

Eurozilla? Europe's Spectre in the US Presidential Election Campaign

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This essay is about the general perception of Europe during the 2011-12 US presidential election campaign, including the competing Republicans and the acting president. It tries to identify some patterns of the portrait of Europe depicted in the current US public debate by collecting some of the most important judgements given in the framework of this and partly in the previous campaign for US presidency. In order to cover a more comprehensive dimension of the issue, it covers not only what the candidates who are still in the race say but also the arch of the whole campaign.

1 INTRODUCTION

There seems to be a new – and at the same time old – figure of speech in this year's US presidential race: Europe as the negative blueprint of an impending transformation of the US into an 'Obamaland', depicted as a kind of Horror-'Euro-Disneyland' doomed exclusively, and without escape, to failure, downfall and catastrophe.

According to the rhetoric of the Republican candidates – those who have given up in the meantime as well as those who remain – contemporary Europe is on the wrong path in every sense: economically, politically and culturally, not to speak of technology and demography. And Barack Obama is depicted as Europe's (willing or unwilling) agent in America, trying to import the failures of the old world into the new world.

2 REPUBLICAN RHETORIC ABOUT EUROPE

Indeed, in their desperate fight against a foe superior in basically everything that American voters usually award: Achievement, leadership, youth, rhetoric, image, education, intellect, fluency, family and wit, the Republican candidates are trying

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to play what they consider one of their few potentially winning – and at the same time quite easy and cheap – rhetoric cards: Anti-Europeanism. They are trying everything to create a new popular myth based on a simple identification: Obama is Europe, not America. And Europe is doom. Which means Obama is doom, of course.

It does not matter that Obama is of Afro-American and Pacific origin rather than of European and Atlantic origin and thus much less identifiable as ‘European’ than the main Republican contenders of this campaign themselves who are all classical ‘WASP’s’ (White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, with Gingrich having switched to catholicism because of his hope to exchange a severe and punishing god for a forgiving one). It does not matter that Obama disagrees in almost every bigger current economic issue with Europe, for example the financial transaction tax, the internationalization of the reform of the banking system, the question of whether monetizing national debt is useful or dangerous, the issue of global privatization of water or the idea of a globalized tax system. And it does not matter that Obama’s new ‘Asia First’ geopolitical strategy is much more oriented towards the Pacific than the Atlantic, thus – probably for the first time in post-WW II history – steering the US ship determinedly away from Europe towards Asia.

In the view of the Republican candidates, all of this does not matter: Obama is Europe, and Europe is the end of all things. That is the decisive point, which the US voter must believe. At least, according to the political gospel of Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich and, to a certain extent, Ron Paul.

In order to generate such a belief, the horror stories about Europe told to the American public by all the Republican candidates were countless during this campaign.

According to Rick Santorum, who gave up the race on April 11, 2012, but as Mitt Romney rightly stated will most probably remain an important figure in the Republican party beyond this year’s elections, the Dutch euthanize their elderly, with 10% of all Netherlands deaths caused by euthanasia, thus demonstrating European barbarity.¹ In other occasions, pointing toward growing anti-immigration fears in the US, Santorum brands Europe as the biggest failure ever in history because Europe has no unifying single language or culture, a fact that in his view has to be considered as a clear precursor of doom.² Not to forget his famous ‘Europe is dying’ speech of April 2006 which is already a classic example of Anti-Europeanism. In this speech, Santorum asserted that ‘Europe is dying because of secularism. Those cultures are dying. People are dying. They’re

¹ H. Horn, *The Dutch Euthanize Their Elderly, and Other Scary GOP Lies About Europe*, *The Atlantic* (Mar. 14, 2012).

² Cf. G. Gurley, *Rick Santorum’s new culture war front: Official English*, *Guardian*, (Mar. 23, 2012).

being overrun from overseas... and they have no response. They have nothing to fight for. They have nothing to live for.³

In another other occasion in 2008, Santorum went more into the details stating the following:

I look at Western Europe, when I go over there and when I read and see, as a place that has rejected Christendom, who sees that the culture that has risen throughout Europe over the last two millennia as flawed and defective and as something that they need to reject. Multiculturalism is now an adopted point of view that Western culture is no better than any other culture. It's not superior. In fact, it's inferior, in many respects, to other cultures. And so we have a group of people in leadership over there who will not fight because there's nothing to fight for. You can't fight to defend what you reject.⁴

