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Migration:
An Historical Perspective

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Europe at the moment is beset by a major crisis caused by the influx of millions of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, predominantly from the Middle East but also from parts of North Africa. **(1)** The numbers have reached enormous proportions in the last few years. People are being driven to leave their homes by civil conflict, above all in Syria, where an estimated quarter of a million people have died since the beginning of the war between the Assad regime and the forces first, of democratic renewal, then of Islamist extremism. **(2)** Similar conditions in Iraq and Libya have pushed more people out; in Afghanistan and part of north Africa political violence and economic deprivation have fuelled the mass movement of people to Europe. **(3)** Huge numbers are coming by sea, often under difficult and dangerous conditions. An unknown number have died on the journey; hundreds of thousands of others have suffered major hardship, including malnutrition, disease, violence and rape. **(4)** European countries have begun to close their borders, and the European Union's plan to distribute refugees by quota across member states has not met with much approval. A scheme to limit the number of refugees by returning them to camps in Turkey has met with some success, and refugees have begun to return to Syria as ISIS has been slowly driven back.

It's worth pointing out that migration has not been confined to Europe. Nor is the problem just a recent one. Since World War II, and especially since the 1980s, wars and conflicts have led to large numbers of refugees, the high figures reflecting not least headlong population growth in the Third World. **(5)** Up to the recent and continuing refugee crisis, Pakistan was the major destination for refugees, mostly fleeing from conflict in

Afghanistan. **(6)** The mass migration of people fleeing from economic disaster and civil conflict in their own countries, two problems that are usually closely interconnected, is not merely a European problem.

In this lecture, however, I'm going to concentrate on Europe and to try and put the current crisis into historical perspective. We need to remind ourselves to begin with that large-scale migration is nothing new in the modern history of Europe. **(7)** The greatest international migration in history, after all, occurred in the nineteenth century, as millions of Europeans made their way to other parts of the globe, a small number of them, after the failure of the 1848 revolutions and the 1863 Polish uprising against Tsarist Russia, for political reasons, but the overwhelming majority in order to seek a better life and better economic prospects overseas. **(8)** The lure of American freedom, and the chance of acquiring land cheaply and farming it not just for subsistence but for profit, were irresistible for many whose future in Europe seemed bleak and without perspective. The extension of the British Empire in Canada, Australia and New Zealand and the achievement of independence by Latin American countries in the 1820s provided another factor pulling Europeans overseas.

The most spectacular exodus was from Ireland. **(9)** Between 1848 and 1855, the island's population fell from 8.5 million to 6 million, and while much of the decline at the beginning of the period can be ascribed to the terrible famine caused in the 'hungry forties' by the repeated failure of the potato harvest and by the indifference and prejudice of the British authorities, the continuing fall, to under 4.5 million by the census of 1921, was almost entirely due to emigration, carried out very much against the wish of the British. More than 700,000 Irish people had arrived on the British mainland by 1861, over 200,000 went to Canada, and 289,000 left for Australia (many of them to join in the gold rushes of the 1860s). **(10)** But the bulk of the migrants found their way to the United States – more than 3 million in all between 1848 and 1921. By 1900, there were more Irish-born men and women living in the USA than in Ireland itself.

The 'hungry forties' played a role elsewhere too, and between 1846 and 1857 well over a million people left Germany in the wake of the potato crisis. The USA became more attractive after 1862 with the passage through Congress of the Homeland Act, which allowed settlers to fence off land for farming in the mid-West at little or

no cost. News soon reached Europe. Another million people left Germany between 1864 and 1873, before the economic downturn of the mid-seventies made the USA less attractive. As the world economy recovered, around 1880, a fresh wave emigrated, with 1,800,000 Germans leaving the country by 1890, this time mostly from the impoverished north-east. Numerically speaking the Germans were the largest single group of immigrants into the USA in this period. **(11)**

A rather similar picture emerged in Scandinavia, where little land could be used for cultivation. Peaking at 188,000 in the 1880s, Norwegian emigration was higher as a proportion of the domestic population in the nineteenth century than that of Britain and Ireland – 971 per 100,000 in the 1880s for example, compared to 608 at the height of the Irish emigration in the 1860s.

