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BACKGROUND NOTE

EUROPE (STILL) TRUSTS AMERICA

An opinion poll on European attitudes, conducted recently among five of the six initial countries of the European Common Market, discovered that the people of Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands trusted three non-Common Market peoples more than they did each other.

All five European Community peoples trusted the Swiss more than any other people, it was found. Four of the five put Americans in second place, then the British; the Belgians put British and Americans the other way round. At the time, Britain was not a member of the Community.

The poll was conducted by David Handley of the University of Geneva and Ronald Inglehart of Michigan State University, with the cooperation of the European Community Information Service.

Respondents, chosen as representative samples of their populations, were asked to express their degree of trust or distrust in eight different peoples. The analysts felt that Switzerland's neutrality, democratic traditions, and probity probably helped give it the favorable "trust" rating from 78 per cent of respondents, and a negative rating from only 11 per cent.

Despite a largely hostile European press over Vietnam, racial troubles, economic conflict with Europe, and the radical attitudes of the new European generation, Americans got a favorable trust rating from 69 per cent of questioned Europeans, and a "distrust" rating from only 23 per cent. The British score was 61 per cent to 30 per cent. Swiss, American, and British got more favorable than unfavorable ratings in all five countries. None of the three European Community countries whose peoples were on the list -- Germans, French, and Italians -- secured a favorable rating from all five countries, although the French average score was 52 to 38 per cent. German ratings averaged 45 per cent favorable, 46 per cent unfavorable. Thirty-one per cent of respondents trusted Italians; 59 per cent distrusted them.

Trust in Communist peoples apparently reflected the poor showing of Maoism among Western European communists: 23 per cent of respondents would put their trust in Russians, but only 9 per cent trusted Chinese. The "mistrust" ratings were 68 per cent and 73 per cent respectively.

Only Dutchmen trusted Germans more than Frenchmen. The Italians, "distrusted" in all five countries, gave a "mistrust" rating to both French and Germans themselves.

The analysts found that "interpersonal trust is a basic dimension of political culture, essential to cooperative political activity." (In common language, although it is more politically useful to be respected than loved, it is more important still to be trusted.) The analysts found that the trust factor varied only slowly from year to year -- except that suspicion of "foreigners generally" was decreasing with education and, especially, travel. But experiences in "formative years" largely determined a generation's views for life.

Toward Russians, for instance, the survey showed that 'mistrust' outweighed 'trust' by six to one among the over-65 age group but by only two to one among under-24's. Trust for Germans by other Europeans (or of Frenchmen by Germans) was low among over-65's who had seen two Franco-German wars and had heard their parents speak of an earlier conflict in 1870. But 58 per cent of Europeans under 24 trusted Germans.

The image of Americans has been more stable. Over-65's, most of whom remember being saved from defeat by Americans in two world wars, were only 65 per cent trusting. In the 55-64 age group, however, with similar memories, the figure was 77 per cent -- as good as for the Swiss. It was in the low 70's for younger groups.

European trust for Americans increases only marginally with education, the survey found. Persons with only an elementary school education gave Americans a score of 67 per cent. University graduates were 70 per cent "trusting." For the Russians, however, "trust" increased dramatically from 19 to 32 per cent with education. Franco-German trust for each other went up from 44 to 63 per cent with university training.

Travel increases the tolerance factor more than education. Europeans who have not been abroad gave America only a 62 per cent trust rating. Those who had visited three countries gave 74 per cent -- although almost none of these had visited America. Well-traveled Europeans (who had visited "nine countries or more") even trusted Russians by 71 per cent -- although few had been to the Soviet Union.

The party line does not always form a partisan's views. Only 67 per cent of French Communists trusted Russians; 72 per cent of French Gaullists trusted Americans. One French communist in three, and one Italian communist in four, had trust in Americans.

Trust for traditionally republican Americans was high among Italian Monarchists (92 per cent) than among Christian Democrats (83 per cent). More true to the party line were Germany's Neo-Nazi NPD party supporters, who gave equally low (24 per cent) ratings to both Russians and Americans.

Churchgoers favored Americans and disfavored Russians particularly highly, it was found; but except in Italy and the Netherlands, Americans were more trusted by those who rated themselves "reformers" than by "conservatives." In Holland, Americans were trusted by all categories -- even by 61 per cent of those who described themselves politically as "revolutionaries."

The analysts warn that although America's image remains high in Europe, it is not improving. A new generation, forgetful of US liberation in two world wars and the fear of Russian hegemony in the days of the Berlin airlift, is growing trustful of Russians and other West Europeans. attitudes toward Americans have hardly changed -- except through travel.