

Is Europe at a Pre-Revolutionary Stage?



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Today, Europe is experiencing multiple crises. Crises of politics, economics and society have emerged across the continent. Inflamed separatists' sentiments perturb European establishments; divisions between social and ethnic communities are in the process of being entrenched; the intensification of the migrant crisis and the rise of the reactionary right has become a source of great friction between national and transnational actors; and populists have fought their way from the fringes of politics with passionate and divisive rhetoric, scoring electoral victories.

Each crisis is significant in its own right, however, they contribute to a broader feeling across Europe – one of unease, uncertainty and animosity. In days gone past one might even say that much of Europe is in a pre-revolutionary state.

Division and change is not alien to Europe. Yes, European states have endured two world wars and constitution-testing crises during the twentieth century (such as the events of May 1968 in France). However, such widespread political mobilisation,

proliferation of ideologues, and crises of identity has not been seen since [the long nineteenth century](#), where the events of 1789 sent waves of change crashing about Europe's socio-political landscape.

For example, 1848 for some was an exercise in forming and expressing identity. Germany's desire to unify under a single constitution culminated in the ill-fated Frankfurt Parliament. In Italy, the aim of unification spurred revolts across the majority of Italian states. In Hungary, revolutionary fervour grew into a war of independence from the Austrian Empire when Austrian-Croatian 'loyalist' [Josip Jelačić](#) crossed the Hungarian border with Imperial troops to re-impose Hapsburg control over the rebellious Hungarians.

These events seem somewhat distant from events in Europe at first glance. Since the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, people have come to believe that Europe will not return to the behaviours of the past where political violence on a massive scale would overturn governments and change the course of countries. Yet for many, the current crises of Europe offer an opportunity to influence the course of national and international politics and society without massive political violence.

Perhaps it is the long-lasting legacies of the long nineteenth century and the recent legacy of the Maastricht Treaty that has kept large scale violence from becoming the modus operandi of the dissatisfied. The mechanisms of suffrage and representation allow those opposing the status quo, or seeking to support it, to legitimately push change into the purview of establishments and communities.

The efficacy of these popular and representative mechanisms is debatable, however, it has allowed the rousing of the masses. Brexit is a key case for this. Without a legitimate platform would Brexit have had the necessary support to change the landscape of Europe? Perhaps instead of violence, it is a political platform and a shared common idea that is needed to stir the passion and anger of the people. This is particularly evident in the separatist movements across Europe currently; Scotland and Catalonia have expressed their desire for independence without mass violence against the establishment, instead, working from within representative political frameworks.

For those without a political platform, the ability to protest en masse without fearing crackdowns as ruthless as those in days gone by, can prevent dissatisfaction being pent up until the point of violent release. The real risk of violence currently in Europe is not between government and opposition, but between the communities across Europe.

So then what, if anything, can the EU do to cap Europe's subterranean upwellings? For many, nothing. The ability of international institutions to quell the tensions of the dissatisfied is not well established – the Concert of Europe was able to do little to prevent the spread of revolutionary fervour. For those groups who oppose the practical and ideological basis of the supranational organization, the EU is their *raison d'être*.

However for others, the EU offers an effective social and political framework to combat separatism and the rise of the right. There is to be no silver bullet for Europe's current crises for they are far too multifaceted and complex, and certainly not from the EU, the target for many forces of change.

With the time of mass political violence seemingly over, can Europe be considered to be pre-revolutionary? In time, perhaps. We can retrospectively place the events preceding revolutions into a revolutionary narrative – if revolutions had not come to fruition, the Réveillon riots, the Campagne des banquets, or the split of the RSLDP in Russia may have been forgotten in history. The crises of Europe will undoubtedly be remembered with significance, however there is the potential for these individual crises to evolve into a singular period of change across Europe – politically, socially, and economically. It would be naïve to dismiss the crises of Europe as periods of unrest in an otherwise smooth period of Europe's history. Given time, the current crises of Europe may prove themselves to be a precursor of revolutionary change in Europe.

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[Választási menet a pesti Kristóf téren 1848-ban. Barabás Miklós akvarellje](#)

Hungarian Revolution of 1848

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