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## Media Bias Across the Atlantic

By Matt A. Mayer

I recently had the great privilege of spending five days in the Netherlands where I gave speeches to Dutch citizens. The groups ranged from high-level diplomatic and security civil servants to business persons, from major media figures to students. The topic of my talks focused on U.S. President Donald Trump's first year and its impact on foreign policy.

Now, when extrapolating, one must be careful not to paint with too broad of brushstrokes. Just as Californians differ greatly from Ohioans, the Dutch don't represent all Europeans, so my observations should be taken with that caveat in mind. That said, given our shared history, the Dutch tend to be more pro-American than many other European countries so I'd submit that their views are more favorable towards the United States. If they don't like a U.S. policy or president, the rest of Europe likely has even dimmer views.

When it comes to President Trump, if my informal survey of the roughly 150 people I spoke with are any indication, then his popularity among the Dutch is very low. The vast majority felt that his first year in office was terrible, which would place them comfortably among liberal-progressive Americans in New York City and San Francisco.

At first, such a negative view didn't make sense to me. After all, the governing Dutch coalition is led by a center-right political party. In the last national election, the [top three parties hailed from the center-right](#) to the far-right. The Netherlands is a center-right country. Obviously, the political right in Europe is a bit different than the political right in America, especially on social issues and the environment. Nonetheless, the political parties on the right in both countries are more aligned on most issues than those parties are with the respective center-left parties.

So why do the Dutch (and other Europeans) hold such negative views of President Trump?

One key reason is his withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement, which most Europeans support due to their firm belief in human-caused climate change. For a country with roughly 50 percent of land just one meter above sea level and 26 percent of land below sea level, rising sea levels pose more than a mere nuisance for beachfront homes. It is an existential crisis.

Another reason is Trump's bluntness. If you've ever spent any time among the Dutch, you quickly pick up how diplomatic and polite they are in everyday interactions. Confrontation is viewed negatively and being blunt is viewed as a rude American characteristic. Trump's use of Twitter to directly

attack opponents and his forceful repudiation of anyone he deems in need of a retort is unsettling for Europeans, as it is for many Americans.

A third reason is utterly consistent with Europe's typical views of American presidents going back decades. Specifically, Europeans loved Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama. They saw those men as more like them, highly intelligent, disposed to soft power over hard power, and believers in the transatlantic alliance and supranational entities built after World War II. Both men clearly swim seamlessly among the Davos crowd.

In contrast, Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush were disliked by Europeans – except among Eastern Europeans who saw them as heroes in their fight against the Soviet Union and Russian aggression. Europeans viewed those men as reckless cowboys, dimwitted and unilateralists largely disinterested in Europe unless countries therein were with them on big defense issues. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's comment on old Europe (western European countries like France and Germany who opposed the U.S.) and new Europe (eastern European countries like Poland and the Czech Republic who supported the U.S.) nicely summarized those presidents' views on Europe.

Not surprisingly, Presidents Clinton and Obama were Democrats while Presidents Reagan and Bush were Republicans. Europeans have put Trump, as another Republican, into the same group, thereby dismissing him as another dumb warmonger lacking depth and nuance. He was at Davos, but he isn't of Davos.

A large part of why Europeans distinguish U.S. presidents by party leads to the fourth and, most likely, reason they dislike President Trump: They get their news from the left. Specifically, per my Dutch audiences, the dominant sources of news on the U.S. for them and many other Europeans comes from The New York Times, CNN and MSNBC, as well as their own left-leaning media sources. As recently noted, [90 percent of the mainstream media coverage of President Trump in his first year was negative](#), it shouldn't be surprising that those who consume that news would hold negative views of him.

Some of the comments I heard were revealing. For example, many noted that the tax reform package passed by Republicans largely benefited the rich. When informed that [90 percent of wage earners could receive a tax cut](#) because of the legislation, they looked like deer in car headlights. They had bought the Democratic Party's talking points lock,

stock and barrel, with no contradictory news making it across the Atlantic.

Similarly, they are highly interested in the Russian collusion story, yet when I asked them what they thought of the Susan Rice email she sent to herself during President Trump's inauguration, they looked back at me with puzzled faces. They had no idea what I was talking about, as the coverage of that odd email was sparse, if at all, in the news sources they consume. Even members of the Dutch media hadn't heard of the email. I strongly suggested they read [Andrew McCarthy's work at National Review](#) for a detailed view on the topic that isn't being reported in the New York Times or talked about much on MSNBC.

The [increasing polarization in America](#) in which divergent news sources feed you depending on your politics already is a cause of concern for our ability to come together. At the end of the day, one has to wonder if the [media bias believed to exist](#) by most Republicans also is tainting the body politic outside of America. What might that polarization do to international affairs in the coming years when so many hot spots exist in which political leaders could fear supporting America because their people hold such negative views of President Trump?

The freedom of the press is vital, but that freedom must be exercised responsibly, as it could have unintended and severe consequences far beyond our shores. As President Trump has said, America first doesn't mean America alone, but, given how he is viewed globally through the media's lens, America just might find itself first and alone when the crisis bell rings.

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*Matt A. Mayer is President of Opportunity Ohio and Contributor to U.S. News & World Report.*