Asked what he exactly meant by this, i.e. what exactly it was that had to be 'fought' for, and who were those against who Europe had to fight, Santorum went to state more precisely, as follows:

If we can get Western Europe to do things that are in the interest of the survival of Western civilization, for one reason or another – I don't know why – but if they can sign up, I'll take them. I don't expect them to. I mean, I expect Poland to be there. I expect the Czech Republic to be there, Romania to be there. But I don't expect France, or Germany, or Belgium, or Holland. I mean, I don't expect any of those countries. They have no interest in us. They hate us because we stand by this old, antiquated idea of Christendom as a good thing, as a culture worth fighting for and worth saving. They don't. They don't believe that... They've given up. They have no hope for the future. They're not having kids. Their birth rates are down. Nobody goes to church. They've abandoned ship. And so, okay, is it important to have an alliance with an empty ship? Folks, nobody's gonna stand by the guns and fire anything. Why? What I think we need to do – and this is obviously not the government – but we need to re-evangelize Europe.⁵

It is ironic that Santorum's 're-evangelization of Europe' request directly echoed the 'great campaign for the re-evangelization of Europe' proclaimed by Catholic Pope Benedikt XVI (Joseph Ratzinger) in September 2011, directed primarily not only to 'secular' Germany, but also – on the occasion of the then's pope's visit to Britain of September 16–19 – much more explicitly towards the Anglo-American 'Protestant' churches, i.e. exactly against Santorum's variant of 'Christendom'.⁶ What the pope meant on this occasion with 're-evangelization' was, unmistakably, the 're-integration' of the Anglican (and of course, in a broader sense, the

³ *Rick Santorum at Pennsylvania Leadership Conference*, PCNTV Philadelphia: <http://www.santorumexposed.com/pages/video/europe.php> (accessed Apr. 1, 2006).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Former Senator Rick Santorum at the Oxford Centre Course on Religion & Politics*, The Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life 2008 <http://www.ocrpl.org/?p=109>, video document <http://www.ocrpl.org/?p=100>.

⁶ Cf. D. A. Foley, *Not Angli, sed angeli! The Pope's visit to Britain*, *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (Oct. 1, 2011), <http://www.hprweb.com/2011/10/non-angli-sed-angeli-the-popes-visit-to-britain/>.

non-aligned Anglo-American) churches into the hierarchies of traditional Catholicism – long seen by many in America, including of course Santorum himself, as just another dimension of European colonialism, pretension and usurpation. In the face of these deep ambiguities inbuilt in the motive of ‘re-evangelization of Europe’, Santorum felt increasingly pressured to nationalize its ‘Christendom’ offensive by continuously devaluating the potentials of Europe to ‘revitalize’ it, or to be on any track to do it right – thus willingly concealing or just simply ignoring the current massive return of religion to Europe.⁷

It is only the natural consequence of such an – all too political – need for differentiation that Santorum, in his presidential election campaign of 2012, comes to the following conclusion:

Europe is dying because its people are content to let the government take care of them instead of building and investing for themselves, he said. If we become like them, the world is lost. The world will go into darkness, and you will leave your children and grandchildren a country and a world that will be the end – the end of everything that our ancestors fought for.⁸

Santorum’s position in all this is – exactly as in its inbuilt contradictions – emblematic, in many ways, for the Republican and Tea Party perception of Europe. And it will most probably remain so, irrespective of what will happen to him with regard to his further personal and political career.

In a similar vein, Republican front runner – and, after his ‘Five States East Coast Sweep’ in New York, Connecticut, Delaware, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island of April 24, 2012, most probably the designated final Republican presidential candidate – Willard ‘Mitt’ Romney has been blaming Europe for many years for what he sees as the cultural and moral decline of the Western world. Already, in 2008, when he withdrew from the then presidential race, he programmatically stated the following:

Europe is facing a demographic disaster. That is the inevitable product of weakened faith in the Creator, failed families, disrespect for the sanctity of human life and eroded morality... If we learn anything from the history of economic development, it is that culture makes all the difference. Culture makes all the difference. What is it about American culture that has led us to become the most powerful nation in the history of the world? Americans love God, and those who don’t have faith, typically believe in something greater than themselves – a ‘Purpose Driven Life’... Some reason that culture is merely an accessory to America’s vitality; we know that it is the source of our strength. And we are

⁷ Cf. for example J.-W. Mueller, *The Return of Religion to Europe*, Japan Times, July 5, 2009, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/eo20090705a1.html>.

