

## Context (I): 'A Changing Europe'<sup>2</sup>

### A SHIFT TO THE RIGHT?

Recent European electoral results confirm that Europe's political culture is being challenged by the right. Resentment towards immigrants and asylum seekers could be one plausible reason behind an upsurge in support for right-wing political parties across the European Union (EU). For instance, in the late 1990s, Spain was the only country in Western Europe led by a centre-right government. It was soon joined by Austria, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway. Since the Retreat (March 2002), the strength of popular support for Jean-Marie Le Pen's *Front National* in the first round of France's recent presidential elections and the gains of the *Pim Fortuyn List* in the last Dutch election demonstrates this trend and the sensitivity of immigration and asylum issues in the new Europe. It may also be evidence that the political mood is becoming more 'nation-statist'.

Resentment toward European governing institutions may, in part, explain the Europe-wide move to the right. Public discomfort about the perceived growing influence of "Brussels" in Europeans' daily affairs has been routinely reflected in polls and election results and generating increases in support for right-wing parties. As well, fears emanating from the growing costs of enlargement and the loss of EU subsidies have also contributed to the popularity of right-wing, Euroskeptic politicians. While in office, some right-wing leaders have been known to pursue an anti-enlargement, anti-integration and anti-immigration platform. Notwithstanding, the right-wing movement in Europe is incoherent, with some elements favouring further economic integration and others espousing a 'pro-nation' outlook.

Despite the perceived lack of legitimacy of EU institutions in the eyes of some citizens, the level of success of the integration process must be measured incrementally. In fact, public opinion research demonstrates that citizens are prepared to support European integration provided "there is a demonstrable benefit to cross-border cooperation." As well, opinion samples may often exaggerate

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<sup>2</sup>For further detail on 'A Changing Europe', consult online video presentations from the Retreat, available at [www.ecommons.net/ccfpd-europe](http://www.ecommons.net/ccfpd-europe), including: John Lloyd (*The Future Context of Canada-Europe Relations - Security, Trade, International Relations, the US and Triangularism*); Gar Knutson, M.P. ("Introductory Remarks"); Paul Dubois (*Europe 2002: A View from Ottawa*); Tom Arbuthnott (*European Democracy, Public Opinion and Politics*); Kurt Hübner (*The Impact of the Euro on Trans-Atlantic Relations: Building Euroland*); Jennifer Jackson-Preece (*Minorities, Multicultures and States*); Ferdinand Kinsky (*Europe after Nice and Gothenberg*); Xavier Arbos (*Regions, Identity and Evolving Federalism*); Ryszard Piasecki (*What Europe, what Union? Poland's Perspective*); Francois G  r   (*The Changing Foreign and Defence Architecture: Europe as a New Superpower?*); and comments from Robert Hage, John Beck, Fredericka Gregory, and Robert Toulemon.