



EU-US RELATIONS – CONTRIBUTION TO EURACTIV DEBATE

WEEK COMMENCING 27TH OCTOBER 2008

1. The EU and the US have long cooperated on regulatory issues in fields ranging from trade to consumer policy, for example in the context of the Trans-Atlantic Economic Council and the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue, but have stalled on moving towards common policy approaches to issues like climate change and energy.

Trans-Atlantic co-operation over regulatory issues is worthy but unexciting. Atlantic relations are in any case prone to a certain staleness induced by a limited pool of people endlessly returning to the same issues. When Europe established its Single Market in the 1990s it was powered by the wider goal of underpinning European integration. Whenever technical or protectionist issues arose they could be trumped by this higher political goal. No such trumps exist in Atlantic relations. Neither side of the pond shows any interest in unification. It should be no surprise therefore that the EU and the US have ‘stalled’ on many aspects of climate change and energy, since these are the key building blocks of power and foreign policy in the 21st century.

2. Do you expect the financial crisis to block or boost future cooperation? What lessons can we draw from the financial crisis in terms of Trans-Atlantic cooperation?

Unlike previous financial crises, our current troubles are rooted in our shared models of finance. They are different in kind from previous Latin American or Asian crises. They have required ruthless self-examination and regulation. Practical Atlantic co-operation in sorting out the mess will therefore continue and must inevitably precede global co-operation.

3. How do you think Trans-Atlantic cooperation will change following the US presidential election in November?

To coin a phrase, “Things can only get better” after the eight years of the George W Bush Presidency. There should be major opportunities for the meeting of minds on both climate change and energy security. There are those who say that we will not see much change in US Foreign Policy, but I disagree with them. The American view of the world, conditioned by its history, and expressed as ‘US Exceptionalism’ will not be going away any time soon. The last two years have been a public humiliation for the Americans and much of the Bush imperial rhetoric has become an embarrassment. A new President will need to find new language for expressing America’s place in the world. We should not expect a full scale swing from ‘Jacksonian’ aggression to ‘Wilsonian’ internationalism. Of necessity either Obama or McCain will continue to display aspects of both Teddy and Franklin Roosevelt. The US is still the world’s military super power and has an extraordinary capacity for re-invention. Of the two candidates, Barack Obama looks best positioned to rehabilitate America and find the language to re-define America’s place in the world.

4. How can the current institutional framework be improved?

The current framework of Atlantic relations has become overly concentrated on business and banking links. It has lost both the intimacy of the generation that experienced World War II and the easy mutual understanding of the ‘Greyhound Bus’ generation of the 1960s and 70s. A previous attempt to enthuse Atlantic Relations included deliberate encouragement of civil society links and people- to-people contact. These fell victim to the ideological fears of business-obsessed Republicans and subsequently to the post-9/11 panic. If the easy intimacy of previous generations is to be restored, the Europeans, and especially the British, will have to show that they are not a soft touch on Islamic terrorism. Any incoming Administration will want to close Guantanamo Bay and disavow state torture. It will be a real test of the liberalism of an Obama Presidency to see how far the US and Europe felt able to claw back the loss of civil liberties implicit in the Patriot Act and its European siblings.

5. In some EU countries and your native UK in particular, developing closer relations with other European countries and the US are often seen as conflicting rather than complementary goals. What is your take on this view?

There are two types of 'special relationship' which the British all too often confuse. There is a historical reality in the birth of the United States, which grew out of eighteenth century English culture, and which will always set up a pleasing mutual resonance. On the other hand, there is the potent political myth of a Special Relationship, cultivated by Churchill and Macmillan, as part of the conscious transfer of British imperial power to the USA. In the current global situation, we are long overdue for the transfer of this second 'special relationship' from the UK to the EU. You do not have to be a student of Arnold Toynbee to recognise the common roots from which Europe and America spring.

6. Going further than the institutional framework of relations, what are the specific issues that EU-US policy cooperation should focus on in future?

I suspect that the Crash of 2008 will lead to a widening of the Eurozone. Any discussion of reform of the world financial system is bound to raise the question of the relationship between the Euro and the US Dollar. In foreign policy the EU and US could usefully review their attitudes to Russia, as reflected in the Black Sea and the Caucasus. A similar concern for the interaction of energy security and foreign policy should see both the EU and the US looking again at the potential of Concentrated Solar Power in North Africa and the Middle East. On climate change, the first step towards success in Copenhagen is the establishment of a level of mutual confidence between Washington and Brussels. The US needs to understand that measures on climate change are not domestic matters to be agreed without reference to partners. If I had to point to one area where joint EU and US understanding is crucial, it would be the Arctic, which is the nemesis hanging over both of us.

7. Is it realistic to talk in terms of creating a single EU-US market as Internal Market Commissioner Charlie McCreevy has done in the past?

It follows from my line of argument that an Atlantic Single Market might follow other major developments. It is unlikely to lead them. Commissioner McCreevy might be better employed in ensuring that American Neo-Conservative money is not used to pervert the next Irish Referendum.

These are important weeks for Atlantic relations and we should all be prepared to explore new avenues of thought. We shall be doing so at the Institute for Environmental Security in our conference on 12th November entitled "After the Vote: Implications of the US Elections for Foreign Policy, Climate Change and International Security". 14.00 – 18.00 in the European Parliament. www.envirosecurity.org