⁸ J. Hanel, *Santorum turns to Colorado for presidential campaign boost*, Durango Herald Feb. 1, 2012.

not dissuaded by the snickers and knowing glances when we stand up for family values, and morality, and culture.⁹

Echoes of this 'blame Europe' rhetoric are found everywhere in Romney's 2011-12 campaign. One example, among many, is as follows:

I want you to remember when our White House reflected the best of who we are, not the worst of what Europe has become. President Obama takes his inspiration from the capitals of Europe; we look to the cities and towns across America for our inspiration. Mr. Obama wants to turn America into a European-style social welfare state. We want to ensure that we remain a free and prosperous land of opportunity.¹⁰

But the Republican argument against the 'Europeanizer' Barack Obama would be, of course, incomplete without the old (and equally cheap) 'socialism' allegation. Indeed, 'not a day on the trail passes without Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich knocking Europe's fiscal fecklessness and its 'socialist' welfare system.'¹¹ As Romney does not tire of repeating:

European socialist policies are not right for the USA... Barack Obama has been taking his political inspiration from socialist democrats in Europe, and it isn't working. Europe isn't working in Europe. It's not going to work here. I believe in America. I believe in the opportunity and the freedom that is American opportunity and freedom. I believe in free enterprise and capitalism.¹²

Also, Newt Gingrich, the candidate who earned both a master's and a doctorate degree in, believe it or not, European history, is tirelessly repeating 'that Barack Obama is 'president of the wrong country' and ought to 'move to Europe.' 'The President would like to force all of us into small vehicles... The President would like to force all of us to do what he wants. He's president of the wrong country... He needs to move to Europe.'¹³

It is ironic that there are times, among the Republican candidates, when this 'socialist' argument leverages to a point of enthusiasm and ecstasy to go out of control. At such times, these candidates do not hesitate to turn it against each other. Since December 2011, Gingrich is accusing Romney of having secretly become a 'European socialist': His campaign, taking note of the large progress Romney has achieved in the meantime in the Republican race, says Romney is

⁹ J. Richman, *Mitt Romney's goodbye speech*, (Conservative Political Action Committee 2008), <http://www.ibabuzz.com/politics/2008/02/07/mitt-romneys-goodbye-speech/>.

¹⁰ R. Marquand, *Is Mitt Romney's Europe-bashing well placed?* Christian Sci. Monitor (2012) <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Global-News/2012/0111/Is-Mitt-Romney-s-Europe-bashing-well-placed>

¹¹ E. Williamson, *Dutch to Santorum: Pull the Plug on Euthanasia Talk*, Wall Street J. (Mar. 16, 2012).

¹² A. Good, *Mitt Romney: European socialist policies not right for US*, Telegraph London Sept. 23, 2011, video document at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/republicans/8783948/Mitt-Romney-European-socialist-policies-not-right-for-US.html>.

¹³ J. Connelly, *Newt Gingrich: President Obama 'needs to move to Europe'*, SeattlePi (Feb. 24, 2012) <http://www.seattlepi.com/local/connelly/article/Newt-Gingrich-President-Obama-needs-to-move-to-3359716.php>.

looking at ‘European Socialist’ ideas in his (wrong) search for a moderate position eligible for election by the middle class. ‘Recent comments by Mitt Romney in which he contemplates a value-added tax and co-insurance are becoming fodder for his rival presidential candidate Newt Gingrich’s campaign, which has taken to calling Romney a ‘Massachusetts moderate’ and now says Romney has looked at ‘European Socialist ideas.’¹⁴

Last but not least, in times of economic, financial and debt crises anti-Europe rhetorics cannot overlook economic and financial issues. A job not only for the multimillionaires (and, quite certainly, in many ways experienced and maybe all too sophisticated ‘financial players’) Romney and Gingrich, but also for long-time house financial commission member (and current chair of the Subcommittee on Domestic Monetary Policy and Technology) Ron Paul, allegedly (and ironically) the most famous, beloved and admired US Republican among European citizens, especially the youth.¹⁵

Paul is of the conviction that Europe is not much more than a big experiment in economic failure, and that ‘the mobs in Europe are a sign of things coming.’¹⁶ In his recent writings on his campaign website, Paul is taking Europe as a shining example of decline, advocating the establishment of a bipartisan American front against the bailout of the Euro.¹⁷

3 OBAMA, THE ‘PARTY OF EUROPE’?

Summing up, Europe has become the great and easy punching bag in the current campaign strategy of the Republican candidates. The attacks on it are one of the few things that unite all the Grand Old Party (GOP) candidates in their bet for the presidency nomination; and the identification of Barack Obama with Europe is seen as one, if not the only key to discredit the acting president in the eyes of the average American voter of 2012.

