

Europe Is Moving Eastward

By [Dominique Moisi](#)

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Madrid and Warsaw recently looked very similar: Both were the sites of massive demonstrations. But the crowds gathered at Europe's western and eastern extremities had very different agendas in mind.

In Spain, citizens were united by economic and social despair. They took to the streets to express their rejection of a European Union-imposed austerity policy that they believe is leading them into an abyss. They want jobs and the dignity and salaries that go with them. The indignation of some had a clear anti-capitalist and anti-globalization tone.

In the Polish capital, Catholic and conservative parties, together with the Solidarity trade union, inspired by a reactionary Christian radio network, Radio Maria, gathered for political and cultural, rather than economic, reasons. In the name of the defense of media freedom, they were denouncing a government that they found too "centrist" and insufficiently "Polish."

Ten years ago, then-U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld famously distinguished between

"Old" and "New" Europe on the basis of their attitudes toward the U.S. and the war in Iraq. New Europe (at least its governments), understanding the need to exercise power, was from Mars, whereas Old Europe (with the main exception of Britain), having decayed into a culture of weakness, was from Venus.

The differences between the demonstrations in Madrid and Warsaw suggest that the distinction between Old and New Europe remains valid, though not in the way that Rumsfeld meant. The moods in the two countries, as well as their perceptions of Europe and their role in it, contrast starkly.

Poland, which is not yet part of the eurozone, sees no alternative to the EU. The country has fully reconciled itself with America's strategic shift away from the European continent, even though Poles are as obsessively fearful of Russia as ever. And can one blame them, given that Russia seems more nostalgic for its imperial tradition than ever? But given the political evolution of Ukraine, not to mention Belarus, Poland can no longer dream of an eastern future. Poland's only way is west — but the European west more than the American one.

Poland is benefiting from economic growth and prosperity in Germany. Reconciliation between the two countries has been one of their greatest achievements, and Poland may, for the first time in its history, be in the right place — close to Berlin — at the right time.

By contrast, Spain increasingly regards Europe more as a problem than as a solution. It is not so much that its people want to leave the eurozone. Rather, the country wants to remain itself, that is, to maintain a lifestyle that is largely the product of climate.

For Poles, the EU is still a tool for modernization, whereas Spaniards increasingly consider it synonymous with an attack on their dignity, if not on their essence. How can one unite member countries with such different emotional calendars? Spaniards are offended when they are compared to Greeks; Poles are shocked when they are compared with Spaniards. Yet not long ago, after the fall of Franco, Poles looked with envy at Spain.

Here I am reminded of a conversation with Polish statesman Bronislaw Geremek in 1978, when we shared an office in Washington. For him, Poland and Spain had long had a somewhat parallel history. Both were unable to integrate modernity into their institutions, and both had fallen into decline after a brilliant historical period between the late 15th and early 18th centuries. Poland had even disappeared from the map of Europe.

Democracy returned to Spain in 1975, and the country soon recovered its place within Europe, just when Poland seemed trapped in its tragic history. But 11 years after my conversation with Geremek, communism collapsed in Poland, and in 2004 the country's "return" to Europe was complete.

Today's Poles do not believe that Europe has cheated them. Nearly everywhere, you can see tangible signs of the EU's support: a bridge here, a school there. In Spain, by contrast, disillusion with the union has replaced the early enthusiasm of the "movida" period. Whether that remains true will most likely determine the future of Europe.

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