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Austria's Imperial Presidency

Austria's 2018 presidency of the European Council is historic—and prophetic.

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A

t a crucial time in Europe, the leadership of the European Union has fallen to Austria. One of the EU's rotating presidencies is currently controlled by the country that was once the heart of the Holy Roman Empire. Just one month in, and its presidency already has an imperial flavor.

Until December 31, Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz will hold the European Council presidency—one of multiple EU presidencies. The Council, along with the European Parliament, discusses and adopts laws submitted by the European Commission.

Kurz's main goal for his time as Council president is summarized with his motto for the presidency: "a Europe that protects."

Kurz wants a Europe that protects (mainly from a large influx of refugees) and builds bridges (between East and West Europe). But what Kurz is promising is not revolutionary. In fact, he is just trying to resurrect the role Austria played for centuries in the Holy Roman Empire.

Heritage of the Holy Roman Empire

For more than 1,000 years, Europe has been home to emperors who claimed to be the successors of Roman emperors. Each pursued the same goal of uniting Europe under the imperial crown. From the mid-16th century until around 1800, the seat of these emperors was Vienna, Austria.

One of the earliest emperors of the Holy Roman Empire was Charlemagne. His territory included much of what is now France, Germany and Austria. Under threat from the East, Charlemagne founded the "Ostmark," a region where the natural borders of the Alps formed a defensive line against the eastern Slavic people. The Ostmark formed the core of modern Austria and is where it gets its name. This modest beginning laid the groundwork for Vienna to rise as the heart of the Holy Roman Empire.

"Charlemagne endeavored to bring unity and peace to his empire—whose borders corresponded roughly to what today is Central Europe—that was established through crusades and interest-driven politics," [Vienna's Imperial Treasury](#) wrote at the start of Austria's presidency of the Council. "As such, he may be regarded as *the father of Europe*, as is recalled annually in Aachen by the award of the city's International Charlemagne Prize" (emphasis added throughout).

One of the EU's founders, Otto von Habsburg, said, "The [European] Community is living largely by the heritage of the Holy Roman Empire, though the great majority of the people who live by it don't know by what heritage they live."

Under Chancellor Kurz, this Holy Roman Empire heritage is again gaining emphasis.

Correlating with Austria's presidency, the [Imperial Treasury in Vienna](#) is offering tours between July 1 and December 31. The tours were advertised throughout Vienna with a large picture of the crown of the Holy Roman Empire. Vienna's Imperial Treasury explained:

In July Austria assumes the presidency of the Council of the European Union. *This is the occasion for lively debate about what Europe is, and what it should be in the future.* The Imperial Treasury in the Vienna Hofburg is well suited as a forum for this discourse, for many of the objects preserved here are directly related to Europe's past.

For example, the crown of the Holy Roman Empire, dissolved in 1806, as well as the crown of the Austrian Empire. These two insignia are central symbols of Europe's history.

The new exhibit acknowledges the fact that many of Europe's citizens have forgotten by what heritage they live. "It is from the European perspective then that 12 objects are examined afresh," the treasury wrote. "The intention is to elucidate the historic context in which these works of art were created, and thereby to make perceptible the diverse roots from which the 'European Idea' grew."

Today's EU citizens face some of the same concerns as the Habsburg dynasty faced. During the Habsburg dynasty, Europe faced the greatest threat of an Islamic invasion in its history. Many Europeans today fear much the same. American librarian Raymond Ibrahim writes in an article for the *American Thinker* that this history [explains Eastern Europe's hostility toward Islam today](#). Ibrahim refers to the Battle of Vienna to explain that fear. And he is not the only one who draws on this connection.

Vienna at the time was the center of the Holy Roman Empire, and the Islamists aimed to conquer it. What concerned the Holy Roman Empire anciently concerns the European Union today.

On the 333rd anniversary of the Battle of Vienna, Archbishop of Vienna Christoph Schönborn warned that "a third attempt at an Islamic conquest of Europe" could happen if Europeans don't return to their "Christian roots."

