

CONVERSATIONS

WITH BILL KRISTOL

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Guest: Christopher Caldwell, Senior Editor, The Weekly Standard

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I: (0:15 – 44:06) The Situation in Europe

KRISTOL: Hi, I'm Bill Kristol, welcome to CONVERSATIONS. I'm very pleased to be joined today by my friend and colleague, Christopher Caldwell, one of the leading journalists of his generation. Not just a journalist, a man of letters, surely. At least, personal letters, I should say, right? Who's written, been at *The Weekly Standard*, for what? Well, since the beginning, really – two decades. Written on Europe primarily, which is what we're going to talk about today, and the author of an excellent book on Europe, *Reflections on the Revolution of Europe*, which came out, what, 6 or 7 years ago? 2009?

But, also, has written widely on so many topics: American politics, Bob Dylan, William Butler Yates, right? Many fine essays. Philip Larkin, a great favorite of both of ours. But let's talk about Europe.

So, you've really focused on that, really since – for a long time, about 20 years or so, I think. But you made a comment to me before we sat down here about how for a while there, you seemed like you were writing, not the same piece over and over, but covering the same topics over and over, and then things changed. So, let's talk about that. Because, I mean, the trajectory for the last quarter century – I was there in the first Bush White House, Berlin Wall falls, Germany unites and, to people's surprise, unifies under NATO, "Europe Whole and Free" is the vision.

Then, in Clinton, Milosevic is defeated, and it looks like "Europe Whole and Free," liberal democracy – "End of History" kind of may not be applicable to the rest of the world, but Europe does seem like a place where it's happening, and I guess you could even say working. So, was that ever the case? Did that change at some point? Give us the big picture here.

CALDWELL: I think certain contradictions in that system kind of built up to a critical mass. I mean, Europe has had – so, in the period we're talking about, roughly after '89, or '91, you know, Europe breathed a great sigh of relief. There was what was called at the time "a peace dividend." None of these Western countries, the United States included, really had to keep up anything like the level of military vigilance that they had before.

A lot of that money was spent on consumption. And you had other trends that allowed people to consume even more, right? You had, in Europe, as in the United States, those were years when you had a great big glut of people in prime working age because of the way the baby boom moved through the aging process. And, you had very few children. You had very few dependents. That becomes a problem later, but it wasn't a problem then. Back then –

KRISTOL: So, in the '90s lots of workers, not so many old people, and very few young people – both of whom take up resources, presumably. Right?

CALDWELL: That's right. Peace and the opening of new markets. It was like a total windfall. And none of those conditions are really present now, and we formed – *we* – I say “we,” in the West, have formed some bad habits from that time, which we're kind of painfully unlearning.

KRISTOL: So, let's go through some of these different conditions since it's a very interesting way that you've put it. Demography, I think you've always emphasized in your witting that demography matters quite a bit.

CALDWELL: I think it does.

KRISTOL: What's the basic picture there on Europe? And what are its implications?

CALDWELL: It's been awhile since I wrote the book and got right, deep into the numbers at a country by country level, but you have, you know, situations like in Italy which has a birth rate of women having like 1.3 children in the course of their lifetimes. If that's the case, you have a population that begins to shrink very rapidly.

KRISTOL: It's already shrinking, if I'm not mistaken. People talk about the demographic problem as in the future, but if I'm not mistaken, in Italy and maybe Germany as well, it's actually already happening. Is that right?

CALDWELL: That's right, but sometimes it's covered up by immigration and sometimes it's not quite covered up. But there are two basic problems with that. One is that you wind up being dependent on high immigration just to even keep your country the same size. And you know, there's an incentive to keep your country the same size. There are a lot of gardens that need to be watered in Italy. You wouldn't want Italy to be totally automated, which would be the solution to a shrinking country.

So, you basically “summon” immigration when you have a low birth rate. But you also create a big economic problem. Because even if you replace your Italian people, your heavily networked, highly educated Italian people, with workers who are going to be basically minimum-wage workers from the other side of the Mediterranean, you are not replacing the capacity to add value to the economy.

And so, when you're a country like Italy, say, with 2 trillion Euros in debt, you're facing the prospect of paying off an almost insurmountable debt with a shrinking economic capacity. And then you're up against the wall.

KRISTOL: When did that wall start to become imminent? To mangle that metaphor.

CALDWELL: To take the case of Italy, you know, it's very easy to be unfair to Italy. People like to make fun of Berlusconi and talk about how quickly the prime ministers change and things like that. Italy has been – There's a tradition of corruption in Italy, certainly. But Italy has over the last quarter of a century, I think, been an extremely well-run country.

You know, it came out of the Cold War with a lot of partisan corruption, some of which we participated in in order to shore-up the bourgeois parties against the communists. And then, you know, once the Cold War ended, that corruption was intolerable to Italians, and they destroyed the party system. The result was Berlusconi, a kind of clownish person, in a way. But, if you look at the job Berlusconi – Berlusconi inherited a lot of debt. He ran quite a tight ship, actually. So did his counterparts on the left. The parties had different names, but people like Prodi, Letta, those people. So, Italian fiscal policy has been quite well run over the last 20 years; it's just they're in a tough position to begin with.

KRISTOL: And the welfare state? So, when you think about Europe, I think, at least, about the demographic issue, then I think they have a big welfare state. How much of a problem is that? How much is that coming home to roost? Or is that overstated by Americans? American conservatives –

CALDWELL: No, it wasn't as a general, as an abstract problem, it was not overstated. But they have been shrinking it. I mean, the most spectacular example was Germany's reforms, carried out by Gerhard Schroeder a little over a decade ago, which really are what positioned Germany to be the, you know, exporting powerhouse that it now is. They basically limited, you know, the number of weeks you could be on unemployment, and they facilitated lower wage jobs. It's a very, it's a very tight ship that they run there. It's a very austere government.

You know, even Sweden's welfare state is shrinking now. Britain has promised to keep its National Health Service funded the same level but other services are shrinking around it. So, I think that they're pretty much in the same position that we're in. They're keeping the services nominally the same in most countries but allowing them to shrink, you know, relative to the size of economy.

