

The Economist: Is the USA Different from Europe and China?

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These are four very recent quotes from *The Economist*. It's not a U.S. cable news outlet; the editorial policy is center left. I found ironic surprises here compared to revised American norms. I'll let them speak for themselves.

Is Nuclear Power Green or Not? "Where nuclear power was once a source of unity for Europe, today it is a source of discord. Of the EU's 27 countries, only 13 produce nuclear power. France and Germany, the two countries that dominate EU policymaking, find themselves directly opposed. France generates over 70% of its power from nuclear reactors. Germany has pledged to close all its nuclear power plants by 2022. For France nuclear energy has a bright future. For Germany and its sceptic kin, the technology has an unhealthy past.

"With the Franco-German engine sputtering on nuclear policy, unlikely alliances have formed. France and the likes of Poland and the Czech Republic are usually sparring partners. Countries in eastern Europe see the French as protectionists who suck up to Russia. Yet when it comes to nuclear power the two are firm pals. It is tempting to carve the EU into simple blocs, whether Club Med or the Frugals. The reality of European politics is kaleidoscopic.

"In this debate, Germany is likely to be on the losing side. It gave up on nuclear power after the Fukushima disaster in 2011. Angela Merkel vowed to ban it in barely a decade. Countries from Belgium to Bulgaria followed, scrapping plans to build nuclear power stations, and pledging to switch others off. However, opinions have shifted. Germany knows it does not have the votes to stop nuclear power being rated as green." (10/30/21 p59).

Does Germany's Need for Russian Gas Threaten Ukraine? "Mr. Putin wrote an essay in July expanding his argument that Russia and Ukraine are a single nation. Since he has already annexed Crimea, a Ukrainian peninsula, and sponsored to take over big chunks of eastern Ukraine by ethnic Russian separatists.

"Ukrainians take his threat seriously. In March and April amass more than 100,000 troops on the border before pulling them back. Now as winter approaches, Ukrainians fear that Russia will turn off the gas again. In 2009 it shut off the flow of gas through Ukraine for two weeks. This cost Russia a fortune since its gas passes through Ukraine to reach customers in Europe. Soon though it may be able to pump gas to Germany via a new pipeline, Nord Stream II, that bypasses Ukraine. Once it opens, which could be soon -- Mr. Putin will be able to choke off supplies to Ukraine almost at will." (10/23/21 p49).

Does Europe Build Border Walls? "The European Union has a firm stance on paying for border walls: it won't. Even after Europe's migration crisis in 2015-16, when 1.4m people arrived, many fleeing Syria's civil war, the European Commission sent Hungary away with a flea in its national ear when it asked for reimbursement for fencing off its border with Serbia, one of the main entry points.

"This month 12 member states wrote to the commission requesting changes in how the EU tackles border security. Among other things, they want Brussels to pay for fences. A physical barrier "serves the interest of [the] whole EU, not just member states of first arrival", it argues. Such things, it says, should be "adequately funded from the EU budget as a matter of priority".

"European countries have built about 1,000km (600 miles) of border fencing over the past 30 years, the bulk of it since 2015. Today, more than half of all EU states have some physical barrier at an external border. As fencing becomes more normal, it will be harder for the commission to refuse to fund it." (10/30/21 p56).

"Communist China's authorities are tightening their grip on the private sector placing its growth model at risk. China's Internet Investment Fund (CIIF) has a mere 1% stake of Bytedance which gives it the power to appoint one of three board members in a unit that holds key licenses because the (CIIF) is no typical investor. The arrangement is akin to America's Federal Communications Commission taking a discounted stakes in tech groups such as Facebook and Twitter, appointing board members and then steering them in a direction it seems fit. (11/20/21 p59-60)

"This is a new form of state capitalism taking shape in China. It may unleash a sustained attack on the technology sector deeming it to have gained too much influence and strayed too far from the communist party's core values. Fear by state capitalists of falling foul of ideological dictat could throttle corporate dynamism. CIIF's board appointee to Bytedance has no clear business experience (but a) background in communist propaganda."