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The Rising Tide of Ethno-Nationalism: Multiculturalism Fails in Europe

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Global Research, October 23, 2010
Real News Newsletter 23 October 2010

Region: Europe
Theme: History

Is Europe's adventure in international living about to end? At Potsdam, Germany, this weekend, Chancellor Angela Merkel told the young conservatives of her Christian Democratic Union that Germany's attempt to create a multicultural society where people "live side by side and enjoy each other" has "failed, utterly failed."

Backing up her rueful admission are surveys showing 30 percent of Germans believe the country is overrun by foreigners. An equal number believe the foreigners come to feed off German welfare.

Merkel had in mind the Turks who came as gastarbeiters, guest workers, in the 1960s. Some 2.5 million now live in Germany. Arabs and East Europeans have come more recently. One survey puts the Muslim population at 5 million.

"Multikulti is dead," says Horst Seehofer of Merkel's sister party, the Christian Social Union of Bavaria. He wants no more immigration from "alien cultures". Turks and other Muslims are not learning the language, he contends, not assimilating, not becoming Germans.

Awareness of deep differences with Turkish neighbors became acute for Germans when, grieving in solidarity with America after 9/11, they learned that Turkish sectors of Berlin were celebrating Islam's victory with barrages of bottle rockets.

Like all of Europe, Germany grows nervous.

This summer, Thilo Sarrazin, who sat on the Bundesbank board, published "Germany Abolishes Itself", which sold 300,000 copies in seven weeks. Sarrazin argued that Germany's Muslim population is unable or unwilling to learn the language or culture, and that mass immigration is destroying the nation.

Across Europe, there is a resurgence of ethnonationalism that is feeding the ranks of populist and anti-immigrant parties that are gaining respectability and reaching for power.

Austrian nationalists triumphed in 2008 when the Freedom Party of Joerg Haider and the Alliance for the Future of Austria together took 29 percent of the vote. The Swiss People's Party of Christoph Blocher, largest in Bern, was behind the successful referendum to change the constitution to outlaw minarets and prohibit the wearing of burqas. Hungary's Jobbik Party, which to the Financial Times "sits squarely in Europe's most repulsive arch-nationalist tradition and which blames Jews and Roma for the hardships of other Hungarians," pulled 17 percent of the vote this year and entered parliament with 47 seats, up from zero seats in

2006.

The Sweden Democrats just captured 6 percent of the vote and entered parliament for the first time with 20 seats, joining right-wing folk parties in Norway and Denmark.

Geert Wilders, a rising figure in Dutch politics, was charged with hate speech for equating Islam and Nazism. In June, his Freedom Party swept past the ruling Christian Democrats, who lost half of their strength in parliament. “More security, less crime, less immigration, less Islam — that is what the Netherlands has chosen,” said Wilders. In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy — one eye on Jean-Marie Le Pen’s National Front, the other on the 2012 elections — rejecting cries of “Nazism” and “Vichyism”, is dismantling Gypsy camps and deporting Gypsies to Romania. Milan is now following the French lead. What is happening in Europe partakes of a global trend. Multiracial, multi-ethnic, multicultural nations are disintegrating.

Russians battle ethnic Muslim separatists in the North Caucasus. Seventy percent of Americans support an Arizona law to identify and expel illegal aliens. Beijing swamps the homelands of Tibetans and Uighurs with Han Chinese. India fights secession in Kashmir, Nagaland and the Naxalite provinces.

“Wars between nations have given way to wars within nations, ” said Barack Obama in his Nobel Prize address.

Ethnonationalism tore Mikhail Gorbachev’s Soviet Union and Josip Tito’s Yugoslavia into 22 separate nations and is now tugging at the seams of all multi-ethnic states. Globalism is in retreat before tribalism.

But the awakening of Europe’s establishment to the shallow roots of multiculturalism will likely prove frustrating and futile. With her fertility rate below replacement levels for 40 years, projected to remain so for the next 40 years, Germany will lose 12 million of her 82 million people by 2050. Her median age will rise eight years to 53, and 40 percent of all Germans will be over 60. Germany’s problem is insoluble. She is running out of Germans. Baby boomer Europe decided in the 1960s and 1970s it wanted La Dolce Vita, not the hassle of children. It had that sweet life. Now the bill comes due. And the bill is the end of their tribes and countries as we have known them.

Old Europe is dying, and the populist and nationalist parties, in the poet’s phrase, are simply raging “against the dying of the light.”

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