



# Is This The End Of EU History?

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Remember Francis Fukayama? The American political scientist and author briefly became the darling of the political science set in the early 1990s with his theory, encapsulated in his bestselling book "The End of History and the Last Man," that the end of the Cold War marked the final evolution of mankind's search for a system of governance, and that Western-style liberal democracy had emerged as the clear winner.

The idea lost much of its momentum following the outbreak of war in the Balkans in the mid-1990s, and the parallel rise of nationalist and Islamist furies in the Middle East and post-Soviet Space. Fukayama's concept of The End of History was progressively superseded by others, such as the theory of a "clash of civilizations" propounded by fellow political scientist Samuel Huntington, that seemed to better explain the new world disorder that followed the collapse of the USSR.

But there is at least one region of the world where Fukayama's ideas of Western-style liberal democracy have proven quite resilient. Beginning with the establishment of the European Economic Community in March of 1957, the prevailing trendline among a growing number of countries on the European continent has been toward integration and harmonization. The culmination of this process came in November of 1993, with the formal establishment of the political bloc known as the European Union. In the two-and-a-half decades since, European politics have continued in this direction, seeking to widen the EU's zone of prosperity and peace rooted in liberal democracy.

Until now, that is.

In his new book, *The People vs. Democracy: Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, Harvard University's Yascha Mounk lays out the disturbing finding that today, less than one-third of millennials now believe it is absolutely necessary to live in a democracy. Indeed, according to Mounk, polling across all age groups in Europe has yielded the conclusion that, in contrast to 20 years ago, many more people would embrace "a strongman leader who does not have to bother with politicians or elections."

Proof of this trend can be seen in recent political developments across the continent.

In Hungary, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's ruling conservative party, Fidesz, has been a fixture of national politics for close to a decade. But its nationalist ideas and protectionist principles have been reinforced in recent years by the rise of the even more extreme and ultra-nationalist Jobbik Party. More recently, the Czech Republic has headed in the same direction under the government of its pro-Russian and anti-immigration president, Milos Zeman. And in Poland, a recent resurgence of the far right has yielded a renewed spike in anti-Semitism and growing concern over the erosion of democracy there.

The Visegrad countries aren't alone. Similarly troubling trends can be seen elsewhere in Europe. In last year's parliamentary elections in Germany, for example, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) emerged as the surprise winner, garnering more than 13 percent of the national vote and becoming the first nationalist party to enter the Bundestag in nearly sixty years. More dramatic still, earlier this month Italy's center-left Democratic Party lost its footing to anti-establishment and right-wing parties in that country's most recent election, leaving a hung parliament.

These examples, and others, serve to highlight that European politics - once firmly rooted in the "end of history" idea of liberal democracy - are increasingly up for grabs. They also challenge the prevailing view held by so many since the end of the Cold War: that the continued existence of the European Union as a liberal democratic order is a virtual certainty. In fact, as Mounk convincingly argues, and as recent political developments worryingly confirm, it is likely to be anything but.

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