with the wider world sharpens the stakes. The median age in Spain and Germany is now above forty-six; in the United States it is 38.5; in much of Africa it is below twenty, with Nigeria around nineteen.[55] The global distribution of youth and working-age population is shifting decisively toward the global south, while Europe ages. In a world of mobile labour and mobile capital, this is a configuration in which Europe's comparative advantage in attracting talent — its prosperity, its institutions, its quality of life — ought to be among its greatest assets. Squandering that advantage through a politics of closure is not the preservation of European prosperity; it is its surrender.

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[52] Draghi, *The Future of European Competitiveness* (n (n 1)) Part A, foreword and ch 1, stating that the EU is entering "the first period in modern history in which GDP growth will not be supported by sustained net growth of the labour force" and that by 2040 the workforce is projected to shrink by close to two million workers each year — "an existential challenge".

[53] Draghi (n (n 1)) Part A, ch 1, recording EU labour productivity converging from 22% of the US level (1945) to 95% (1995) and then falling below 80%; the EU–US GDP gap widening from −17% (2002) to −30% (2023); the productivity gap "largely explained by the tech sector"; and only four of the world's top 50 technology firms being European.

[54] Draghi (n (n 1)), Closing the Skills Gap chapter, recording approximately 203 ICT graduates per million inhabitants in the EU against 335 in the US, and 845 STEM graduates per million against 1,106, with the EU talent pool further depleted by brain drain; and identifying regulatory fragmentation across Member States as a third barrier to the scaling of innovative firms.

[55] "The Draghi report highlights that productivity must be the goal for Europe" (IESE Insight, January 2025), recording median ages above 46 in Spain and Germany against 38.5 in the United States and far lower figures in Africa (e.g. around 19 in Nigeria), and noting that the EU–US gap grew by 12% in 2023, of which 72% was attributable to productivity.

VII. The Fiscal Arithmetic of Immigration: Who Pays In, Who Takes Out

A. The evidence on net fiscal contribution

The central empirical claim of the anti-immigration politics — that migrants are a drain on the public purse — is, on the weight of the evidence, false, or at best true only of particular categories under particular conditions. The careful literature, assembled over decades and across many countries, converges on a different conclusion: that immigrants, taken as a whole and over the long run, are roughly fiscally neutral to modestly positive, and that labour migrants in particular are clear net contributors.

The International Monetary Fund's 2024 working paper on migration into the EU summarises the macroeconomic position: the long-term overall impact of migrants on fiscal balances is, on average, approximately neutral, with estimates of the average fiscal contribution falling in a band between minus one and plus one per cent of GDP.[56] Within that band, the position improves markedly for labour migrants and worsens for some categories of humanitarian and family migration — which is to say that the fiscal outcome is not a fixed property of "migrants" but a function of policy, and above all of how quickly and fully newcomers are admitted to the labour market. A study by Fiorio and colleagues finds that, on average, migrants were net contributors to EU public finances over the period 2014 to 2018.[57] Strikingly, in Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal — several of them the very states whose politics have turned most sharply against immigration — the research finds that migrants contribute *more* to the national budget than they take out. One of its authors, the economist Giacomo Boffi, framed the finding as a direct rebuttal of the prevailing politics: the study, he said, serves to debunk "the populist myth that migrants are more of a burden on social security and the treasury than the native-born population."

B. Younger, working, and therefore fiscally helpful

The mechanism is not mysterious. Immigrants are, on average, younger than the native population and arrive at or near the start of their working lives, having been educated — and therefore paid for — by someone else. They are disproportionately of working age precisely when the native population is ageing out of it. The Spanish fiscal authority, AIReF, sets out the logic in its 2025 sustainability analysis: immigrants tend to be younger than natives, which raises their contribution to public revenue through taxes on labour; higher-skilled immigrants earn more and so contribute more in tax; and, decisively, immigration "boosts growth via an increase in labour input", smoothing the decline of the working-age population and, by raising growth above the rate of interest, reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio and helping to prevent the debt "snowball effect."[58] The same box cites the United Kingdom's Office for Budget Responsibility, whose March 2024 forecast found that higher immigration would raise tax revenue without significantly altering public expenditure, thereby reducing the deficit and the debt. And it invokes the seminal study by Dustmann and Frattini, which found that immigrants from the

[56]Anh Dinh Minh Nguyen and others, "Migration into the EU: Stocktaking of Recent Developments and Macroeconomic Implications" (IMF Working Paper No 2024/211, 2024), estimating the long-term overall impact of migrants on fiscal balances as on average approximately neutral, in a range of −1 to +1 per cent of GDP, and citing Fiorio and others (2023) finding migrants on average net contributors to EU public finances over 2014–2018.

[57]M Fiorio and others, "The Net Fiscal Position of Migrants in Europe: Trends and Insights" (TransEuroWorks Working Paper, 2024), finding that in Belgium, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal migrants contribute more to the national budget than they take out; the author Giacomo Boffi describing the study as debunking "the populist myth that migrants are more of a burden on social security and the treasury than the native-born population".

[58]Autoridad Independiente de Responsabilidad Fiscal (AIReF), "Fiscal Impact of Immigration" (Box 5, Opinion on the long-term sustainability of public finances, March 2025), finding that immigration raises public revenue through labour taxation, smooths the decline of the working-age population, and — by raising growth relative to the interest rate — reduces the debt-to-GDP ratio and helps prevent the debt "snowball effect"; and citing the UK Office for Budget Responsibility's March 2024 forecast that higher immigration raises tax revenue without significantly increasing expenditure, thereby reducing the deficit.

European Economic Area to the United Kingdom contributed substantially more than they consumed in public services.[59]

This is the precise inverse of the populist claim, and it is worth stating in the terms the user of these arguments most often reaches for. The complaint that immigration "raises taxes" gets the causation backwards. It is the *absence* of working-age contributors — the ageing of the native population, the fall in the ratio of payers to recipients — that raises the per-capita burden on those who remain. Immigration, by enlarging the body of contributors relative to dependants, *relieves* that burden. A country that responds to an ageing population by reducing immigration is not protecting its taxpayers; it is condemning them to carry a heavier load, because there will be fewer shoulders beneath it.

C. The scale of the contribution already being made

The contribution is not hypothetical; it is already large and growing. The share of the EU's working-age population born outside the Union rose from around 8 per cent in 2014 to 12.6 per cent in 2024, and the European Commission and the European Central Bank have both attributed a substantial part of recent EU employment growth to this inflow.[60] Across the OECD, immigrants made up a little more than 15 per cent of all workers in 2022, up from 13 per cent in 2015, and more than 20 per cent in nine member countries; and the OECD's International Migration Outlook records that 2022 saw around six million new permanent immigrants to the OECD, a record, driven precisely by the labour shortages and demographic pressures that this article has described.[61] The workers are coming, where they are allowed to; they are filling the shortages that ageing has opened; and they are, on the evidence, paying their way. The question is not whether Europe can attract them — many still wish to come — but whether it will build the institutions to admit them, or instead persist in the politics of repulsion.

