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Will Coronavirus Wreck the EU?

European leaders are known for taking advantage of crises—and they have one on their hands.

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"Coronavirus Could Break the EU," declared *Politico*. "With Borders Going Up Around Europe, Coronavirus Is Devastating the EU's Superstate Pretensions," wrote the *Telegraph*. "Coronavirus Tests Europe's Cohesion, Alliances and Even Democracy," wrote the *New York Times*.

Will the European Union—a grand political experiment welding together dozens of countries—succumb to the coronavirus?

Those saying *yes* make good points. Coronavirus is exposing some massive flaws in the EU. *TheTrumpet* has consistently forecast the development of a European superstate. Does the way Europe's governments are responding to coronavirus prove us wrong?

Financial Crisis

Italy is Europe's most troubled economy. By some measures, it is the fourth-most indebted economy in the world.

Then it became Europe's first country wracked with coronavirus. Thousands died. The entire country locked down. "As if deliberately, COVID-19 has hit the eurozone just where it hurts most—Italy," wrote Jeremy Warner in the *Telegraph* (March 10).

Italy's bank stocks tanked. "It's likely that banks will need to be rescued," said Prof. Nicola Borri of Luiss University. "The economy has basically been stopped. We are probably going to see massive defaults. Clearly, Italian banks will be badly hit" (*New York Times*, March 17).

The International Monetary Fund's former deputy director in Europe, Ashoka Mody, has warned that Italy will require between \$500 billion and \$700 billion to get back on its feet. This dwarfs any previous EU bailout.

And Italy is not the only country that has been hit. After hundreds died in Spain and France, countermeasures there also began harming these highly indebted countries. Slowing global trade hurt the world's third-largest exporter: Germany.

Some forecasters predict an unprecedented depression. Oxford Economics said the eurozone economy could shrink by 10 percent this year. David Owen from the investment banking group Jefferies said it could shrink 15 percent over the second quarter. That would be worse than the Great Depression that transformed Europe in the 1930s.

Leadership Crisis

At the start of the coronavirus outbreak, China's authoritarian government looked bad for having suppressed news of the virus. Once Europe's fatalities increased, China advanced a new narrative: The EU has no strong leader. The weakness of

Europe's governments enabled coronavirus to spread, whereas China's authoritarian regime took swift action to wrestle the disease under control.

This narrative overlooks many unpleasant truths—including the government's heavy-handedness and brutality in enforcing its policies, and the fact that it may simply be lying about how many Chinese have died. But it also contains a kernel of truth: Europe *has* been weak and divided, and its lack of leadership did worsen the problem.

Those who want stronger politics and leadership within Europe have been quick to take advantage. Italian far-right leader Matteo Salvini blamed Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte for the crisis and called on him to resign. Another far-right party, the Brothers of Italy, has also been rising as the emergency unfolds. Combined, the two parties could win enough seats to lead a coalition.

French President Emanuel Macron's party was punished in municipal elections, to the benefit of the Green Party and the Socialist Party. The extremist National Front held on to previous gains. But the political picture is not yet clear, since this was merely the first of two rounds of elections, and the second has now been canceled—due to coronavirus.

Across Europe, extremist parties are rising, but none leads a government. Whatever damage coronavirus causes, these parties will blame mainstream leaders for any failings and explain that they could have done things so much better.

Every Country for Itself

EU officials talk a lot about “solidarity” and “cooperation.” The EU is not about “narrow national self-interest,” they say; it is a community of nations working together for the betterment of Europe and of mankind.

Coronavirus exposed that lie. When the stakes were high, it immediately became *every country for itself*.

As Italy struggled, it asked for emergency medical supplies. No European country responded; instead, they hoarded their own resources. Germany banned the export of medical masks and other protective equipment before later relenting. China won a diplomatic and public relations victory by sending Italy 34 tons of supplies.

Borders went up in Europe's supposedly borderless Schengen zone. Austria cut off Italy. Germany cut off Austria, France and Switzerland. Spain closed its borders.

