

WorldWatch January 2004

by David C. Grabbe

Forerunner, "WorldWatch," January 2004

European Disunity

The development of a united Europe has seen a number of setbacks recently. In December 2003, the nations of the European Union (EU) failed to reach an agreement on the proposed EU constitution. (Incidentally, French national television accused the United States of orchestrating the impasse in order to head off the emergence of a rival "superpower Europe.") The biggest point of contention is over the distribution of power: how to prevent the large states from overriding the will of the small states—or, how to prevent a majority of small states from overriding the will of the popular majority.

Another hot topic has been whether or not to include a reference to Christianity in the constitution. Certain countries, notably Spain and Poland, were adamant that a reference to Europe's Christian heritage be included in the wording. But others, especially France with its secular tradition, were equally strong in their opposition to such a reference. The Pope has repeatedly urged the heads of state to include such a reference, but so far his voice has not been heeded.

Other controversial topics on which there is widespread disagreement include the issue of European foreign policy (whether Europe speaks with a single voice or the individual nations maintain their own foreign policy), EU defense (whether to have a common army, what role it would play, how it would affect NATO, etc.), and the proposed mutual-defense pact (which the neutral countries, Austria, Finland, Ireland and Sweden, have opposed on the basis that it would threaten their neutral status if they were forced into a military response).

Because of these disagreements, an idea has arisen which is gaining some popularity. Some national leaders are in favor of a "two-speed" Europe, which would consist of core nations that could come into agreement quickly on economics, defense, and crime fighting, while the other nations could sort out their differences.

As it stands now, one thing is certain: European unity and integration is a very slow and painful process. The European constitution could possibly be voted upon again in six months, but more likely, it will be a year or more before it comes up again. Since few EU states have much enthusiasm for a project that was essentially foisted on them by Brussels insiders, a game of "pass the buck" can be expected until the ultra-federalist Luxembourg presidency in early 2005.

» According to a Eurobarometer poll released in December, less than half the population in the European Union's member states now support the EU project. The poll found that just 48% of EU citizens viewed membership as a "good thing," down from 54% in the spring of 2003. Britain was by far the most negative state, with positive feelings tumbling to 28%, but even the French were below half for the first time after months of battles with Brussels over various issues.

» Two years after the introduction of the euro, an increasing number of EU citizens feel that the single currency has led to a hike in prices, the *EU Observer* reports. A Eurobarometer survey reveals that 89% of those polled feel that price inflation has

occurred with the currency changeover, some 5% more than last year. Most dissatisfaction was found in Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, and Greece. Moreover, satisfaction with the new currency has been falling steadily since January 1, 2002, when the euro was introduced. Although 51% of citizens in the 12 countries that adopted the euro do not have any problems using the euro currency, just 47%, down from 50% last year, said they were happy with the changeover.

Western-Mediterranean Agreement (Tunis Declaration)

Even as the European Union argues certain foundational issues, an interesting coalition has risen from the shores of the western Mediterranean. The *Washington Times* reports that ten African (Muslim) and European (Catholic) countries, with a combined population of nearly 250 million and a gross domestic product of \$3.7 trillion, have implemented an ambitious plan to build an economic, political, and cultural bridge across the Mediterranean Sea. The summit participants include five European countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Malta) and five African states (Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Mauritania). Delegates portray it as a "challenge and opportunity" to overcome differing levels of development and political differences and turn the Mediterranean into "a sea of peace." French President Jacques Chirac hails the agreement, known as the "5 Plus 5," as "historic." Italian President Silvio Berlusconi says it paves the way to a "permanent dialogue between Europe and Islam."

Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, host of the meeting, describes the charter as the "beginning of a new process of cooperation and solidarity" in what was once the center of the Roman Empire. In the summit's final communiqué, the signatories jointly agreed to struggle against international terrorism, improve trade relations, and halt illegal immigration toward Europe. Plans include cooperation among the interior ministers of the 5 Plus 5 to "fight terrorism in all its forms," hold annual business forums, and create a Euro-Mediterranean bank. Participants agreed on "the importance of seeing the European Union accompany its enlargement process by a parallel supportive effort towards countries of the southern flank of the western Mediterranean region."

While this mix of nations is not a significant political, economic, or military threat, the symbolism is worth pondering: Ten European and African nations, five on each side of the Mediterranean Sea, covering a significant portion of territory anciently occupied by the Roman Empire.

U.S. Immigration

According to a report released by the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) and detailed in the *Washington Times*, total immigration to the United States rose dramatically by 1.4 million in each of the past two years—of which about a third were illegal aliens. If the numbers remain unchanged, this decade will mark the most massive wave of immigration in American history, with 45 million immigrants—about 14% of the country's total projected population—forecast to live in the U.S. by 2010. The report remarks that the figures show that immigration totals are unrelated to labor needs and economic conditions in the U.S. Despite a weak U.S. economy and rising unemployment since 2000, immigration has significantly outpaced record levels seen in the 1990s and shows no sign of abating. In September, the Census Bureau said the foreign-born population in America had grown to more than 33 million in 2002, a jump of 5% in one year, accounting for 44% of the nation's population growth.