VIII. Germany's Wager: The Refugees of 2015 and the Growth Dividend

A. "Wir schaffen das"

No episode tests the competing theories of immigration more directly than Germany's reception, in 2015 and 2016, of more than a million asylum-seekers, most of them fleeing the Syrian civil war. On 31 August 2015 Chancellor Angela Merkel concluded a press conference with the phrase that would define the decision and dog her for the rest of her career: "Wir schaffen das" — we can do it.[62] The decision was denounced at the time, and is denounced still, as reckless; it contributed to the rise of the AfD and to the hardening of the European mood that this article has traced. The question this Part asks is narrower and more answerable than the cultural quarrel: what, a decade on, does the evidence say about the economic result?

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[59]Christian Dustmann and Tommaso Frattini, "The Fiscal Effects of Immigration to the UK" (2014) 124 Economic Journal F593, finding that EEA immigrants to the UK made a positive net fiscal contribution, paying more in taxes than they received in public services and transfers.

[60]European Commission, "Migration, mobility and the EU labour market" (Special Topic, Economy and Finance, November 2025), recording that the share of the EU working-age population born outside the EU rose from about 8% in 2014 to 12.6% in 2024, and that immigration has contributed materially to EU employment growth; see also O Arce and others, "Foreign workers: a lever for economic growth" (ECB Blog, 8 May 2025).

[61]OECD, *International Migration Outlook 2024* (OECD Publishing 2024), recording around six million new permanent immigrants to OECD countries in 2022 (a record), driven by post-pandemic recovery, labour shortages and demographic change; and OECD, "Economic impact of migration", recording immigrants at over 15% of all workers across the OECD in 2022 (up from 13% in 2015), exceeding 20% in nine member countries.

[62]"Ten years on: Refugees near German employment levels" (InfoMigrants, August 2025), recording that more than a million refugees arrived in Germany in 2015–2016 and that Chancellor Merkel's statement of 31 August 2015, "Wir schaffen das", framed the policy; Germany received close to half of all Syrians arriving in Europe.

B. The integration record

The evidence says that the wager has substantially paid off. According to the Institute for Employment Research (IAB), the German government's own labour-market research body, around 64 per cent of the refugees who arrived in 2015 were in employment by the end of 2024 — against 70 per cent in the general population — and roughly 90 per cent of those employed held jobs subject to social-insurance contributions, most of them full-time.[63] The trajectory matters as much as the level: integration into work proceeded faster than in earlier refugee episodes such as the Balkan wars, and the employment rate rose steadily with length of stay, reaching around 61 per cent seven years after arrival and climbing thereafter, with employment among men far higher (around 73 per cent) than among women (around 29 per cent), and three-quarters of those in work in qualified jobs.[64] By the end of 2023 some 972,000 Syrians lived in Germany, of whom roughly 163,000 had already naturalised as German citizens.

C. The demographic and fiscal dividend

The macroeconomic significance of this is best grasped against the counterfactual of decline. Germany's Federal Labour Agency has estimated that, absent immigration, the country's workforce would shrink by around 209,000 jobs every year; the inflow of younger workers, including refugees, has offset that erosion, and in 2024 prevented a net loss of jobs that the demographic trend would otherwise have produced.[65] The median age of the Syrian arrivals, around twenty-eight, sits almost two decades below the German median of forty-seven: they are, demographically, precisely the cohort the country most lacks. More broadly, the employment rate of people with a migration background in Germany stood at 70 per cent in 2023, above the EU average of 66 per cent, and the number of people in employment in Germany rose by 6.1 million — some 17 per cent — between 2005 and 2023, a major contributor to the rise in tax and social-security revenue over the period.[66]

The lesson is not that humanitarian admission is costless — the initial years required substantial investment in language training, qualification recognition and administration, and the integration of refugee women remains incomplete. It is that the investment has yielded a return, fiscal and demographic, that the alarms of 2015 entirely failed to anticipate. Germany made a bet that a frightened continent told it was mad, and a decade later its labour market is stronger, its tax base broader, and its demographic decline slower than it would otherwise have been. The bitter irony, which Part III foreshadowed, is that the political reaction against the decision has now produced a government committed to winding down the very humanitarian admissions that the evidence vindicates — a triumph of the politics of projection over the arithmetic of need.

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[63] Institut für Arbeitsmarkt- und Berufsforschung (IAB), study reported in "Ten years on: Refugees near German employment levels" (InfoMigrants, August 2025), finding that around 64% of refugees who arrived in 2015 were employed by the end of 2024 (against 70% of the general population), with roughly 90% of those employed in jobs subject to social-insurance contributions, most full-time.

[64] Institute for Employment Research (IAB), "Syrian workers in Germany" (analysis covering 2016–2022, summarised by the European Commission, January 2025), recording an employment rate among Syrian refugees of around 61% seven years after arrival (men 73%, women 29%), with about 75% of those employed in qualified jobs; and recording approximately 972,000 Syrians resident in Germany at end-2023, of whom some 163,000 had naturalised since 2015.

[65] German Federal Labour Agency estimates reported in "Syrian Immigrants as a Catalyst for Germany's Labor Market" (analysis, August 2025), that without immigration Germany's workforce would shrink by around 209,000 jobs annually, and that younger immigrants — with a median age of around 28 against Germany's 47 — have offset a substantial part of the country's population decline since 2014.

[66] IAB-Forum, "Drivers of employment growth: an overview of the integration of migrants into the German labour market" (August 2025), recording a migration-background employment rate of 70% in 2023 (against an EU average of 66%), an increase of 6.1 million (17%) in the number of employed persons in Germany between 2005 and 2023, and a fall in reliance on means-tested benefits among migrants without a refugee background.

IX. Britain's Counter-Experiment: Brexit and the Economics of Subtraction

A. A natural experiment in reverse

If Germany ran the experiment of addition, the United Kingdom has, since 2016, run the experiment of subtraction, and the two together constitute as close to a controlled comparison as political economy ever affords. The central promise of the Brexit campaign was the recovery of control over immigration, and the post-Brexit system that came into force in January 2021 ended the free movement of EEA nationals and replaced it with a points-based regime designed, in the end, to bring the numbers down. The economic consequences have been the subject of unusually clear official analysis, and the analysis points uniformly in one direction.