The respective strategy of the Republicans can be distilled in the accusation against Obama to be ‘the party of Europe’ – an attempt that Rick Santorum has

¹⁴ J. Tapper, *Gingrich Campaign Says Romney Is Looking at ‘European Socialist’ Ideas*, ABC News (Dec. 27, 2011) <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2011/12/gingrich-campaign-says-romney-is-looking-at-european-socialist-ideas/>.

¹⁵ Cf. *Hamburg for Ron Paul Demonstration in Germany* (July 7, 2011) <http://runronpaul.com/campaign-trail/hamburg-for-ron-paul-demonstration-in-germany-europe/>.

¹⁶ R. Paul, *Mobs in Europe A Sign Of Things Coming*, Real Clear Politics, (Aug. 24, 2011) original video document http://www.realclearpolitics.com/video/2011/08/24/ron_paul_mobs_in_europe_a_sign_of_things_coming.html.

¹⁷ R. Paul, *Bail out Europe? No thanks!* (Dec. 19, 2011) <http://www.ronpaul.com/2011-12-19/ron-paul-bail-out-europe-no-thanks/>. Cf. R. Paul, *No Bailouts for Europe!*, (Dec. 5, 2011) <http://www.ronpaul.com/2011-12-05/ron-paul-no-bailouts-for-europe/>.

successfully brought forward since 2008, eventually developing it into the 'signature attack' of the campaign 2011-12. Or in his own words:

Santorum was calling Obama a socialist before it was cool. He launched what's now become a signature attack in an August 2008 speech to the Oxford Centre for Religion and Public Life: Calling President Obama a socialist. Santorum attacked the then Senator Obama on numerous fronts, accusing Obama of wanting a 'more secular, government-driven, top-down, elitist culture,' similar to that of Western Europe. Noting Obama's speech in Berlin, Santorum said: 'It was just such an affirmation of this belief to see Barack Obama in Germany. He is the party of Europe. They love him over there. Why? Because it is a very secular world. It's a very secular culture. It's a socialistic culture. It is exactly what Barack Obama wants to see America. If you look at everything they do, they point to the journey of Western Europe as the journey they want to replicate here in America.'¹⁸

This extremely reductive caricature, or, euphemistically speaking, rough outline of a negative comic strip about Europe for use in US popular culture (and propaganda), is not really new. Already during the last presidential elections in 2008, a spectre was made of the 'old world' foremost by the Republicans, although the ghost of Europe seemed to work well even with some Democrats.

The rhetoric has not changed much since then: there is a basket of already traditional clichés about Europe to resort to anytime there are no other good points to make. Among them are: 'Europe is too complicated, both politically and culturally, it can't work'. 'There are too high taxes, and thus less options for economic manoeuvre'. 'There is no meritocracy'. 'Europe is the old, America (and now to a certain extent Asia) is the new'.

These topoi of the post-1989 Republican quiver in 2012 are held together by a hardly hidden mischief about the fact that what Europe was always accused of seems to have now turned into a reality, as allegedly shown by the debt and euro crisis, the crisis of the welfare state and of the European health care system, the crisis of European institutions and politics, and not least the deep rifts between the UK and Continental Europe, exemplified and broadened by the debt crisis. Last but not least, the failure of Continental European leaders, mainly Angela Merkel and Nikolas Sarkozy, to implement their envisaged transnational financial transaction tax and a globally harmonized tax system, as well as to internationalize aspects of the reforms of the banking system in February and March 2012 contributed to further discredit European policies in the eyes of many US voters.

In short: According to the present Republican candidates, the multiple crises since 2007 prove that Europe is 'socialism' doomed to decline. In their view, that

¹⁸ A. Kaczynski, *Santorum Was Calling Obama A Socialist Before It Was Cool. He launched what's now become a signature attack in 2008*, BuzzFeed Politics, (Feb. 22, 2012) <http://www.buzzfeed.com/andrewkaczynski/santorum-was-calling-obama-a-socialist-before-it-w>.

judgement was, among others, exemplified by French Presidential candidate's Françoise Hollande's February 2012 proposal to tax incomes over 1 million Euro by 75% – a badly needed, god-send to the argument reservoir of the Republicans. But what exactly has Hollande's indeed quite debatable proposal – rejected by more than 85% of European voters – to do with Obama?

