er cooperation among sovereign states. The Protestant countries are reluctant to abandon sovereignty for historical and political reasons," while the Catholic Church "has consistently supported both the European Union and its expansion."

But social scientists, convinced that religion is fast becoming a spent social force in Europe, have paid little heed to religion's role in recent European politics. The authors' analysis of Eurobarometer survey data from 10 countries over recent decades suggests that this neglect is a mistake. They find that Catholics, especially devout ones, "are warmest toward the Union, while Protestants tend to be slightly less supportive than secular citizens are." Strong religious commitment may also encourage support for European integration among some Protestants in established state churches (Lutheran and Anglican) who take their cues from their clerical leaders. But the most devout sectarian Protestants, such as Calvinists in the Netherlands and Northern Ireland, "are the least fond of the European Union."

"If, indeed, religious tides are slowly ebbing in Europe—especially Catholic commitment—a prime source of Europeanist sentiment may be eroding," Nelsen and his co-authors conclude. As a result, the EU "will be ever more dependent on its economic performance" for continued public support.

A Brighter View of Russia

"Russia" by Anders Åslund, in *Foreign Policy* (July–Aug. 2001), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1779 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Mention Russia today, and an image of catastrophic decline may well come to mind. Shock therapy failed, the economy has collapsed, the infrastructure is crumbling, corruption is widespread, the population is shrinking. Russia, in this view, seems headed for Milton's "reign of Chaos and old Night." Get a grip, urges Åslund, author of *How Russia Became a Market Economy* (1995). The country's plight has been vastly exaggerated.

True, official data show that gross domestic product (GDP) shrank 44 percent between 1989 and 1998. But that's a statistical mirage. "Under communism," Åslund notes, "everybody padded output to reach targets in the planned economy, while nobody cared about the quality (or even the usefulness) of the items produced." The subsequent decline in production of shoddy or useless goods should be welcomed, he says. And the statistics miss the substantial output of the postcommunist underground economy.

A more accurate picture of Russia's economic development to 1998 would show stagnation, says Åslund. The problem is not excessive "shock therapy," but "too little shock and too much corrupt state therapy in the form of subsidies to the country's elite." And don't blame the plague of bribery on privatization, he says. It "is overwhelmingly connected with law enforcement, tax collection, and state intervention." Despite all its problems, Åslund points out, Russia since 1998 has achieved continued economic growth: The GDP increased 5.4 percent in 1999, and 8.3 percent last year.

Another important and largely unrecognized achievement, says Åslund, is the "extraordinary improvement" that privatization and market pricing have made in Russia's infrastructure. He cites an impressive expansion in the telecommunications industry, improvements in airports and airlines, increased road construction, and new ports that have been built around St. Petersburg. Russia is in the midst of a "building boom." Maintenance problems, however, persist "where state monopolies linger," he observes.

As for Russia's population meltdown, Åslund says the shocking statistics are misleading. Yes, the country is "losing" more than 500,000 people a year—but population decline is "an issue across Europe." Yes, male life expectancy decreased from 64 years in 1989 to 57 years in 1994—but the 1989 figure was an aberration caused by former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev's anti-alcohol campaign. The 1994 figure fit long-term trends. "Nothing suggests that

average healthcare standards in Russia have fallen," Åslund maintains. Indeed, the infant mortality rate fell by 17 percent between 1993 and 1998.

Slow as Russia's reforms have been, Åslund says, they "have progressed far enough to keep the communists at bay." Many Russians and foreigners think that democracy is Russia's problem, and that "a strong leader" is needed. On the contrary, Åslund maintains, "the unlawful enrichment of the elite is the problem. . . . The widespread disregard for democracy and the repression of media are the greatest dangers.

Venezuela's Delusions of Wealth

"The Real Story behind Venezuela's Woes" by Moisés Naím, in *Journal of Democracy* (Apr. 2001), 1101 15th St., N.W., Ste. 802, Washington, D.C. 20005.

Corruption, corruption, corruption—that's the reason most people in oil-rich Venezuela are poor, President Hugo Chávez asserts, and a large majority of Venezuelans believe him. Lambasting the "politicians" and the "rich" for stealing the country's wealth, the fiery former military officer promises to set things right. Unfortunately, the national "fixation with corruption" is as much of a roadblock to progress as corruption itself, argues Naím, the editor of *Foreign Policy* and a former Venezuelan minister of trade and industry (1989-90).

The focus on corruption encourages Venezuelans to believe that theirs is a rich country crippled by thieves. According to a recent public opinion poll, about 90 percent of Venezuelans believe that their country is wealthy. But despite occasional windfalls, oil income "has long been insufficient" to make Venezuela rich. Oil's contribution to the national treasury fell from $1,540 per person in 1974 to only $200 two decades later. Sixty-eight percent of Venezuelans live in poverty today—more than twice the percentage two decades ago.

"Venezuela's tax system, labor and social security laws, health, education, housing, state-owned enterprises (including the oil and petrochemical industry), agriculture, and almost all its public-sector institutions, as well as most of its regulatory frameworks, are in desperate need of reform and modernization," Naím writes. Yet the national obsession with corruption precludes a debate. Indeed, thanks in no small part to "the enormous role of the state" in Venezuela, "corruption has become pandemic," he says. An experiment with neoliberal economic reforms during the 1990s was modest and short-lived, falling "far short . . . of what most other Latin American countries implemented."

Even so, the reforms provoked widespread popular discontent. During the 1990s, Naím notes, "the two political parties that were the building blocks of Venezuelan democracy for more than five decades lost almost all of

A Chávez supporter demonstrates in the streets of Caracas last year, shortly after his landslide reelection.