B. What the official forecasters found

The United Kingdom government's own pre-referendum modelling found that if net EEA migration fell to zero, GDP would be reduced by around 1.8 per cent over fifteen years, and GDP per capita by around 0.6 per cent.[67] The Office for Budget Responsibility, the independent fiscal watchdog, has built reduced migration into its central forecasts with consistently negative effects on output: it assumes that the post-Brexit trading relationship will reduce long-run productivity by around 4 per cent relative to membership, and it has found that lower net migration could reduce GDP by around 1.5 percentage points by 2028–29.[68] As long ago as 2016 the OBR estimated that reduced migration would lower trend output growth by around 0.3 per cent a year through slower labour-force growth alone, before any productivity effect.[69]

The fiscal side mirrors the growth side. The OBR's own work finds that skilled-worker migrants who entered in 2022–23 had an average net positive fiscal impact of around £16,300 in that year, and around £12,000 once dependants are included.[70] Reduced-migration scenarios, by contrast, are projected to widen the deficit progressively over time, as the loss of contributors outweighs any saving on public services. The conclusion drawn by the UK in a Changing Europe research initiative is uncompromising: "Most immigrants are already net fiscal contributors; decreasing their numbers will only decrease their contributions."[71]

C. Good politics, bad economics

The British case is instructive precisely because the politics and the economics point in opposite directions. In early 2025, around two in three Britons told pollsters that immigration was too high; reducing it is, in that sense, responsive to public demand. But the same policy that satisfies the demand also reduces growth, widens the deficit, and intensifies the labour shortages — in health and social care above all — that an ageing society can least afford. This is the trap that this article has been describing,

[67]HM Government, *EU Exit: Long-term economic analysis* (2018), modelling that a fall in EEA net migration to zero would reduce GDP by approximately 1.8% over fifteen years and GDP per capita by approximately 0.6%; discussed in Jonathan Portes, "Immigration and the UK economy after Brexit" (2022) 38 Oxford Review of Economic Policy 82.

[68]Office for Budget Responsibility, "Brexit analysis" (2025), assuming that the post-Brexit Trade and Cooperation Agreement will reduce long-run UK productivity by around 4% relative to EU membership; and OBR analysis discussed in "Lower migration is bad news for the UK economy" (UK in a Changing Europe, November 2025), finding that lower net migration could reduce GDP by around 1.5 percentage points by 2028–29.

[69]Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts (2016 onward) and analysis collated in "Brexit impact on immigration" (Brexit FactBase, 2026), recording the OBR's estimate that reduced migration would lower trend output growth by around 0.3% a year through slower labour-force growth, and that reduced-migration scenarios widen the fiscal deficit over time.

[70]Office for Budget Responsibility analysis reported in "How might the UK's new approach to migration affect the economy?" (Electronic Immigration Network, October 2025), finding that skilled-worker migrants entering in 2022–23 had an average net positive fiscal impact of around £16,300 that year, and around £12,000 including dependants; and recording net migration of 431,000 in 2024, expected to fall further following restrictions announced in 2024 and 2025.

[71]"Lower migration is bad news for the UK economy" (UK in a Changing Europe, November 2025), concluding that because most immigrants are already net fiscal contributors, reducing their numbers reduces their contributions and harms the public finances.

observed in a single country with unusual clarity: a democratic public, frightened and ill-served by the public debate, demands a policy that is against its own material interest, and a political class, unwilling or unable to contest the framing, supplies it. The figure of the migrant absorbs the anxiety; the economy absorbs the cost; and the underlying problem — an ageing population that needs more workers, not fewer — is left not merely unaddressed but aggravated. Britain outside the Union and Germany within it have run the experiment in both directions, and the results are exactly what the demographic and fiscal logic predicts.

X. The Kafkaesque Labyrinth: Permits, Renewals, and the Limbo of Belonging

A. Before the Law

In the parable "Before the Law", which Franz Kafka embedded in *The Trial*, a man from the country comes seeking admittance to the Law and is met by a doorkeeper who will not let him pass — not now, perhaps later. The man waits. He waits for years, bribing the doorkeeper, studying the fleas in his collar, growing old at the threshold. Only as he is dying does he learn that the door before which he has waited his whole life was meant for him alone, and that it is now to be shut.[72] No image better captures the experience of the would-be European than this: a door that appears open, a threshold endlessly guarded, a process whose rules are never quite disclosed, and a clock that runs out. Kafka, who spent his working life as a lawyer in a semi-public insurance institute and knew bureaucracy from the inside, gave the modern world its adjective for this condition. The immigration systems of the European Union are, in the most exact sense, Kafkaesque.

In *The Castle*, Kafka's other great parable of administration, the land surveyor K. arrives in a village to take up a post to which he has apparently been appointed, only to find that he can never reach the Castle authorities who appointed him, can never obtain the documents that would confirm his status, and is shuttled endlessly among officials who are at once powerful and unaccountable.[73] K. is not refused; he is simply never confirmed. He exists in a permanent provisionality, neither admitted nor expelled, his life suspended on the issuance of a paper that never comes. This is not a literary exaggeration of the migrant's condition; it is, for very large numbers of people, a literal description of it.

B. The two-year wait and the absence of certainty

The single greatest obstacle to attracting and retaining the workers, investors and founders that Europe needs is not the height of the bar but the opacity and slowness of the process — the years of provisionality during which a person cannot plan, cannot commit, cannot be sure. A worker who must wait years for a residence permit, then renew it at intervals on uncertain criteria, then wait again — often two years or more of processing — for the naturalisation that would finally confer security, is a worker who cannot be certain of anything: not of whether to buy a house, enrol a child in a school whose country she may have to leave, or accept a long-term post. Certainty is the commodity that the European systems most conspicuously fail to supply, and it is the commodity that mobile talent most prizes. A founder choosing between Lisbon, Berlin and Austin will weigh not only tax rates and salaries but the simple question of whether, in five years' time, she and her family will know where they stand. Too often, in Europe, the honest answer is that she will not.

C. The patchwork of nomad visas

The proliferation of "digital nomad" visas since 2020 illustrates the patchwork at its most vivid. Almost every Member State now offers some such permit, and no two are alike: the income thresholds,

[72] Franz Kafka, "Vor dem Gesetz" ("Before the Law"), incorporated in *Der Process* (*The Trial*, 1925). The parable's structure — a gate intended for one person, guarded so as never to be entered — is the governing image of this Part.

