



Are These the Last Days of Belgium?

Europe is unraveling. The Bank of Ireland simply prints euros without even the authority of the central bank to back it up. The creditworthiness of the debt instruments of many European nations is dropping precipitously. Muslim immigrants are rapidly overtaking the graying population of many European democracies. Christianity, once the mainstay of European culture, is now relegated more and more to Jim Crow status in many nations of Europe. The effort to create an umbrella European super-state, the European Union, is proving to be a huge flop.



One possible salvation for the peoples of this mother continent of Western civilization is to do what old Czechoslovakia and old Yugoslavia did: allow peoples artificially placed within a hybrid nation to break away and form their own state. At the Treaty of Versailles, the great powers forced the Czechs and the Slovaks to “unite.” In addition, other nationalities — Germans, Poles, and Hungarians, to name a few — were compelled to be part of this new political creature. Why? The victorious powers wanted to create a check to German power.

The wishes of the peoples in Eastern Europe were not part of the political calculation. Austria, for example, was forbidden to unite with fellow Germans in the Weimar Republic. Germans in Danzig, Memel, Pomerania, Silesia, Alsace, and other regions adjacent to Weimar were also prohibited from joining Germany. One consequence of this cynical game was to give dictators such as Hitler plausible reasons to demand territory for Germany. So it was that the Saar, which was hardly a hotbed of National Socialism, voted overwhelming in 1935 to join Nazi Germany. Danzig and Memel, though not totalitarian in spirit, nevertheless elected their own independent Nazi governments before happily joining the Third Reich.

In Switzerland — the single nation of Europe which moved utterly away from centralization and instead had a confederacy — the majority of Swiss were German linguistically and culturally. These German Swiss were the only major group of Germanic peoples who utterly rejected the totalitarian malice of Nazi Germany. Given the free choice within their Swiss cantons to determine most governmental and political issues, these German Swiss chose happily to remain part of their confederacy — and they were some of the strongest voices condemning the outrages of the Nazis. Indeed, when France fell, and Switzerland pondered the sense of trying to resist an Axis Europe that effectively surrounded their landlocked country, it was the German Swiss who were the most insistent that the Swiss National Guard should fight any Nazi intrusion into their nation.

Belgium is like Switzerland in many ways. Both nations have more than one official language, are densely populated, industrialized, and located at what was long a battleground of European powers. The creation of each nation, however, could not be more different.

The Swiss, desiring neutrality, peace, and liberty, formed their confederation over centuries. Some



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on February 22, 2011

cantons spoke French, some Italian, and some German. Very robust local government is the salient political characteristic of the confederation. The Swiss eschewed empire and colonies as well, which they early on grasped would complicate their happy republic.

Belgium, by contrast, was the invention of great powers at the Congress of Vienna after the Napoleonic Wars. This “nation,” which was never really a nation, began as a smaller part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. This combination of the two modern nations of the Netherlands and Belgium, which together had about half the population of France or Prussia, was intended to prevent either nation from getting too powerful. No one consulted either the Dutch or the two constituent peoples of Belgium — the Walloons and the Flemish — as to what they thought about this arrangement. This Frankenstein nation did not last long. Belgium became a separate kingdom in 1830, and it has remained so ever since.

The small nation of Belgium had an appetite for empire. The Belgian Congo was a territory wildly out of proportion to the home country (much as the Dutch East Indies was vastly larger than the Netherlands). Unlike the Swiss, and unlike the America envisioned by the Founding Fathers, the Belgians created and administered as an overseas territory a group of people in central Africa who had nothing whatever to do with Belgium, and who were certainly never consulted about the matter.

Belgium, has also always been an artificial country. The great powers who made it simply cobbled together into a single nation two peoples who did not even speak the same language. Now, almost two centuries later, we are witnessing perhaps the final dissolution of the “nation” of Belgium. It has been 250 days since Belgians went to the polls. This country with a vast cultural divide has now gone longer than any other parliamentary democracy in history without forming a government. Needless to say, the issues facing all nations in Western Europe cannot be resolved without any effective structure of government.

Ironic, or perhaps iconic, is Belgium, the failed nation — the nation whose capital is Brussels, capital of the European Union, NATO, and a number of other international organizations. Belgium represents, in many ways, what the fanciers of a United Europe hoped their continent would be. The bureaucrats of international governmental organizations who inhabit Brussels imagine a superintending class of global governors and look to the nation they live in as an example of how that would work.

Belgium, however, does not work.

It has never worked, really. Even during World War II, when Belgium was invaded by Germans (hated from World War I), whose sole rationale for invasion was that the Belgians were in the way, the “nation” of Belgium failed utterly. King Albert surrendered while his allies were still fighting the Germans. Perhaps more tellingly, during the Nazi invasion of Belgium, there were incidents of Flemish and Walloon units of the Belgian Army shooting at each other rather than at the Germans.

The Nazis also tried to cow the Swiss, and famously sent the message to the head of the Swiss National Guard that Hitler had one million troops which he was prepared to send into the Swiss Confederation. Switzerland’s reply? “Please tell your Fuehrer that in our whole national guard we have only half a million men: but each one of them will shoot twice.”

While the epicenter of European supra-nationalism flounders in helplessness, the voluntary and decentralized union of Swiss cantons shows just how to make a civil society work.

Photo: St. Michael and St. Gudala Cathedral in Brussels: AP Images



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