

German wrath on Greece slips into a racist mode reminiscent of the dark old days

By Professor Christos D. Katsetos
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Yet another week has passed by, which was marked by a display of paroxysmal manifestations about the Greek financial debacle in the German media. The crisis is real and the utter disappointment and resentment of Greece's European partners –Germany included-- is justified to a large measure. But the German wrath has gone too far.

And so it came last week's edition of the Munich-based "Focus" weekly magazine bearing the sensationalist title "Betrüger in der Euro-Familie" ("Swindlers/defrauders in the European Family" -- "Απατεώνες/καταχραστές στην Ευρωπαϊκή οικογένεια") on its cover page along side with an appalling image depicting Aphrodite of Milos (Venus di Milo) giving "the finger" whilst being wrapped, from the waist down, in the Greek flag [*Focus*, vol. 22, issue number 8, February 2010].

http://www.focus.de/magazin/videos/focus-titel-betrueger-in-der-euro-familie_vid_15672.html

In fairness, this is beyond poor taste political satire. It is an insult to the Greek flag and the dignity of the Greek nation. But reading between the lines of the Focus publication one may also discern certain disturbing entrenched perceptions of dormant cultural racism traceable to the ideological tenets of Alfred Rosenberg's *Der Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*, (1934).

In many ways, the title "Betrüger in der Euro-Familie" brings to mind the words used by a ruthless villain, General Karl de Suire, the infamous "butcher of Kalavryta", to characterize his Greek victims: "Ein Volk von Nichtstuerden, Schieber und Korrupteure" (Λαός από απολίτιστους αεριτζήδες και διαφθορείς -- an uncivilized people [full] of racketeers and corrupters).

Quoting from the 1949 essay by W. R. Loader entitled "Greeks Ancient and Modern" published in *Greece & Rome* (1949) 18:121-125:

"During the recent German occupation of Greece the occupying authority published a number of brochures in which it was argued that the modern Greeks have nothing whatever in common with the ancient Greeks. These brochures were circulated among German troops with the object of stifling any sympathy or admiration which the ordinary soldier might feel for the present-day Greeks as descendants of the ancient Athenians and Spartans. (It is pleasant to record that that object was not always achieved.)

In part, this propaganda was a revival of Fallmerayer's theory that the Greeks, as a race, vanished in the Middle Ages, their blood being at first diluted and then swamped by that of Slav invaders. It was also in the line of Nazi party doctrine, since Rosenberg in *Der Mythus des o. Jahrhunderts* contended that the modern Greek was merely a feeble Levantine who had, in common with the ancient Greeks, only the name of Hellene."

[W. R. Loader. Greeks Ancient and Modern. _Greece and Rome_ (1949), 18:121-125
Cambridge University Press doi: 10.1017/S0017383500010639]

On a more sober note, I should like to quote my esteemed colleague Dr. Marios
Evriviades, Political Scientist at Panteion University of Athens:

"The Greeks may be all the Germans say (and worse) but in their history they [the
Greeks] neither invented gas ovens nor did they put them in use 24 hrs a day for five
years in the middle of the 20th century. These same Greeks, incidentally, were the first to
inflict on fascists their first organized defeat when Europe lived in fear and despair."

Contemporary German politicians and journalists, who are amongst the heirs of the
German nation at-large, carry the heavy burden of history for the abominable crimes
committed (by their fathers and grandfathers) against Greek citizens (Jews and Christians
alike) during World War II. As such, they ought to be particularly careful not to slip into
a mode of "romantic" racist narratives and morbid ideations, which have plagued
Germany's latest dark chapter in history.

Christos D. Katsetos, MD, PhD, FRCPath
Professor
Drexel University College of Medicine