The pace of emigration from Austria-Hungary was steady, rising from 183,000 in the 1860s to 286,000 in the 1870s, 294,000 in the 1880s and 496,000 in the 1890s. **(12)** From 1900 to 1914 over a million people were recorded as leaving the Habsburg Empire, the overwhelming majority of them bound for the USA, their numbers increased by an agreement signed by the Hungarian government with the Cunard Company in 1903. Russian emigration, which began on a large scale with Jews fleeing the pogroms initiated after the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in 1881, showed a mixture of political and economic motives. More than 10,000 people, mostly Jews, left every year from this point on, with a total of nearly 800,000 in 1881-90, 1.6 million in 1891-1900 and again 1.6 million in 1901-1910. The final wave of European emigration overseas came from southern Italy, which remained mired in agrarian backwardness even after the turn of the century. **(13)** Trapped in an unremitting cycle of poverty and backwardness, people in southern Italy began emigrating overseas in increasing numbers.. No fewer than 873,000 emigrated in 1913 alone; the percentage of the entire population of Italy leaving the country increased from 0.6 in the 1880s, many of them North Italians leaving for skilled jobs in other parts of Europe, to 1.8 between 1900 and 1913. With fast steamships guaranteeing a quick passage, around 40 per cent of these came back between 1897 and 1906, and by 1913 this figure had risen to 66 per cent. Around one and a half million Italians emigrated permanently in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Almost no part of Europe apart was exempt from this massive exodus. Nearly a sixth of the entire population of Greece emigrated between 1890 and 1914, either to America **(14)** or to Egypt. Altogether some sixty million people are thought to have left Europe between 1815 and 1914: 34 million to the USA, 4 million to Canada, and maybe a million to Australia and New Zealand. Between 1857 and 1940, 7 million Europeans left for Argentina and between 1821 and 1945 5 million for Brazil.

The effects of this mass migration on other parts of the world could be devastating. The boost it gave to economies such as those of the United States and Australia was very much at the expense of the indigenous populations. John Gast's 1872 painting 'American Progress', **(15)** expressing the doctrine of America's 'manifest destiny', shows the symbolic figure of Columbia accompanied by hardy pioneers and stagecoaches, while she lays telegraph lines across the Midwest and is followed by that great symbol of nineteenth-century civilization, railways, as they head towards the Rockies in the top left of the picture. At the bottom left-hand corner, however, half-naked native Americans are being pushed into the outer darkness along with the bison on which they depended. Their population plummeted as Europeans streamed across the plains. **(16)** Europeans introduced diseases, mostly accidentally but in some instances deliberately, diseases such as smallpox, to which native Americans or Australians had not been exposed and to which they therefore had no immunity. Populations were driven off their open land as it was fenced off by immigrant European farmers and confined to into increasingly poor and unsustainable reservations. Sometimes there were massacres of native populations. **(17)** The establishment of new European colonial empires from the 1880s to the First World War added state-sponsored genocide to the factors reducing native populations, most notably in German South-West Africa and the Belgian Congo. Superior weaponry and greater numbers led to the defeat of native states, though in some areas, notably New Zealand, where the Maori were well organized and supplied, and the state of Ashanti in West Africa, which took a long series of wars to subdue, they resisted with a good deal of success.

After the end of World War I, growing restrictions on immigration into America produced a drastic reduction in the number of Europeans leaving for other parts of the world. But this did not mean an end to migration. From

this point for almost a century, most migration within Europe was forced, not voluntary; it was overwhelmingly caused by what came in the 1990s to be known as 'ethnic cleansing'.

It began in Europe with the Balkan Wars that raged from 1911 through into the First World War as the Ottoman Empire, Muslim and predominantly Turkish, collapsed and smaller states such as Serbia and Greece, Montenegro and Bulgaria, fought to increase their territories. Altogether 100,000 Turks were expelled from the Balkans by the forces of the Balkan League before 1914, **(18)** 130,000 Bulgarians from Macedonia to Bulgaria, 100,000 Greeks from Bulgaria to Greece. 49,000 ethnic Turks were exchanged for 47,000 ethnic Bulgarians in another population transfer agreed between governments, but carried out just as violently as the others.

