

# Europe now faces a political crisis

Although the results of the presidential election in France, legislative election in Greece and local elections in other European countries such as Great Britain, Germany and Italy **have come up to observers' expectations**, their major significance must be properly grasped and their far-reaching consequences properly understood. The temporary turbulence in the financial market is not a major problem. Rather serious attention should be given to possible changes in policy orientations under pressure of public opinion, as shown in these elections. It may not be an exaggeration to say that Europe has now **to face a political crisis head-on**, which may deal a blow to the deep-layered mechanism of capitalism in Europe or even the whole West.

Francois Holland of the Socialist Party on the left **won out** in the French presidential election, becoming the first Socialist president in 17 years. Later on, France will be holding its legislative elections; the results will also deserve attention. Holland's policy orientations in many fields go against those of the outgoing President Nicolas Sarkozy who failed to get re-elected. Holland is largely against austerity and reforms. He wants to increase government expenditure to support economic growth. At the same time he also wants to reverse some reforms aimed at cutting welfare subsidies such as cutting the increased retirement age back to 60. On France's policy towards the European Union (EU), Holland advocates re-opening negotiations on the already-signed EU Fiscal Treaty, and especially to add a clause on promoting growth.

In Greece, two political parties backing the austerity policy demanded by EU and the International Monetary Foundation (IMF) won out in the first and third places. But together they just managed to get a little bit more than 20% of the total votes, not enough to form a government. In this election, a large number of votes were given to anti-austerity parties. For example, the Radical Left Coalition or Syriza won 16% of votes to become the second largest party in the parliament. Right now, it is uncertain whether a government can be formed, that would continue to effectively carry out austerity and reform policies. It seems that the EU-arranged transitional techno-bureaucratic government has to step down with its mission unaccomplished after the parliamentary election. In addition, the ruling alliance in the Netherlands had earlier been forced to resign for being unable to implement deficit-cut plans. In Britain, the ruling alliance also suffered a crushing defeat in local elections. All these show that voters in various countries have all cast their ballots against austerity policies.

Obviously, Europe is facing a political crisis. Economic recession, high unemployment and big cuts in incomes and welfare have made life unbearable for people who now use their votes to express their dissatisfaction. The French presidential election was not an ideological competition between the left and the right, but a reflection of people's anti-austerity and anti-belt-tightening sentiments. The ultimate outcome of such a political development is very likely to severely damage the foundations of the euro and EU. Political changes in France, Greece and other countries make it even more difficult for the weak-sentiment-dominated market to recover confidence. The following two problems are especially more worrisome.

The first is that the French-German alliance will cease to exist except in name. The two countries' policies will be **poles apart**. Even if both sides are willing to negotiate a compromise, there is little room for policy maneuvers under pressure from both the market and domestic politics. Without a Paris-Berlin axis to play leader, it will be very hard for the Eurozone to maintain its cohesion and to be decisive in face of accidents. The situation will become

even more serious when it is swept by "shock waves". If both France and Germany **stick to their guns** on major affairs such as reaching a fiscal treaty, then the risks will be even higher.

The second is that, with political changes, the Eurozone will inevitably exhibit some dangerous signs or even be subject to a new wave of attacks. Most likely, the crisis will start in Greece. As the political situation remains unclear, whether Greece will be able to continue carrying out tough bail-out measures imposed by EU naturally becomes problematic, and this will affect the decisions of the EU and IMF on whether to continue granting loans to Greece. Given the fierce collision between public opinion at home and international requirements, it cannot be ruled out that Greece would become the first member country to pull out of the Eurozone. This would cause shocks and a chain reaction, in a time when the EU loses the leadership of a solid France-Germany axis in dealing with the crisis. The results of the elections in France and Greece may also provoke a chain reaction, weakening the resolve of other European countries especially the PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain) countries, to implement austerity measures and reforms. As a result, there will be turbulence, one after another.

