

WHILE EUROPE FREEZES IN DEMOGRAPHIC WINTER – WORLD CONGRESS OF FAMILIES SEEKS A THAW

By Don Feder

With Europe locked in the depths of demographic winter, the World Congress of Families offers a thaw (“the natural family” as “the springtime of nations”) as it prepares for its 4th Congress -- Warsaw 2007.

The population bomb, hyped by the likes of Paul Ehrlich (AKA: Malthus Man), turned out to be a dud. The Western world now faces the reality of depopulation. Since the 1970s, worldwide fertility rates have been cut in half. In all, 59 nations with 44% of the world’s people have below-replacement birthrates.

To maintain a stable population requires a birthrate of 2.1 children per woman. Italy’s rate is 1.2. In Spain, the average is just 1.15.

Russia is losing 700,000 people a year by attrition. If the trend isn’t reversed, by 2050, the nation could lose one-third of its current population (146 million).

Confronting this chilling prospect, Russian President Vladimir Putin has adopted a pro-natalist policy, including a \$110- monthly stipend to Russian families that have a second child. Stay-at-home moms would receive 40% of their former salary, and families with two children also would get a direct payment of \$9,000.

For years, Western governments have created financial disincentives to child-rearing, so it’s encouraging to see some

leveling of the playing field. Still, the question remains: Can families be paid to have children?

Pope Benedict XVI doesn't think so. At a recent meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, the pope blamed the "eclipse of love" and "materialistic visions of the universe, of life and human fulfillment" for falling birthrates.

Bluntly put, for decades, Western society -- under the sway of feminists, environmentalists, Zero Population Growth-types and other assorted utopians -- has inculcated an anti-family ethos.

Selfishness was celebrated. Marriage and children were downgraded to lifestyle options. Women who stayed at home to raise and nurture a family were derided. The importance of fathers was downplayed. Abortion was enshrined as a "human right." And contraception was ubiquitous.

Exacerbating the trend, in the postwar period, most industrialized nations rapidly secularized. In Western Europe, weekly church attendance has fallen to 5%, compared with 30-40% in the United States (which has a replacement-level birthrate of 2.1).

Faith is the strongest incentive for family formation and procreation. Mormon Utah has the highest birthrate in America. Worldwide, it's traditional Catholics, Orthodox Jews and evangelical Christians who are having large families.

Economist Robert J. Samuelson wrote about depopulation graphically in a *Washington Post* column (June 15, 2005).

"Europe as we know it is going out of business," Samuelson warned. Talk of a united Europe challenging America is a fantasy. "It's hard to be a great power if your population's

shriveling,” the economist observed. It’s also hard to maintain a social insurance system with a demographic deficit. Samuelson: “Western Europe’s population grows dramatically grayer, projects the U.S. Census Bureau. Now about one-sixth of the population is 65 and older. By 2030 that would be one-fourth, and by 2050 almost one-third.”

None of this has penetrated craniums in Brussels. The European Union now is insisting that members facilitate homosexual marriages contracted elsewhere. If a same-sex union is formed in the Netherlands, Belgium or Spain (the only countries to recognize same), and the couple moves elsewhere in Europe, the new state of residence will be expected to recognize the union.

Rocco Buttiglione, formerly a member of the Italian government, charged the EU is advancing a “soft totalitarianism” that seeks a state religion which is “an atheistic, nihilistic religion – but it is a religion that is obligatory for all.”

While Europe suffers from empty-cradle syndrome, the EU is intent on promoting unions which are guaranteed to be sterile, thus advancing extinction in the name of a dubious equality.

If Europe has a sickness of the soul, the World Congress of Families has the cure. With this in mind, the International Planning Committee (of which I’m a member), chose Warsaw as the site of World Congress of Families IV (May 11-13, 2007).

The World Congress of Families was founded by Dr. Allan Carlson – family scholar, author and the president of The Howard Center for Family, Religion and Society.

Under Carlson’s guidance, the Congress fosters an international network of pro-family organizations, activists,

scholars and parliamentarians seeking to restore the natural family as the fundamental social unit.

The World Congress of Families' mission is to shift the terms of debate – “1) From the family as an obstacle to development, to the family as the source of stability, social renewal and progress, 2) From the small family and voluntary childlessness as good to a celebration of the large family as a special social gift and 3) From religious orthodoxy as a hindrance to progress to religious orthodoxy as the source of humane values and cultural progress.”

Quietly and unobtrusively, WCF is making progress. There have been three Congresses to date – Prague (1997), Geneva (1999) and Mexico City (2004). Each has been roughly double the size of the previous Congress.

Typical of the spin-off effects and synergy of these gatherings, Mexican businessmen Fernando Milanes and Jesus Hernandez came to Geneva for World Congress of Families II as concerned citizens. Hernandez and Milanes were so inspired by Geneva that they returned to Mexico and formed The Family Network – now the country's most active pro-family alliance, with tens of thousands of members.

Their organization became the host committee for World Congress of Families III. Over 3,300 delegates from 70 countries assembled in Mexico City's Banamex Center for the first Congress in the Western Hemisphere.

Now, it's Poland's turn. An island of pro-family values in a sea of political correctness, Poland has produced many intellectual champions of the family, including Pope John Paul II. In the 20th century, Poland endured both Nazism and communism – ideological onslaughts on the family.

In the early decades of this century, Europe will be pivotal to the battle for the family. If the family fails in the Old World, the repercussions will be worldwide. (A faction of the Supreme Court is fond of citing European rulings as “precedent” for U.S. law.)

Poland’s central location makes it accessible to delegates from both Western and Eastern Europe, as well as to the nations of the former Soviet Union.

The next World Congress of Families will address such timely issues as: the importance of marriage, fecundity as a natural expression of family love and hope for the future, how to counter assaults on the family (including pornography, drugs, a hostile media, cohabitation, divorce and marriage-substitutes), rejecting the contraceptive mentality, promoting pro-family policies, building a new culture of marriage and strengthening the vital bond of faith and family.

The International Planning Committee for WCF IV convened in Warsaw in early May to meet with the Polish host committee and political and religious leaders. The opening session was held in the office of Prime Minister Kasimierz Marchinkewicz and was attended by his chief of staff as well as by three leading members of Poland’s Senate. Poland’s new conservative government pledged full support for WCF IV.

The Committee also was granted an audience with Archbishop Kazimierz Majdanski – who, as a young priest, was imprisoned by the Nazis. The founder of Poland’s Institute for Studies of the Family, Archbishop Majdanski gave the Congress his blessing and promised to provide more than 200 student volunteers.

The May, 2007 Congress will be held in the tallest building in Warsaw. The Palace of Culture and Science was Stalin’s gift to

the Polish people. For 40 years, its 3,000-seat Congress Hall was the site of annual meetings of the Polish Communist Party. Next year, a very different type of assembly will take place there -- a meeting whose slogan could be: "Families of The World Unite! You have nothing to lose but ideologically imposed utopian visions."

Members of the Planning Committee came to Warsaw from the United States, Mexico, Kenya, Qatar, France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Pakistan and Russia to help coordinate what is fast becoming an international secretariat for pro-family activity.

The Eur-ocracy can't be pleased about what's coming its way in less than a year. Like their communist predecessors, politicians who would consign the family to oblivion believe that history is on their side. The World Congress of Families will help to prove them wrong.