In 1919 the Peace Settlement after the First World War had decided to reward Greece at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, which had been on the side of the Central Powers. The Young Turk nationalists had already taken over the Empire before the war, and organized armed resistance against the territorial settlement. As the conflict flared, each side began to expel members of the other group - defined above all by religious adherence, Christian or Muslim. **(19)** Altogether some 1,500,000 Greeks were forced out of Turkey, often with a great deal of violence and loss of life. A precedent for this already existed in the forcible expulsion of Christian Armenians from Anatolia during the war, when violence escalated until it became the genocide of over a million Armenians. 500,000 Muslims were expelled from Greece during the postwar turmoil. The two governments ratified the expulsions retrospectively under international supervision in 1923, when the Ottoman Empire was also finally replaced by the Republic of Turkey, and a further population exchange was agreed, involving 200,000 Greeks and 360,000 Turks, carried out in 1923-24 under violent and brutal circumstances, setting an ominous precedent for the future.

During the Second World War, after Hitler conquered Yugoslavia in 1941, a Croat client state under the fascist Anton Pavelic declared independence and took over Bosnia-Herzegovina and indeed all territories inhabited by Croats. **(20)** Pavelic began a huge campaign of ethnic cleansing of these areas, to drive out the 2 million Serbs

who inhabited the new state, along with 45,000 Jews and 30,000 Gypsies. Decrees were issued defining Croats as Aryan and depriving all non-Aryans of their rights. Mass murder was committed by the fascist Croat Ustasha against Serbs on a vast scale, with the entire population of Serb villages herded into the local church and burned alive, corpses mutilated, and camps opened up where the inmates were systematically abused and murdered. In addition, 30,000 Jews were killed, along with most of the Gypsies, and at least 300,000 Serbs, possibly 400,000 were murdered. Most of the rest fled, 180,000 of them to Serbia. Hungary expelled thousands of Serbs from the Vojvodina; Bulgaria expelled 40,000 Serbs from its territory; 61,000 Bulgarians were forcibly exchanged for 100,000 Romanians.

Far larger in scale however were the population transfers and ethnic violence envisaged by the Nazis during the Second World War. 'Who now remembers the Armenians?' Hitler said to his generals as he ordered them to exterminate the Poles and their culture. As the war progressed, the ethnic violence grew in scale and ambition, until the General Plan of the East, official Nazi policy from 1942, proposed the extermination by disease and starvation of between 30 and 45 million Slavs to make way for German settlers after the war. **(21)** Hitler's policy of ethnic cleansing, better called genocide, derived from a deep Darwinian conviction that all wars were racial wars, and that Germany and the Germans were destined to rule Europe and the world. For Stalin, on the other hand, population transfers, while they might retrospectively merit being called ethnic cleansing, were more limited in purpose, however large their scope. **(22)** Stalin imposed a social revolution in the style of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the following years in areas his forces invaded first of all by forcibly removing what he defined as counter-revolutionary social groups: the Polish landowning class, for instance, of whom one and a half million were deported from the east Polish areas occupied by the Red Army in 1939; some 350,000 died, including thousands of Polish officers shot in the woods at Katyn. 200,000 people were deported from the Baltic Republics when they were occupied in 1939, perhaps 10 per cent of the population; many of them were sent to labour camps. 400,000 Romanians were deported from Moldova. The purpose of these expulsions was not to exterminate the Polish or Latvian or Estonian population or eradicate their culture, but to remove anyone who Stalin thought might be an obstacle to the imposition of Stalinist-Communist rule.

From 1941 onwards, Stalin also deported groups he thought posed a possible threat to Soviet security by allying themselves to the invading Germans: ethnic Germans, obviously, especially from the Volga, Crimean Tatars, and many others. Bulgarians and Armenians were removed from the Black Sea coast. Altogether these deportations affected nearly 2 million people, of whom an unknown number died in the harsh conditions of deportation. 30,000 Finns, Poles and Germans were deported to Siberia in 1935-36, and 172,000 Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 1937. During the war, a million ethnic Germans were deported from the Volga and other areas in the west of the USSR, half a million Chechens, 191,000 Crimean Tatars, 300,000 Poles and many more, mostly to Siberia. Again, however, 'ethnic cleansing' does not seem quite the right term to use, even if some of the areas cleared were then settled by other ethnic groups, as in the East Prussian capital of Königsberg, now Kaliningrad. Under Stalin's eventual successor Nikita Khruschev, these deportations were mostly reversed and the survivors allowed back home; the security need was no longer felt to be real, if it ever had been, and Khruschev denounced the deportations as inhumane.

