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## Focus

TWO REASONS WHY  
ITALIANS ARE TURNING  
SOUR ON THE EURO

The euro zone's greatest existential threat may no longer center on small, peripheral countries such as Greece and Portugal dragging it down, but instead on the prospect that its third largest economy, Italy, could abandon ship. Two recent economic reports show what the euro has meant to Italians and why polls suggest they are no longer keen. One suggests they are poorer as a result of being part of the currency bloc, the other that they are falling further behind their counterparts in main trading partner Germany.

It is a distant risk to the currency bloc that Italy will actually walk away, but not beyond imagination. Italy's 5-Star movement, which wants to dump the euro through a referendum, has been surging in opinion polls recently, getting as much as a third of the vote in a March Corriere Della Sera poll. The anti-European Union Northern League got another 12 or so percent - and there are others. But actually leaving the euro zone would come down to whether Italian voters believe 15 years or so of the currency had been good or bad for them.

The recent analyses suggest it has been the latter. Consider, first, how much Italians have to spend. A December report from Eurostat, the European Union's statistics agency, looked at GDP per capita - the economy divided by its people - in terms of purchasing power between 2004 and 2015. Assuming a base of 100 for the EU's combined 28 countries, powerhouse Germany rose to 124 from 120 over the period. Italy, however, sank to 96 from 110. That puts Italy closer to emerging economies like the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia that it does to Germany. France was pretty much unchanged at 106. This means that simply in terms of what they can buy, Italians are poorer than they were in 2004, a few years after they swapped the lira.

## Your Euro, My Euro

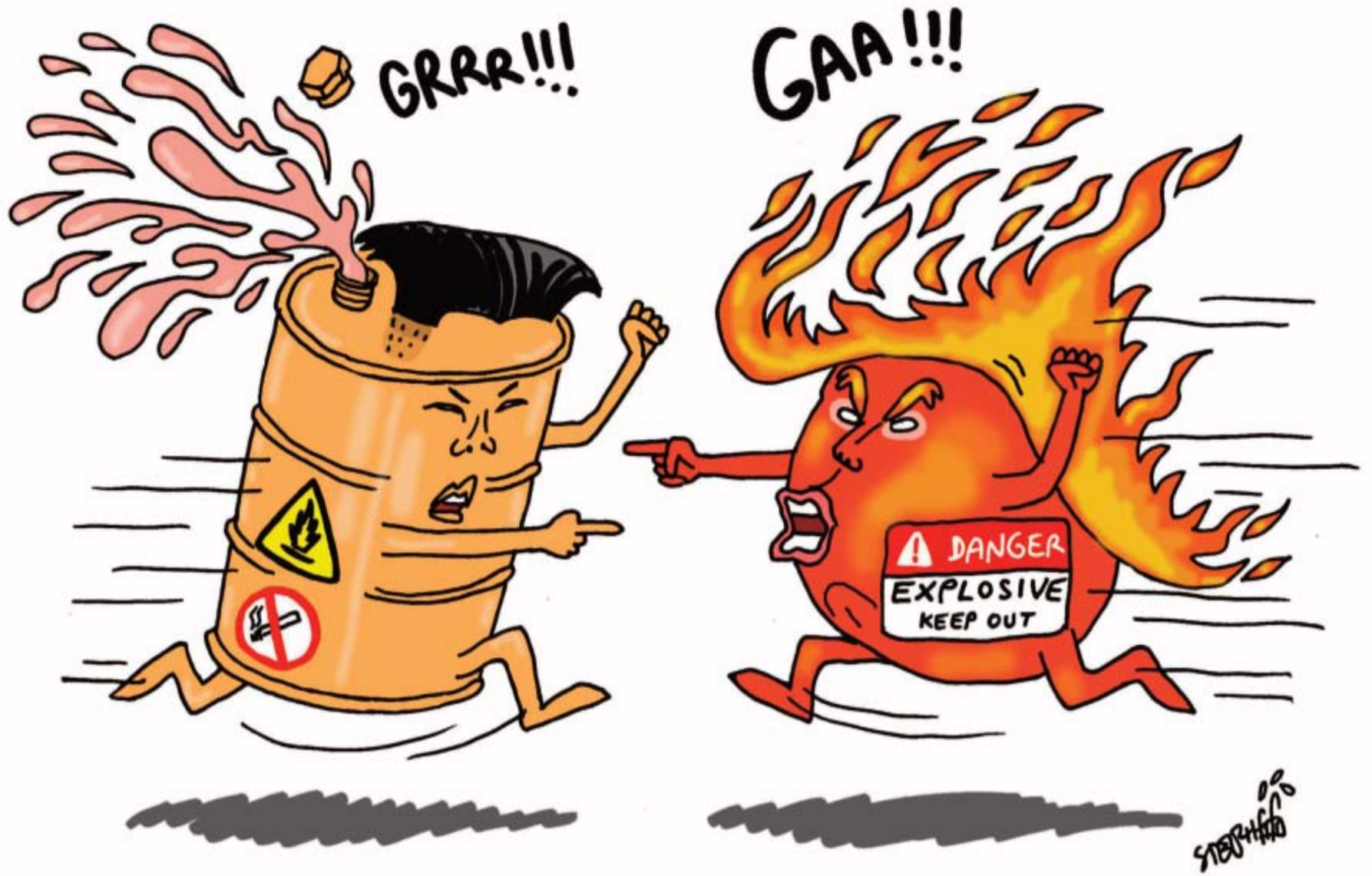
Second are some findings this month from research group World Economics that suggest Italy's problems from its currency linkage with Germany are increasing. Germany has become much more competitive as a member of the euro zone. By comparison, Italy has not. World Economics takes a basket of representative goods and services in US dollars and compares it in purchasing power terms with the cost in other currencies. The result is its World Price Index (WPI).