Never mind this question either. In the view of the current Republican presidential candidates, Europe (or better: the European spirit, and accordingly the 'party of Europe') must – and should be – blamed for all these failures that led to the present crises, and also for the potential ones in the future. Because Europe, being the colonial predecessor of America, must have laid the foundations of everything that went wrong in current America, eventually. America being, at its core the invincible spirit of the future, there must be some kind of a hidden inbuilt mechanism that is subverting it from the inside, and you call it 'the old European fault mechanism.'

At least, this is what the Republican candidates want to make the American public believe these days, thus subtly reviving old anti-colonial feelings, and playing on the as yet deeply inbuilt 'revenge' spirit of parts of the American public against the old continent.

4 FOUR PARADOXES

But already, at first glance, there are – at least – four paradoxies, if not clear contradictions inbuilt in this (old and new) Republican view on Europe.

First, the Republicans claim to be 'the' experts on the economy, deriding Europe for its behaviour in the financial and debt crises since 2007, and Obama for his purported incompetence in economic and financial issues in general. But they themselves apparently do not know that behind their backs their own major political and lobbying clients, i.e. the US Money Market Mutual Funds (MMMFs), have started to massively re-invest in European governmental debt obligations since February 2012. They obviously strongly believe in Europe's medium- and long-term soundness, infrastructure, safety, stability, growth and future (probably including the general demographic outlook), just without telling their Republican representants and (taxation) protectors on Capitol Hill:

The US Money Market Mutual Funds have strongly increased their engagement mainly in Germany and France, as the statistics of data analyst iMoneyNet show. The ten biggest US MMMF's bought large amounts of German and French short-term governmental debt obligations in February 2012. Their investments in Germany increased by 21% to at least 15.1 billion dollar and to France by 18% to at least 13.9 billion dollar. Investors and analysts depart from the assumption that this trend will continue throughout the following months. According to iMoneyNet data, the overall investment of MMMF's in five nations of the Eurozone was 246 billion dollars at the end of February 2012. That was an increase

by 16% only within the time frame of February. The biggest increases were registered in Belgium, followed by Germany, France and the Netherlands.¹⁹

How is this possible, if Europe is 'dying', 'lost', 'the end of everything', 'darkness' (Santorum) – a continent of 'failed families' and 'eroded morals', and a 'socialist' 'disaster' (Romney)?

Second, not only Romney and Paul, but also Gingrich and to a certain extent Santorum, as well as large parts of the GOP according to their restless public statements seem to favour very similar, if not the same, austerity policies for the US as the European countries are currently undertaking – i.e. less government, spending reviews, budget cuts, reduction of federal deficit.²⁰ How can they then blame Europe for doing everything wrong in controlling the debt crisis? In the end, with that they are criticizing core issues of their own austerity strategy. Or as even the conservative US 'Christian Science Monitor' asks: 'Is Mitt Romney's Europe-bashing well placed? Mitt Romney called the Obama White House a reflection of the 'worst of what Europe has become' in his victory speech (after the New Hampshire Republican primaries). But the austerity favored by the GOP is much in vogue in Europe.'²¹

Third, probably the most accentuated paradox is that while the Republicans are tirelessly 'bashing' everything they can find about Europe, finally their party is in many ways closer to future Atlantic lines and strategies than the current Obama administration and its counsellors. While George W. Bush was probably the last traditional 'Atlantier', basing his foreign and global policy strategy and the respective vision of democratization very traditionally on the 'classical' ties between the US and Europe, the new 'Asia First' strategy of president Obama is much more oriented towards the Pacific, openly downgrading (and downplaying) the importance of Europe on many occasions – to the extent that the 'loss of importance of Europe' has become a kind of mantra in Obama's government and its public echoes.

With this background, it is just another paradox that Bush was the most derided and despised US president in Europe since WW II, while Obama is the most well-loved by Europeans, who indeed seem to often mirror or even recognize themselves in him quite undifferentiatedly, and obviously without knowledge of his administration's conviction that the future of the US lies in the

¹⁹ 'US-Fonds decken sich mit Euro-Staatsbonds ein', *Handelsblatt Düsseldorf*, Mar. 31, 2012, (translation from German by the author).

²⁰ Cf. in detail R. Benedikter, *The European Debt Crisis 2011-12: The Case of Italy. A Call for Reform at the Interface between Systemic and Structural Dimensions*, European Fin. Rev. London, (April/May 2012).

