Chapter 1

The Global Engine That Keeps on Going, and Going, and Going

“European socialist communist run healthcare will tell you what doctor to see and has lengthy waiting periods”; “Europeans are less happy than Americans because they are less free.” European citizens—from Ireland to Poland to Italy—reading this would likely either laugh or cry; either way, they would not recognize their continent or their particular country in either statement. As discussed in later chapters, Europeans enjoy long life expectancy, extensive civil liberties, private hospitals and doctors, and are some of happiest people on earth; Europeans are doing fairly well. But are Europeans not taxed like crazy? Well, the top 10 percent of British, French, and Swedish income earners contribute less tax revenue to the government than do their American equivalents.

I understand if this is surprising. Headlines of China rising, Europe falling, and India challenging everyone have filled papers and book covers since the turn of the century. More than half of the American college students I surveyed as part of this book project believed China is more important than Europe (see appendix). However, headlines and truth do not always agree. Therefore, armed with straight-talk and eye-opening facts, I step into this ill-informed, news-fed maelstrom, to counter prevalent myths, rectify misperceptions, and correct distortions about this prosperous region across the Atlantic that more than any other region directly affects prices on goods in American stores, job growth in major sectors of the United States, and the global economy, as well as international trade, security, and stability.

Wait a minute. Europe? Really? This bastion of culture, ideology, and wine, but also of communism, fascism, and warfare; a continent which the United States was instrumental in twice liberating? The region whose

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history American students study because it is the cradle of ideology, governance, and, still, most of our ancestors, but which today is predominantly thought of as favorite vacation destination? Sure it has some household names, businesses such as Conoco-Philips, Siemens, BMW, or Nokia, and of course the world’s financial capital (London), but is it not full of welfare dependents and socialized policies? Is Europe not so blasé? So “yesterday”? It must be far less important to us in America today than when the Soviet Union was pointing missiles at us and threatening global stability, correct?

Objectives

If ordinary, hard-working, Americans knew the importance of Europe to their own, and global, well-being; if the media talking heads, with millions of followers, were not distorting facts and disseminating myths about Europe, this book could be considered superfluous. However, this is not the case. Even elected representatives at times stand in the people’s house and completely misrepresent the facts to score cheap points domestically.

As discussed in the next chapter, a distorted picture of the world’s largest economy, with the highest valued currency, and common institutions that decide on everything from the size of strawberries to mobile phone charges; which sets international standards for accounting and toy safety, distributes more than half of global aid, sends civilian and military personnel into conflict zones across the globe, and can approve or deny American business mergers, can easily lead to mistakes. Citizens elect decision makers whose actions affect peoples’ daily lives, and citizens make better choices, and avoid falling for distorted advocacy, if they better understand the functioning and preferences of the largest buyer and foreign supplier of goods, services, and jobs in the United States, namely Europe.

Clarifying misperceptions held about Europe is admittedly a challenging task, but let me assure skeptics: this book is not a whole sale advocacy of all things European, or a sermon on how we must unquestioningly follow their lead. In fact, it is often the opposite. Furthermore, if a majority of Americans want to support policies that cut us off from much of Europe and other countries by restricting trade, closing immigration, and recalling troops from abroad, or any other policy change, large or small, it is their right in a free and democratic society. But a better, more prosperous, democracy begins with, and is sustained through a well-informed citizenry (further explained and justified in chapter 2) who know the true consequences of their actions.

Thus, it is your prerogative to accept, challenge, or dismiss the evidence; I can only hope to promote a better understanding, an improved