For the euro zone, the index allows for counter-intuitive comparisons between member countries - essentially creating German euros, French euros, Italian euros and so on. Over the past two years, the "Italian euro" has gone from being 3 percent overvalued to 4 percent undervalued in the WPI, effectively a better position vis-à-vis the dollar. But the difference between it and the "German euro" has widened by two percentage points as the latter has become 14 percent undervalued.

This means Italian businesses exporting to Germany, their top destination, are facing worse conditions than previously. It also make German imports cheaper and therefore more competitive domestically. World Economics points to other euro zone countries that have a worse problem - France and Greece, for example - but suggests that Italy is a new fault line for the euro zone. "Italy looks like becoming the next 'domino' to suffer from the strength of the German economy as trends ... have become much more pronounced over the past 12 months," it said in a note.

None of this may be caused by the euro per se, or be enough to outweigh the benefits of pooling a currency and the protection that can bring. But added to other factors - annual GDP growth struggling to reach 1 percent, for example, or declining capital investment in business and infrastructure - they do go some way towards explaining why fewer Italians tell pollsters the euro is a good thing. —Reuters

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## STOCKHOLM ATTACK PUTS CHOKEHOLD ON TOLERANCE

Hours after the truck attack that killed four people in the heart of Stockholm, Muslim taxi driver Abdi Dahir found himself in a suffocating chokehold from a man sitting in the backseat. Struggling to breathe, Dahir, who moved to Sweden from Somalia as a child, felt he could die too, at the hands of an angry passenger who blamed the country's openness to Muslim immigrants for the attack that afternoon.

"We have done everything for everyone, we have given them mosques, we have given them everything but they kill our own people. Then we'll kill them," the man growled at Dahir before grabbing him around the neck, according to an audio recording of the assault. Dahir, who recorded part of the conversation on his cell phone, said he had also activated a concealed alarm, prompting police to intervene. Stockholm police said they were investigating the incident. "I tried to work, but I'm too nervous to have anyone sitting behind me in the car," said Dahir, his voice still hoarse.

Anti-Muslim anger is putting the Nordic country's deep-rooted liberal traditions to the test, after a man hijacked a beer truck and rammed it into a busy downtown pedestrian mall. At the time of the attack, the suspect, 39-year-old Rakhmat Akilov from Uzbekistan, had applied for asylum but had been rejected and faced an expulsion order, making him one of more than 12,000 people wanted for deportation in Sweden. In court on Tuesday his lawyer said he had confessed to a terrorist crime.

Europe's most welcoming nation to asylum seekers has tightened immigration policy in recent years and is considering new measures after Friday's attack, including

better policing of deportation orders and banning membership of terrorist groups. It is also bracing for rising intolerance and hate crimes. "I'm quite worried about the political climate," said Mohamed Nuur, 25, a local politician from the ruling Social Democrat party who represents constituents in Rinkeby, a sprawling area of apartment blocks largely planned and built for workers in Sweden's progressive heyday of the late 1960s.