KRISTOL: Still bigger than us, though, in general? I mean, the size of government and the size of the welfare state. Or is that also a little misleading?

CALDWELL: I think that that's a very complicated thing to figure out when you consider the how big healthcare bulks in our economy and the fact that it's now so heavily regulated that it's hard to say whether it's welfare or –

KRISTOL: So, it doesn't just count as part of government, but is it really *not*?

CALDWELL: Then, when we compare governments' spending, we often compare only our federal government spending to their national spending. Whereas, if you add in state and municipal spending, you get a pretty high number. I think the systems are roughly comparable.

KRISTOL: If I'm a cheerful, moderate-liberal, pro-EU, conventional-wisdom type – [jokingly] which is the kind of guy I am, as you know – why can't I say, "Well, okay, this seems reasonable. It's been peaceful for the last 20 years since Milosevic. They're capping the welfare state, as we are, so they're not going to blow up that way. They're taking in some immigrants to replace the kids they're not having. And anyway, there are worse things in the world than being Italy of – I don't know what the numbers are – 60 million, and then 55 million, and then 50 million. It's not like that's the end of the world either, right? There's just a little more space to go around for all these people. So, what's the problem? Why can't this go on?"

Or *can* it go on? Or is there really a crisis or are we just having some blips here, a little populist uprising, but, basically, the system functions?

CALDWELL: I mean, it's functioning at this moment. People work through crises. I mean, there have been times when – there certainly were times during the Cold War, both in Europe and in the United States – think of the United States in 1974 and 1975 when people said, "This just looks bad: every trend is going the wrong direction, and if you plot out where our inflation is going, if you plot out where our growth is going, we're going to have – there's going to be chaos shortly." And yet, the trend lines change and you pull out.

But there are really ominous things going on now. I think that the escalation of the radicalization of Muslims in Europe, I think, has, in the past 2 or 3 years – and you know the incidents – the Nice truck bombing, the Berlin Christmas Fair bombing, those sorts of incidents, I think, have really worried Europeans.

KRISTOL: So, immigration? I guess that's the elephant in the room. How serious a problem is that? Muslim immigration to Europe. And the difficulty of assimilating those immigrants compared to, presumably, other kinds of immigrants from more-akin cultures and societies?

CALDWELL: There are the aspects of the immigration problem that are simple to talk about, or sort of, maybe, safe to talk about and get talked about: The economic aspects. I think that even those, as we can actually witness from our own presidential election in the past year, even when the economics – even when the problem with immigration is only economic, it's a problem. There are certain efficiencies you get out of, you know, low labor costs. In fact, we've built our entire economies in the West around low labor costs. And you can have a really well-functioning economy that way. It's not so clear that you can have a well-functioning *political* system when your economy works on low labor costs. So there's that. And they have that problem, fully. And you see that in France.

But there's also this problem of Islam. Islam is a near neighbor, you know. To some extent, Europe has a globalized immigrant pool, as we do, but the preponderance of their immigration is going to be from countries in the near abroad. And those are not going to be like, you know, Russia and Armenia because those are countries with great demographic problems, too. They're shrinking. It's going to be these growing countries in the Middle East and North Africa – increasingly sub-Saharan Africa. And so, Islam is going to take up a larger and larger weight in these countries.

And a lot of people say, "Wow, you look at France, and Islam is already the second-most-important religion in France." No, it's the *most* important religion in France. It may not be the religion with which people most associate their ancestry, but it's the religion that motivates the most people in a big way. And so, that's got to have an effect on the culture of these countries. You can't have the main religious passions of a country channeled into a new religion without getting other new institutions. I think that people who sense that are right.

KRISTOL: Talk more about that, either in particular countries like France; Sweden, you've reported from, I know, where this is a big issue there. Both the numbers and also the – Italy, I guess – not so much Islam, maybe, but also a huge influx of non-traditional Italians or even non-traditional neighbors of Italians. What's it like, what are the implications of that, and is that the change you saw six, or seven, or eight years ago? You said something when you started to go around 2009 or '10. Things really started to change, I mean, just in your reporting. Is that the core of it?

CALDWELL: I think that's right. Part of it is just raw size. I mean, I think that the people who had misgivings about having a multi-ethnic Europe had an example of a Western country, a multi-ethnic Western country with certain problems to look at, and that was the United States.

You know, the United States is a very mixed picture. You have, on the one hand, you have extremely successful immigrants who have become Americans, and to the point where they're invisible to their fellow citizens. They're not even seen as ethnic minorities anymore.

On the other hand, you have a race problem of long standing, right? Which dates from before the Mayflower, as they say, and has only been imperfectly solved. Although, perhaps, solved to the extent that Europeans felt it could be managed at the time when they were setting up their own systems of this sort of thing.

But, there is this question in Europe of: Do we think of these newcomers and their children as sort of like immigrants on the way up, as in America? Let's just put them to work, and then, in a generation or two, everything's going to be fine? Or do we think of them as a sort of, a difficult to digest bunch of people who are destined – probably through the fault of the majority country – to clash with the majority, as is the case in the American race problem. I don't think Europeans are even close to figuring that out.

KRISTOL: But there's some evidence that it's not as easy to get to the former solution as they would like, right? The radicalization of the Muslims of the second generation –

CALDWELL: That's right. So there are couple of problems. One is an unreasonable expectation of what assimilation means. In our heads, you know, Paddy O'Rielly has a very Irish name, and he's our friend and he lives on our street, and in fact, his great, great, great grandfather, Paddy O'Rielly, came in 1850. And *he* was really different, and he didn't speak English, but now, Paddy is just the same person as you and me.

We forget that that process of turning Paddy into just like you and me, it took a while. I think that most people think that it's probably about three generations before you get someone who's seamlessly a member of the same country. And that sort of similarity, I think, is necessary. Or let's say Europeans perceive that similarity as more necessary than Americans tend to.

So that's, I think, one thing that they forgot – that it takes time.

The other thing that they forgot is that people who came to the United States, although they assimilated, they assimilated in every single respect except one: their religion. Most Americans don't change their religion. Despite, you know, revivalism and things like that, most Americans have the religion of their great, great grandparents. It comes down through families in different ways. Sometimes it's matrilineal, sometimes it's patrilineal, but Americans have the same religion as their great, great grandparents. And no one has ever come up with a solution to wash religion out of immigrants.

