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## A Deeper Meaning to Anti-Americanism Abroad

Anti-Americanism regrettably has become an indisputable factor in European politics. But the notion itself is not very helpful because it confuses two separate issues. On one level, anti-Americanism is an exaggeration, because what is called "anti-Americanism" is simply criticism of American foreign policy. On a deeper level, it is a dangerous understatement that obscures a profound *crise de conscience* in Europe.

First the overstatement. Hostile feelings toward other nations or races have

### Europe

by Paul Widmer

emerged several times in European history. One has only to recall anti-Germanism in France or anti-Frenchness in Germany during the first half of this century. Compared to these pernicious examples, anti-Americanism obviously is not the right word. Aside from a few fringe groups on the extreme left and the extreme right, such visceral hatred toward Americans does not exist anywhere. On the contrary, there is a new phenomenon, the wide appreciation of American culture.

Whereas the Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset contended in the 1950s that America could not survive culturally without a continuous European input, the opposite seems to be true today. New York has become the undisputed world metropolis for cultural events.

But if anti-Americanism has virtually vanished in the cultural field, it has not done so in the political arena. Many of those who are among the most slavish followers of American cultural leadership criticize the political behavior of American government most severely. For instance, the leftist German highbrow magazine *Transatlantik* consciously patterned its layout after *The New Yorker*, reviews in

its arts sections the latest plays and exhibits in New York and San Francisco—and criticizes U.S. policy on the political pages with predictable regularity.

On this level, then, what is called "anti-Americanism" is less than that. It is a serious and public disagreement with certain aspects of American policy. But since the U.S. is the leader of the Western world, it is natural that the Europeans express their opinions on matters of common concern.

On the deeper level, anti-Americanism is a euphemism for a fundamental shift taking place within Europe. To explain the situation, one has to go back to 1968, when for the first time in postwar history, Western society as a whole was challenged radically. To be sure, in the '70s the activist challenge faded in significance. However, many younger Europeans did not renew their loyalty to the existing political institutions. If any political protest was expressed at all, it was no longer in favor of radical visions, but simply against change.

In this milieu, the environmentalist movement took root. It aimed to eliminate the obnoxious side effects of modern civilization and, in its more ideological version, the complexity of a society based on high technology. This movement, however, was not able to suggest how to achieve these goals. The prime targets that could bring the people onto the street were, until the late '70s, the nuclear power plants. In 1977, when the deployment of neutron bombs in Europe was considered, the movement became more political and took on an anti-American character, in large part because the weapons to be deployed were American.

At this juncture, the somewhat diffuse movement evolved into a peace movement. With the Carter administration's decision not to deploy neutron bombs in Europe, the peace movement seemed to enjoy its first victory. Bolstered by this, the amplified protest was redirected against the

impending stationing of cruise and Pershing II missiles—and joined by other groups whose roots are not in environmentalism.

What has occurred on the domestic level for some years thus finally spilled over into the foreign-policy arena. The former protests against the technological world—the civilian use of nuclear technology, in particular—have engulfed international security issues. The same flawed logic is applied. Domestically, one has nothing against a high standard of living, only against its unpleasant side effects. In foreign policy, one wants international security, but not the weapons that ensure it. This means that the retreat from reality, as practiced by many individuals recently, is increasingly seen as suitable for entire nations.

Such an attitude threatens the alliance and strains the transatlantic relationship. But it is only tangentially related to anti-Americanism. The problem would have arisen regardless of what the U.S. might have done or not done.

The main problem is that too many Europeans have lost their confidence in the accepted values of Western society. They deride the U.S. as a bulwark of dynamic capitalism, modern technology and strong anti-Communism. Yet they also reject what they perceive to be the ugly face of communist societies, and look mockingly on the stumbling European unification process and setbacks in East-West detente. Having chosen cynicism as their most reliable companion, they judge the systems in East and West as equally flawed and insufficient.

In sum, they know what they do not want, but they do not know what they want. Here lies the long-term problem that the Europeans must solve. This implies that the main changes in the transatlantic relationship have to occur in Europe and not, whatever may be said, in America.

If this malaise is not to grow into a major crisis, the task of designing perspec-

tives for Europe has to be tackled urgently. By making a few proposals to reform the structure of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Henry Kissinger recently joined the debate over Europe's role in the future. He strongly pleads for a sort of Europeanization of NATO. The Europeans should, among other new functions, assume the major responsibilities for conventional defense. And they should take over those arms-control negotiations that deal with weapons deployed on Western European soil.

The time is indeed ripe for a discussion in which responsibility is the key word. Nearly 40 years after the end of World War II, the Europeans have to recognize that they cannot rely eternally on a defense structure that was designed in a postwar period when much of Europe was devastated. The originally badly needed dependence upon the U.S. has become a comfortable tradition that no longer corresponds to Europe's potential strength.

Restructuring the alliance's defense is important, but it is not enough. Defense needs to be embedded in a context of political convictions and purposes. Western Europe must know and make clear what it stands for politically. The open society, as it is realized in Western Europe and America, still enjoys the support of an overwhelming majority. Europeans, together with the Americans, have to assume their responsibilities in order to make the survival and further development of this kind of society possible.

If Europe's destination and responsibilities can be convincingly reshaped, anti-Americanism will presumably shrink again. Dependency corrupts and absolute dependency corrupts absolutely. The newest wave of anti-Americanism is an expression of this truth.

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