Italians are irate. Eighty-eight percent believe the EU hasn't done enough to help them. Last November, well below half of Italians said EU membership was a disadvantage to their nation. Now, *more than two thirds* believe that.

No wonder people have begun writing the EU's obituary. Push has come to shove, and the EU is behaving less like a superstate than like schoolkids in the cafeteria when the food runs out.

'Forged in Crises'

But the EU's obituary has been written many times before. The EU has faced the 2008 financial crisis and the 2015 migrant crisis. But rather than causing it to fall apart, these challenges have prodded this political experiment toward even greater unification.

Take the euro. “So much political capital has already been expended on European monetary union,” wrote Warner, “and so much pain has been suffered trying to make it work, that even though it may not deserve to survive, policymakers cannot allow the latest seizure to succeed where the last one failed. They are too heavily vested in it to let go, so the euro is cursed to stagger on, whatever the coronavirus has to throw at it” (*Telegraph*, March 10).

European leaders have faced the same decision many times: Allow the euro to collapse, or take any step necessary to keep it together. Every time, they have chosen the latter, even if only by doing the bare minimum.

Forging a group of historically warring nations into one superstate is a huge task. Europe's founding fathers knew it would be difficult to strip power from national governments and funnel it to a shared authority. They knew that national populations would only surrender this power if forced to—*by crises*.

Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founders, wrote: “Europe will be forged in crises and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises.” Former German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble said in 2011, “[C]risis represents an opportunity. ... Europe always moved forward in times of crisis. Sometimes you need a little pressure for certain decisions to be taken.”

In today's coronavirus crisis, some leaders have taken the same view. Robert Holzmann, governor of Austria's central bank and a board member of the European Central Bank, told *Der Standard*, “Every economic crisis is a cleansing. One can exploit it to emerge stronger.”

Right now, the eurozone is a crisis-making machine. Europe is stuck in an awkward halfway state on its way to being a superstate.

Unlike the EU, there are lots of ways that American states pool resources to address a crisis. All Americans pay money into

one federal pot, for example. The federal government oversees banks in all states and guarantees certain funds in an emergency. Europe lacks such safeguards. The eurozone shares a currency, but there is no federal taxation and only a weak federal government.

Coronavirus could change this. It could force Europe to finally put these nuts and bolts of a superstate into place.

According to former European bureaucrat Bernard Connolly, leaders knew that creating the euro without these other aspects of government would provoke economic crisis—and they proceeded deliberately. He wrote, “The purpose of the crisis will be, as [Romano] Prodi, then Commission president, said in 2002, to allow the EU to take more power for itself” (*Telegraph*, Aug. 20, 2007). These leaders were confident that the crises the euro provoked would provide the pressure necessary to create that superstate.

We saw this process unfold after the 2008 financial crisis. Greece, Cyprus and other governments had to forfeit enormous control over their economies to receive a bailout from the EU (principally Germany). But this process is not complete, and the coronavirus crisis could drive Europe toward further integration.

We are seeing this already. Faced with Italy’s imminent collapse, the European Central Bank (ECB) announced its biggest-ever money-printing exercise on March 18. ECB head Christine Lagarde announced that there “are no limits to our commitment to the euro. We are determined to use the full potential of our tools, within our mandate.”

Lagarde made clear the ECB would tear up the previous rulebook regarding buying government bonds. The *Telegraph*’s Ambrose Evans-Pritchard wrote, “It took 20 years, but the eurozone finally has its own version of the U.S. Federal Reserve” (March 19).

Strong Leadership

The coronavirus is also acclimating Europe to much tougher, authoritarian-style government. Soldiers patrol the streets of France, Italy and Germany. In Spain, police drones patrol public areas, target any gatherings, and send people home. Across the Continent, populations are under virtual house arrest.

Whether or not coronavirus justifies such drastic measures, such an approach comes with grave civil dangers. Zeit Online published an article titled “Curfews in Austria: That’s What Autocrats Dream Of,” noting, “Austria has massively restricted civil liberties due to the coronavirus. This is understandable in this situation, but it is also dangerous. ... Suddenly, measures are socially acceptable that autocrats and dictators can only dream of: curfews, abolition of freedom of assembly, the greatest possible control of public life” (March 16).

