

MANY EUROPEANS WERE LIVING IN A FOOL'S PARADISE

Dieter Farwick 03-Jan-2007

"Many Europeans were living in a Fool's Paradise" - Interview with Professor Walter Laqueur about Europe's demography, Euro Islam and Europe's relations to the U.S.

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*Dieter Farwick: The title of your newest book *The Last Days of Europe: The Changing Face of a Continent* sounds provocative to many Europeans. You paint a very bleak picture.*

Europeans were more accustomed to the optimistic views of your American colleagues – such as those of Charles Kupchan in his book *The End of the American Era* (2003) and Elizabeth Pond's *The Rebirth of Europe; a Continent on the Way to World Power* (1999). These books corresponded with the euphoric European voices that spoke of Europe as a powerhouse independent from the United States and building one pillar in the desired multipolar world.

What has changed in such a short period of time ? Facts and figures or perceptions and illusions?

Walter Laqueur: I am not sure one can generalize. There was not that much optimism in France and Italy ten years ago. But it is true-- many Europeans were living in a fool's paradise and many still do.. On the surface life was pleasant, civilized and easy, there were no major wars, no one was starving. But if one looked below the surface, the critical signs of decline were obvious. As for the American Euro-optimists---. there was a great deal of wishful thinking. They were unhappy with the Bush administration and they thought Europe was moving in the direction of their dreams. But dreams they were.

Dieter Farwick: It is no coincidence that you start with the demographic facts and figures that have been available for years but have obviously been neglected. What is the trend for Europe's greatest countries, including Russia? What are the most important implications of shrinking and ageing societies?

Walter Laqueur: Europe has been shrinking for the last decades. The French demographers realized it and the Germans too (Herward Birg for instance). But who was listening to them? Fellow professionals. Europe no longer reproduced itself. Some countries are shrinking rapidly (Russia for instance but also Italy, but all European societies are becoming much older. In another fifty years The US will have more than 400m inhabitants whereas the population of Europe will be smaller than that of Pakistan and probably also Nigeria. Who will work in European factories?. Who will serve in European armies –people aged forty and above? This trend has political and economic consequences Europe's place in the world is becoming less important. According to the UN statistical department the population of Yemen will be larger than that of Russia before the end of the century. This prediction could be wrong, but the population of Turkey certainly will be larger. Where will the borders of Russia be? Not where they are today. Will Russia be able to keep the Far East and Siberia?

Dieter Farwick: The demographic development is tightly interwoven with a phenomenon that is often referred to as the "sneaking 'Islamization' of Europe." There are catchwords, such as: Ghetto, parallel or even anti-society. What are the risks and dangers of this development? Is "Euro-Islam" the best course of action?

Walter Laqueur: Again, most politicians closed their eyes. If they had visited schools and kindergarten in the big cities they would have been aware of the trend but politicians were too busy. Certain regions of Europe will have Muslim majorities from the Ruhr region to the west, the big cities of Holland, Belgium and Northern France—certainly as far as the younger age groups are concerned.

It may be true even with regard to a city like Malmö in Sweden. To talk about integration in these circumstances is pointless. Why should the new majority make an effort to be integrated? The situation in Britain is different, about half of the new immigrants are not Muslim.

Euro Islam”—I do not see it, or better I see it only as a transitional stage.. There is a process of assimilation and secularization in the Muslim communities. Muslim women in Europe will be emancipated. But I fear the young generation is attracted more by the negative aspects of Western civilization than by European values. In any case this may take several decades.

Dieter Farwick: Europe is neither an ethnic nor a religious or cultural entity. The present 25 member states of the European Union – in 2007 rising to 27 members and later even more – still give priority to their national interests and agendas. Why is there a successful common market but no “Europe speaking with one voice” – as the six founding nations called their vision?

Walter Laqueur: Countries begin to cooperate closely only when facing common dangers or major crises. At the present time there is no clear and present danger. Why give up their sovereignty, their old institutions etc when there seems to be no urgent need to do so? I suspect the impetus to closer European collaboration will come only following a major crisis. That it is needed here and now has not yet entered public consciousness.