So, basically, to accept a large number of immigrants from Muslim lands is to commit yourself to a certain degree of Muslim identity, several generations down the line. And absolutely no one thought of that.

It's because Islam did not really have a political expression in the years when the European immigration policies were being devised. In the '50s, '60s, everyone thought of, you know, Bathism and Arab nationalism as being the threat. It wasn't until Khomeini's revolution – which we didn't even think of as *Khomeini's* revolution in the late '70s – it was a revolution that turned out to be a Muslim revolution. It wasn't really until then that people realized that Islam might be a living political force.

KRISTOL: This is a bit of a digression, but do you think '79 was really crucial? The Iranian Revolution. In terms of either actually making political Islam a living force, or letting the rest of us know that it was a living force?

CALDWELL: More letting the rest of us know. Because we know that, you know, there was the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. And they were doing battle with government and there were, you know, Sayyid Qutb was hanged in, what, in 1965? So, these things are going on the Sunni world as well.

KRISTOL: And the Saudis were doing their thing.

CALDWELL: That's right, but I'm talking about Europe's realization of this. What I'm saying is that at the time when they were assessing the opportunities and risks of accepting a large number of Muslims from the other side of the Mediterranean, Islam didn't really play a big role in their deliberations.

KRISTOL: And how has that played out, in your judgement? So, they came in, and more came in, and now, what, 10 percent of France is Muslim or something like that? And Sweden, I think, is something similar, maybe?

CALDWELL: Sweden is a very interesting case. I mean, Sweden – it's been awhile since I've been in Sweden, so, again, my numbers are not totally up to date. But I think a basic problem with the immigration in Sweden is the way it interacted with their housing policy.

Bizarrely, Sweden, in the 1960s when it was a country of about 6 million people, built a million family units of housing. Sort of dream homes. It was sort of like a “pie in the sky” sort of like, the kind of thing that a popular socialist government does because it can. They were generally satellite communities, outside – they were utopian kind of things, far away from inner cities. They didn’t like them. Some Swedes moved into them, but all in all, they didn’t like them. And a lot of those apartments were empty at the time when the big migration crises of the post-Cold War came.

I believe Sweden is the only country in the world that has never said no to, after these wars, to refugees. I mean, they’ve accepted – even from the Iraq War, okay? They’ve accepted many, many, many times more refugees, I think even in absolute numbers, than the United States. So, they’ve accepted refugees after each of these wars in the last, you know, 27, 28 years, starting with Yugoslavia.

And they’ve been able to put them in these housing projects where they’re very seldom seen. So, the bizarre thing is that Sweden has built up this very large immigrant population, and I mean, immigrants and their children are now probably over 20 percent of the population. Large, okay? I think maybe the largest in Western Europe, you could say, unless you count countries like Luxembourg and Switzerland who have big internal immigrations.

And they’ve built it up without really leaving any impression, say, in the center of Stockholm. But it’s beginning to. Tensions are beginning to mount. Because you can’t – the government can’t give an infinite quantity of resources to these places that aren’t very well connected the economy. So, you get riots and demonstrations, and some of these ghettos are quite Islamized.

In general, and again, it’s been awhile since I’ve been in Sweden, so I don’t want to – this is not up to date information. But one thing that mitigated the problems of assimilation somewhat are that Sweden’s immigrants came from such a large variety of countries. There was no dominant migrant group that set the tone the way Turks do in Germany, for instance, or – in a much more benign way – the way Mexicans do in Southern California.

But out of this diversity of migrant groups, a kind of common Muslim culture has formed in Sweden in some of these housing projects. So, you do see an astonishing number of veiled women, for instance, even when the majority of women don’t come from countries where women veil themselves.

KRISTOL: I gather, in other parts of Europe, the second generation or third generation, I suppose, is more pious or more Islamists, more political in their Islamism than their parents were? That is not something people expected. Maybe they should have, but they didn’t.

CALDWELL: I’m not sure they should have. There’s a mix of things going on here. One is a general resurgence of religion worldwide.

I think that there are probably people in their middle age, in middle age now, let’s say 45-year-old American Christians are probably more religious than 75-year-old American Christians, from what I gather. You know, if you look at Robert Putnam’s work, the heyday of the religious rebirth in America was roughly 1970 to 1990.

You’ve had that going on in, among European Muslims, but you’ve had other things, as well. One is the change in the economy. For immigrants who came in the early 1960s, it’s true that many of them were brought into industries where the jobs were hard to fill. And one of the reasons the jobs were hard to fill is that the industries didn’t have many prospects. You know what I mean? Things like, you know, haberdashers in Yorkshire, and lace makers in Belgium – these things were going to go out of business soon, and they didn’t offer the kind of security that people did in sort of that golden age of the corporate ladder.

However, people did trust that there was a corporate ladder. The social structure was kind of, it had a large middle class, and so you figure if someone came from Turkey or North Africa, after a few years of working in a factory, his son would do something sort of like a bit more grand.

But now, we're in a different economy with a different social structure. We've got all these "McJobs," as those who dislike the social structure call them. You know, things like folding sweaters at the Gap and pouring espressos at Starbucks, and things, but it's tough to see the next level. It's much harder for a 20-year-old North-African kid in the suburbs of Paris to climb out of, climb up from his social class than it maybe was for his father.

So there's a certain amount of alienation there. It's kind of natural that they would be a little bit, let's say, less-well-disposed towards the mainstream of the culture than their parents were.

KRISTOL: So, all of this is going on, and is there a moment where people look up and say, "Whoa, this isn't working out the way we hoped"? Is it Euro-related crises? Immigration-related crises? Terrorism-related crises?

CALDWELL: There have been many moments. And, you know, the public don't tend to like mass immigration. But elites do. This is the same story, I think in every society, for the last 500 years. We've had many immigrations in many places. Elites think it's good for the economy, and it winds of being good for *them*, as individual participants in the economy. And those who compete with immigrant labor do less well by it.