[73] Franz Kafka, *Das Schloss* (*The Castle*, 1926). K.'s inability to obtain confirmation of a status he has supposedly already been granted is the precise predicament of the long-term resident awaiting the documents that would secure his position.

durations, tax treatments, processing times and — crucially — the onward paths to permanence differ wildly from one country to the next. Table 3 collects the principal European schemes.

Table 3. Selected European digital-nomad visa schemes (2026).

Country (visa)	Income/month	Duration & renewal	Path to settlement	Processing / tax
Portugal (D8)	€3,480	1 yr → 2 yr (then 3 yr)	PR after 5 yr; citizenship 10 yr (7 yr CPLP)	Slow; flat 15% (ITS)
Spain	€2,760–2,850	1 yr → 3 yr → +2 yr	Citizenship after 10 yr residence	~15–45 days; ~24%
Greece	€3,500	1 yr → +2 yr	No expedited citizenship route	50% tax break, 7 yr
Estonia	~€4,500	1 yr	None — no PR or citizenship	~30 days
Croatia	€2,540–3,295	12 months	No clear onward path	~20 days; foreign income untaxed
Malta	—	Up to 4 yr	None — a four-year dead-end	—
Bulgaria	~€2,583	1 yr → +1 yr	—	Flat 10%
Romania	—	—	—	10–14 days

The variation is not benign diversity; it is fragmentation that imposes real costs. A remote worker who qualifies in Lisbon does not thereby qualify in Madrid; a permit that leads to permanent residence in Portugal leads nowhere at all in Estonia or Malta, whose nomad permits are, as one analysis bluntly puts it, four-year dead ends with no path to settlement.[74] Processing times range from around ten days in Romania to the notoriously slow Portuguese system; income thresholds run from roughly €2,540 a month in Croatia to around €4,500 in Estonia and €3,500 in Greece; tax regimes vary from Bulgaria's flat 10 per cent to the progressive rates triggered by tax residence elsewhere.[75] For the worker, the result is a bewildering and shifting landscape that must be navigated country by country; for the Union, it is a collective failure to present a single, legible offer to the global market for talent. Twenty-seven doorkeepers, each with different rules, none of them quite willing to say what lies behind the door.

D. The renewal trap and the price of provisionality

It is tempting to suppose that the difficulty lies only at the point of entry, and that once admitted the newcomer is secure. The opposite is nearer the truth. The deepest deterrent is not the first permit but the long succession of renewals, status changes and processing delays that stand between the first permit and the security of citizenship — the years of provisionality during which a person's right to remain is always about to expire and must always be renewed, on criteria that may have changed since last time, through an administration that may take many months to decide. The typical European trajectory runs from an initial visa, to a renewable residence permit, to permanent residence after some years, to naturalisation after some years more — each stage a fresh application, each application a fresh wait, each wait a fresh occasion for the rules to shift beneath the applicant's feet.

[74] "European Countries for Digital Nomads in 2026" (B&K Law Firm, February 2026), recording that the Maltese and Estonian digital-nomad permits do not lead to permanent residence or citizenship, making them, at most, a four-year route with no path to long-term settlement; and that income thresholds range from around €2,540/month (Croatia) to around €4,500 (Estonia).

[75] "Digital Nomad Visas in Europe (2026): Costs, requirements and length of stay" (RemotifyEurope, February 2026), recording processing times of 10–14 days (Romania), around 20 (Croatia) and around 30 (Estonia, Hungary), with Portugal notably slow; and "Spain Digital Nomad Visa vs Portugal, Croatia, Greece, Estonia" (Jobbatical, March 2026), recording Portugal's D8 income threshold at €3,480/month and the conversion of the long-stay visa into a two-year permit renewable for three.

The arithmetic of this is corrosive. A person who must wait, on a common pattern, around ten years of lawful residence before becoming eligible to naturalise, and who must then endure a processing delay frequently approaching two years for the citizenship paperwork itself, will have spent the better part of a working life in a status that is by definition temporary — unable to be certain that the next renewal will succeed, that the criteria will not tighten, that a change of government will not narrow the route, or that the file will not simply languish in a backlog like the fifty thousand that accumulated in Portugal. The provisionality is not a transitional inconvenience; for many it is a permanent condition, K.'s endless suspension before the Castle translated into administrative fact.

This matters economically because certainty is what permits commitment, and commitment is what the demographic arithmetic requires. A worker who cannot be sure she will be permitted to stay will not put down the roots — the mortgage, the long-term post, the business with employees and premises — that convert a transient labour input into a settled, productive, tax-paying member of the community. An investor who fears that the route he entered by may be withdrawn or rendered worthless by delay, as the golden-visa episode taught the market to fear, will place his capital and his family elsewhere. The slow path from permit to renewal to citizenship is therefore not a peripheral administrative defect but a central economic failing: it converts people who might have committed into people who hedge, and a continent that needs commitment above all has built a system that systematically discourages it. The remedy, as Part XIII argues, is not merely a faster front door but a guaranteed and legible *path* — a published timetable from arrival to citizenship on which a newcomer can actually rely, so that the question "will I be allowed to stay?" has, from the first day, a knowable answer.

XI. Golden Visas and Broken Promises: The Erosion of Legitimate Expectations

A. The rise and retreat of residence-by-investment

For a decade after the sovereign-debt crisis, the southern Member States competed to attract capital through "golden visa" schemes — residence permits granted in exchange for qualifying investment. Portugal's *Autorização de Residência para Atividade de Investimento*, launched in 2012, was the most successful: it generated over €7.3 billion in investment and granted more than eleven thousand visas, with the purchase of real estate accounting for roughly three-quarters of applications.[76] Spain, Ireland, Greece, Malta, Hungary and others ran parallel schemes. The programmes were always controversial — they were criticised for inflating house prices, for laxity on money-laundering, and for the unseemliness of selling residence and, in Malta's case, citizenship outright — and a wave of closures and reforms has now swept most of them away.

The retreat has been comprehensive. The United Kingdom abolished its Tier 1 (Investor) visa in February 2022 amid concerns about money-laundering; Ireland closed its Immigrant Investor Programme in February 2023; Portugal removed the real-estate route in October 2023; Spain ended its scheme entirely on 3 April 2025; and in April 2025 the Court of Justice struck down Malta's citizenship-by-investment scheme as incompatible with EU law.[77] Spain's closure, framed by Prime Minister Sánchez as a response to the housing crisis, ended a twelve-year programme that had granted nearly sixteen thousand visas — just 0.3 per cent of residential property transactions — and attracted over a billion euros a year.[78] The Malta judgment is of particular legal significance: the Court held that a

[76]"Is the Portugal Golden Visa Ending in 2024? Not Really" (Portugal Homes, 2025) and "Portugal Golden Visa Changes 2025" (Global Citizen Solutions, April 2026), recording that the ARI scheme launched in 2012 generated over €7.3 billion in investment and more than 11,000 visas, with real estate accounting for around 75% of applications before its removal.