Dieter Farwick: You write in your book that Europe was fixated on the US and disregarded developments in the Asia-Pacific rim. What were the reasons and what are the consequences?

Walter Laqueur: Europe was fixated in its political thinking on America because America was the big brother so to speak, first it was the great example to be imitated, and later it became a rival and even opponent—economically and politically. And as a result of this fixation Europeans were not aware that other centers of power were emerging above all in the Far East and South Asia as important (if not more so) as America

Dieter Farwick: The European members developed the so-called European Defense and Security Program. The European Reaction Force was seen as the tool to gain the European Union military capabilities in order to conduct military operations independent of the US. With shrinking defense budgets and reduced military forces, this force only exists on paper. Did most European countries turn a blind eye to the worldwide challenges ahead?

Walter Laqueur: How many years has a Rapid Deployment Force been discussed, and how little progress...When the United Nations asked for a peace keeping force in Lebanon, how long did it take to get a few thousand soldiers together. All this is based on the belief that in the 21st century military force is no longer needed. More wishful thinking, another delusion. More Euro-centrism--ignoring the world outside Europe...As one of the Euro-optimists is putting it, Europe will lead the world through its moral example, the rule of law. (Mark Leonard)..

Dieter Farwick: You are one of the world's leading experts on terrorism which has to be seen in connection with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and Europe's dependence upon politically fragile regions for its energy supply. What could and should the European countries do more to cope with these huge challenges?

Walter Laqueur: Spread of weapons of mass destruction. As far as terrorism is concerned it is my impression that there is some cooperation in Europe at least as far as the exchange of intelligence is concerned. But with regard to the broader issues it seems that Europe has accepted that proliferation is inevitable. This is tantamount to accepting that nuclear (or biological or chemical) weapons will be used in local wars—or by terrorist groups, There is much talk about the need for more diplomacy even though diplomacy has led nowhere. This is yet another manifestation of Europe's weakness and indeed irrelevance.

Dieter Farwick: Putin wants to turn Russia again to a superpower – not just an energy power. What are his chances of achieving this ambitious goal and objective?

Walter Laqueur: Yes, Putin is trying hard and for a number of years he (or his successors) might succeed. But Russia is rapidly shrinking. Moscow prospers, the rest of the country is depopulated. More than 10.000 Russian villages disappeared during the last decade and this process continues.. In other words—a colossus based on oil—on feet of clay.

Dieter Farwick: You write that Europe's fall is not yet a done deal. While the decline of its relative power on the world stage is irreversible, there are still chances to avoid a total collapse. What is your view about the idea to form a new nucleus within the EU with a limited number of countries that want closer cooperation and integration?

Walter Laqueur: Nothing is inevitable. There could be events beyond our imagination. Great powers could collapse within a short period. The fate of the Soviet Union is an example. In politics we are dealing not with absolute certainties but with probabilities. But this does not provide much comfort for Europe. For the misfortune of other great powers would not benefit Europe but on the contrary harm it as it depends so much on exports and foreign trade. Today the US still provides something like a safety net for Europe, if this safety net goes Europe would be on its own. A new nucleus within the EU—certainly, a new impetus could come only from a small group. But at the moment I do not see much readiness to take such initiatives—all governments are preoccupied with their own domestic affairs

Dieter Farwick: You were born in Germany, you live in the States and in Europe. You can touch and smell the atmosphere on both sides of the Atlantic. What are the crucial distinctions between the lone superpower and the failing European Union?

Walter Laqueur: America faces enormous problems not only in the economic field. But there is far more optimism than in Europe that it will be able to cope. Its experience in the Middle East is teaching Americans that there are limits to its lone superpower status. Obviously there will be greater reluctance to get involved in future. This means not greater freedom but greater disorder in world affairs. At this time I do not see any other power to cooperate with America or to compete with it or to take its place.

EUROPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Walter Laqueur American historian
and political commentator.

(...)