This author warned that Europeans may now accept “restrictions on liberties sooner than before. That the longing for the *proverbial strongman*, who finally takes action, will grow stronger” (emphasis added). If you have read the *Trumpet* or the *Plain Truth*, “strongman” leaps off the page. We have been forecasting for 80 years that a “strongman” will take control of a united Europe!

Financial Times commentator Gideon Rachman said China’s new narrative—that strongman leadership saved the Chinese from more harm—could have global ramifications. “If it gains traction, the geopolitical effects of the coronavirus will linger,” he wrote. “The belief that China is on the rise and the West is in inexorable decline will gain new adherents. And arguments for authoritarianism and against democracy will be made with increased boldness—in both China and the West” (March 17).

Europeans are already questioning their governments. Across the Continent, traditional mainstream parties have lost support to fringe parties and have struggled to form governing coalitions, which then govern poorly, decreasing support further. Satisfaction with democracy is at an all-time low, according to a Cambridge study from January. The report states, “Europe’s average level of satisfaction masks a large and growing divide within the Continent, between a ‘zone of despair’ across France and southern Europe, and a ‘zone of complacency’ across Western Germany, Scandinavia and the Netherlands.”

Why Europe Struggles to Unite

The late Herbert W. Armstrong, founder of the *Plain Truth* magazine, had an impressive track record forecasting events in Europe. Immediately after World War II, when Germany lay in smoldering rubble, Mr. Armstrong forecast it would rise again to lead a union of nations. You could call this *the* signature prophecy of Mr. Armstrong’s 50-year ministry.

Consider the fractured state of Europe at that point, how weak postwar Germany was, and how unlikely Germany was to emerge as the leading nation on the Continent. Yet on May 9, 1945—the day after Germany surrendered—he told his listeners that Germany would rise again as part of a “European union.”

When the European Economic Community began in the 1950s, Mr. Armstrong knew it was the first stage of the final resurrection of the Holy Roman Empire. The *Plain Truth* wrote in September 1967, half a century ago: “[I]f 300 million Europeans were united and could speak with one voice, this would excel any might in the world today One thing you can count on. In fact it is so sure you can bank on it: The cry of a political union in Europe will get louder and before long we will see the Common Market develop into a *United States of Europe*.”

Mr. Armstrong knew there would be a European Union. That happened. He forecast that East and West Germany would reunite. This was fulfilled just a few years after his death when the Berlin Wall fell on Nov. 9, 1989. Mr. Armstrong foretold that Europe would one day join together in a common currency. This became reality on Jan. 1, 2002, with the launch of the euro. He said a revived German power would dominate a union of European nations—exactly what we see today.

How could he foresee this so accurately? Because he relied on the Bible.

Many Bible passages describe a world power that rises and falls repeatedly. Revelation 17 portrays this power as a beast, symbolic of an empire. This beast is led by a church, which the Bible symbolizes as a woman.

The prophecies refer to the repeated attempts to raise up the ruins of the Roman Empire in Europe, to re-create a power that unites a substantial portion of the Continent under one empire.

“There is going to be a resurrection of that old Roman Empire. Not very many people believe it because people have gotten completely beyond really believing the Bible means what it says,” Mr. Armstrong said on a *World Tomorrow* broadcast more than 50 years ago. “You’re going to have to live and see it, and you’re going to have to know that God was speaking when He said that this thing is coming.”

Revelation 17 describes this beast as having 10 horns. It explains that “the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast” (verses 12-13).

This is a united European superstate, ruled by kings, not elected representatives, and united under one overall strongman. This is exactly the direction the coronavirus crisis—just like earlier crises—is driving Europe.

But what about all the infighting among European nations, the “*every country for itself*” approach to problems?