[77]"Every Golden Visa Still Open in Europe in 2026" (IMI Daily, April 2026), recording the closure of the UK Tier 1 (Investor) visa in February 2022, the Irish Immigrant Investor Programme in February 2023, the Portuguese real-estate route in October 2023 (Law 56/2023), and the Spanish scheme on 3 April 2025 under Organic Law 1/2025; and the Court of Justice's ruling against Malta's citizenship-by-investment scheme in April 2025.

[78]"Spain Ends 'Golden Visa' Scheme After 12 Years" (Idealista, April 2025), recording the end of the Spanish golden visa on 3 April 2025 under the amendment to Law 14/2013, nearly 16,000 visas granted between 2013 and 2025 (0.3% of residential

Member State may not commodify Union citizenship by granting it in exchange for predetermined payments, since to do so undermines the relationship of solidarity and good faith between the Member States on which citizenship of the Union rests.[79] Table 4 summarises the status of the principal schemes.

Table 4. Residence- and citizenship-by-investment schemes: status in 2026.

Country	Scheme	Status	Note
Portugal	ARI golden visa	Real-estate route closed Oct 2023 (Law 56/2023)	€7.3bn raised, 11,000+ visas; fund/enterprise routes remain; AIMA backlog ~45–50k
Spain	Golden visa	Ended 3 Apr 2025 (Organic Law 1/2025)	~16,000 visas 2013–25 (0.3% of property market); pending applications protected
Ireland	Immigrant Investor Prog.	Closed Feb 2023	Was €1m; low utilisation and political pressure
United Kingdom	Tier 1 (Investor)	Closed Feb 2022	Was £2m; money-laundering concerns
Malta	Citizenship by investment	Struck down by CJEU, Apr 2025	Case C-181/23; MPRP residency programme survives
Hungary	Golden visa	Relaunched Jul 2024	Against the prevailing EU trend
Greece	Golden visa	Open (tiered)	€250k–800k depending on zone

B. Portugal and the problem of legitimate expectations

The Portuguese reform repays closer attention, because it has been widely — and not quite accurately — described as a breach of investors' legitimate expectations, and the truth is both more interesting and more troubling than the simple charge. The reforming statute, Law 56/2023, enacted as part of the *Mais Habitação* ("More Housing") programme, did *not*, in fact, apply retroactively. It expressly grandfathered pending applications: residence permits already issued remained valid, family-reunification applications approved under the old regime were preserved, and applications already submitted or awaiting municipal pre-approval continued to be processed under the former framework.[80] The process by which the reform was made, moreover, was scrupulous rather than peremptory: announced in February 2023, passed by Parliament in July, vetoed by President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa in August on the ground that it would not in fact curb speculation, returned to Parliament, and only then enacted, taking effect on 7 October 2023.[81]

To the extent that the charge is that Portugal abruptly stripped rights from pending applicants, then, it is largely unfounded, and intellectual honesty requires that it be set aside. But the deeper grievance survives the correction, and indeed is sharpened by it. The expectations that were eroded were not the formal legal rights of those already in the queue — those were protected — but the *practical certainty* on which investment decisions depend. The sudden abolition of the dominant route, mid-stream, signalled

property transactions), and around 2,000 applications a year; and Organic Law 1/2025 of 2 January 2025.

[79]Case C-181/23 *Commission v Malta* (Court of Justice, judgment of 29 April 2025), holding Malta's citizenship-by-investment ("golden passport") scheme incompatible with Article 20 TFEU and the principle of sincere cooperation; the Maltese residence-by-investment programme (MPRP) was unaffected. The precise neutral citation should be verified before publication.

[80]"Portugal's Golden Visa: Post-2023 Changes and What to Expect" (LVP Advogados, January 2026), recording that Law 56/2023 clarified that it did not apply retroactively: residence permits already issued, and family-reunification applications approved under the previous regime, remained valid, and applications already submitted or at preliminary stages (such as those awaiting municipal pre-approval) continued under the former legal framework; and "Is Portugal Golden Visa Ending: 2026 Changes" (imin-Portugal, September 2025) to like effect.

[81]"Is the Portugal Golden Visa Program Suspended? Not Exactly" (Portugal Buyers Agent, December 2025), recording that the Mais Habitação bill was announced on 16 February 2023, approved by Parliament on 19 July 2023, vetoed by President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa on 21 August 2023, and entered into force on 7 October 2023 as Law 56/2023.

that the rules of the game could change without warning; the President's own veto conceded that the policy was of doubtful efficacy; and, most damaging of all, the administration of the surviving scheme collapsed into a backlog of some forty-five to fifty thousand pending cases as the immigration service SEF was dissolved and replaced by the new agency AIMA, leaving even grandfathered applicants in a limbo of years-long delay.[82] A formal grandfathering that is honoured in law but defeated in practice by administrative collapse is, from the investor's point of view, scarcely better than an outright breach; the certainty that was promised is gone either way. And the tell-tale fact that Portuguese property prices continued to rise by nearly 17 per cent in the year after the real-estate route was removed suggests that the scheme was never the principal driver of the housing pressure it was abolished to relieve — that the reform, in other words, sacrificed certainty for an objective it was poorly designed to achieve.

C. The doctrine and its lesson

The doctrine of legitimate expectations is one of the general principles of EU law, the subjective corollary of the principle of legal certainty, protecting expectations engendered by precise, unconditional and consistent assurances from a competent authority.[83] The lesson of the golden-visa episode is not that the schemes ought to have been preserved — several were bad policy, and the housing pressures were real. It is that the *manner* of their reform, the abruptness and the administrative failure that accompanied it, taught the global market a lesson that Europe can ill afford to have taught: that a residence or investment route offered by a European state today may be withdrawn, or rendered worthless by delay, tomorrow. A continent that needs to attract capital and talent has instead advertised its own unreliability. The remedy, developed in Part XIII, is not to resurrect the golden visas but to replace the whole patchwork of fragile national promises with a single, durable, Union-level guarantee on which an investor or a worker can actually rely.

