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Report #2 from Athens

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Text

IDEAS

OP-ED

by Gary Zabel (Advocate)

Athens is a Mediterranean city. The days are hot and the evenings pleasant. Like Madrid, people are up all hours of the night. I took a walk today from 10:00 to 11:30 PM, and was never alone on the street. Young women were not afraid to stroll by themselves even though it was a couple of hours past sundown. Sidewalk cafes were open, and newsstands had not yet closed for the night. There was not a policeman in sight. Come to think of it, I haven’t seen a single cop since I’ve been in Greece.

Michalakopoulou Street is lined with ATMs, and people are queued up at every one of them. The lines aren’t long – only about four or five people – but by the time someone is done using the machine, a new person has arrived in line. The news wasn’t good today. More on that in a moment. I have enough euros to carry me through the rest of my stay, but I’m as worried as everyone else about what is going to happen. So I decided to withdraw another 100 euros from one of the ATMs. When I finally figured out which way to feed my card into the machine and punched-in the right responses, I received an onscreen message that said, “We are sorry, but we cannot dispense cash at this time.” How many Greeks have gotten the same message and felt their hearts sink? I crossed the street, walked down a couple of blocks and took my place in line at a different machine. This time I got the money.

Back to the bad news. Judging by their list of cut-throat demands, Germany, Finland, and some of the eastern European countries want Greece out of the EU. If that isn’t a joke, I don’t know what is. What in the world could Europe possibly be without Greece? Before the Hellenic influence (as channeled through Rome), Germany, Finland, and Eastern Europe were collections of tribal bands roaming the forests on horseback, and committing things to memory because they had no written language in which to write them down. If Greece is forced out of the EU, the reigning idea of Europe is finished. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, the 2012 presidential candidate of the *Front de gauche* (*Left Front* of France), said today that Germany is destroying Europe for the third time in one hundred years. “Germany” of course means the German government. Even the very middle-of-the-road German magazine, *Der Spiegel*, came out today with an article that branded the new Eurozone demands a *Katalog der Grausamkeiten*: a “Catalogue of Cruelties.”

At this point, the only way to save Europe is for Greece to beat the Euro-sadists to the punch and leave the euro on its own initiative. It’s time for Tsipris to unite with Syriza’s Left Platform faction and make the argument for Grexit to the Greek people. It’s time to put the Europe of the banks out of its misery and create a new Europe from the bottom up.

Longtime Open Media Boston contributor Gary Zabel is a professor of philosophy at UMass Boston - and most recently, the director of the division of political economy of the new online international graduate college The Global Center for Advanced Studies. He is visiting Greece for the college’s founding conference, Democracy Rising, and will be sending a series of reports about his trip in his role as Our Man in Athens.

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