²¹ Marquand, *supra* n. 10.

Pacific, and not in the Atlantic anymore.²² It is an open secret that Obama believes that he cannot invest much time in consultancies with European leaders, because in the era of the new multi-polar world characterized by the rise of China, India and the rapid development of new 'large' geopolitical spaces like South America and Africa, they lose importance quickly and because they do not speak with one voice.²³ It was no accident that Obama is snubbing Europeans in ostentatious ways, for example by breaking tradition and not attending the EU-US summit in Spain in May 2010, asserting to 'have no time' for 'leaderless' and 'decision-weak' consultations with European officials, the latter only finding out about Obama's last minute snub through press reports.²⁴ In this view, the Republicans who, on the one hand, propagate an open cultural Anti-Europeanism, on the other hand, seem to follow much more traditional power strategies in cooperation with Europe than large parts of the current Washington Democrats.

These three paradoxes are eventually embedded into a *fourth*, overarching one which is not strictly Republican anymore: Obama's necessity to react repeatedly to the portrait pictured by the Republicans that he is the 'Europeanizer of America' by distancing himself from Europe, and thus by sometimes harshly criticizing, if not humiliating, Europe in his public statements on the state of the world.

Look, for example, at Obama's 'critical lecture to the Europeans' in September 2011. In this occasion, he openly stated that European incompetence was hurting the international economy and that it was Europe that was 'scaring the world', thus at least indirectly blaming Europe for having caused and elongated the global financial and economic crisis. His statement that 'the Europeans have not fully healed from the crisis back in 2007 and never fully dealt with all the challenges that their banking system faced. It's now being compounded by what's happening in Greece... They're going through a financial crisis that is scaring the world, and they're trying to take responsible actions, but those actions haven't been quite as quick as they need to be'²⁵ unleashed a storm of incredulity, anger and rejection in Europe. It was widely judged as 'arrogant', 'pitiful' and 'absurd' in European capitals.²⁶

Indeed, by (unconsciously?) following the patterns of Republican Europe-bashing in order to vitiate their 'Europeanizer' argument by showing

²² Cf. H. Clinton, *America's Pacific Century*, For. Policy, Nov. 2011 http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century; and F. Zakaria, *The Future of American Power: How the US Can Survive the Rise of the Rest*, For. Affairs (May/June 2008).

²³ Cf. J. Shapiro & N. Witney, *Towards A Post-American Europe. A Power Audit of EU-US Relations*, (European Council on Foreign Relations Report, Nov. 2009).

²⁴ E. MacAskill, *Obama's EU summit snub sparks diplomatic row*, Guardian, (Feb. 2, 2010) <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/feb/02/barack-obama-eu-summit-snub>.

²⁵ K. Allen & D. Gordon Smith, *Obama's Euro-Crisis Lecture Is 'Pitiful and Sad*, Der Spiegel online International, (Sept. 28, 2011) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,788807,00.html>.

²⁶ *Id.*

opposition and discomfort towards the old continent in a variety of occasions, Obama may be risking, once more, behaving like a bull in a china shop, having already put the cat among the pigeons with his 'Asia First' strategy, considered by many Europeans as a symptom of disesteem, if not as an open affront.

Are these four paradoxes, which are complexely (i.e., both affirmatively and dialectically) interwoven with each other, in the process of changing Europe's image in the US public sphere? Do they lead to an overall decline of the image of Europe? Or do they merely affirm a certain Anti-Europeanism based in the history of America 'from colony to superpower',²⁷ which has long been in vogue and has lately been given eloquent expression by, among others, Dominique Moisi and Robert Kagan through the images of a Western dichotomy between Mars against Venus,²⁸ respectively of 'paradise against power'?²⁹ In other words: Is the perception of Europe modified by this US presidential race? Or has it eventually been, more or less, always the one discussed ambiguously these days in the public – temporarily Republican-dominated – presidential campaign?

CONCLUSION: DOES 'OBAMAIZATION' OF THE USA EQUAL 'EUROPEIZATION'? OR, DOES OBAMAMERICA EQUAL EUROZILLA?

What does all this mean? How is the image of Europe perceived, changing, or confirmed (in its clichés) within the framework of the current US presidential race? And what will the medium- and long-term effects of the Republican's pejorative propaganda be, as well as of Obama's occasional publicly displayed scepticism?