These events were dwarfed by the ethnic cleansing that went on in East-Central Europe at the same time and for a while afterwards. **(23)** At the end of the Second World War, around 11 million people, all of them ethnic Germans, were forcibly expelled from Eastern Europe, or, if they had already fled, were prevented from going back to their homes. German settlement was scattered all over East-Central Europe and had been strengthened of course by Nazi colonization, but many families had lived in the region for centuries. Now they were expelled by the re-established nations, by Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and other countries. Long lines trudged towards Germany, with the weak succumbing to hypothermia and malnutrition. **(24)**

The expulsions were no mere act of mass revenge carried out by peoples of Eastern Europe who had suffered under the Nazi jackboot. On the contrary, they were ordered by the Allies, and planned long before the war came to an end. During the Second World War, the Czechoslovak leader in exile Eduard Benes convinced the Western Allies that the continued presence of a large German minority in Czechoslovakia would saddle the state with a million or more 'young, incorrigible Nazis' who would be a major potential source of destabilization. 'National minorities', he declared in 1942, 'are always – and in Central Europe especially – a real thorn in the

side of individual nations. This is especially true if they are German minorities.' By mid-1942 the British government had accepted the principle of the transfer of German-speaking minorities out of Eastern Europe.

Towards the end of 1944, it also became clear that Stalin would hang on to the territory in Eastern Poland he had annexed in 1939 under the terms of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and that there was no alternative to compensating the postwar Polish state with the territories to the west, in Silesia and up to the rivers Oder and Neisse, that had been part of Prussia and later Germany for years, decades or even centuries. **(25)** The Red Army was in occupation and Stalin held all the trump cards. Stalin expelled 1.8 million ethnic Poles from eastern Poland, and their arrival in the west of the country was a major impulse behind the Polish expulsion of ethnic Germans, whose homes these people now occupied. Meanwhile half a million ethnic Ukrainians were sent to the Soviet Union from Poland, and in 1947 another 140,000 were expelled from the new Soviet territories to the new Poland. 120,000 ethnic Hungarians were exchanged for 73,000 ethnic Slovaks in 1947. All the Allies could do at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945 was to ratify these various *faits accomplis* and issue a call for the population transfers to be conducted in a manner that was 'orderly and humane', which they clearly were not.

During the Cold War and the division of Europe into two armed camps, ethnic conflicts were largely suppressed, above all by the authoritarian regime of Marshal Tito in the multiethnic state of Yugoslavia. In 1989-90 the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ending of its claims over Eastern Europe removed the threat that had kept the Yugoslav nationalities together. Slovenia declared independence in 1990. Croatia followed suit a few months later, in 1991, as did Macedonia. At this point, the Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic abandoned the idea of trying to keep Yugoslavia going and opted instead for the creation of a new and viable Serbian state.

However, Serbian nationalism was based from its beginnings in the nineteenth century on a historical concept of Greater Serbia, and Croatia's independence in particular was seen in Belgrade as a serious challenge to Serbian hegemony. With the announcement of Croatian independence the Yugoslav National Army, effectively a Serbian army, invaded or began to bombard border areas of Croatia inhabited mainly by Serbs. The historic city of Dubrovnik on the Dalmatian coast was shelled **(26)** and the border town of Vukovar was destroyed. Serbian

forces took control over central Croatia. Some 200,000 Croats were forcibly expelled from the area, which was designated as the Republic of Serb Krajina. The war came to a rapid end, however, brokered by an international agreement, because both sides saw a greater prize at stake that brought them to the negotiating table: Bosnia-Herzegovina, which also declared independence in 1991.

