



## Europe: Immigration and the Price of Empire

The European Union, which is enduring severe financial crises in several of its member states, including Greece and Ireland, and internal stresses in artificial nations such as Belgium, may soon face new woes. The fear of German or Franco-German hegemony is already producing some quiet anger among smaller nations.

When these smaller countries did not need to rely upon the larger and stronger economies of Germany and France, the stresses of the European Union could be held in check. Now, however, dependence and control within the Union are bringing to a boil old complaints from the Second World War as well as older historical grievances.



Europe is also beginning to feel the pinch of immigration. The growth of large Muslim immigrant families (often living in communities separated from the rest of their host country, as in France) coupled with the decline in the number of native Europeans, have transformed the landscape of Europe, especially Western Europe. The flow of immigrants into Europe had slowed, until recently.

Turmoil in Tunisia, revolution in Libya, the end of the Mubarak regime in Egypt, and other surrounding upheavals have created a new flood of immigration into Europe. Since the collapse of the Tunisian government in January, about 6,000 refugees have found their way to the Mediterranean island of [Lampedusa](#), a part of Italy off Sicily, which has become a locus for immigration into Europe from Africa and Asia. It would be a mistake, however, to compare Lampedusa with Ellis Island, as some have done.

The flow of Pakistani and Indian immigrants into the United Kingdom, just like the flow of Caribbean and African immigrants into Britain, has little to do with the proximity of that nation to the Indian subcontinent, the West Indies, or the lands of Africa from which so many immigrants to Britain have come. The reason why Libyans seek Italy as their new home has something to do with the historical connection between those Mediterranean lands, but that is not the principal connection. Why are there immigrants in France, Belgium, Holland, and Portugal?

Part of the reason is proximity. Italy is the closest neighbor of both Tunisia and Libya. Part of the reason is the welfare benefits package. Part of it is the openness of those nations to immigrations. But a significant part of these European nations' current problems with a flood of immigration lies in the colonial empires that each nation sought and possessed for many years. There is a price of empire, and the nations of Western Europe are now paying that price.

Consider the United Kingdom. Several decades ago, the whole of the Indian region — India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Burma — was part of the British Empire in the Indian Ocean basin. Malaya and Singapore lay to the east and Iraq, Kenya, Sudan, South Africa, and the myriad other parts of British East Africa lay to the west. After the "Empire" dissolved, the British, intent on maintaining the pretense of empire, established and promoted the British Commonwealth of Nations. This hodge-podge



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on March 11, 2011

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included self-governing democracies such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as wholly dependent true colonies such as Belize and Guyana. It also included key choke points such as Gibraltar, Singapore, and Suez, as well as treaty lands such as Hong Kong.

Although in the last century colonies were often considered valuable assets, by and large they were an onerous burden on the mother nation. Those of the United Kingdom were no exception. Though British naval and land forces stretched all around the world, creating the illusion of a grand and powerful empire, its colonies were a huge economic drain on Great Britain. There was another price to pay as well: people who lived in these colonial lands had a claim upon the United Kingdom. They demanded, and were granted, special rights to immigrate to the “mother country.” So, many decades ago, Britons experienced some of what the rest of Europe is undergoing today: an influx of populations with different cultures, faiths, and races.

This immigration was not all bad. Many people from the Indian subcontinent, for instance, have become well educated, successful professionals who fit well into British life and enrich that culture in many ways. But other immigrants have created stresses in British national life. Courageous politicians of the past, such as [Enoch Powell](#) (long forgotten by many today) warned of the grave dangers of largely open immigration into the United Kingdom. Aside from his strong opposition to the growing socialism of Britain and his embrace of Christianity (embarrassing to the elites of Great Britain), Powell took a firm stand against the flood of immigrants into his country from Asia and Africa in his 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech, quickly denounced as “evil” and “racist” by the media. Powell was, by anyone’s definition, brilliant and brave. Now he might also be called prophetic.

Almost inevitably, those European leaders who urge that countries such as France, Holland, or Austria have an inherent right to control their borders and preserve their cultural identity, are tarred as some incarnation of Hitler, although Enoch Powell was an intrepid soldier in the war against the Nazis. What these political leaders want, instead, is the right to preserve the culture, language, legal system, and borders of their own countries.

Interestingly, Switzerland — which never sought empire, or dabbled in grand systems of alliances, or tried to parlay one group of people against another group in distant regimes of the planet — is not haunted by the ghosts of post-colonialism. The Swiss have answered the flood of Muslims very directly, banning Islamic minarets in most parts of the confederacy. They never owned or controlled other nations, so when the Swiss in their tiny nation insist on protecting their own heritage, they stand on solid ground.

*Photo: A marketplace in London is home to immigrants of many backgrounds.*



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