XII. The Roads Not Taken: EU Inc, the Blue Card, and the Failure of Harmonisation

A. The Blue Card that never flew

Europe has known for two decades that its fragmented approach to skilled migration was failing, and it has twice legislated to fix it. The EU Blue Card, created by Directive 2009/50/EC, was meant to be a single, prestigious, Union-wide work-and-residence permit for the highly qualified, a European answer to the American green card. It conspicuously failed to become one. Member States were sluggish in transposing it; the salary thresholds were set high; and, fatally, it had to compete with the parallel national schemes that Member States kept in being — France's *Passeport Talent*, the Netherlands' *kennismigrant* scheme — which they continued to prefer.[84] The consequence was a permit issued in wildly uneven numbers and dominated almost entirely by a single country. As of 2020, Germany had issued some 27,000 Blue Cards and France around 1,500, while Cyprus, Greece and the Netherlands had issued none at all — Germany alone accounting for the overwhelming majority of all Blue Cards ever

[82]"Golden Visa Changes in Portugal, Greece & Italy" (Forth Capital, October 2025), recording the transfer of functions from SEF to the new agency AIMA, a backlog of around 45,000 to 50,000 pending applications, and a fully digital application system expected in early 2026; and recording that Portuguese property prices continued to rise (16.9% year-on-year to April 2025) after the removal of the real-estate route, suggesting that the scheme was not the principal driver of price inflation.

[83]On legitimate expectations as a general principle of EU law and the corollary of legal certainty, see Case 112/77 *Töpfer v Commission* EU:C:1978:94; Case 120/86 *Mulder v Minister van Landbouw en Visserij* EU:C:1988:213; and Joined Cases C-182/03 and C-217/03 *Belgium and Forum 187 v Commission* EU:C:2006:416, [147].

[84]"EU Blue Card Guide" (Centuro Global, August 2025), recording that the Blue Card created by Directive 2009/50/EC suffered from slow transposition, high salary thresholds and competition from parallel national schemes such as France's Passeport Talent and the Netherlands' kennismigrant permit; and EUR-Lex, "EU blue card — entry and residence of highly qualified workers", recording the 2016 Commission review's finding that fragmentation and parallel national schemes rendered the directive ineffective.

granted.[85] Even at its 2014 level, the Blue Card (13,852 issued) was outnumbered by the national highly-skilled permits it was supposed to supersede (24,922).[86] A recast directive, Directive (EU) 2021/1883, replaced the original with effect from November 2023; whether it will fare better remains to be seen, but the structural problem — Member States' insistence on retaining their own competing routes — has not been resolved.

The Blue Card's history is, in miniature, the history of European migration policy: a sound idea for harmonisation, repeatedly diluted by the Member States' jealous retention of national control, and so deprived of the scale and simplicity that alone could make it work. It is telling that, as the recast was being negotiated, no new EU legislation on legal migration had been agreed for five years — a paralysis that speaks to the depth of the political deadlock.

B. EU Inc and the twenty-eighth regime

The same pattern — a harmonising ambition advanced against the inertia of fragmentation — is playing out, even now, in the field of company law, and it is worth dwelling on because it reveals both the scale of the prize and the obstacles in the way. On 18 March 2026 the Commission presented "EU Inc.", a proposal for a single, optional, fully digital set of corporate rules applicable across the whole Union — part of what it calls the "28th regime", a body of EU-level law that companies could choose in place of the twenty-seven national systems.[87] The Commission's own framing of the problem is a precise indictment of the status quo: entrepreneurs today face "27 national legal systems and more than 60 company legal forms", so that founding a company "can take weeks or even months". Under EU Inc., by contrast, a company could be founded "within 48 hours", for "less than €100", with no minimum share capital, through a single EU-level interface, with full freedom to choose the country of incorporation and access to the whole single market.[88]

The significance of EU Inc. for the present argument is twofold. First, it is a tacit admission, by the Commission itself, that the fragmentation of twenty-seven national regimes is a serious drag on European dynamism — exactly the diagnosis this article advances about immigration. Second, and more soberingly, EU Inc. has not yet been realised: the Commission has called on the Parliament and the Council to reach agreement only "by the end of 2026", and the history of such proposals — the Blue Card above all — counsels against assuming that the call will be heeded.[89] If the Union can contemplate a twenty-eighth regime for companies — a single digital front door, opened in forty-eight hours, valid across the whole market — there is no principled reason it cannot contemplate the same for people. The case for a uniform European route to residence and citizenship is, in this light, simply the application to human beings of the logic the Commission has already embraced for firms.

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[85]"Blue Card (European Union)" (summarising official figures), recording that as of August 2020 Germany had issued around 27,000 Blue Cards and France around 1,500, while Cyprus, Greece and the Netherlands had issued none — Germany accounting for the great majority of all Blue Cards; and that Directive 2009/50/EC was repealed and replaced by Directive (EU) 2021/1883 with effect from 19 November 2023.

[86]Steve Peers, "The revised Blue Card Directive" (EU Immigration and Asylum Law and Policy blog, 2021), recording that in 2014 some 38,000 highly-skilled permits were issued in the EU, of which national permits accounted for 24,922 and EU Blue Cards only 13,852; and that no new EU legal-migration legislation was agreed between 2016 and the Blue Card revision, illustrating the legislative paralysis in this field.

[87]European Commission, "EU Inc. – making business easier in the European Union" (News, 18 March 2026), presenting EU Inc. as a single optional harmonised corporate legal regime, part of the "28th regime"; see also Commission Q&A QANDA/26/615 and press release IP/26/614.

[88]ibid, recording that entrepreneurs currently face 27 national legal systems and more than 60 company legal forms, with company formation taking weeks or months, and that EU Inc. would permit formation within 48 hours, for less than €100, with no minimum share capital, via a single EU-level interface, with free choice of country of incorporation.

[89]ibid, recording the Commission's call on the European Parliament and the Council to reach agreement on the EU Inc. proposal by the end of 2026; the proposal was, at the time of writing, not yet adopted.

XIII. The Proposal: A Uniform European Route to Residence and an Expedited Path to Belonging

A. The principle

The argument of the preceding parts converges on a single institutional conclusion. Europe's demographic and fiscal predicament requires more working-age newcomers; the evidence shows that such newcomers, properly integrated, pay their way and slow the decline; and the existing architecture — twenty-seven national regimes, a thicket of permits, fragile and reversible investment schemes, and a Blue Card hollowed out by the Member States' refusal to surrender control — is almost perfectly designed to deter the very people Europe needs. The remedy is to do for people what the Commission now proposes to do for companies: to create a single, optional, Union-level route that offers, in place of the patchwork, one legible door and, behind it, certainty.

The proposal advanced here has four elements: a uniform route of admission; a single, fast, digital process; a guaranteed and expedited progression to permanent residence and citizenship; and the durability — the protection against arbitrary reversal — that the golden-visa débâcle showed to be indispensable. Table 5 sets the proposed design against the status quo.

Table 5. The proposed uniform route compared with the status quo.