Mr. Armstrong always said the process of forming this superstate would be hard. In the November 1965 *Plain Truth*, he wrote about one “hard, stern fact” that the nations of Europe must face: “The nations of Europe are utterly UNABLE TO UNITE THEMSELVES by their own political maneuvering,” he wrote. “For more than 31 years, the *Plain Truth* has said Europe WILL UNITE! And also for more than 31 years we have said these countries CANNOT AGREE AMONG THEMSELVES.”

Bible prophecy makes clear the EU has some trauma ahead. It describes a power consisting of 10 kings (nations or groups of nations). Currently the EU has 27 nations; 19 in the eurozone. Only a major crisis will reduce that number. *Trumpet* editor in chief Gerald Flurry wrote in February 2011: “Germany will use this crisis to FORCE Europe to unite more tightly. In the process, some eurozone countries will be forced out of the Union. When that happens, the pundits will say European unification is dead, that the European Union has failed. DON’T LISTEN TO THEM!”

The EU may become even more divided and dysfunctional before this power emerges.

And even when this power is revealed, the Bible reveals that it will still have serious divisions.

What Is Next

Daniel 2 describes this same European power with different symbols. It depicts a giant human statue made up of four parts, each representing a different empire.

Its legs are made of iron—symbolizing the Roman Empire. But this empire has been repeatedly resurrected throughout history. The seventh and final resurrection of this empire is symbolized by the feet of this statue. These feet have 10 toes—another symbol of the 10 kings that will combine together. But this empire is not forged from pure iron, but rather is a mixture, “part of iron and part of clay” (Daniel 2:33).

The Bible explains the symbolism: “[T]he kingdom shall be divided,” states verse 41, “but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron” But the unstable mixture will mean that “they shall not cleave one to another” (verse 43) and that “the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken” (verse 42).

This is describing a marriage of convenience—proud, independent nations forced together by crises. They unite for a short period. But it’s not a solid and stable union: Each nation retains some of its individual loyalties.

But Europe is yet to achieve even this tenuous unity. How can it get there? It needs a common sense of self and purpose that applies to all the members of the Union. The EU has tried to do this, with its flag, anthem and talk of solidarity. But the current crisis proves it has been unsuccessful. It needs more.

“For years the *Plain Truth* has said these nations are going to have to realize their inability to unite themselves POLITICALLY—to choose a common political-military leader that ALL can trust,” wrote Mr. Armstrong. “They are going to finally face the fact they must look to a supreme authority they can all trust! That supreme authority cannot be a politician, or a general The only possible answer is a religious leader!” (*Plain Truth*, November 1965).

Europe has tried to unite without using religion (the Catholic Church), and has failed. Its response to the coronavirus crisis

shows how much it needs that help. Mr. Flurry explained in 2006 how this would happen: “Throughout Europe’s history, what has helped it to overcome its division has been a unity of purpose between *church* and *state*. Charlemagne showed how strong Europe could be when he formed a partnership between Germany and the Roman Catholic Church to create the Holy Roman Empire. That empire has risen up repeatedly since that time.

“But this church-state union hasn’t always been a happy marriage. Usually the two have been drawn together because of a *crisis*—an *emergency*. ...

“Herbert W. Armstrong believed the same pattern would occur again in our time—that European nations would unite suddenly because of a crisis, and that the Roman Catholic Church would play a huge role in solving that emergency. In times of *crisis*, religion has a way of pulling people together! ...

“Crises are developing that could lead to this ‘emergency’ that will cause Europe to look to a newly strengthened Germany and end up bringing church and state together—from the weakening of the U.S. economy to danger brewing in the Middle East” (*Trumpet*, April 2006).

We are a long way toward the European superstate prophesied in the Bible. Several of the details—the 10 kings, the strong leader, the role of the Catholic Church—are not yet in place. But coronavirus portends future crises certain to push Europe closer to becoming the power pictured in the Bible.

Continue to watch. Not only because the Bible prophesies that this growing superpower will directly affect your life, but also for an even more important reason. When you watch as the detailed prophecies of your Bible are proved true in daily news headlines, you will realize that the Bible truly is inspired by God, a book you can rely on in every detail and every circumstance.

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