So, when – And then there are obvious feelings of, you know, just cultural threat. People not wanting people who look differently from them in their countries.

I mean, the first would be around the mid-1960s. You had Enoch Powell saying the week after Martin Luther King was shot and American cities blew up, the thing he warned was, "There will be many Washingtons in England." That was his warning. And he received several hundred thousand letters, and they were all positive. People loved it. He was thrown out of the Tory party for it, or he was thrown out of the leadership for it. But nothing happened.

And then in the late 1970s, there was another demand on the continent for – late-70s, early-80s – for much tighter immigrant enforcement, under Giscard, actually, under Valery Giscard d'Estaing, in France. And a plan to freeze in-migration and to repatriate lots of past generation of workers was put in place. There were financial incentives put in place, and a lot of people took the money and went to Algeria, and came back. Basically, there was a deeper logic to the immigration, right? It overwhelmed anything the government could say about it without a great exercise of will.

It's pretty much the same thing happening a decade before our own Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. A very similar thing. "We've let in too many immigrants, which is fine, you know; the ones who want to stay can stay, but it's going to stop here," they said. But that was only the beginning.

So, the question is, once a wave of migration gets under way, it takes tremendous political will to stop. To take another American example, our great wave of immigration began in the middle of the 19th century, and people were complaining about it quite early. And it took until the mid-1920s to even slow.

KRISTOL: And so, for you, the immigration issue seems central, maybe *the* central challenge, to the sort of happy story of a Europe that's peaceful, and sort of "End of History" like, and overcoming all these old-fashioned tensions? I mean with the combination, I guess, of immigration with the economic challenges?

CALDWELL: Yea, it's the combination that's interesting. Because I'm not sure that I would call immigration the *main* challenge, but it's aspect of *all* of the challenges. It's a window through which you can see everything. It's a metonym, maybe. So, yes, it's central. It is the big – you can't talk about

controlling immigration without talking about the nature of the globalized economy. And you can't talk about it without talking about European borders, and therefore, the European Union project. It's really a beautiful – it gives you a beautifully holistic view of what's going on.

KRISTOL: To get us up towards the present, let's just say, on the European Union – which has not been mentioned yet. What about the European Union? How central is the question of the EU to Europe, or is that almost a sort of a – would things be that different if there were no EU? Will it be different if Britain leaves the EU and so forth? How big a question *is* the EU question?

CALDWELL: The EU question is a very big question, because the EU has made it impossible for governments to defend their borders.

The borders of the EU have always been the borders of whatever country at the time happens to have the most lenient immigration policy. Because the countries have the responsibility of policing their own external borders. That is why when Victor Orban was called a nationalist –

KRISTOL: This the Prime Minister of Hungary.

CALDWELL: This is the Prime Minister of Hungary. When he was called a nationalist during the migration crisis of 2015 for putting up a border – putting up a fence, sorry – on the border of his own country, he replied, "Well, I'm only carrying out my responsibilities as an EU member to defend the external border." He did have an internal border fence with Croatia, I believe, which he took down, just to remain intellectually consistent.

All of the things that certain populist politicians, let's say the anti-EU politicians, say about migration is absolutely impossible as long as these countries remain in the EU. Britain is a special case because it's an island. And it has always had a special migration policy and has been able to enforce it. But the other countries really have had no way to create policy on their borders.

KRISTOL: This really became, I guess, maybe a qualitatively bigger issue with the Syrian Civil War and the mass migration of, what was that, 2014, 2015, I guess?

CALDWELL: I think it started maybe in 2014.

KRISTOL: Talk about that. Was that right or was it already been happening? Is that a moment, I mean?

CALDWELL: There was a miniature situation of that sort, of a stream of migrants coming out of Senegal into the Canary Islands in 2005, which I wrote about for our magazine.

But, yes, I think that Syria, just the picture of miles-long lines of humanity marching into Europe, I think it hit Europe at some very deep level. It hit them at a deep level in a very, very ambivalent and confusing way. There was a genuine outpouring of humanitarianism and pity, combined with a sincere unwillingness to repeated the worst things that had happened in European history, combined with fear.

It was a very uncomfortable, it was a very uncomfortable moment. I think that Angela Merkel chose to take the lead, and she took the lead by silencing the voice of fear. I mean she said, "We're not going to worry about the fear, we're just going to worry about behaving in ways we won't be ashamed of in front of our grandchildren," you know. I think that it proved, her welcome to those migrants proved intolerable, actually, to her own people. And that's why it stopped.

KRISTOL: Let's just walk through the history here – this is sort of a blur for all of us. There are these tons of humanity, masses of humanity on the borders of Europe, and they're not really on the borders of Germany, they're on the borders of Hungary, and Greece, and Croatia, and Slovenia and various places, right? I don't know the geography well enough even to know quite where they were.

But, somehow, why is the Merkel the central figure? She was clearly, right? Because Germany sort of sets the –

CALDWELL: No, it's not just that, it's that she said that because – She said in the summer of 2015 that Europe needed to have a heart and welcome some of these people, and that Germany certainly had room for, I believe the number she said was 600,000 of them. And they all made a beeline for Germany.

KRISTOL: That was *Germany* will take in these hundreds of thousands?

CALDWELL: That was the way they understood: anyone can go to Germany now. All sorts of things resulted from that. One is [that] a lot of people in Iran and Pakistan said to themselves, "Hey, how are they going to know I'm not a Syrian when I get there?" And so, that entire region got on the road to Germany.

And I remember talking to people in Austria and in Southern Germany, talking to migrants about this, and the easiest way to get, you know, like the migrants' views on things is you walk around and find Pakistanis because they spoke English.

So, you did have a massive influx of people. They came in, across on boats; they came through Turkey, came on boats to Greece. Some came over land through Greece, although that was a much trickier route. They crossed the former Yugoslavia, and then reentered the European Union, generally in Hungary.

And this was a bizarre thing because, generally, under what the Europeans call the Dublin Rules, the country that first accepts, that first makes bureaucratic contact with the immigrant is responsible for billeting him. Well, Greece couldn't do that. Greece just didn't have the resources to accept these millions of people, so they just waved them through. And the other countries began waving them through; Austria began waving them through. There were so many of them.

