

## ***New London CT Jewish Leader***

### **August 8, 2002 "Consequences of Mass Arab Immigration" By Kenneth W. Stein**

In evaluating current demographic characteristics and future trends, two recently released reports by the European Commission and the United Nations suggests that Europe faces a potential Arab immigrant onslaught, perhaps as great as that America endured during the European immigration of the 19th and early 20th centuries. If Arab labor supply meets European labor demand over the next twenty years, what are the implications for Europe, Middle Eastern Arab states, and Israel? Coupled with residual anti-Semitic feeling, a generally lukewarm if not pro-Palestinian attitude by European states toward resolving the conflict, Europe's requirement to maintain hydrocarbon energy imports from the Middle East, and its deep interest in sustaining commercial relations with North African Arab and Middle Eastern states, the advent of massive Moslem/Arab migration adds one more reason to believe that in the decades ahead Israel's relationship with Europe will be rocky. European immigrants to the United States altered American culture and urban demographics, spawned nativism, and changed the nature of domestic politics. There is no reason to believe that an Arab migration of such magnitude will not similarly alter Europe's political, social, and cultural landscape over the next quarter-century. At the end of May, the European Commission published its "Social Situation Report 2002" ([http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/news/2002/jun/inbrief\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2002/jun/inbrief_en.pdf)). The Report predicts that before 2015, Europe's population growth will be stagnant or even negative in most EU regions. But the age structure of the EU's population will change more quickly than will its size. By 2015, one in three Europeans of working age will be over 50, while the number of those between 20 and 29 will fall by 20% and the 50-64 age group will grow by 25%. Immigration already counts for 70% of EU population growth in the past five years, with most of the immigrants going to Italy, Britain, and Germany. Three or four working people are needed to support each retired person; immigration to Europe even at current levels will not satisfy EU labor requirements. Released in July after 18 months of painstaking work by a team of Arab scholars and intellectuals, the United Nation's "Arab Human Development Report 2002" (<http://www.undp.org/rbas/ahdr/PR2.pdf>) notes that a "mismatch between aspirations and their fulfillment has in some cases led to [Arab] alienation, apathy and discontent." The population of the Arab world is 280 million, and that number is likely to grow to 400-450 million by 2020. Thirty-eight percent of the current Arab population is under the age of 14; by comparison in the U.S., with about the same total population, the corresponding figure is only 14.1%. The report points out that in 1999, the combined GDP of all Arab countries stood at \$591.2 billion, less than the GDP of Spain. Israel, with a population of six million, enjoyed a GDP equal to one-sixth of the entire Arab world. Over the past decade, per capita income

growth in the Middle East was lower than that of any other region in the world except for sub-Saharan Africa. Significantly for Europe's future, more than 15% of the present Arab labor force is unemployed, with few job opportunities at home; just over half of the young people in the Arab world (13-20 year olds) want to emigrate to industrialized countries, with Europe, the UK, and the U.S. as the most desirable destinations. Moreover, it is precisely the most literate and talented Arabs who are most likely to emigrate, raising the threat of a "brain drain" that will leave behind the poor and un(der)educated in the Middle East. Given great disparities among Arab states, "poverty and deprivation in their many forms remain real in many Arab societies." Will the EU try to stem the tide of massive Arab immigration by pushing to change the economic and political status quo in Middle Eastern and North African states? Not likely. European countries do not want to change a status quo if it will interrupt the flow of oil or commerce with the Middle East. Will Middle Eastern autocrats open up their societies beyond minor structural reforms, human rights, civil society creation, and privatization to stem the tides of migration? Not likely. Arab leaders are terrified of economic and political liberalization. Such changes will undermine their long-term control of nation-state politics. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that comprehensive regional structural changes would either decrease the desire of Arab youth to emigrate or halt the current Arab demographic explosion. So what happens when European labor demand meets Arab supply over the next two decades and beyond? In Europe, effects will come in national and local elections, delivery of health care, urban growth, pressure on infrastructure, real estate prices, labor issues, cultural changes, and demands for social protection packages. Externally, mass immigration will influence common or separate policies toward immigration, asylum, exiles, and foreign policy choices. For Israel, it means no easier times ahead with most of the countries of the EU.

At Emory University in Atlanta, Dr. Kenneth W. Stein teaches Middle Eastern history and politics.