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Europe: Ripe for Rising Demagogues

A tour of European nations shows democracy on its deathbed...

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At first glance, Europe looks like one of democracy's great success stories. For most of its history, Europe has been dominated by empires. Through the 19th century and after World War I, these were replaced by democracies.

These democracies began to fall in the 1930s. They were almost wiped out in the '40s.

But then democracy made a comeback. After World War II, Britain and America brought democracy to Western Europe. The last hold-outs, Spain and Portugal, transitioned to democracy in the 1970s. Just over a decade later, the Berlin Wall toppled and democracy conquered the rest of Europe. Many countries once behind the Iron Curtain are now firmly in the club. It's *democracy über alles*.

But take a closer look and things don't seem so great. In fact, in country after country, democracy faces some grave problems.

Spain

In the last four years, Spain has held four inconclusive elections. Opposing parties have managed to form unity coalitions, but none has lasted.

Spain held elections in April this year after yet another coalition collapsed. No one managed to form a government, so in November they again held fresh elections. As this magazine goes to press, the nation has still failed to form a government.

It is difficult to see how Spain can ever return to having a functioning democratic government. It is divided between left and right, but with the added complication of separatism. Regions like Catalonia have strong independence movements. Some political parties want to clamp down hard on any separatism; others believe it best to allow the different regions considerable local autonomy. Any faction will struggle to rally a majority.

The only clear victor in Spain is the far right—in the form of a party called Vox. In the April election, Vox entered Spain's parliament for the first time in the nation's democratic history, with 10 percent of the vote. In November, it catapulted into third place, winning 15 percent and more than doubling its number of seats in Spain's congress.

France

In France, the extremist National Rally party has become one of the country's most popular parties. Having shed its old name (the National Front) to distance its association with anti-Semitism and the far right, it came in first place in France's European Parliament elections. In France's presidential elections in 2017, the National Rally leader, Marine Le Pen, came second in the opening stage of voting, and made it to the final round. Ultimately, enough voters were put off by the party's extremism that it did not win.

Still, France is clearly unhappy. In December the nation was engulfed in massive protests that cut off electricity and shut down schools, as masses of people demonstrated against unpopular pension changes. The nation's "yellow vest" movement has been making headlines for well over a year as hundreds of thousands vent their dissatisfaction with the government.

Belgium

In 2010 and 2011, Belgium set a new world record for the longest period any developed country has been without a government: 589 days.

If Spain is vying to take this prize, It appears Belgium is unwilling to let it go. The nation's last elections were on May 26, and as of this writing it still does not have a governing coalition. Like Spain, it is divided both between left and right and between separatists and unionists. The result is deadlock.

The Netherlands

Dutch populist Thierry Baudet and his Forum for Democracy party stunned the Netherlands in the country's most recent elections on March 14. His party—established in 2016—won more seats than any other. *Foreign Policy* called "one of the greatest political upsets in Dutch political history."

For established political parties, the entire March 20 election was an upset: Various Euroskeptic and Green parties made notable gains, weakening Prime Minister Mark Rutte's hold on the upper house of the Dutch parliament.

Baudet has adopted some of the policies of the far right but rejected their more divisive language. His rapid rise in popularity shows that the Dutch are keen on his new approach to politics.

Germany

The Germans fell short of Belgium's record for coalition negotiations after the last elections, but they did set a personal best. Their four months sorting out a government was the nation's longest since World War II.

The result is an unstable coalition that could collapse at any time. The reason it took so long to form is that voters have abandoned both the mainstream right and mainstream left for more extreme parties. In the most recent local elections, in Thuringia on October 27, extreme parties gained *most* of the vote. Die Linke (the Left)—successor of East Germany's brutal Communist regime—came in *first place* with 31 percent. The Alternative für Deutschland, the new far-right party, came in second place, with 23.4 percent. One of these two must be included in any coalition to have a majority in the state parliament.

Italy

The European Central Bank effectively forced then Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi out of office in 2011, replacing him with a government of experts. In hindsight, it is clear this was not healthy for Italian democracy. Two upstart parties won their last national elections.