Dimension	Status quo	Proposed uniform route
Legal basis	27 national regimes plus a diluted EU Blue Card	Single optional EU route — a "28th regime" for people
Tracks	Fragmented: golden visas, nomad visas, Blue Card, national permits	Talent / investment / entrepreneur, harmonised at Union level
Process	Country-by-country; weeks to years; opaque criteria	Single digital interface; weeks; published criteria
Renewals	Repeated, on shifting criteria	Defined timetable; minimal renewals
Path to citizenship	~10 yr residence plus up to 2 yr processing; highly variable	Expedited, harmonised, integration-based; months, not years
Durability	Reversible (cf. golden-visa closures and backlogs)	Anchored in EU law; legitimate-expectations and CJEU protection
Investment focus	Often speculative residential property	Productive enterprise, research and job creation

B. A uniform route of admission

The route would be a single European residence permit, granted under harmonised Union criteria and valid — like the Blue Card in its original aspiration, but this time without the competing national escape-hatches — across the whole Union. It should be open on more than one track, because Europe needs more than one kind of newcomer: a talent track for the skilled, calibrated to genuine labour-market shortages rather than to arbitrary salary thresholds; an investment track, the legitimate successor to the golden visas, channelling capital into productive enterprise, research and job creation rather than into speculative residential property — the very reorientation that Portugal's surviving fund-and-enterprise routes already gesture toward; and an entrepreneurial track, paired naturally with EU Inc., so that a founder who incorporates an EU Inc. company in forty-eight hours can obtain, through the same digital interface, the right to reside and build it. The unifying principle is that admission criteria should track the Union's actual economic needs, should be set once at Union level, and should not be undercut by twenty-seven parallel national schemes.

C. A single, fast, digital process

The process must be fast and digital, because slowness and opacity are the true deterrents. If the Commission can promise company formation in forty-eight hours through a single interface, the ambition for people need not be measured in years. The standard should be measured in weeks: a single application, a single set of documents submitted once, a single decision, and clear, published criteria against which that decision is made. The contrast with the present reality — the Portuguese backlog of fifty thousand cases, the two-year naturalisation waits, the renewals on shifting criteria — is the contrast between a system designed to admit and a system designed to delay.

D. An expedited and guaranteed path to citizenship

This is the element the user of these arguments rightly insists upon, and it is the one the existing systems most conspicuously lack. The single greatest disincentive to relocation is the absence of a certain and reasonably swift progression from permit to permanence to citizenship. Today that progression is a patchwork of long and variable residence requirements — typically ten years to naturalisation, sometimes more, administered with the delays described above — so that a worker may spend a decade or more in provisionality, never sure of the ground beneath her feet.[90] The proposal is for a harmonised and expedited timetable: a defined and reasonably short period of lawful residence — calibrated to integration rather than to mere endurance — after which permanent residence is acquired as of right, and a further defined period after which citizenship follows, on transparent and attainable conditions, processed within months rather than years. Certainty is the point. A newcomer who knows, on the day she arrives, exactly what she must do and exactly how long it will take to become a permanent resident and then a citizen, is a newcomer who can commit — who will buy the house, found the company, raise the children, and pay the taxes that the demographic arithmetic demands.

E. Durability against arbitrary reversal

Finally, the route must be durable, because the golden-visa episode demonstrated that a promise which can be withdrawn or rendered worthless by administrative collapse is no promise at all. Anchoring the route in Union law, with the protection of the general principle of legitimate expectations and the supervision of the Court of Justice, would supply precisely the protection against arbitrary reversal that the fragile national schemes lacked. A person admitted under the uniform route, and progressing toward citizenship on its published timetable, should be secure against the kind of mid-stream rule-change and processing breakdown that has characterised the national programmes. Durability is not a luxury; it is the condition on which the whole value of the offer depends.

F. Subsidiarity, sovereignty, and the limits of the proposal

It must be conceded at once that citizenship is, under the Treaties, a matter for the Member States, and that nationality of a Member State is the gateway to citizenship of the Union; the Court's recent ruling against Malta turned on precisely this relationship.[91] The proposal therefore does not, and constitutionally could not, have the Union confer citizenship directly. What it proposes is a harmonised route of *admission* and *residence* — squarely within the Union's existing competence over legal migration — coupled with a harmonised and expedited *recommended timetable* for naturalisation that Member States would commit to honour, much as they commit to other common standards. This is a

[90]"Digital Nomad Visa 2026 Guide" (Global Citizen Solutions, 2026), recording that Portugal offers permanent residence after five years and citizenship after ten (reduced to seven for nationals of Portuguese-speaking CPLP countries), with comparable or longer periods elsewhere; naturalisation periods and processing times vary widely across the Union, commonly amounting to a decade or more of provisional status.

[91]Case C-181/23 *Commission v Malta* (n (n 79)), affirming that while nationality remains a Member State competence, it must be exercised consistently with EU law and with the relationship of solidarity and good faith underlying Union citizenship. The proposal here is for harmonisation of admission and of a recommended naturalisation timetable, not for the conferral of citizenship by the Union itself.

more modest proposal than it may first appear, and it is the natural extension of instruments the Union has already enacted, from the Blue Card to the long-term residents directive. The Malta judgment is not an obstacle to it but a guide: citizenship may not be sold as a commodity, but a transparent, integration-based, Union-wide path to it is a very different thing, and one wholly consistent with the solidarity the Court was at pains to protect.

XIV. Objections and Replies

A proposal of this kind must meet the strongest objections, not the weakest, and several deserve a serious answer.

A. Housing and public services

The most powerful objection is that newcomers strain housing and public services, and that the golden visas in particular inflated house prices — the very concern that drove their abolition in Spain and Portugal. The concern is real and must be met, not dismissed. But three points blunt it. First, the evidence that the investment schemes were the principal driver of housing inflation is weak: Portuguese prices rose by nearly 17 per cent in the year *after* the real-estate route was closed, and the Spanish scheme accounted for just 0.3 per cent of property transactions.[92] The proposal here, moreover, deliberately steers the investment track *away* from residential property and toward productive enterprise, precisely to avoid the housing channel. Second, housing supply is a function of construction, and construction is a function of, among other things, labour — much of it migrant; a policy of excluding workers to protect housing is partly self-defeating, since it removes the hands that build the houses. Third, the fiscal contribution of newcomers, documented in Part VII, is itself a resource that can be directed to the public services and housing that growth requires; the choice is not between newcomers and services but between a growing tax base that can fund services and a shrinking one that cannot.