The politico-economic situation in Europe no doubt has arrived at a major historical moment. How it will develop remains to be seen. But other regions including China and Hong Kong must prepare for the worst, and get ready to face up to possible new attacks. In addition to preparing for weakening foreign demand, in regard to matters such as aiding Europe (for example, through injecting funds into IMF), China must take a wait-and-see attitude and not act harshly without making careful calculations. Decisions can be made after it becomes clear where Europe is heading.

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## WORDS AND USAGE

① **Come up to sb's expectations** (idiom) – To be as good as someone expected. (符合某人的期望)

Examples: 1.The performance of many Legislative Council members fail to come up to Hong Kong people's expectations. 2.Sorry, but this product does not come up to my expectations and I want to return it.

② **Face sth head-on** (idiom) – to confront a problem directly and openly. (迎頭面對)

Examples: 1.I always face life head on. 2.Let's face this problem head-on and try to solve it quickly and painlessly.

③ **Win out** (phrasal verb) – If something or someone wins out or wins through, they are successful after a competition or struggle. (獲勝，勝出)

Examples: 1.In the end, greed won out over doing the right thing. 2.She was sure she'd win out if she persisted.

④ **Poles apart** (idiom) – In complete opposition (like the north and south poles); far from coming to an agreement. (截然相反，南轅北轍)

Examples: 1.The two brothers were poles apart in nearly all their views. 2.They'll never sign the contract because they are poles apart.

⑤ **Stick to one's guns** (idiom) – To refuse to change one's ideas or actions although other people try to make one change them. (If a soldier sticks to his guns he continues to shoot at the enemy.) (堅持不讓步)

Examples: 1.I'll stick to my guns on this matter. I'm sure I'm right. 2.My parents want me to study accounting, but I'm sticking to my guns and majoring in philosophy.

# 歐洲現政治危機 歐元前景更堪憂

歐洲的法國及希臘大選和英德意等的一系地方選舉，結果雖與預期基本摺合，但對其重大意義及深遠影響仍須認真掌握。金融市場的一時震盪並非主要問題，更須關注者乃在選情反映的民意壓力下，政策大方向的可能變動。若說歐洲正面臨一場政治危機並不為過，且或將衝擊歐洲以至西方資本主義的深層機制，故對其後果不容輕視。

法國大選中左翼社會黨的奧朗德獲勝，出現了十七年來該黨的首位總統。稍後法國還將進行議會選舉，結果如何同樣值得關注。奧朗德的政策與競選連任失敗的薩科齊在許多方面背道而馳，主要是反收緊反改革，既要增加政府開支以撐經濟，又要倒回一些削減福利資助的改革，例如要把提高了的退休年齡改回六十歲等。在對歐盟政策上，奧氏聲言要重新談判之前商定的財政協約，尤其是要加入推動增長的條款。

在希臘，認同執行歐盟及IMF緊縮政策的兩大政黨得票為首名及第三名，但合起來仍只得二成多點，並不足夠籌組政府。此次選舉中選票大量投向反收緊的政策，例如激進左翼聯盟便以得票一成六表現奇佳而成為第二大黨。能否籌組能繼續有效執行嚴厲收緊及改革路線的政府，一時難於確定。看來由歐盟等安排的過渡性技術官僚政府，也將未竟全功而要在選後退下。加上早前荷蘭執政聯盟已因無法推動削赤方案而被迫辭職，英國執政聯盟在地方選舉中亦遭遇慘敗，顯示各國人民對收緊政策均投下抗議票。

歐洲顯然正面臨一場政治危機：人民在經濟低沉、失業高升和收入、福利大減下已無法忍受，而要通過選票表達不滿。這次法國



▲歐洲政局轉變未知會否觸發新一輪歐債危機，衝擊全球經濟

選舉並非左翼右翼間的意識形態之爭，而是反收縮反過緊日子等民情的體現。但這種政治演化的最終結果，很可能是嚴重地衝擊了歐元及歐盟的生存基礎。法希等國的政局變化，更難令本就情緒虛怯的市場回復信心，特別是以下兩大問題更值得擔憂。