It is part of a belt of heavily immigrant neighborhoods that ring Stockholm. Drab grey terrace houses line the streets where small shops advertise halal products in both Arabic and Swedish. Many women there wear head scarves when they go out. "We already see manipulated images spread by Nazis and others who want to spread hateful messages," said Nuur, a Muslim of Somali descent.

Rinkeby has seen trouble such as riots among disaffected youths, but it looks well kept compared to many of the more run-down areas around major cities in Europe. In Rinkeby metro station, Refa Jafari, a slight 23-year-old in a black baseball cap who came to Sweden as an unaccompanied minor from Afghanistan in 2010, stood handing out free SIM cards for a mobile operator. "I will try to prove to Swedes that all people who have black hair are not Muslim and that all Muslims are not terrorists. We have been suffering the very same problem in our own countries," he said. "That is why we are here."

## White Power

Fearing reprisals, Sweden's Security Police are stepping up surveillance of white supremacist groups. "There is talk of taking

revenge, of using violence, or a threat of violence, to show that we are angry about what has happened here," security police chief Anders Thornberg told local TV. Suspected right-wing extremists have planted bombs at asylum centres in the past, he noted. Sweden, a country of 10 million people, has received around 700,000 asylum seekers since the end of the 1990s. In 2015, when hundreds of thousands of migrants entered the EU across the Balkans, Sweden took in a record 163,000, more than any other European Union member relative to the size of its population.

That huge migration wave from two years ago has since subsided after the EU reached a deal with Turkey to take back refugees and other migrants that cross illegally. But it caused soul-searching in Sweden, where the government tightened residency rules, cut benefits and imposed more border controls. Support has grown for the anti-immigration Sweden Democrats, which opinion polls rank as the second biggest party behind Prime Minister Stefan Lofven's Social Democrats. "We've not been taken seriously, maybe even a bit ridiculed, and I hope we can leave that behind us now," Sweden Democrats Vice Chairman Julia Kronlid told Reuters after the attack.

By far the biggest act of terrorism in the Nordic region was carried out not by an immigrant but by an anti-immigration fanatic, Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in 2011 in an Oslo bomb attack and shooting rampage at a Norwegian summer camp. Although hostility to immigration is still a political taboo for most mainstream political parties in the region, calls to shut the door are growing louder.

An hour after last week's attack, Christian

Tybring-Gjedde, a lawmaker from Norway's ruling populist Progress Party, accused Lofven in a Facebook post of "implementing Europe's most irresponsible, naive and culturally self-destructive immigration policy". Back in February, US president Donald Trump attacked Sweden's immigration record, tweeting: "Give the public a break - The FAKE NEWS media is trying to say that large scale immigration in Sweden is working out just beautifully. NOT!"

Last week, before the truck attack, members of a vigilante anti-immigration group, Soldiers of Odin, which has expanded from Finland to the Nordics and Baltics, entered the gates of Al-Azhar, a Muslim school in Vallingby, a suburb near Rinkeby. Assistant school head Roger Lindquist told Reuters two men had walked around the school yard days before the attack, taking photos of students and putting up stickers with their emblem. The school had felt compelled to hire security guards, he said. "Why do they hate us? Why do they want to harm us and why do they want to shut down our school?" he said.

Sweden's liberal tradition is far from defeated, however. Friday's truck attack prompted countless acts of generosity and solidarity and brought thousands of people onto the streets of central Stockholm in a show of unity against violence and extremism on Sunday. "It was fantastic. A sea of people that came together and showed love, all kinds of people. That is what Sweden is about, and that is how we must keep it," said Juma Lomani, 32, who came to Sweden as a 19-year-old from Afghanistan and now works for an organization helping young refugees adapt to Swedish society. —Reuters

## NATIVE AMERICANS FEAR LOSS OF CULTURE

Ever since he can remember, Richard Saunders has seen families cross the fence on his Native American reservation in southern Arizona, where the US-Mexican border splits his tribe's land in two, to seek work, see a doctor or go to school. Laborers from Mexico would stop by his grandfather's house on the US side of the reservation, the ancestral home of the Tohono O'odham nation, which today is marked off by a barrier of loosely spaced metal bars designed to block vehicles between the two nations.

"He'd stand out there and converse with them, take a shot of tequila. Grandma would make them some burritos, and they'd be on their way," recalled Saunders, a senior figure in the nation's administration, heading its public safety department. But Saunders and other nation members fear US President Donald Trump's plan to sever their land with a border wall will be no different to slicing through their culture and their community.

