

# Europe Steps To The Right

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Unlike America, whose people elected a left-of-center government last November, European capitals may soon take on a decidedly conservative tilt in coming elections. If nothing else, this change in direction will further widen the rift between Europe and the United States on issues ranging from trade to NATO.

[Generally, European conservatives back protectionist, nationalist and culturally insensitive policies. Liberals espouse less restricted, global trade; international cooperation and cultural progressiveness.]

March 7 marked a day of national calamity for Germany's ruling Social Democrats (SPD) and Christian Democrats (CDU). In the only elections to be held in Germany this year, voters in Hessen handed these leading parties severe losses, voting instead for more conservative parties, especially the right-wing *Republikaner*. Though running for the first time, the *Republikaner* collected 8.3% of the vote statewide. What is most intriguing about this setback for the SPD and CDU is that they are considered conservative parties.

The SPD chairman, Björn Engholm, described the losses as "a deep frustration on the part of the voters toward all those who govern in Hessen and Bonn." Chancellor Helmut Kohl shrugged off the results as due to the "miserable image" of disagreement among the factions of the CDU. He claims the *Republikaner* will lose their ability to garner votes if the larger parties prove they can solve Germany's problems. The German electorate may not be patient enough for that.

## France, Italy and Spain Too

Within this past week, French voters mimicked their German counterparts, sweeping the ruling Socialist party out of office in parliamentary elections, and placing the center-right conservatives in power. Among the minor parties, the greatest advance was made by the National Front, the anti-EC, extreme right-wing party, which took 12.4% of the vote.

The French public's main concern—and deciding factor—is the economy. Gross domestic product in France has made only sluggish gains over the last two years, and unemployment has hit 10.5%. Economically, French conservatives are said to be nationalist and protectionist and willing to risk a trade war with America over farm subsidies.

A third European nation in turmoil is Italy. Over 200 Italian businessmen have been jailed on corruption and bribery charges in a nationwide "spring cleaning." Five members of Socialist Prime Minister Giuliano Amato's government have been implicated in it and have resigned. Both the Socialist Party leader, Bettino Craxi, and the Liberal Party leader, Renato Altissimo, also resigned after being informed they were to be tried on charges of corruption, receiving stolen money and breaking the party financing law.

In the scandal's wake comes a lowering of the country's credit rating from Standard & Poors. Public calls for privatization of state-owned businesses seems to auger a shift toward a more conservative Italy. The ruling government is already talking openly of creating a broader-based government soon.

Lastly, Spanish elections are due before the end of August. Analysts wonder if those elections will follow the same course as this month's French vote. Currently with a Socialist government, high unemployment and a sluggish economy, the scenario in Spain mirrors the recent situation in France. Similar to Italy's present quagmire, an illegal political financing scandal is brewing in Madrid as well.

## **Ideology of the Beast**

What does this shift to the right mean?

First, it signals a growing frustration among Europeans toward their ruling liberal governments—and amazingly toward the EC. They feel that the liberal bureaucracy has never delivered on any of its promises and has only complicated matters. They are willing to give the conservatives a chance to do what the liberals could not.

Secondly, Europeans are beginning to think in their all-too-familiar, we-need-a-leader-quick manner. Having begun casting about for fresh faces and new (or old?) ideas to bring the continent out of its doldrums, they may pick someone who promises to show a way out of their mess, as did Vladimir Lenin in 1917, Benito Mussolini in 1922 or Adolf Hitler in 1933. Though these men were of two different political views, their policies were dictatorial and fundamentally—but radically—conservative.

What about the Beast's basic ideology? From the information the Bible provides, he seems to fit better into a conservative, dictatorial mold rather than a liberal, bureaucratic one. The clearest descriptions of the Beast appear in Daniel 11, where the King of the North's government is monolithic, aggressively militaristic and economically powerful (Daniel 11:36-43; *cf.* Revelation 17: 11 through 18:19).

Of course, this shift in European politics may be temporary, but the conditions in Europe are showing considerable parallels to what they were the last time a head of the Beast arose. Symptoms include inept liberal governments, economic instability and hardship, and ethnic and nationalistic fervor. The table seems to be set. The question remains: who will sit at the head of the table?