首先是法德聯盟將名存實亡。兩國政策南轅北轍，即使雙方有意洽商尋求妥協，在市場及國內政治壓力的夾擊下，政策的迴旋空間甚少。在沒有法德軸心擔負起領軍龍頭的角色下，今後歐元區再難以維持凝聚力，和應對事故時所需的決斷力，故若再遇上衝擊波時形勢將更嚴峻。若法德兩國就財政協議等重重大事項爭持不下，則風險更高。

第二是在政局變動之際，歐元區必出險象並產生新衝擊而出現危機的最大可能來源是希臘。在政局不明朗下，能否繼續執行歐盟的嚴苛援助要求自然成疑，並將影響歐盟及IMF的繼續發放貸款。在民意與國際要求的強烈碰撞下，不能排除希臘會成為首個退出歐元區的成員國。這自會引發震盪以及連鎖效應，而到時歐盟將缺少了堅實的法德軸心帶領應對行動。法希選情還可能引起連鎖反應，動搖其他國家尤其意西葡等幾個歐豬國的收緊與改革決心，令震盪一浪接一浪出現。

歐洲的政經局勢顯然已到了重大歷史性關口。雖然這將如何演變尚待觀察，但其他地區包括中國內地及香港等，都必須做好最壞打算，要準備好應對衝擊。除要防範外需轉弱外，中國對於援助歐洲之事（如注資IMF），更應靜觀其變謀定後動，要先看清楚歐洲何去何從再說。

2012/05/08 大公報社評

# 與其為唐代女強人改寫歷史 不如歌頌唯一女性文壇領袖

四月十三日，湖南衛視播連續劇《太平公主》最後一輯。我看到此劇編者「改編」歷史的意圖。看來，他認為武后、韋后、太平公主、安樂公主和上官婉兒這幾個富有權力慾的女人集中在一個時代，「上承貞觀之治，下啓開元盛世」，為其他朝代所沒有，想把故事改得有聲有色。那就是：假設李隆基（唐明皇）由祖母（武后）指定接班，由姑母（太平公主）扶上帝座；而上官婉兒，則在殺了韋后等人，趁着李隆基登位時自殺；至於太平公主，則又有功不居，而到母親（武后）曾經出家的感業寺削髮為尼。

歷史真相則是：連李隆基上一代——李顯（唐中宗）、李旦（唐睿宗）兩個皇帝的繼位，都不是武后指定；上官婉兒是韋后一黨，她與韋后都死於李隆基發動的政變；至於太平公主，則以「謀逆」而被李隆基所殺。

《太平公主》的編劇「改編」歷史，吃力不討好，因為許多地方不合情理。聰明的做法，應在幾個女強人之中，選一個做主角，編出一套既有創意又有教育性的新劇。選誰呢？我以為該選上官婉兒。

上官婉兒，不但是唐代衆多才女中最傑出的一個，而且是我國幾千年歷史中唯一的女性文壇領袖。要用的材料很多，如武則天的詔令，出自她手；唐中宗的詩文，她是槍手；本人詩才，又超過當時的才子。她把最有名的兩個詩人——宋之問、沈佺期評定甲乙，千古傳誦。李隆基雖然殺了她，登帝位後，卻接納大臣張說（音悅）的意見，蒐集她的遺作，編成《上官昭容集》，頒於天下。這樣的故事，編得好，不但女觀眾追看，男觀眾也追看，而且老少咸宜，何樂而不為？