B. Wages and the native worker

A second objection holds that immigration depresses the wages of native workers, particularly the low-paid. The empirical literature finds these effects to be, in general, small, concentrated among previous immigrants rather than the native-born, and outweighed in aggregate by the gains to growth and the public finances.[93] A serious version of the reply does not deny that particular workers in particular sectors may face wage pressure, but insists that the remedy is robust labour-market enforcement and a calibrated, shortage-driven admissions policy — both of which the uniform route, with its harmonised and adjustable criteria, is better placed to deliver than the present free-for-all of irregular flows and exploitative parallel schemes.

C. Integration, cohesion, and identity

A third objection — the deepest, and the one least amenable to fiscal rebuttal — concerns social cohesion and national identity: the fear that rapid immigration dissolves the shared culture on which democratic solidarity depends. This is the objection that the depth-psychological analysis of Part II took most seriously, and it cannot be answered with tables. But it can be answered in part by the German evidence of Part VIII, which shows integration proceeding, over a decade, further and faster than the alarms predicted; and it can be answered in principle by Jürgen Habermas's concept of constitutional patriotism — the idea that the bond uniting a diverse polity need not be ethnic or cultural sameness but

[92] "Spain Ends 'Golden Visa' Scheme" (n (n 78)) (0.3% of transactions) and "Golden Visa Changes in Portugal, Greece & Italy" (n (n 82)) (Portuguese prices rising 16.9% year-on-year after the real-estate route's removal), together suggesting that investment-residence schemes were not the principal driver of housing inflation.

[93] The mainstream empirical finding — that the wage effects of immigration on native workers are on average small and concentrated among prior immigrants — is summarised in, among others, the OECD and IMF analyses cited above (nn (n 61), (n 56)); the AIReF analysis (n (n 58)) likewise finds the dominant effect to be a positive contribution to growth and the public finances.

shared allegiance to the constitution, the rights, and the democratic procedures of the community.[94] A Europe confident in its constitutional values — the rule of law, equality, the open society — has the resources to integrate newcomers around those values without demanding that they erase themselves. The expedited path to citizenship is itself an instrument of cohesion: it converts the permanent outsider, the K. forever before the Castle, into a fellow citizen with a stake in the common project. Exclusion, not admission, is what corrodes cohesion, because it manufactures a resident population of the rightless — exactly the condition Arendt identified as the solvent of political community.

D. Democratic legitimacy and the limits of expertise

A final objection is procedural: that to override, through Union-level harmonisation, the clearly expressed preference of national electorates for less immigration is technocratic high-handedness of just the kind that fuels the populist backlash. This objection has force, and the reply is not to deny the democratic will but to insist on an honest public argument about its consequences. John Stuart Mill's defence of free discussion rested on the conviction that even a settled majority opinion must be continually tested against the strongest contrary case, lest it harden into "dead dogma".[95] The argument of this article is offered in that spirit: not as a plan to be imposed over the heads of citizens, but as the contrary case that the present consensus has too rarely been made to confront. A democratic public entitled to choose less immigration is also entitled to be told, plainly, what it will cost — in growth foregone, in pensions imperilled, in services unstaffed — and to choose in full knowledge of the price. The wager of this article is that a public so informed would choose differently, or at least would choose with its eyes open.

XV. Conclusion: From the Politics of Fear to the Politics of Measure

The European Union stands at a demographic crossroads of a kind it has never faced before. Its fertility has fallen to a level that, sustained, means steady decline; its population is ageing into a structure that its pension systems can honour only by making the old of the future poorer; its workforce is beginning the first sustained contraction in its modern history; and its productivity and innovation have fallen behind the world's leaders. Every one of these pressures points toward the same conclusion: that Europe needs, and will go on needing, more working-age newcomers than its own birth rate can supply. And yet, at this exact moment, the politics of the continent have turned against the newcomer with a ferocity that the evidence cannot explain and the arithmetic cannot survive.

This article has argued that the contradiction is intelligible only as a politics of projection — the displacement onto the migrant of anxieties about decline that the continent cannot bear to own. It is the Shadow that Jung described, the narcissism of minor differences that Freud named, the friend–enemy line that Schmitt made the essence of the political, the plague-town's search for someone to blame that Camus dramatised. It is, in the largest sense, the substitution of a frightened nostalgia for a clear-eyed reckoning with the future. And its institutional expression — the patchwork of twenty-seven national regimes, the Kafkaesque labyrinth of permits and renewals, the broken golden-visa promises, the Blue Card that never flew — is a machine for repelling the very people the continent's survival requires.

The alternative is not naïve openness; it is what Camus, in *The Rebel*, called measure — *la mesure* — the refusal of both the nihilism that says nothing matters and the absolutism that sacrifices the human present to an abstract future.[96] A politics of measure would acknowledge the genuine anxieties of

[94] Jürgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity" (1990), in *Between Facts and Norms* (tr William Rehg, MIT Press 1996); and *The Postnational Constellation* (tr Max Pensky, MIT Press 2001), developing constitutional patriotism (*Verfassungspatriotismus*) as a post-ethnic basis for solidarity in pluralistic societies.

[95] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (1859) ch 2, on the necessity of free and open contestation of received opinion, and the danger that unchallenged truths become "dead dogma".

[96] Albert Camus, *L'Homme révolté* (*The Rebel*, Gallimard 1951), on *la mesure* (measure) as the mean between nihilism and absolutism, and on rebellion as affirmation rather than negation. The closing invocation is of Camus's insistence that genuine

citizens without surrendering to them; would admit newcomers in numbers calibrated to real needs, through a single legible door, with a fast and certain path to belonging; and would defend, in Popper's terms, the open society against those who would close it.[97] It would treat the stranger at the gate not as the carrier of the community's disowned fears but as Kant's bearer of cosmopolitan right and a future fellow citizen — and, not incidentally, as the taxpayer, the worker, the founder and the parent on whom the European social model now depends.

The man from the country, in Kafka's parable, dies before the gate that was meant for him alone, never having passed through, because the doorkeeper would not let him and he dared not force his way. The tragedy is not only his; it is the doorkeeper's too, and the Law's, for the door is now to be shut and what lay beyond it will never be known. Europe is, at present, the doorkeeper. It has a choice that Kafka's doorkeeper did not believe he had: to open the gate that was always meant to be entered, on terms that are clear and fair and certain, and to discover, on the other side, not the enemy it has been taught to fear but the renewal it has ceased to believe in. The cure has been standing at the threshold all along. It remains only to recognise it, and to let it in.

revolt affirms a shared human dignity rather than dividing the world into the saved and the damned.

[97] Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (n (n 32)), on the open society as one that "sets free the critical powers of man" and on the duty to defend it against the forces of closure.

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