The Battle of Vienna was the same battle commemorated by Chancellor Kurz when he signed his coalition agreement with the far-right party. "The symbolism that Sebastian Kurz staged last December could not have been clearer," wrote Paul D. Shinkman, a senior national security writer for *U.S. News and World Report*. "Atop Kahlenberg, a hill outside the [Austrian](#) capital of Vienna where in 1683 the Holy Roman Empire successfully defeated predominantly Muslim Ottoman invaders, Kurz signed an agreement with his country's far-right, anti-immigration party to form a coalition government."

One could add one more striking parallel: the Habsburg dynasty, like the EU today, lacked leadership. Only two great leaders emerged under its century-long rule. But once the Habsburg dynasty got its leader, it saw a powerful revival and success. Kurz recognizes Europe's urgent need for leadership and seeks to fill that gap.

Bible prophecy shows that a much larger and more powerful resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire is forming before our eyes—one that encapsulates the Habsburg dynasty and much more.

In order to understand how Kurz is trying to fix some of the EU's problems, you have to understand how Austria tried to fix Europe's problems in the past.

'Bridge' Between East and West Europe

Austria may have spent some time as the heart of the Holy Roman Empire, but it also served as a bridge to the East. In a.d. 796, Charlemagne used the eastern frontier to conquer the Avars in the *Drang nach Osten*, or "push toward the East." He made it Austria's obligation to not only stop the Slavic people but to also bridge the gap to Eastern Europe.

Situated at the very center of Europe's trade, Austria connected Eastern and Western Europe through trade routes along the Danube River and north and south through the Alpine passes. Trade dependence on Austria increased its influence and power in Europe. The country developed as a mediator between East and West.

In an interview with *Der Spiegel* magazine published October 21, Kurz claimed: "Austria is a country that can function in Europe as a bridgehead between Eastern and Western Europe. This has always been good for our economy, and politically, I believe this to be our obligation" (*Trumpet* translation throughout).

Kurz's work at unification is being compared to the Habsburg dynasty's. German newspaper *Die Welt*, for example, wrote on Oct. 22, 2017, in "[Habsburg Light? Sebastian Kurz's New Austria](#)":

Austria's presumed new Chancellor Kurz is likely to become a new power factor in the EU. He can make use of old partnerships in Eastern and Southeastern Europe—like a Habsburg imperial and royal imperial-strategist.

Austria's historic ties to East European nations are crucial in Europe's current crises. The refugee crisis has driven a wedge between East and West Europe. Kurz sees himself as the mediator between the so-called Visegrád nations (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic) and the rest of Europe. He hopes Austria can close the divide in the same way that it did anciently.

Together, with Austria, the Visegrád Group aspires to overturn German Chancellor Angela Merkel's refugee policy. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babiš said last year: "The Visegrád Group needs more allies; we need Austria and other countries in the Balkans, Slovenia, Croatia or maybe even others." Many people in Eastern Europe feel ignored by the Western EU nations, but Austria hopes to change this.

Based on Austria's historic role and various prophecies in the Bible, the late Herbert W. Armstrong predicted that Austria would play a crucial role in uniting East and West Europe. But anciently, Austria alone was not capable of "bridging" Europe's division. It needed the help of Europe's historically most powerful institution: the Catholic Church. The *Plain Truth*, under Mr. Armstrong's direction, wrote that the same would be true at the final resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire. (Order a free copy of [He Was Right](#) for more details on his predictions based on Bible prophecy.) The February 1972, *Plain Truth* stated:

One of the biggest roles desired by the Vatican is that of mediator between East and West. ... The Vatican, you can be sure, will continue to do its part in courting the Eastern European countries. Its *Ostpolitik* has been to bring them back into the "fold" for a long time. And that is certainly the path it must continue to travel.

Would it come as a surprise that Kurz also relies on the revival of that relationship?

