

21.2.2017 The Risk of Western Democracies Becoming 'Trumpised'

If Brexit has got the ball rolling, the surprising election of Donald Trump has set the scene: theatrical governance, outrageous speeches, as well as messages intended to shock public opinion that is left reeling. And what will be the outcome? Will Europe follow in his footsteps? The year 2017, with elections taking place in the Netherlands [March], in France [May and June] and in Germany [September], will have hefty consequences.

The resilience of the American democratic structures is rather re-assuring. The Trump order that decided to arbitrarily ban people from seven 'Muslim' countries from entering the country has for the time being remained without effect. Just three weeks after being sworn in as president, this has come as a major blow to Donald Trump. One has to admit that the fact that Donald Trump has even signed this order is in itself horrific and totally unfounded, and only serves to give in to the moods, and even the interests of Donald Trump himself. In official terms, the doors had to be closed to 'the countries of terrorists', but the list enacted seems quite bizarre. For example, Saudi Arabia, the home country of Osama Ben Laden himself, has not been targeted. It seems that Donald Trump has major personal interests there. By contrast, Iran, the big country of Shia Islam, the sworn enemy of the Sunni terrorism of IS, has been included on the list against all expectations.

What will come of other orders, and how long will the White House persist in its spectacle of reckless power inspired by populism? This 'American see-sawing' towards populism marks a point in history when western democracies face two different visions of the future. Either they continue to be inspired by the wish of an enlightened global leadership, based upon their economic strength and in the name of democratic values, or by 'burning their bridges' with the rest of the world, choosing to isolate themselves in order to protect their 'national interests'; actually, to try and preserve a position of relative riches, which they believe to be in jeopardy. However, economic history has already shown that this choice is just an illusion, and even risky. Donald Trump is the exact opposite of Barack Obama. That doesn't mean that the USA will go to the dogs. The democratic structures governing America have enough backbone to counter the injunctions of the newly elected President. Whether this would be the case in France if the extreme right were to win the election is not quite so certain, given that the president is invested with greater power there. However, as far as France is concerned, the way the presidential elections are going is not at all reassuring. The right-wing victories in the primaries – François Fillon –, as well as the left-wing ones – Benoît Hamon or Jean Luc Mélenchon –, are finding it difficult to get to the second round, and they are re-affirming themselves as euro-sceptics by following suit with discourse that could set Europe on a path of adventure.

Emmanuel Macron is standing as a possible hopeful, but he does not have the backing of any political party, and he has only made tentative gains in the polls. By contrast, all the polls show that Marine Le Pen is gaining strength. The powers driving Marine Le Pen, her Dutch equivalent, Geert Wilders, and the AfD in Germany, are intent on unravelling Europe. In Germany, the AfD is not in such a strong position, but Germany on its own could not hold firm and guarantee the European structure against the battering blows of 'Trump-like' decrees, which would proliferate under the French and Dutch heads of state who are out of control. The fact that this may even be a possibility is disquieting in itself. Over the course of the next three months, the future of the western democracies in Europe hangs in the balance.