"If I was to walk into your home and build a wall right in the middle of your house, how would you like that?" said Verlon Jose, vice chairman of the Tohono O'odham, whose name means "Desert People." "Over my dead body will this happen," Jose told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. For more than a century, the Tohono O'odham - like other Native Americans - have seen their ancestral lands shrink as a result of hundreds of broken land deals with the US government in its westward expansion in the 1800s.

Of the 3,500-km border wall that Trump says will stop drugs, crime and rapists from Mexico, 100 km would run through Tohono O'odham land, putting most of the reservation, which is slightly larger than Lebanon, in the United States and a smaller piece in Mexico's Sonora state. For now, the border barrier, with three gates for the American Indians to use, zigzags around cactus, riverbeds and ancient burial sites, letting through the desert's jaguar, deer, pig-like javelinas, venomous Gila monster lizards and poisonous sidewinder snakes.

Francine Jose, 50, a cousin to the tribe's vice chairman, lives about four miles from the border. About 10,000 people live north of the border, where the schools, com-

merce and services are located, and another 2,000 live on the Mexican side. "I think about the Berlin Wall," she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation. "Why do we have to hate or be mad at the country next to us?"

## Opposition

The Tohono O'odham's government has not ruled out a high-profile protest similar to one which began last August in the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation, where activists camped for months in opposition to a proposed oil pipeline in North Dakota. At its height, thousands of protesters gathered at Standing Rock, and more than 700 were arrested. The protest ended after efforts to stop the pipeline lost in court. "It could turn into that," said Jose, 50. "If we're to see bulldozers start to come in, we will not be standing alone."

However, he is encouraged by Department of Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly, who recently said it was "unlikely that we will build a wall or physical barrier from sea to shining sea". A suggestion by Department of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke that electronic monitors may be used in some sections has also helped to allay concerns. Tribal leaders say the border could be best protected with high-powered surveillance cameras, better access roads and more personnel.

The harsh desert itself, with no year-round sources of running water, is an effective deterrent. Once across the border, the nearest main roads lie 20 miles north. Last year, the bodies of 85 migrants were found on the reservation compared with 16 so far this year, significantly down from years when more than 100 were found, Saunders said.

Even though barbed wire along the border was replaced by the sturdier vehicle barrier in 2006 - in response to the rise of Mexican drug-smuggling cartels and security fears following the 9/11 attacks - evidence of stealthy crossings is easy to spot. Drug traffickers leave behind cloth slippers with carpeted soles, used to obliterate their footprints.

Abandoned black plastic water jugs are strewn amid the towering Saguaro cactus, poignant signs of thirst that can kill in the desert where summer temperatures

are typically well above 38 Celsius. Crisscrossed with dry stream beds, or washes, that flood during the violent summer monsoon season, the landscape burns under a relentless sun. Turkey vultures circle, and a few long-horn cattle huddle under the mesquite trees.

## Broken Treat

Tohono O'odham was under Mexican jurisdiction before its modern borders around 2.8 million acres (1.13 million hectares) of territory were laid out in a 19th century land deal between the neighboring nations. Under US law, Native American reservations are sovereign nations that govern themselves, and building a border wall through Tohono O'odham land would amount to a treaty being broken by the US government, said Carlos Velez-Ibanez, Regents' Professor and Founding Director Emeritus of the School of Transborder Studies at Arizona State University.

"Indigenous populations on their land have treaty rights, and they're treated as nations, and they're recognized as nations," he said. "Trump and Co would in fact be violating the treaty rights of indigenous nations." Asked about Arizona Republican Sen John McCain's position on the reservation wall, McCain's office did not respond. He told CNN the wall was not a "viable" option and that border security needs technology and drones.

The state's other US Senator, Republican Jeff Flake, said in an email that the most effective border security "might mean a wall in some places or a fence in others, as well as the right combination of manpower and surveillance". "Arizona communities along the border should be a part of the discussion and planning as they are of the most affected," he wrote. Tohono O'odham Tribal Police, with nearly 100 officers, work with the US Customs and Border Protection, which has more than 1,000 agents at the reservation, said Saunders. It's only fitting that the Tohono O'odham, who have hunted, gathered food and grown crops for thousands of years in the region, are caught up in issues of border protection, Jose said. "It is embedded in our culture to protect. Not to own, but to protect," said Jose. "That is what we are doing." —Reuters