However, Euro-optimists have not only greatly underrated the opposition against the Europe they envisage, more importantly, among those writing about Europe's vision of the future and how it quietly eclipses the American Dream, there seem to be no demographers. The authors are stronger on visions than on facts and figures and the question of what Europe will be like a few decades hence is not among those preoccupying them.

But it is an important issue. According to the United Nations Population Division, almost 21 percent of the population of the globe lived in Europe in the year 1900. Today less than 12 percent do and according to their projections it will be less than 7 percent by 2050, less than 4 percent by the end of the century.

According to these projections :

- the population of Germany, 82 million (2005), will count 32 million (2090)
- the population of Italy will have shrunk from 57 million to 15 million, and
- the population of Spain will decline from 40 million to 11.9 million.

The decline in Eastern Europe is even more dramatic. Up to 2050,

- the Ukraine will shrink by 43 percent,
- Bulgaria by 34 percent,
- the Baltic countries by about 25 percent,
- and the same is expected with regard to the Russian Federation.

By the end of the century, Yemen will have a larger population than Russia. The situation of Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and other East European countries will be slightly better; they will shrink by only 17-18 percent.

By 2040, or possibly even before, the United States will over-take Europe as far as population figures are concerned. (The median age in the U.S. will be thirty by that time, in Europe it will be nearer sixty.)

By 2050, both Nigeria and Pakistan might overtake the Europe of the 15—meaning the European Union as it was before the recent admission of East European countries.

In 2050, both Iran and Turkey will each have a population as big as France and England taken together,

- Egypt's population will be as large as that of France Italy, and Spain taken together.
- Ethiopia and the Congo will each have as many inhabitants as Germany, France, and Britain taken together.

In brief, the dimensions on the world's stage are going to change, slowly at first, but rapidly and dramatically later on. Is it possible that a continent with small and shrinking human resources (and one that is over-aged at that) will dominate the twenty-first century?

AN INTERVIEW WITH WALTER LAQUEUR

Alexander H. Jaffe 23/08/2005

You have commented on antisemitism and anti-Zionism in a recent book (The Changing Face of Antisemitism, Oxford University Press, 2006, and a long article in The Times Literary Supplement.) But let us begin on a personal note: You grew up in Nazi Germany; antisemitism has not been a purely academic issue in your life. Did you expect a resurgence of antisemitism after Hitler and the holocaust?

Hitler gave antisemitism a bad name, but there had been anti semitism before and there was no reason to believe that it had come to an end in 1945. Prior to Hitler antisemites did not mind to be called antisemites, (there were some exception--the Nazis did not like the term and virtually banned it during the war because it was offensive to some of their allies such as Haj Amin al-Husayni, the Jerusalem mufti). Today this term has gone out of fashion and there is great indignation in some circles to if the are charged with antisemitism. In some can tries it can lead to criminal prosecution. A spade is no longer called a spade but an agricultural implement. In any case the impact of the Nazi deterrent was limited to Europe and North America. There was closed season as far as the Jews were concerned; this lasted for several decades but was bound to come to an end. The surviving Jewish communities had been doing too well, moved into prominent positions in many fields and many people got impatient to be reminded constantly of the mass murder which had taken place. After all, they argued, there had been massacres on a massive scale in other places even in our time, how could one possibly maintain that the holocaust was somehow unique?

But some critics such as Chomsky maintain that antisemitism has virtually disappeared...

I wish he were right, but it is a ludicrous statement. Do we really have to discuss this? I don't think that upon further reflection even Chomsky will stick to this thesis. It is true that antisemitism is changing its manifestation and motivation, not for the first time in its long history. Racialist antisemitism has gone out of fashion after the Nazis, at least in Europe and America. But racialist antisemitism is a relatively recent (19th century) phenomenon, even though some antecedents can be found in 15th century Spain (the purity of the blood concept).

Medieval antisemitism was largely religious-theological in inspiration. The Jews rejected the founders of two of the worlds major religions and this was bound to lead to great hostility. Some historians believe there was antisemitism in the ancient world prior to the rise of Christianity. Others think this was no more than part of general, free floating xenophobia. This is a highly specialized field, I am not an expert but I tend to think the latter are right.

