

The Trump Phenomenon as Seen in Europe

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Global Research, March 15, 2019

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 14 March 2019

Region: [Europe](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [History](#)

President Donald Trump is frequently seen through the prism of an American media that despises him and wants to discredit him so that he can either be impeached soon or defeated in 2020. To a certain extent the foreign media has picked up on that depiction of Trump, emphasizing his boorish qualities and narcissism while neglecting what he has or has not accomplished while in office. To be sure there have been major missteps which have driven the Europeans and others crazy, including the withdrawal from the international climate treaty and the nuclear agreement with Iran, but Trump, to his credit, has also recognized the futility of Washington's Asian wars and is serious in his intent to reduce the American footprint in places like Syria and Afghanistan. He is also an enemy of what is seen as the Establishment in global policymaking, choosing instead to promote national interests rather than international treaties and obligations.

My wife and I recently spent a week in Venice for the Carnival that precedes the beginning of Lent. It was quite an experience as the event attracted literally tens of thousands of visitors from all over the world. On the Sunday preceding Ash Wednesday there were so many tourists crammed into the vast Piazza San Marco that it was impossible to move, but everyone was having fun and both my wife and I remarked on how polite and well behaved the crowds were. And the food was wonderful!

In the course of the week we managed to speak to many of the co-celebrants, primarily those from Italy, Germany and Britain and the conversations inevitably turned to the subject of Donald Trump and what he is doing. I fully expected that I would receive an earful, but what actually developed was quite a surprise. Nearly everyone had good things to say about the American president, though there were suggestions that he might be more than just a little bit *pazzo*, *verrückt*, or *bonkers*.

Their arguments went something like this: world government has proven to be a disaster for most of the ordinary people in most developed countries. Wealth has been concentrated in the hands of the few who constitute the Establishment in each country and benefit primarily from globalism. Examples cited by the Europeans included the Clintons, who have become de facto billionaires, and Tony Blair, who is well on his way to doing the same. In Europe, the Common Market, which started out as a free trade and labor zone, has now morphed into a European Union and become a government that is far more heavy-handed and intrusive than the national governments that it has to a large extent replaced. The disastrous creation of a unified currency has crushed weaker national economies, but somehow the elites in each country seem to continue to thrive amidst all the damage being done to ordinary people.

As a response, an increasing number of Europeans are entertaining following the Brexit

model of either leaving the European Union altogether or abandoning the currency union while also reducing the power of the European Parliament. Nationalism is on the rise as Europeans realize that any aspiration to create something like a United States of Europe was from the start an illusion. Today, the Europeans continue to be betrayed by their elected leadership and the time has come to put a stop to it, which is why they admire Trump as they see him serving as a wrecking ball demolishing the entrenched Establishment and the globalism that it has promoted. People are demanding change and the last election in Italy, the repudiation of the policies of Angela Merkel in Germany, and the unrest in France demonstrate that the problem is not going to go away.

There were some other lessons learned from Carnival. Post-Christian Europe is continuing to hang on to some vestiges of the Ancient Faith. I was amazed when the speaker at the final ceremony on *Martedì Grasso* introduced the finalists for Carnival Queen as being young women exemplary for their “Christian virtues and beauty.” I turned to my wife and commented how much I would like to hear similar words once in a while in the United States at a public gathering.

We also encountered many recent refugees from South Asia and the Middle East, working in shops and restaurants. Most of them spoke excellent Italian and were clearly fully accepted by their Italian colleagues. As Venice has a huge tourism economy, it was not exactly a model for dealing with the waves of immigrants in parts of Europe where there is no work, but it was refreshing to see how people will come together if they are just allowed to cooperate without a whole lot of interference from the government and the loud agenda driven groups that proliferate on the political left of center.

Finally, it was difficult being in Venice and not noticing that the largest group of foreigners in the city was Chinese, numbering certainly in the thousands, possibly as many as ten thousand. While Washington wastes its money on weapons and endless wars the Chinese are making deals and expanding both their personal and economic presence. Many shops in Venice and elsewhere in Italy are now owned by the Chinese. In Venice they sell their own cheap glass products to compete with the high-quality local Murano glass and they find plenty of buyers. As long as the Chinese glass is labeled “Made in China” it is perfectly legal, as much as the Venetians themselves hate it. We went into one shop that had an Italian salesperson. He told us not to buy anything as it was all Chinese junk.

The Chinese, to their credit, have been promoting the so-called Belt and Road Initiative or BRI plan, which aims to establish a trade link connecting China by sea and land with southeast and central Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa using a network of roads and both rail and sea connections. It is not unlike the ancient Silk Road which spanned Asia and penetrated into Europe by way of the Italian merchant republics, most notably Venice. Northern Italy is seen as a key component [or even the European hub](#) for the new venture and Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte [is prepared to sign](#) an agreement with Beijing to develop the initiative further. Conte is doing so over objections from Washington, of course.

As Mark Twain put it,

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.”

Indeed.

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