Mixing Religion and Politics

You probably wouldn't think there would be much religious talk in the European Council presidency. However, under Kurz there is.

Vatican News reported on July 24 in ["Austria: Meeting of Churches and EU Presidency"](#):

The Christian churches in the European Union met on Monday for a top-level discussion with the Austrian EU Council presidency. The talks with Secretary of State Karoline Edtstadler (övp) in Vienna dealt, among other things, with the topics of EU social policy, Brexit, migration, Western Balkans integration, and climate policy.

Kurz is a staunch Catholic and does not hesitate to admit that his religion also guides his politics. His campaigns attract many Catholic voters.

He told Swiss website Jesus.ch that he sought a priest's counsel when dealing with the migrant crisis during his time as foreign minister. Kurz's actions ended up stopping the flow of refugees through the Balkans in February 2016. Merkel opposed his actions, calling them anti-humanitarian. But Kurz believed his actions aligned with his Catholic faith.

Kurz also meets regularly with Vienna's Cardinal Schönborn, who is seen by some as a possible successor to Pope Francis. Like Kurz, Schönborn urged Europe to develop a common strategy to stop the flow of migrants (read about Schönborn's view on how to solve the refugee crisis [here](#)). Schönborn warned of another attempt of "an Islamic conquest of Europe." Kurz's government, in essence, works to keep Islam out of Europe. Schönborn is a close friend and adviser of Kurz, and both remember the history of the Holy Roman Empire.

East European leaders largely agree with the Catholic Church and Kurz on this topic. "Let us not forget, however, that those arriving have been raised in another religion and represent a radically different culture," Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán wrote in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. "Most of them are not Christians, but Muslims. This is an important question, because Europe and European identity is rooted in Christianity" (Sept. 3, 2015).

But like leaders of the Holy Roman Empire before, accepting the church's advice can only go so far. Kurz told Jesus.ch about the counsel a priest gave him: "As a human being, one must never lose one's compassion for one's neighbor." Kurz commented: "As a politician, one must, however, never lose sight of reality. And what one should always preserve as a politician is the determination to make the necessary decisions, even if they are difficult."

Many religious authorities speak out against how European leaders treat the refugee crises. But when it comes to the union between church and state, their voices are more and more drowned out. One of the stated goals of Austria's presidency is to protect "European values." Many of these values trace back to Catholicism.

Austria is not the only country thinking about Europe's imperial heritage. Editor in chief Gerald Flurry wrote in the September issue of the *Trumpet*:

Some powerful Germans today are thinking more and more about the Holy Roman Empire, and they want modern Germany to take on more power of its own in the spirit of that empire. They want to establish Europe as a mighty, German-led superpower.

While Austria's presidency lays the groundwork, it will be Germany that will ultimately lead Europe. Germany already has Europe's strongest economy and could quickly develop a military to match. Austria has only a fraction of Germany's economic power, but look what it can do with a leader like Sebastian Kurz.

The Bible describes a European empire that has repeatedly risen up in Europe. Revelation 17 describes this empire as a "beast." It is ruled by seven kings, "five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come" (verse 10). In other words, this

empire has seven periods of dominance that come one after the other. At the time this prophecy was revealed, five incarnations of this empire had fallen, one was on the scene, and one was still to come.

Verse 1 describes this beast with seven heads being ridden by a woman. Bible prophecy uses a woman to symbolize a church. Where in the world have a series of empires been led by the same church? Only Europe, the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church match this description.

Charlemagne led one of these incarnations of this beast power. The Habsburg dynasty led another. The final resurrection of this empire is rising before our eyes. By acknowledging the EU's imperial heritage, Austria is confirming the Bible's description of this European power. The EU is simply a modern continuation of the Holy Roman Empire.

The history that Austria is drawing upon tells us a lot about this rising European empire. You can read much more about this history, and what the Bible says about this empire, in our free book [The Holy Roman Empire in Prophecy](#). ▪

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