And then Germany had these people lined up at the borders and getting very impatient, you know, sometimes without water or food, and so they were letting them in without processing them.

I'm afraid that everything people say about the sort-of-like slapdash way this was handled was true. It was very chaotic. And so, over the course of this crisis, I think that the voice of *fear* began to drown out the voice of *compassion*.

KRISTOL: And, okay, so this is 2015. So, then, did they sort of manage to stop it or did they –

CALDWELL: Merkel negotiated, in the name of Europe – it was she who negotiated, but she did it in the name of Europe – a bilateral, or let's say, an agreement with Erdogan of Turkey. It involved sort-of-like trading people who were not appropriately in, swapping people who were not appropriately in Europe back to Turkey in exchange for genuine refugees from Syria. So, it's not like Europe is losing people through this deal. But part of it is that Turkey would stop the flow.

So now, Erdogan is a very interesting strategic position. He controls the spigot on, you know, what is a great political problem for every European leader. And I believe that the amount that Europe agreed to pay Turkey was somewhere around 3 or 4 billion Euros for this deal.

KRISTOL: And Erdogan is not – I mean, it's hard to believe that 10 years ago, Turkey was viewed as a candidate to excision to the EU, and that was the politically correct, and not just politically correct but the actual hope of European leaders –

CALDWELL: Of some. It was always a very weird thing. I think one reason that they – there're a number of reasons Europeans said Turkey was a candidate, but I think the main reason they said it was they thought there was little chance of it actually becoming a candidate. So, once there did appear to be a chance of Turkey becoming a candidate, Nicolas Sarkozy, then in power as President of France, said he would veto Turkish membership.

So, I think there's still very little likelihood of it, but –

KRISTOL: And Erdogan is Islamizing Turkey.

CALDWELL: Yes, he is – but he was doing it back at the time when everyone was so enthusiastic about Turkey, as well.

KRISTOL: But that's itself interesting, isn't it? Just to get us outside of Europe a little bit. Do we consider Turkey part of Europe? I guess that's a question, right? A part of it is, I guess, geographically.

CALDWELL: Yes, just a small part. Thrace, yea.

KRISTOL: I mean, that's interesting, though, that this modernizing country, one that would seem to be going towards, let's say, a Greek and towards a European model, you might say, of governance and of life. That's not the case anymore, right? That's sort of a big deal, no?

CALDWELL: Yes, it is, but always, I think, the main Europeanizing force in Turkey was the army. So, as it got more, as Turkey got more democratic, it got more Muslim. It's one of those many places in the world where democracy and liberalism sort of come apart.

KRISTOL: I suppose Turkey and Pakistan would be cases where 30, 40 years ago, people had a view of how that might go, which does not seem to have worked out.

CALDWELL: Yea, I don't know much about Pakistan. But I know, people tell me women used to wear halter tops in downtown Kabul.

KRISTOL: Right, Afghanistan. No, no, sure.

II: (44:06 – 1:16:38) On European Populism

KRISTOL: So, do you think 2015 was really the year, starting to look back and say this was a big moment where, perhaps, the post-Cold War era ended – you'll explain in a bit what the future's going to be – and whatever the future is, began? Is that the moment?

CALDWELL: Yes. You know, there were a few things leading up to it. I think the other candidate for it is 2008 and the finance crash, when the whole Western economy proved to be sort-of-like unsustainable under the funding mechanisms it had.

And that found its particular expression in 2010 – in Europe, it's particular expression was 2010 and the Greek-euro crisis. But I do think that 2015 was the year when the difficulties with Europe and, particularly, with the EU came onto everyone's TV screens and everyone was talking about them, and that's why the year after, 2016, turned into the year of populism.

KRISTOL: Interesting. So, 2008, the financial crisis leads to the Greek crisis, and I guess, many crises in Spain and elsewhere, in terms of economics, really, and really raises big question marks of the sustainability, I guess, of the Eurozone, and the amount of debt, and the one currency and so forth. And that seems to get managed by the elites, temporarily at least.

CALDWELL: I would say it gets managed *for* the elites temporarily. And when we talk about the Greek crisis, I think that most economists think that you have to distinguish between when you're talking about the system and when you're talking about Greece.

It would be much better for Europe if Greece stayed in the Eurozone. It would probably be much better for Greece, after an initial period of adjustment, if it pulled out of the Eurozone.

Because you have a situation where, basically, the Greek part of the euro is overvalued and they have no – they can export nothing except tourism now, basically. And they have very high unemployment. They have youth unemployment, you know, it's at some preposterous level; it's over 30 percent.

Spain has the same type of economy, and that's just the normal economy – and it's been that way for about a decade, and there doesn't seem to be a way to shift people out of it. So, there is something mis-designed at the heart of this project.

KRISTOL: And so, that creates, obviously, potential for radical parties on the left and the right, then you add on the migration crisis in 2015, and really, full-bore populism we get in 2016, right? Across the whole continent, really. And in Britain, I guess.

CALDWELL: That's right. And again, something like the National Front in France has always been there. It's been there since the 1960s. For the past two or three decades, it's had a, it's had just a general level of about 15 percent in the population, and the other two parties – the two mainstream parties – have used it to shut them out.

But now, the National Front is somewhat higher than that. It seems very likely to get into the second round of the French elections this spring. It's the party of 40 percent of young people, of people under 30.

KRISTOL: That's amazing, huh? It's *attracting* young people.

CALDWELL: It's different. It's different in [that] a difference in quantity becomes a difference in quality.

KRISTOL: And Brexit? The British exit from the EU doesn't happen, I suppose, without the crisis of 2015, without the migrant crisis?

CALDWELL: I would say that's right. I think the one issue, you know, in Brexit that kept coming up was migration. And I think that the people who argued that Britain should remain in the European Union said, "Well, look, Britain's being in the European Union is not causing it to take a lot of these refugees, most of these people aren't coming to Britain." Which was true, but people just felt it; people felt that they were out of control of their borders. And I think that was, indeed, decisive for Brexit.

