

Political instability in Western Europe

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To some extent, the political, economic and social difficulties that confronted all governments explain the frequent governmental crises that followed one another in Western Europe. In France, General de Gaulle could not impose his idea of a strong executive power and preferred to resign, despite the personal prestige he had acquired during the war as head of the Free French.

In Italy and Belgium, the issue of the monarchy divided the population into two irreconcilable camps. The internal situation continued to deteriorate. In Italy, a referendum was held on 2 June 1946 when it was decided to abolish the monarchy. A republic was immediately declared. In Belgium, the return of King Leopold III – whose attitude during the war had been condemned in certain circles – provoked serious riots in Wallonia and Brussels. Insurrection was in the air, and the forces of law and order cracked down with some bloodshed on strikes and demonstrations against the king. Despite the majority in support of the monarchy secured in the referendum of March 1950, the King of the Belgians preferred to abdicate in favour of his son, Baudouin, for the sake of national unity.

These constitutional crises weakened the Western democracies, which had felt threatened by Communism ever since the beginning of the Cold War. However, the political stability of a country had no direct effect on its willingness to take part in the process of European unification, as was demonstrated by the dictatorships in Spain and Portugal.