The party receiving the most votes was the Five Star Movement. This was founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo. It wants to oust the elites and introduce a new political system. It has championed using online polls to make major decisions based on the will of its membership.

The other big winner was Lega (the League). Originally Lega Nord (the Northern League), it was a fringe right-wing party campaigning for autonomy and even independence for northern Italy. But for this election, it dropped the "Northern" and campaigned for anti-EU, anti-migrant policies—calling for mass deportations and so on. Lega is now Italy's largest right-wing party. Its leader, Matteo Salvini, has consciously modeled himself on Italy's former dictator Benito Mussolini.

These two surprising parties governed in coalition until this year. But the Lega's skyrocketing popularity led the party into a bid to break up the coalition and hold fresh elections. It failed to hold those elections and is now out of office, but the coalition that took its place is unstable, and the party could soon be back.

Sweden

Sweden's left-wing government embraced those migrating into Europe in 2015. It has since paid for that at the ballot box. In 2018, the Social Democrats, Sweden's established center-left party, experienced its worst result since 1911. All the established parties did so badly in that election, it took four months for them to forge a coalition.

According to some polls, the Far-Right Sweden Democrats have become the nation's most popular political party. Meanwhile, residents in some of Sweden's more ethnically diverse regions have to beware of improvised explosive devices if they move around their cities at night.

Central and Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe is on a different path. There, a number of political strongmen are enjoying robust mandates from their voters. Some have called this “illiberal democracy.” With the left heavily influencing the judiciary, financial institutions and media in these countries, these strongmen have broken the traditional rules of Western politics and begun involving themselves in these institutions.

The left has used its control of these institutions to wage guerrilla warfare on its political opponents. But the way the right is fighting back also has some worrying aspects. It has created governments that “not only keep a firm grip on the legislative and executive branches,” says the *Journal of Democracy*, “but also dominate virtually all spheres of social life, including commerce, education, the arts, churches, and even sports.”

Does this trend in Eastern Europe indicate the direction that those in Western Europe will take? It certainly looks like it. In Austria, Sebastian Kurtz has reversed the decline of his right-wing party by embracing the same kind of personality-driven, Christian-identity politics of the east. Many in the west are paying attention.

Wanted: A Strong Leader!

It is clear that Europe’s democracy is far from healthy. In fact, it is terminally sick. Governments are ceasing to function. Nation-threatening problems are not being solved. And across Europe, people are worried.

Such an environment threatens to produce a frightening outcome.

“Meet the Medieval German Warlord With a Message for Modern Politicians,” writes *The Local De*, a German-focused, English-language website. The quip reads, “In an age of uncertainty and upheaval, it pays to have strong leaders. Perhaps Germany could draw from history for inspiration.” The article argues that Germany needs a strong leader, someone like Henry the Lion, a medieval warlord who practiced military conquest and supported the Holy Roman Empire.

Such thinking is growing remarkably common. Twenty-six percent of young adults in Eastern Germany and 23 percent in Western Germany want “a strong leader who does not have to worry about parliaments and elections.” Fewer than half “totally disagree” with this statement.

A University of Leipzig study concluded: “Around 40 percent of Germans display authoritarian characteristics, while only 30 percent are explicitly democratic.”

This is exactly the trend that *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry warned about in his January 2019 cover article, “Germany—A New Kind is Imminent.” “Germany today is crying out for a stronger leader, and the European Union wants stronger leadership and direction from Germany,” he wrote. “There is a strong demand for a new leader in Germany. People can’t agree on what his policies should be—but they want someone different from Merkel, and someone with vision.”

The Bible describes this imminent change in Europe. Revelation 17 talks about 10 kings who will rule over Europe, all under one overall king.

“This soon-coming ruler could literally be called a *king*,” wrote Mr. Flurry. “Even if he is not, the Bible gives him that title. When the Bible talks about a king, in most cases it is not referring to a democratic government. Even if this man doesn’t have the title of ‘king,’ he will lead like an absolute monarch, like an authoritarian king right out of the Middle Ages.”

Bible prophecy shows that Europe is about to revert to the monarchy it has been familiar with for most of its history. The conquest and expansion which also form that history will soon follow.

NI Lead

