



Germany's President Resigns

President Horst Kohler has abruptly resigned as head of state of Germany in response to criticism of his remarks a few days earlier in which Kohler said that Germany was on the right path of developing military power sufficient to protect its economic interests. Although he later clarified his remarks, stating that he meant enough military power to keep up international trade routes, the political damage was done.



Kohler had been a highly respected political leader in Germany. He won re-election easily one year ago. His political philosophy is what passes in Europe for free enterprise and patriotism. His family escaped from East Germany when Kohler was relatively young — rather like several other political figures who have emerged as conservative in Western Europe — and so far as he could act in his largely ceremonial role of president, he espoused conservative positions: He opposed extending the minimum wage for postal workers; he supported the rights of the German states, at the expense of the federal government; and he openly supported a more patriotic attitude for Germans. Kohler had also used the few powers of the president more than past presidents.

His resignation means that a new president will have to be elected by members of the Bundestag and the Bundestrat — the two chambers of the German national legislature. Normally, the Bundestag, the chamber elected directed by the people, has most of the political power in the federal government, but not in the selection of a president. The recent political losses of the Christian Democrat Union/Christian Social Union party in North Rhineland-Westphalia means that it no longer controls (with its allies) the Bundestrat. So the next president will have to be elected as a compromise candidate among the parties of the “Right” and some party of the “Left.” His resignation, along with the state losses last month, means that Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, has less freedom of action politically.

She has been a pivotal figure in trying to prevent the house of cards — which is the practical bankruptcy of several European nations — from causing a general collapse of confidence in these governments. The big state losses her party received last month were assumed by many to reflect unhappiness with Germany's decision to help. Only one thing is certain: the mess in Europe just got



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Photo: German President Horst Kohler announces his resignation: AP Images



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