

Trump and the two sides of the same coins

Or the North-Atlantic divide

By Gerd Eisenbeiß, May 11, 2018

It looks as if the American President is looking at some coins from a different angle than we Europeans, more precisely from the backside. The North Atlantic, which had previously connected us to form "the West" as a unity, has become a dividing ocean. While there is still common values between many Americans and the vast majority of Europeans (unfortunately without Russia), it has become cold between governments and parliamentary majorities - almost like during the Cold War.

If you look at the coins, which are seen so differently by America's president and Europe¹, you count at least four:

- 1 The coin of the Planet's future
- 2 The trade balance coin
- 3 The coin of military Security
- 4 The coin of complexity of things

To 1) While Europe basically acknowledges the **ecological overload of the earth**, even if it is difficult to bring the necessary consequences to a political decision, scientific findings on this subject are subject to the disregard and disdain of the American President. It is not only about the imminent climate risks, but also about the at least basic appreciation of knowledge and understanding, facts and expertise. In the depths of widespread worldview and interpretation, this difference is already made by the different roles of religious imprints, which are as strong in the USA as in Pakistan or Guatemala, while Europe has predominantly and increasingly come to a secular-scientific view of the world, its emergence and its further development. Those who deny the evolution of life and allow

¹ It must be acknowledged that some Europeans and so far a few governments find Trump's view useful for their purposes (America first, Hungary first, Bavaria first!) and even leave the European consensus of values regarding democracy and the rule of law.

their daily lives to be determined by traditional religious rules, like a good part of the Americans, may be incapable of thinking about the future based on science.

To 2) Where Trump sees America being exploited through **unfair trade relations**, Europeans have always seen the exact opposite; they and the East Asians worked highly for printed paper to allow Americans a comfortable consumer life. Nobody forced US citizens to buy European or Japanese goods; they did it because it was cheap for them - and it was cheap because their currency was so highly valued due to the imperial strength of the US. Suppliers were happy to get the printed paper called dollars and put it in their treasure chest or under their pillow in the happy feeling of being rich. Trump sees this exploitation of the rest of the world in terms of jobs, although the US does not actually have a significant unemployment problem if the structural job situation in regions of declining industries (coal, steel) is deducted.

Of course, the huge and still rising surpluses of Chinese and German exports are a problem, because unemployment in other countries (including the EU) is the downside of such export successes. But how will US exports rise and imports fall if the world is eager for dollars? If Trump succeeds in making the US even stronger, the dollar will certainly not be devalued! The currency of a country that significantly improves its trade balance usually rises in value!²

3) Decades after the World War, Europeans felt that they were **not only protected by the United States**, but that they were also dominated by it in a gentle but perceptible dependence. America's strength as the world's number one military power was neither selfless grace nor was it seen as such. At the most, the militarily traumatized Germans enjoyed a certain tolerance as military

² You can suppress this cybernetic self-regulating effect if you manipulate your own currency politically like the Chinese do and apply asymmetrical trade restrictions - or like the Germans if such an export-strong country operates in a currency network with much weaker economies.

freeloaders - also because elsewhere they were quite happy not to see the Germans in a leading position in this field.

Now, years ago, the US made it clear that Europeans had to do more for their own security, especially after Russia fell back into its old aggressive role and the dream of a Euro-Asian peace and security area from Portugal to Vladivostok had burst. Trump, however, sees the coin somewhat differently: he ignores the American role as a world power with claims of influence and the right of intervention all over the globe; he has apparently not understood that it is precisely this role that he continues with "America great again" that gives the USA so much influence in its favour and makes the dollar so strong that US exports suffer.

To 4) Some of these "2 sides of the same coin" problems can be summarized: it is then the "**complexity coin**". While the world from Europe looks highly multi-dimensional, even complex, where everything is connected with everything, Trump allows himself a strategy of radical simplification to treat everything as bilateral. He is full of suspicion against all multilateralism and organisations from the UN to the EU, from the World Trade Organisation to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change - one may assume that this is a consequence of his lack of information and laziness to think; he therefore does not understand complex structures, which is not synonymous with stupidity. No, Trump is not stupid, but he loves simple thinking, especially when it doesn't require a change of opinion. This reduction of multilateral complexity to simple bilateralism also seems convincing to him, because it seems advantageous in view of American power: as American president he is the more powerful in every bilateral situation! One wonders if Trump plays billiards as well as golf and with how many balls - it would surprise me; chess is certainly not his thing, but he sees himself as a master in the game between buyer and seller.

Where Europe uses diplomatic means to try hard not to let complex situations escalate, Trump thinks and acts like a poker player at best, but possibly also like James Dean in "Rebel Without a Cause"³. It is certainly a great moment for Trump when the Europeans react full of dismissal to his nuclear button competition with Kim Jong-un or his incendiary bombs in the Middle East.

³ In this film from the 50's boys drive their cars towards a cliff to test who proves their courage by being the last to jump out of the car before it falls into the abyss.