The contradictions between the reality and the picture of Europe delivered by this campaign's Republican candidates in the service of short-term tactics could hardly be sharper. The alleged 'socialism' of Europe in times of fundamental reforms of the welfare state and the far-reaching liberalization of the labour markets is as much a mirage as the alleged 'Europeization' of America in the hands of Barack Obama. 'Obamaization' of the US does not equal 'Europeization'. The extent of crisis ascribed to Europe by the Republican candidates is non-existent and is at best a caricature. Anyone who takes a more careful look at the issues notices, after just a few seconds, *first*, that Obamamerica does not equal Eurozilla in any way. And *second*, that Europe is not Eurozilla.

But there might be also some truth in a nutshell in constating growing differences between the US and Europe, surfaced through the recent crises.

²⁷ G. C. Herring, *From Colony to Superpower. US Foreign Relations Since 1776* (Oxford U. Press 2008).

²⁸ D. Moisi, *The Real Crisis Over the Atlantic*, For. Affairs (July/August 2001).

²⁹ R. Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power. America and Europe in the New World Order* (Random House 2003).

Germany's 'ordoliberalism'³⁰ is indeed the contrary of the anticipatory use of money by the US economic and financial culture; and France's new, increasingly restrictive immigration policies could not be farther away from, in essence, unbroken open-minded American thinking (against all odds of Arizona laws and the like). It is also the case that due to the new economic, political and demographic shifts, America is drifting towards the Pacific, and that Europe is becoming smaller in a more rapidly multi-polar world.³¹ In addition, despite the continued success of US popular culture in Europe, there might be a sense of a growing cultural divide particularly in the dimensions of civil religion, social psychology and general perception of the greater societal good.³²

In contrast, the 'Asia First' strategy of the Obama administration does not remain without effect on the image and the culturo-political presence of Europe in the US. If there were decisive European influences at the very fundamentals of the birth of the US and its constitution, the all too obvious and openly programmatic turning away from Europe that the present administration regularly celebrates could prove to be a double-edged sword. If, for example, Hillary Clinton's statement that 'I broke with tradition and embarked on my first official overseas trip to Asia'³³ before of visiting Europe was meant to underscore the new priorities of America's foreign policy, 'Europe remains our important partner' rhetorics are increasingly perceived as worthless diplomatic small talk.

But let us not forget: Atlanticism decisively co-created the most open and individualistic society in the world – not the Pacific inclination. Who says that the US, as we know it, might not be risking something important by clinging too far into the Pacific – for example losing aspects of its roots in Western culture, mindset, history, political system and institutions? At the present moment, 'pacific' has become a cliché synonym of 'positive' and 'future'; 'atlantic' of 'negative' and 'regress'. But who says that this is the whole simple truth?

The real paradox with regard to Europe's current perception in the US is that while the Obama administration in power does not lose opportunities to demonstrate its new 'Pacific' orientation at the expense of Europe in terms of political and strategic anticipation, the Republicans are using what they depict as a caricature of 'Europe' as a negative cultural spectre, in order to scare US voters and

³⁰ S. Dullien & U. Guerot, *The Long Shadow of Ordoliberalism: Germany's Approach to the Euro Crisis*, (European Council on Foreign Relations, Feb. 2012) http://www.ecfr.eu/page//ECFR49_GERMANY_BRIEF_AW.pdf, and http://ecfr.eu/content/entry/the_long_shadow_of_ordoliberalism_germanys_approach_to_the_euro_crisis.

³¹ Cf. R. Benedikter & J. Seung-Lee, *Does China Want to Buy Europe? Europe's Crisis and China's Reluctant Rise. Lead Story*, *The European Business Review* (March/April 2012) <http://www.europeanbusinessreview.com/?p=5858>.

³² Cf. Shapiro & Witney, *supra* n. 23.

³³ Clinton, *supra* n. 22.

to profile themselves in front of a negative mirror. It is tragic that both are contributing to the loss of importance of Europe in the US by pursuing different, even opposed goals. But both could be on a track where they do not know what they are doing. Both Democrats and Republicans could be wrong in downgrading Europe, because the resulting loss of influence could be, in the end, at America's expense. If the acting president and his advisors may play a very risky game in distancing themselves from the Atlantic on the vogue of a certain short-lived zeitgeist, the Republicans seem not to have seized the unique opportunity of going against this trend. Given that the US future, in the medium and in the long term, most probably does not lie in using Europe as a dead pledge for strategic interests on the one hand, and (simultaneously) for day-to-day gains in domestic politics on the other hand, but instead lies in keeping and strengthening the connections with its most important democratic ally, the Republicans would have the opportunity to gain in profile by being for Europe, not against it. When will the Republican party, driven by Tea Party bias as it is, understand this (if at all)?

