

Prof. Manfred Pohl:

Europe's destiny is a union from Lisbon to Novosibirsk

White ethnic groups at the continent will cede their domination, to be replaced by a multi-cultural society and attitudes

Denis Korobko



- Prof. Pohl, you have organised a student seminar in Sofia on a topic dealing with another sort of refugee wave, one caused by climate changes - something that you predict will happen in the future. What made you settle on that issue, given that Europe is even now struggling under a refugee influx, albeit triggered by other factors?

- The project My Europe 2100 encompasses the whole of the 21st century and we believe that climate change will have a growing effect on the behavior of people in the world's various regions. Because of more persistent droughts, increasing challenges in growing crops and natural disasters, including storms, hurricanes, etc., many people will be forced to leave their homes and essentially become refugees. This applies not only to islands such as the Maldives or countries like Bangladesh, which, I believe, will be the first to suffer. We are also talking about cities like New York and many coastal areas around the world. The 21st century will ar-

guably be the century of climate refugees and we have to not only stop raising walls against economic migrants but avoid 'climate walls' too.

- What is the difference between climate and political/economic refugees? Would the end result not be the same for Europe?

- In terms of numbers, I would say that the reasons driving refugees to Europe currently are irrelevant. There has always been and will always be refugees fleeing regions where people are persecuted for their convictions and migrants motivated to move by bad economic conditions. With climate refugees the situation is vastly different - they have no other choice but to escape danger and humanity is obligated to welcome them.

- Does this mean that Europe is destined to part with its image of a 'white continent'?

- This is a crucial question because the world will undergo a fundamental change in the future. Refugee flows and mass migration patterns will accelerate and gradually change life as some continents know it. Europe will no longer be predominantly populated by representatives of Caucasian ethnic groups; there will be more diversity, especially after the region is flooded by

Close-up

Professor Manfred Pohl is a historian and an economist who teaches history of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial culture at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. He is a staunch supporter of the concept of united Europe and strong euro. In the name of this cause in 1998 Prof Pohl established the Europoint organisation, which has kick-started numerous initiatives related to the introduction of the single currency. He also has claim on the credit for Ottmar H r'l's sculpture depicting the euro logo set in front of the European Central Bank. In 2001 Prof. Pohl was presented with the prestigious European Culture Award by the „Pro Europe" foundation at the European Parliament in Strasbourg. In 2008, together with Germany's then Minister of Economy Wolfgang Clement he co-founded the Initiative Frankfurter Zukunftsrat (Future for Frankfurt), whose mission is to attract famous figures to support policies aimed at not only Germany's future but that of the whole of Europe. In 2011, he established the youth project My Europe intended to promote public responsibility and independent thinking among Europe's youth. The initiative affords young people the opportunity to exchange thoughts among themselves as well as with politicians, entrepreneurs and scientists on the future of Europe. A workshop in that very same spirit was held in Sofia on 28-29 November under the title Climate Refugees in the 21st Century.

refugees from Africa and Asia, which will trigger a profound social transformation. The so-called white ethnic groups will cede their domination, to be replaced by a multi-cultural society and attitudes.

- Do you see any danger in this or is this simply the road that Europe must prepare for?

- This is a road that Europe has no choice but to travel. The time

of national borders is over. No one will be able to stop refugees with walls or fences. Europe will have to think long and hard about the best approach to the refugee problem. It should consider the number it can receive and its response when inevitably the refugee flows escalate to something approaching the scale of the Migration Period.

- What should Europe do in

such a scenario? Do we have any room for maneuver?

- There is no clear-cut solution. The important thing is for Europe to recognise that refugees will keep coming and it must be prepared for this. Europe must decide whether it wants to close its borders or keep them open. These are all extremely difficult questions and I think Europe will not be ready to answer them for a long time to come, governments will not know which road to take.

- The wave of refugees in recent years has been related to areas of military conflict (especially in the Middle East), and has caused a great deal of problems in Europe. The EU



seems rather divided in its approach to refugees. Do you think that is a problem, and if yes, how can it be solved?

- Europe is in conflict in terms of accepting refugees - from Angela Merkel's 'welcoming' policy to Viktor Orban's overt rejection. In between, there are a lot of gray areas that accept few refugees. Hence, the conclusion that there are very few European countries able to receive an unlimited number of refugees. That means that Europe is threatened by disintegration refugees-wise, because currently there is not a single stand on the issue, and there will never be one. The refugee problem has demonstrated how fragile Europe is today.

- This will inevitably bring along cultural, political and economic changes. Do you think Europe has to fight back or try to change in any way?

- It has already become clear that fences and walls will not stop refugees. Changes in European culture, politics and economy will have to be made. The question is to what extent Europe is ready to solve the refugee problem peacefully, without itself collapsing. This is the paramount question, and politicians need to interfere by all means, and solutions ought to be sought not when refugees are already on their way, but in the poorer countries threatened by climate change, so that as

many people as possible have means of existence and remain in their native countries.

- What is the role of the so-called rightist populists and the Eurosceptic parties that have been earning an ever growing number of supporters in various EU countries?

- It is huge. And they will continue to play a huge role, all the more because the rightist populists have a number of answers that speak the minds of European citizens regarding the refugee crisis. Populists are joined by the Eurosceptics who believe Europe will be better off without the single currency, and who urge for the restoration of national frontiers and cur-

Refugee flows and mass migration patterns will accelerate in the future

The time of national borders is over, fences and walls will not stop migrants

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rencies. However, it is my opinion that the young people, and in particular the ones taking part in the project My Europe, are against frontiers and in favour of a single European currency.

- Is it possible that the rise of such parties and similar attitudes in society in recent years and other current issues cause the disintegration of the EU and weaken Europe right before the next wave of refugees? Can you tell us when are we to expect that wave?

- It is obvious that the first massive wave of refugees weakened Europe. Besides, Brexit revealed that the EU was not as strong as it seemed. Europe is weak, but Europe has to brace itself for the next waves of refugees in the 21st century, which will for sure be the century of refugees, and of the Migration Period. And this wave will come relatively soon, even before the end of the current decade.

- Politicians, entrepreneurs, and scientists will in all likelihood play a leading role in the solution to the problem. But who will have the key role and why?

- This is a very difficult question because politicians do not regard scientists seriously, despite scientific forecasts. This is what we witnessed after the US

elected Donald Trump president. There are still many politicians who ignore climate change, or at least believe that for economic reasons they have to postpone addressing the issue, which is unfortunately impossible. The issue has already been brought to the attention of the politicians, and they will have to deal with it, to discuss among each other, to make clear decisions, so that the future generations will be able to live in peace.

- In Bulgaria we believe that "Unity makes strength". This is our national motto. How would Europe's motto sound like, given the new circumstances?

- I can only recommend that the EU adopt Bulgaria's national motto. "Unity makes strength" is the motto all Europeans should live by in the current situation. It ought not to be replaced by new ideas or dissipated into new causes. Unity makes strength, and Europe has to be united in the aftermath of Brexit, and consider the need of a single continent-wide European Union stretching from Lisbon to Novosibirsk, i.e. a Union that will include Russia. In future, Russia will have to be included because it has vast territories and resources, and is also a part of Europe.