KRISTOL: And do you think Brexit is a big deal going forward? Or Britain wasn't in the Eurozone anyway, so do they just have some renegotiation and life looks the same in 2025 in Britain as it did in 2015? And there's still a ton of French citizens working in the city, and a lot of Poles and Eastern European working in restaurants?

CALDWELL: I don't think it makes a big practical deal with those people who are in Britain, but I think that as an example, as a breach in the sort of wall of inevitability that was constructed around the European Union, it's hugely important.

I'm not sure Trump would have happened without Brexit, you know? It gave people a sense of possibilities.

And I think one of the things that "utopians," such as the builders of the European Union, most need to do is to extinguish the sense that there are alternatives. Which, I think, they had very successfully done for

many years. So, I think that Brexit has an extraordinary psychological impact on all these European countries.

KRISTOL: And so, do other countries follow that path or is there a reassertion of sovereignty, do you think?

CALDWELL: Well, yes. But, on the contrary example, we just had an election in the Netherlands where Geert Wilders, the populist candidate, argued very strongly that only he could defend the Dutch borders. And although he was polling *very* strongly over the winter, looked clearly like he would be the largest party, he was defeated and he fell well-short of expectations.

KRISTOL: And why was that?

CALDWELL: Well, this is a sort of a complicated thing, and I think it has a lot to do with Donald Trump. People in the Netherlands tend to look at the first few weeks of Trump as a sign that the populism might not be workable. I think that this is probably more a reflection of the news sources that they draw from than it is of Trump's actual performance, but you know –

KRISTOL: And the Netherlands is a very European country, I mean, in the sense it's a little country right in the heart, there, people from different nationalities, different languages.

CALDWELL: Yes, it is – but, on the other hand, it is a country where, in a referendum in 2005, two-thirds, or 63 percent, voted to reject the European Constitution. So, it is a country with a history of very expressive populist politics.

Or, in 2002, you can look at when Pim Fortuyn, who was a kind of a sort of chatty entrepreneur from Rotterdam, wound up almost becoming its prime minister. So, they will go populist, you know, if given the opportunity. I think it is significant that Wilders didn't do better in this election.

KRISTOL: So, is – I guess the way I'd put the question is – You, in passing, said the "utopian" hopes of the founders of the EU, but isn't the populist reaction, the pro-sovereignty, "we're going to fix the democracy difference by going back to the nation state," how utopian is that, given the actual world of Europe and globalization today?

CALDWELL: You really can't *go back to* anything, ever, in any aspect of politics. The one area – So, to the extent that people are going to promise to recreate the world of 1960, they will fail.

But the thing that populists can win on is saying, "Look, the system you set up does not have much of a voice for the more modest people in society." And you can certainly see the consequences of that in what's happening to wages, you know, in one way, and what's happening to free speech in another way. So, that, I think, is the populist message that wins in certain places.

KRISTOL: And where do you think it goes? What are the scenarios for the next two, five, ten years? I'd say the conventional wisdom is still somewhat dismissive of an alternative to the EU, the progress of the EU, you know, the kind of liberal scenario.

CALDWELL: I mean, I think the conventional wisdom is always that things will go on as they're going – if things are not going to go on as they're going, then it splinters into many alternatives, right?

KRISTOL: And, also, because they want it to go that way, as you say, and so much of the project depends on the sense of – what is their metaphor? The bicycle. "You have to keep bicycling; if we stop, it will fall over." So, there's a sort of real, built-in desire, and wish and belief in the importance of saying it's going to keep going this way.

CALDWELL: I sometimes worry – on the one hand, you know, the key factor is there really is a class division. The European Union is an elite project. These movements are, these populist movements are demotic movements. And so, when you look at Europe, from no matter what angle, the myth-making, the story-telling, the day to day narrative is always really positive.

And so you know you've got this big populist thing because it makes itself felt at the ballot box, but it's always invisible culturally. So it's very hard to read.

We've got the same thing here. The thing I was about to say about Trump is, and we're now in late March, but, of course, the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* say Trump is failing. But that's just because that's what they've been saying all along.

And I think that the position now is just essentially what it was two weeks before the elections in November: The people who like Trump, like Trump, and the people who don't, don't. And the people who don't like Trump, you read them every morning and evening and you see them on the news every night. The people who do like Trump are somewhat invisible.

I'm using an American sort-of-like metaphor just to explain what I think is happening in Europe. The thing I worry about in Europe is that there is a logic of escalation in some of this. That the people whose voices *aren't* heard have to do things to make their voices heard. Do you know what I mean? They'll have to, you know, like, demonstrate and that kind of thing.

There is a – I worry that some of these conflicts that are now expressed in terms of just kind of distaste and like online snark will become real, much more real conflicts.

KRISTOL: I guess it would be like, as in the '30s, we had our populism of the right and left, but it wasn't comparable to the populism in Europe of the right and left. I mean, it was a pale, and much more civilized, and milder imitation, you might say, of Europe. So, Trump might be the much milder of what we're going to see and are seeing of Le Pen.

CALDWELL: But there's always the question of whether an accident could've taken it into a different, more malign, or benign, turn. I mean, if Huey Long had lived, or if you read Philip Roth's novels – things can happen that make things, make innocent-seeming things dangerous, and dangerous-seeming things innocent.

KRISTOL: Well, I'm a big believer in the contingency of history, so I'm glad to mutually establish that. Having said that, you should now – well, walk us through some scenarios here.

CALDWELL: Okay, so, there's one. That the populists, unable to make themselves heard in the newspapers and on the internet, do begin to do things like – well, look at what happened in Ukraine three years ago where people show up in the middle of the city and they just camped out, and that's their home. Sort of like an escalating level of demonstration.

Another possibility is, you know, reconfigurations in the European Union. They have lost Britain. Right now, we're in a period where Britain is reconfiguring its relationship with the European Union. It's trying to sign a bilateral deal on defense with Germany. It's trying to reconcile, it's trying to settle on a price for withdrawing from the European Union that will guarantee it access to the European markets. We could see a lot more bilateral cooperation.

I would not rule out – even if you have a wave of countries withdrawing from the European Union – a very strong, I mean, the survival of a rump European Union, the heart of which might resemble the original six who were in it, which have – except for Italy – which generally have similar monetary policies and similar economies.

