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Likely Collapse of the Euro Leads to Second Amendment Lessons

by James Heiser

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As the economic crisis in the European Union grows day by day, there is a proportionate degree of speculation around the world about the final extent of the damage that will be done by the looming collapse of the euro. According to Daniel Mitchell, a contributor to Forbes.com, many individuals among the wealthy elite in Europe are already planning to flee their respective countries for safe havens in nations such as Costa Rica or Australia. Meanwhile, the British Foreign Office is making plans to evacuate Britons from the Continent in the event of widespread rioting.

A November 25 article for the London *Telegraph* explained that the British government is actively planning to cope with a widespread breakdown of social order within the EU:

> Diplomats are preparing to help Britons abroad through a banking collapse and even riots arising from the debt crisis.
> The Treasury confirmed earlier this month that contingency planning for a collapse is now under way....
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> Recent Foreign and Commonwealth Office instructions to embassies and consulates request contingency planning for extreme scenarios including rioting and social unrest.
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> Greece has seen several outbreaks of civil disorder as its government struggles with its huge debts. British officials think similar scenes cannot be ruled out in other nations if the euro collapses.
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> Diplomats have also been told to prepare to help tens of thousands of British citizens in eurozone countries with the consequences of a financial collapse that would leave them unable to access bank accounts or even withdraw cash.

As bleak as such an assessment sounds, it comes across as almost mild compared to the warning issued by Daniel Mitchell in a November 27 article for Forbes.com. According to Mitchell (who is a senior fellow at the Cato Institute), some wealthy Europeans are preparing for a level of chaos in their respective countries worthy of the title, "apocalyptic." In Mitchell's words:

> About a year ago, I spoke at a conference in Europe that attracted a lot of very rich people from all over the continent, as well as a lot of people who manage money for high-net-worth individuals.
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> What made this conference remarkable was not the presentations, though they were generally quite interesting. The stunning part of the conference was learning — as part of casual conversation during breaks, meals, and other socializing time — how many rich people are planning for the eventual collapse of European society.

> Not stagnation. Not gradual decline. Collapse.
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> As in riots, social disarray, plundering, and chaos. A non-trivial number of these people think the rioting in places such as Greece and England is just the tip of the iceberg, and they have plans — if bad things begin to happen — to escape to jurisdictions ranging from Australia to Costa Rica (several of them remarked that they no longer see the U.S. as a good long-run refuge).

In fairness, Mitchell's own assessment of such "doom and gloom" scenarios is more measured; in his words, "I don't expect that a nightmare situation will materialize, but I certainly can understand why wealthy people have contingency plans to escape."

Even more cautious analyses still sound quite dour. Kirsty Hughes, a senior associate fellow with the Centre for International Studies at the University of Oxford, recently offered three possible scenarios for the European crisis. The most moderate scenario still projected "a rapid acceleration of the EU's loss of geopolitical influence" and "substantial political stasis" with at least some member nations of the EU electing to leave the union. Her other two scenarios project either a fracturing of the eurozone, or that "the eurozone breaks up amidst chaotic market and political scenes. The huge political and economic shockwaves scar Europe for decades to come — and impact negatively world-wide." Hughes, as an advocate of a strong EU, speculates that in the last scenario,

> With no EU, there is no European voice in the world. European views on democracy, human rights, geopolitics or economics are multifarious and scorned outside Europe. European countries no longer coordinate at the UN or WTO or at global climate talks. The Asian century has arrived rather earlier than expected and there is one less pole in the multipolar world.

However, such an assessment seems rather dubious in several regards. First, the EU is experiencing its current crisis because there is no "European voice" in the sense in which she is using the term. It is precisely because there is no such thing as "Europe" in terms of the political fantasy at the root of the European Union scheme that the euro has fallen on such hard times in such a brief period of time. Second, European countries will continue to wield such global influence as is proportional to their political, economic, and military strength. The illusion of the EU attempted to give the appearance that the sum of its member nations was greater than its parts. The euro crackup is testimony than, in fact, the EU has been dramatically *less* than the sum of its member nations.

Mitchell's assessment of the European crisis provides him with what is — for him — a new defense of firearms as "the ultimate guarantor of civilization." Previously he had counted "Respect for the Constitution," "The presumption of liberty," "personal protection against crime" and "Ability to resist government oppression" as his four arguments for the right to "keep and bear" arms. In Mitchell's words, firearms provide:

> 5. **Personal protection against social breakdown**. If politicians destroy the economic system with too much debt and too much dependency, firearms will be the first and last line of defense against those who would plunder and pillage.

Of course, such an argument for the right of self-defense is not new. Only in an age such as ours, which has taken social stability for granted, could the responsibility of the individual to care for himself and his

family be conceived of requiring such formal articulation. Social chaos has been far more common and widespread than modern man is often capable of readily grasping. The city walls, castles, and keeps of Europe are a reminder that the history of the nations that now make up the EU once took for granted that peace against highwaymen and political rivals was often difficult to secure in one's most immediate environs. And the localized chaos that exists in the aftermath of disasters such as Katrina has proven time and again that those people who are not prepared to defend themselves may discover that they are inadvertently inviting trouble.

Only time will tell the eventual outcome of the economic crisis in Europe and these United States. Certainly, these circumstances are already teaching valuable lessons in basic economics to those who are willing to learn. Americans from the Beltway to the heartland need to remember that the liberties enumerated in the Second Amendment are not some sort of political abstraction; rather, they reflect what can be a fundamental reality of living in a fallen world: the need of the individual to defend himself from violence to himself, and his property.