How then would you define the new antisemitism?

It is post racialist and in many respect similar to the earlier religious antisemitism, except of course that certain ideologies have replaced religion. "Usury" has become "Wall Street". The Protocols of the Elders of Zion are no longer in fashion in the West, they have been replaced by the neo-Conservatives as the nefarious plotters and wire pullers and the all powerful Jewish lobby in Washington. In the 1920s and 30s one of the main accusations in the antisemitic arsenal concerned "Jewish Communism"; today it is Jewish globalism and capitalism. In Lessing's "Nathan"--the classic 18th century play--there is a famous repetitive scene: "Tut nichts, der Jude wird

verbrannt," ("Never mind, the Jew is for burning"). Well, for the time being the Jew is not for burning, only for boycott.

The church (and Islam) believed that there was no salvation outside the church, but the moment the heretics desisted from their heresies and joined the fold (political correctness in modern parlance) they were no longer enemies but were treated as equals. This explains inter alia the presence of Jews (or lapsed Jews) in their ranks. Post racialist antisemitism (again I refer to Europe and the Americas--the situation elsewhere is not the same) does not aim at the expulsion of the Jews let alone their physical destruction. They want the Jews to desist from their erroneous belief that they have the right to have a state of their own and generally speaking take a lower profile.

Which leads to the issue of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. To what extent (to pick just one example) is antisemitism involved in the appeals to boycott Israel?

Had Israel committed crimes more heinous than any other country it would be only natural that it should come in for such massive attack. But if it is singled out for sins, real or spurious, committed by many other countries and governments on a far larger scale, the reasons must be other than those adduced.

According to the peace researchers 25 million people were killed in internal conflicts since the end of World War Two. 8.000 civilians were killed in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which ranks forty-sixth in the list of victims. Yet Israel has been condemned far more often than all other countries taken together by the United Nations. Israel has been condemned for its treatment of its Arab minority and I am sure there could be improvements. But the situation of the Palestinian Arabs has been and is infinitely better than that (to name but one example) of the Dalets (the Untouchables) in India of which there are about a hundred millions. But I have not heard of any protest demonstrations in this context in the streets of Europe or any other continent.

Why this relentless focusing on Israel and who are its main protagonists?

This varies from country to country. In the UK the teachers unions have been very active, they were for many years under Communist influence, today the Trotskyites have key positions. But if there would be no willingness to follow their lead the boycott appeals would not be very successful. In the US the influence of certain churches has been strong.

Sometimes the naivete displayed on these occasion is disarming. I read somewhere : Why can't we bar Ahmadinejad from coming to Europe on the occasion of the soccer world championship? After all we (meaning the European governments) decided not to let enter Lukashenka of White Russia and Mugabe of Zambia. As if the answer was not known--if Lukashenka and Mugabe had substantial oilfields in their countries and if they were close to producing nuclear weapons, no one would dare to deny them entry.

Israel (and the Jews) have been singled out for attack because they were few and weak. Let us engage in a simple exercise in counterfactual history. If the Ottoman Empire had collapsed not in 1918 but at the time of the Crimean war, or after the Russian-Turkish war 1828/9. What if the great majority of European Jewry would have decided to migrate to Palestine , and what, if with a birthrate like the Gaza Strip, it would now have fifty million inhabitants or even more? Such a Greater Palestine extending from the Nile to the Euphrates with substantial oilfields would be a major force in world politics. It would live in peace with its neighbors, the refugee issue would be settled, just as it has been settled everywhere else, no one wants to trifle with

a country this size. It would be a honored member of the United Nations, Muslim religious leaders would invoke quotations from the Koran and the Hadith stressing the closeness and friendship between Muslims and Jews, children of the same ancestor--- Abraham-Ibrahim. The Norman Finkelsteins of this world would sing songs of praise concerning the miraculous renaissance of an old people its progressive, tolerant character--or legoyim--a shining beacon to the rest of the world. These are of course mere fantasies that might have appealed to a visionary like Disraeli. The Ottoman empire did not collapse and the Jews did not emigrate and Israel is a small country without oilfields or other such resources. It is safe to attack Israel.