容若

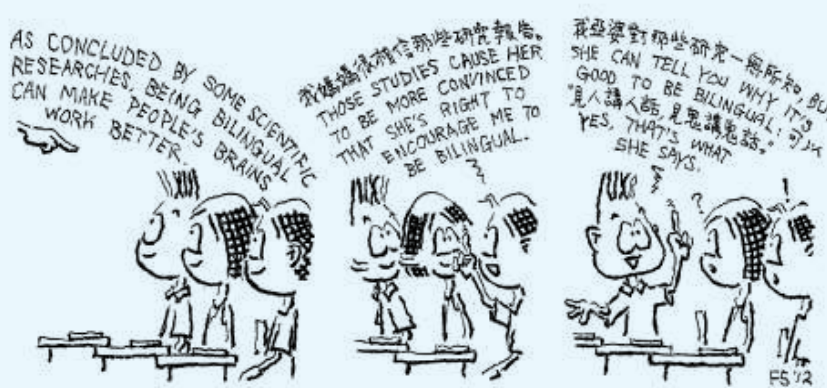
## 觸景立畫

## 多媒體創作觀測研究



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## SOHO DIARY



## Bilingualism and Human Brain (1)

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It is known that many companies in Hong Kong require their employees to speak fluent English and Chinese (preferably Cantonese and Putonghua). Most companies just focus on the communication ability of their workers but do not take their language skills as an indication of the level of their intellectual power.

In 2004, the researchers from York University in Canada carried out tests on 104 people between the ages of 30 and 88. They found out that those who were "fluent" in two languages might be able to keep their mind sharper for longer time. Recently the US researchers from Northwestern University concluded that being bilingual is like having brain training sessions all the time, and as a result can produce a sharper mind.

So, I can now tell my friends in other parts of the world why so many

Hong Kong people are so quick in mind and why they are so efficient. It is because, if they are bilingual, switching from Cantonese to English and back from English to Cantonese has an impact on their brains. In this way they can be more sensitive in certain ways.

The Northwestern University study also makes me think more about how people in Hong Kong can function quite well although Hong Kong is such a noisy place. The researchers studied the brain responses of healthy student volunteers and traced their pattern of brainwaves (腦電波). There were 48 of them and 23 of those student volunteers were bilingual. It is found that in a noisy environment the bilingual group could process sounds better. They were better able to get important information (the speaker's voice) and they could forget or delete noises that were useless.

## 通識記憶體

歐盟現有27個成員國，是世界具重要影響的區域一體化組織。1999年1月1日歐盟國家，使用歐元作為流通貨幣。現歐元區有17個國家，包括德國、法國、意大利、荷蘭、比利時、盧森堡、愛爾蘭、希臘、西班牙、葡萄牙、奧地利、芬蘭等。2009年10月20日，希臘政府宣布當年財政赤字佔國內生產總值比例逾12%，遠高於歐盟允許的3%上限。隨後，全球三大評級公司相繼下調希臘主權信用評級，歐洲主權債務危機率先在希臘爆發。迄今，歐債危機正在由債務危機轉向經濟危機，進而演變為社會、政治危機。

**歐盟多國經濟同陷衰退》》》**

最新經濟數據顯示，歐元區經濟整體已陷入衰退，英國、捷克等歐元區以外的歐盟成員國亦陷入衰退。歐債危機爆發至今，已有13個歐洲國家政府更迭。近日法國大選奧朗德上台，變數驟生，他曾放言要「終結」緊縮政策，引發德國和歐盟強烈不滿。歐債危機和歐元前途，已是歐洲以至全球各國最關注的政經議題。

## 3年歐債危機 13國更迭政權

歐債危機事件簿	
2009年10月20日	歐洲主權債務危機率先在希臘爆發
2010年4月27日	葡萄牙、西班牙信用評級相繼降級
5月2日	歐元區啟動希臘救助機制。希臘宣布大規模財政緊縮
5月10日	歐盟設立7500億歐元的穩定機制
11月21日	愛爾蘭成為在歐債危機中倒下的第二個歐元國
2011年5月5日	葡萄牙成為在歐債危機中倒下的第三個歐元國
10月17日	法國主權債務狀況惡化，債務負擔進一步加重
11月10日	歐盟委員會預測歐洲經濟增長陷於停滯
12月9日	歐盟26國立約提前一年啟動歐洲穩定機制
2012年1月13日	法、奧、葡、意、西評級下調
4月12日	意大利拍賣近30億歐元國債
4月14日	西班牙成歐債風暴中心