KRISTOL: That's sort of a German/French condominium with small countries floating along. I guess Italy was a medium sized country. I suppose this is why the French election is very important, though? If Le Pen was actually able to win, that would be pretty astonishing.

CALDWELL: Le Pen's victory makes no sense within the European Union, right? So, it would necessarily involve moves to withdraw France from the European Union.

KRISTOL: Which would be kind of big.

CALDWELL: Yea, that would be big.

KRISTOL: You think the chances of something big happening one way or the other – this is to say nothing, of course, of more migrant crises, more economic crises, the debt crisis. So, if you step back and look at it from 30,000 feet, it seems to me – but I don't know much about this – that the odds are as good that something really big happens and some big fracture or fractures happen, for better or worse, let's just say, as opposed to sort of things going along with these hiccups.

CALDWELL: I would say, if you look at it from 30,000 feet, as you put it, that the big issue in Europe is its weakness. Economic, demographic, and military. And that, you know, geo-strategy abhors a vacuum. So, I do think that there is a likelihood of a major lurch of some kind in the next decade or two.

KRISTOL: Weak multinational empires do not usually survive forever. They usually break up in ways that are not easy going and –

CALDWELL: Or predictable.

KRISTOL: Or predictable, I guess, right? If you think of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Do they bring other things down with them, I guess? That's another interesting question.

CALDWELL: I don't know. The last time, you know, a lot of empires – well, you had the Soviet Union. But, I mean, if you look at World War I, you had four empires falling at the same time.

KRISTOL: That's interesting. So, short term, what should people be watching for as they think of Europe and the future of Europe? And I want to ask what implications it might have for us. Because there are so many analogies. I think you're right about Trump.

You were talking earlier about the things that happened in the '90s and 2000s that didn't quite break through in Europe, in a way. I think that's very comparable to here, too. Buchanan, and then Ron Paul. And so Trump is different from them, obviously – and had a real celebrity, and wasn't nearly as hard-edged and lost some of the really distasteful aspects of Buchananism and Paulism – but, in a way, you could look back and say this was incipient and that it breaks through, and I suppose, it's similar in Europe in some ways.

Well, let's just go back to Europe for a minute, and then I want to talk about its implications. So, is there a real sovereignty possibility? Could we be looking at a map with Hungary and Britain and, you know, a couple of new countries reconfigured, there, in the former Yugoslavia, and some border wars, and could we be looking at European history – not the nightmare scenario of the '30s, exactly, but let's call it "normal" European history, I think, of the 19th century – which is not one set of borders and is not entirely peaceful, but it's not ghastly genocide or world war, either; it's just nation states.

CALDWELL: Nineteenth century. The nineteenth century, I think, was quite peaceful, even, in Europe, relatively. Germany was consolidating itself.

KRISTOL: But still, there were the issues between different peoples, Romanians and Hungarians, and where the borders were not a set thing. We're so used to settled borders, but why does that have to stay forever when you think about it, right?

CALDWELL: Well, I mean there is a great advantage to settled borders for everyone, and I think that the advantages are so great that the Europeans would be slow to give them up. It's not like – so yes, you know, I think that you will have – You will have a return to –

I don't know. I guess I don't know. You know?

KRISTOL: The counter argument, I suppose – and I don't know which way I think this goes, either – because, on the one hand, I'm not an "End of History" person, so I think we'll go back to history, and we kind of know what history looks like. I mean, history has looked like. It's nation states, it's peoples, it's ethnic and religious tensions. It doesn't mean it's 1938.

But conversely, you talk to young Europeans and they are kind of European. They're not quite as much, I don't think, Spanish, Czech, or French. They are very used to traveling without visas; they're very used to being with people from other countries. I think.

CALDWELL: I think that's kind of an optical illusion. I think when you talk to Europeans who talk to you about traveling, they're generally traveling – which means they have enough money to get out of the country and cross the ocean and travel. So that's an elite view.

I think that maybe the best way to look at is, I'm often reminded of something your father said in one of his essays, I think in the '70s, when he was writing about the counter culture in the 1960s. He said, you know, "I think when the history of this time is written 150 years from now, there will be a chapter called, what was it? 'The Aristocratic Impulse.'" So, there was something about what he saw in the ferment of the 1960s that was kind of aristocratic or anti-democratic.

And you know, I think that when we look at the last 70 years, there have been a lot of attempts by a lot of different means to – No one wanted to say, after World War II, you know, the problem was the people kind of got their way, and they rose up and they're not really the best judges of what makes a stable or peaceful country. You know what I mean? There have been attempts over the last 70 years to insulate parts of our government and parts of our society from democracy.

I think that the, I mean, you certainly see it in the increasing role of the Supreme Court here, and I think that the European Union is an example *par excellence*. To some extent, in ways, that move was vindicated. There are a lot of rights for people who didn't have them before.

But you wind up with a lot of the problems when you have less democratic system of rule. When the people don't get to sort-of-like pound their fists on the table, they don't get as much. And so, people have gotten poorer and income inequality has grown.

So, in a way, what's being demanded now is getting, people want sovereignty back. They want – they do want, I mean, we've just been saying it's really hard to restore the past and anything you do historically. But in a way, they do want the – they want a little bit of the claim to rule their own lives that they had, that they felt when they were like members of trade unions and consulted on things in the 1960s.

I remember seeing a statistic that was in one of Eric Zemmour's books, that in the 1960s, 20 percent of members of the French National Assembly were working class. Now it's one percent.

So that's the kind of thing I think that people are demanding. So, my fuller answer to your question is, you may see demands for sovereignty, you may see people carving off smaller places that they can rule and feel they are masters of. But you may not.

This democracy movement, I think this populist movement is basically a democracy movement, and it may lose. You may have, you know, a situation in which elites maintain order with increasing difficulty, or decreasing difficulty.

KRISTOL: Or decreasing even nominal respect for obeying institutions of democracy. You could go back to that past, too. That kind of pseudo-Austro-Hungarian. It wasn't, you know, horrible dictatorship, it had some democratic institutions – I don't really know much about it, but that's what my impression is – but at the end of the day, it wasn't democracy the way we think of it.