As in other parts of the region, there were no clear boundaries between the different groups. This was particularly the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina. **(27)** Here ethnic divisions were overlaid by religious divisions, so that in addition to Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs there were also substantial numbers of Muslims in Bosnia, the legacy of the centuries-long Ottoman rule over the area. From 1992 until 1995, extreme nationalist Serbian forces led by Radko Mladic carried out a deliberate programme of what was now officially called 'ethnic cleansing' in Bosnia with the attempt to drive out by violence the Muslim population from areas claimed by Serbia. Serbia forcibly expelled over a million Bosnian Muslims and Croats from what it now called the Serbian Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. 90 per cent of the atrrocities in the war were perpetrated by Serb forces, with Croatian forces joining in in the areas Croatia claimed. In 1993-4, Croats expelled tens of thousands of Bosnian Muslims from the region it claimed, designating it the Croat Union of Herzegovina-Bosnia. The most notorious atrocity was the massacre in 1995 by Serb forces of 8,000 Bosnian men in the town of Srebrenica, but there were many other instances of killing, maiming and shooting, while the deliberate starvation of Bosnian Muslim prisoners in the Serb-run Omarska camp aroused worldwide condemnation in 1992 when a photographer secretly filmed the inmates. **(28)**

The conflict ended in 1995 when the NATO bombing of Belgrade brought the Serbs to the negotiating table; an autonomous Serb republic was created within Bosnia's boundaries, as the Croats took the opportunity to win back the territory they had lost in 1991-2, expelling 200,000 Serbs from the Krajina region into the Vojvodina. Altogether 140,000 people died in the conflict, which flared up again at the end of the decade in Kosovo. **(29)** An autonomous province within the Republic of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was inhabited mainly by Albanian-speakers, but there was a Serb minority and, more importantly, from the very beginning, in the nineteenth century. As the Albanian inhabitants of the province began to follow other national groups in Yugoslavia in a

move towards independence at the end of the 1980s, the Serbs, led by Slobodan Milosevic, began a campaign to eradicate Albanian and Kosovan identity from the province. An irregular resistance army was formed by the Kosovo Albanians, operating from bases inside Albania itself, and fighting reached a height in 1998, when a Serb massacre of 60 Kosovar Albanians including women and children attracted international condemnation. In 38,000 missions, NATO planes aimed to drive the Serbs from Kosovo and pressure Serbia into a withdrawal by once again bombing Belgrade. (**30)**

The most immediate result was a massive campaign of ethnic cleansing in which Serb forces drove between 850,000 and a million Kosovar Albanians from the province; **(31)** refugees claimed torture and murder by the Serb forces and police. The campaign failed, however, as the NATO campaign forced Milosovic to come to terms in June 1999; Kosovo was placed under United Nations control and in 2008 declared independence, still not recognized by many other countries. Altogether perhaps 10,000 Kosovo Albanians were killed, and maybe 1,000 Serbs. Most of the refugees returned, but now the Kosovar Albanians began their own campaign of ethnic cleansing, which reached a height of violence in 2004; altogether a quarter of a million Serbs were driven from the province in the years following the war. The break-up of the former Yugoslavia had taken over a decade of violence to achieve, involving forced population transfers on a very considerable scale.

It was only just over a decade ago, therefore, that the era of 'ethnic cleansing' that had begun in Europe nearly a century before finally came to an end. But forced migration was not the only kind of population transfer in postwar Europe. Voluntary migration has been happening on a large scale for many decades, indeed since the nineteenth century. Industrialization of course brought large numbers of people from the countryside into the towns, not just within individual states but across borders in an age, before 1914, when there were no passports and hardly any border controls. Let's take Germany as an example. Between 1850 and 1900 the population of the eastern provinces of Prussia fell by around one and a half million. The German occupational census of 1907 also revealed over half a million foreign workers in the country, from Austria-Hungary, Russian Poland and Italy. There were special circumstances dictating a huge increase in foreign workers during the Second World War, as the Nazis' refusal to force women into the factories combined with losses of manpower at the

battlefront led to the importation of seven million foreign labourers, mostly forced, by 1944. The 'economic miracle' in postwar West Germany brought in large numbers of so-called 'guest workers' **(32)** especially from Turkey, Yugoslavia and Italy; their numbers declined following the oil crisis of 1973 but still remained substantial. Germany, with a low birth rate, an ageing population, and a structural shortage of labour over more than a century, continues today to need foreign workers to keep its economy going, a major reason why it has been so welcoming to refugees.