Obama's administration is clearly neglecting Europe. But it is mainly the image of Europe that has been – and continues to be – depicted by the Republican presidential candidates that points – willingly or unwillingly – towards a Western world which, as it seems, is deeply torn in itself. What the Republicans try to do is to transfer the inner 'ideological polarization'³⁴ (Francis Fukuyama) of the US to the outer relation with its most important democratic ally, Europe. And that it risks hurting the Western world much more in the medium- and long-term perspective than in the current – all probably only transient – GOP candidates may imagine.

WHAT IS THE OUTLOOK?

First, the current 'image war' about Europe in the US presidential race may be worrying, and to a certain extent, even disturbing for many European and Western leaders. It is so, increasingly, also for many independent civil society leaders in emerging countries around the world who perceive that this war is fought primarily to exemplarily depreciate some of the main issues brought forward by the rising global civil society, such as social emancipation, economic reform and religious laicism – and thus also addressed against them in a more global perspective.

Nevertheless, Europeans should neither turn away from this spectacle in disgust and horror, nor react with the revival of Anti-Americanism. Instead, they should try to work on the deeper roots of the issue. These roots lie in the

³⁴ F. Fukuyama, *American Political Dysfunction*. The American Interest, Vol. VII, no. 2, November/December 2011.

persisting receptiveness of parts of the American public for Anti-European stereotypes, and this has a complex history. Europeans should invest more money, time and resources in the US to contribute to a more realistic image of the EU in the US context. Because if it is right that the Obama administration has been devaluating and neglecting Europe, it is also true that Europe has been neglecting its own image in America in the past decade, by shifting lots of money and attention to the emerging markets (ironically, exactly like America!), and thus directly and indirectly downgrading its cultural presence and its diplomatic, political and financial investments into the dissemination of its diverse languages, cultures and, most importantly, its – in many ways – highly complex, if not over-complicated political system. Europe is now challenged here, and the ‘image war’ of the Republicans during the presidential campaign 2011-12 against it may, in retrospect, result in having been a timely and healthy wake-up call finally.

Second, concerning the administration of Barack Obama, it will be well advised to rediscover Europe as the natural ally of many democratic agendas. President Obama’s position needs this rediscovery not only with regard to its foreign agenda but also in order to re-adjust Europe’s image – at least to a certain extent – in the public American imagination in its very own, domestic interest. All too often in the past years, the Obama administration has confined the importance of Europe in the US to a foreign affairs issue, among others. But the topic has much more domestic, and as such more deeply rooted, and wider ramified implications and effects. Devaluating Europe means, indeed, directly or indirectly devaluating some of the current Democratic party’s most important agendas of social progress. Since the collective imagination will be playing an ever-increasing role in the fate of applied politics both domestic and abroad, the current Democratic administration would thus commit a grave error and act against its own primordial interests in letting the image of Europe slip further.

Third, with regard to the unprecedented Republican behaviour during the campaign of 2011-12, I would not necessarily agree with Fidel Castro’s quote (which nevertheless may be the only one ever found that made some remote sense to me), that ‘the Republican presidential race as the greatest competition of idiocy and ignorance the world has ever seen.’³⁵ However, there could be a growing sense among the American public that this field of candidates is not really prepared to deal with the complex challenges of contemporary foreign policy – neither with regard to the needs of America, nor for the consideration of Europe by the as yet leading superpower.

³⁵ F. Castro, quoted in T. Gabbay, *Fidel Castro: Republican Primary Is ‘Greatest Competition of Idiocy That’s Ever Been’*, The Blaze, (Jan. 16, 2012) <http://www.theblaze.com/stories/fidel-castro-republican-primary-is-greatest-competition-of-idiocy-thats-ever-been/>.

If the Republicans continue with their – on many occasions – irresponsible and flat-rate rhetoric campaign against Europe, independent of the final outcome of their primaries and of the presidential election in November, their largely artificially propagated cultural rift and sociopolitical polarization within the West could change from electoral propaganda to a self-fulfilling prophecy. That is something nobody on either side of the Atlantic can want to occur. After this disastrous US presidential campaign of 2012, a more balanced mutual image of Europe and the US will have to be re-established, or better: newly established between the Atlantic partners to meet the common future challenges.