So this is interesting.

And I guess language, I was thinking about your instance where you said well, I just, if people travel to the US, of course, I think of them, and they like traveling all around Europe and they think it's one big thing and they've escaped the nation state. But I suppose language is a very interesting test, too. At the end of the day, I mean, I think the elites speak English everywhere, so in that respect, English has become the *lingua franca* of the world. But it's not as if – My impression is young Spaniards, and young Czechs, and young French speak – I mean, they still speak the languages, right? Their own languages?

CALDWELL: In different ways. I mean, English is the *lingua franca* of the traveled classes and the people who deal with people from other countries. That's not everybody. So, it has to do with class. I think that anyone of the educated class is going to speak English, pretty well. I think that's even true now in France and Italy, which are a couple of countries where –

KRISTOL: That was true in the 18th century, obviously. They all spoke French, and it didn't stop them from fighting wars with each other. Yes, elites all spoke French to each other, and could speak French to each other, and everyone else went about becoming more nationalist.

I mean, that would be an interesting – So, basically, this picture is, which may or may not happen, would be a return of class, so you've said, or class consciousness, return of the nation state and sort of sovereignty, maybe ethnicity, too, let's call it, maybe religious differences.

It really is back to history in spades, right? Everything we read about when we were in college as being sort of 19th or early 20th century: class, religion – religion was fading, but religion may be back further – nation state, nationalism.

CALDWELL: Yes. But, you know, they're back in different ways.

So, class is back. I mean, I think class is a real fact of our information economy. I think that the prospects of the people who go to Ivy League universities and the people who live in – even people who go to good schools in decaying industrial cities in the Midwest, I think the gap between their prospects is probably wider than it was 50 years ago. That's just an anecdotal thing, but I do think that there is a great deal of truth about the social schism that people talk about. So class is back.

A return of the nation state? Some of the nation states are returning, but the question is are they returning with all their prerogatives? Even, you know, even when Donald Trump says "America First," you can see that there are certain areas in which he's keen not to be seen to offend. Do you know what I mean?

And you cannot really have – you cannot *safely* have a return to the nation state with its plenary powers that you had before the invention of the atomic bomb. Do you know what I mean? I mean, nations are going to have to be bound together in something. There's got to be. So, yes, there seems to be a demand to restore certain things that we've lost in the last ten or 20 years, but it's not clear how much *can* reasonably be restored.

KRISTOL: And I guess, just to push this one step further, one could then end up in a half-restoration, which could be healthy and fine. Where you have a greater recognition of class problems and of national identity but still in a healthy system of alliances, and trade and so forth. That would be a sort of happy, liberal future that is less utopian than the EU.

Or, of course, as you said, I don't think you can restore what was, but it doesn't mean the *attempt* to restore what was wouldn't lead to a lot of chaos and destruction, right? You say that you can't have the atom bomb with these independent nation states – well, you *could*, we'd just probably have nuclear wars. Things could get out of control, right?

CALDWELL: That's the worry.

KRISTOL: And Europe, in a way, is the – I guess, one final question: You've studied Europe – you're interested in the rest of the world, obviously – but, it's funny, I would have said 15 years ago, well, the future is going to be Asia, America, Asia, Islam – those are sort of obvious, huge issues – China, India, Islam. And then how we deal with all those.

Europe just seems like this placid, you know, “Disneyworld in the middle,” with wonderful history, wonderful cathedrals, and good food. And “it's not going to make history,” I remember I used to say in speeches. And people sort of thought this sounded right.

I'm sure I picked this up from you or from someone else: Conceivably, for the first time in a millennium, Europe will not be at the center of world history in the 21st century, right? You know, in the past, if you studied world history, you studied primarily European history, even into the, of course, until through at least 1945, even with America's rise. And that may not be the case now. It's demilitarized; it's weak, as you say; it's shrinking. But, maybe, it is still the kind of cockpit, though, where these things play out, right? I mean, I don't know.

CALDWELL: Maybe. I mean, that came up in the 20th, you know, in the Cold War. I think people used to say, I think there was a German historian – it might have been Eberhard Jackel – who said, you know, “This could have been – if you look at what Germany was doing in the age of Weber and Einstein, and this really could have been the German century.”

Then, someone in the 1980s said, “What are you talking about? It *is* the German century. You've got the Berlin Wall running through the middle of Germany now.” And so, yes, Europe can be the scene of world history even if it's not the *protagonist* in world history, but it seems to show very little sign of being the protagonist.

I think that a lot of, I think one thing that a lot of people have pointed to is the nature of the European economy over the last 50 years. There's been very little innovation, all it's been is the sort-of-like adaptation of American technological breakthroughs to local markets. I mean, it's an intelligent continent full of intelligent, well-educated, capable people with a great tradition and, occasionally, hard working, but it's not coming together into a, let's say, a plan for the future. And if you're not actually shaping the world, you're most likely being shaped by the world.

KRISTOL: So that's another reason why. And then I guess the question is whether this EU project, which sort of has tried to insulate them, in a way, from history – they almost explicitly say that, right? It's a flight from History, with a capital “H,” and the rest of the world, too, really. Doesn't seem to quite work, though.

CALDWELL: Well, the strange thing is they sort of got caught in a sort of contradiction. They wanted to overcome petty nationality. But the moment they do that, I mean, they're vulnerable to the question: “Well, then, why do we need the EU? We've got the United Nations.”

KRISTOL: And, what are the grounds for denying the Syrian refugees, or the Moroccan refugees or people who are poor from Senegal entry? If you are genuinely an international, humanitarian, citizen of the world.

CALDWELL: Right. If you've overcome the nation state, this is the right place for these people who need more to eat, yea.

KRISTOL: And that turns out to be a problem. Or seems to be, at this point.

Chris, thank you very much for this conversation. I've found it extremely thought provoking, and I hope you'll come back after taking a bunch of trips to Europe and after a few of these votes in a year or two, and we'll discuss again what's happened and how you were prescient and correct about everything. Or not. Thanks, Chris. Thank you, Chris Caldwell.

And thank you for joining us on CONVERSATIONS.

[END]