Similarly, the economic crisis that began in 2008 led to a sharp downturn in net migration, that is, the balance between people immigrating to a country and people emigrating from it, in the countries most affected: **(33)** thus the downturn was especially sharp in Spain and Italy. As Europe's largest, most prosperous and most resilient economy, Germany was not only well placed to resist the most serious effects of the downturn but also continued to need immigrant labour; thus it bucked the trend, and began to attract increasing numbers of foreign workers. **(34)** Major changes in the pattern of migration within Europe were also driven by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of Communism, and the eastward extension of the European Union after 1990. The free movement of labour within the EU has for example drawn substantial numbers of Poles into the UK, reversing the previous pattern of net migration. **(35)** Thus in the UK, immigration from within the EU was already fuelling the rise of Eurosceptic populism before the refugee crisis and remains a far greater political issue than immigration from the Middle East. This is partly because until the accession of the Eastern European states to the EU, and Tony Blair's decision not to use the rules of the EU to limit their numbers, there were fewer immigrants from EU states than from non-EU countries. **(36)** In addition to this, people know that in the end that refugees from areas torn by civil strife such as Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Libya or Somalia will eventually want to go home once political stability has been restored. It's also worth noting that a high proportion of people who feature in the immigration statistics are not really immigrants at all, but people who come to our world-leading universities to study, something that opinion surveys have shown the vast majority of British people actually welcome. **(37)**

However, rightly or wrongly many British people regard immigration from other EU countries as a permanent problem unconnected to short-term crises or short-term study. If people are informed about the true scale of migration, their hostility to immigrants decreases, but it remains the case that this hostility is far greater in the UK than in other European countries, driven not least by the rise of a narrow English nationalism not least in response to the rise of nationalism in Scotland. **(38)**

It's this nationalism that has fuelled the movement for Brexit. It isn't true that immigrants take British people's jobs, or, conversely, that they come to the UK to live off benefits, but it is true that concentrations, say, of Polish migrant labourers in parts of East Anglia and in some other parts of the country have led to a feeling of cultural alienation among the British inhabitants of these areas, though overall the proportion of immigrants in British society is relatively low **(39)** and the increase in recent years has hardly been dramatic. **(40)** Brexit was not mainly a response to immigration, and many of the highest votes for Brexit were in areas where there were very few immigrants. The reasons for the vote were more complex, but a major part of it was a simple protest against the country's governing elites by people who, in many cases rightly, felt they had been neglected by governments of both political parties and had not seen any rise in their living standards for a very long time.

There will always be people searching for work and prosperity in countries other than the ones where they were born: this applies to the British as well as to others, though the statistics seldom feature in the debate on the EU in the UK. **(41)** Over the last 200 years, migration has been sometimes economic, as with most European emigrants in the 19th century, sometimes deliberately created by war, as in the twentieth, and sometimes the consequence of armed conflict and civil strife, which fuel the refugee crisis of the present century. Solving the crisis in the Middle East would go a long way to solving this crisis, but the longer-term problem, of regulating labour migration, remains. Here, we have to decide what we want. Clearly, given the dependence of British institutions such as the NHS (42) or the universities **(43)** on skilled and highly trained people, doctors and scientists, students and nurses who come from outside the UK, nobody with any sense wants to put up barriers that will stop them from coming. The 96 per cent drop in the numbers of nurses coming to the UK from other EU countries since Brexit is worrying, to say the least. Blanket across the board promises of numerical

reductions in immigration, say, to the 'tens of thousands', are not only unattainable but also deeply damaging. Some form of discrimination is clearly needed.

The history of migration, to conclude, then, is an intrinsic part of the history of humanity; indeed, it's how we all got here in the first place. **(44)** It can be damaging, as the history of European migration in the 19th century showed, as well as bringing benefits. The task for the future surely lies in managing it so that it enriches our society to the benefit of all, including the migrants themselves