This may explain anti Zionism and hostility towards Israel, but to what extent does it explain the new antisemitism? Where is the border line?

It goes without saying that not all anti-Zionism is antisemitism. We should not forget that up to the 1930 the great majority of Jews were either opposed to Zionism or indifferent--which did not make them antisemites. And there is room for legitimate criticism of Israeli policy; I for one have been more than uneasy since 1967 about Israeli policy vis-a-vis the West Bank and Gaza which I thought shortsighted and self defeating. This explains why Israel lost a great deal of sympathy. But it does not explain why other countries, many of them not great and powerful, who have been responsible for gross violations of human rights have been immune to attack--no demonstrations, no UN resolutions, no boycott. In other words there is some specific animosity whenever Israel is concerned--whether to call this Judeophobia or post racial antisemitism or radical anti-Zionism is an interesting semantic question. But whatever terminology is used, there is some element involved which does not exist when the behavior of other people is judged. If Palestinian hostility can be explained as a consequence of the conflict, why should Israel and the Jews generate such strong passions among the likes of Mikis Theodorakis or Carlos the Jackal, people without a known personal stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict who have not suffered from it physically or emotionally? Sympathy with the underdog? But if so why concentrate on one specific underdog and ignore all the others?

To what extent is the situation of European Jewry affected by the new wave of hostility?

It has been affected for years; Jewish institutions such as schools all over Europe need special protection by police and other security forces; no other ethnic or religious group is in a similar position. Amsterdam has a Jewish mayor, but he cannot move a step without his bodyguards. I am less concerned about the countries in which antisemitism was rampant before World War Two, simply because the Jewish communities there are quite small. There is xenophobia and aggression against aliens, but the Jews are a very small part of these aliens and if dangers are perceived by, for instance, ultra nationalist Russians they are threatening from very different directions.

If there is a physical danger facing Jews in countries such as France it comes from among Muslim radicals. We all know that the ethnic composition of European countries is rapidly changing. About a third of the young generation in many West European cities (and this goes not only for France but also for Germany, the Netherlands, etc) is now of Muslim origin, and their birth rate is much higher than that of the local population. Since the Jewish communities are also concentrated in the big cities it means that soon they will live in a largely or even predominantly Muslim milieu. Some years ago a French left wing intellectual wrote in Le Monde that

the political implication of the fact that there are ten times as many Arabs as Jews in France cannot be disregarded. The person was attacked, but he only articulated what many others were thinking.

In less than a generation from now there will be more politicians such as a Ken Livingstone the mayor of London. He is not of course, an antisemite, some of his assistants are Jews, some are Muslims. But these Muslims hate the Jews, and the Jewish friends hate the Zionists, whatever that may mean. In brief, the situation of Jews in this new Europe will not be an easy one.

What about Jewish self hate, which is sometimes mentioned as a motive--and indignantly rejected?

In our time a great many people have been distancing themselves from religion and (to a lesser degree) from their ethnic origins. This is true a fortiori for the Jews among whom assimilation has been more widespread than among any other group. It has been in many ways a natural process and I find nothing reprehensible in it--there is no moral obligation to identify with the Jewish community or support Israel. But if "anti-Zionism" is the only known Jewish activity of such a person, the question of a deeper motive such as self hate inevitably arises. Self hate does exist. And it is not a Jewish monopoly, Pascal wrote "le moi is haissable". This goes back among the Jewish left too for a long time, well before the existence of Israel. Rosa Luxemburg wrote in one of her letters from prison to Mathilde Wurm (I quote from memory)--do not come to me with your specific Jewish concerns (she had written about the pogroms in Eastern Europe). The fate of the Indians in Putamayo (Colombia) she wrote was closer to her. She felt, that she had to prove that she was a true internationalist. There was something (to put it very mildly) self-conscious in such utterances.