

Thomas Bauer

Congratulations, Mr. President ... here is our agenda

The fate of the transatlantic relationship does not solely depend on whether John McCain or Barack Obama will move into the White House after the elections next week. It will rather be decided by the way Europeans react to and interact with the new U.S. President, as well as to which extent they are willing and able to set an agenda and contribute to its implementation.

On Tuesday, November 4, 2008, the citizens of the United States will decide who is going to succeed George W. Bush in the White House. Presidential elections in the U.S. have always been a particular event in the political calendar. Their extraordinary appeal to Europeans on the one hand stems from the multi-million dollar show surrounding the electoral process, which goes far beyond the European understanding of a mere political campaign. On the other hand there is of course the pure political and military power linked to the position of the last remaining superpower's head of state. A third aspect, which makes U.S. elections interesting to Europeans is the idea of getting a snapshot of the current public opinion in America through the citizens' vote, which holds implications not only for international relations in general, but with regard to the role and future development of the transatlantic partnership in particular. However, this rather passive approach is not only irritating; it is even dangerous, because it limits Europeans to being spectators instead of contributing, proactive partners. The fate of the transatlantic relationship does not solely depend on the person that will give his inaugural address on January 20 next year. Its fate will rather be decided by the way Europeans react to and interact with the new U.S. President, as well as to which extent they are willing and able to set an agenda and contribute to its implementation.

Europe is still too passive

The European approach of merely observing in terms of transatlantic relations is founded on a substantial strategic deficit within most EU member states' capitals, paralyzing proactive initiatives for fostering the European column in the transatlantic building. Consequently – from a U.S. perspective – Europe has remained in a state of being more of a

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passive bystander concerning transatlantic ties, instead of becoming a shaping power. This has led to a specific problem, especially after the events of 9/11. Washington ignored the relevance of the transatlantic partnership because some EU member states didn't act the way the U.S. wanted them to. It rather preferred other formats for political action, such as the Coalition of the Willing, leading to Europeans developing little interest in the future of the partnership. The U.S. attitude has nothing to do with an

intentional disparagement of European political action in general. It is rather the result of a reality check concerning effective solutions following American interests. Washington

has always acted according to its own national interest, and it will continue to do so in the future. This rather pragmatic and legitimate behaviour is founded on a traditional American perspective on international relations: Why should America listen to those who seem to be deaf, dumb, and blind in regard to global engagement, pragmatic political choices, and strategic arrangements directed at securing the status of a unipolar world system?

Of course this attitude does not reflect the reality of a globalized world, which has changed dramatically in the last decade. America's clumsiness in recent efforts for effective and sustainable crisis and conflict management has proven that the idea of a unilateral Western dominance has failed to meet the expectations of the countries that are most affected by the negative side of globalization. Through various means other players have developed their own appeal and sovereignty of interpretation when it comes to international relations, e.g. Russia, China or India, but also regional organizations such as the EU, ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), or the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Military force no longer represents the core element

of political power; today's politics are about developing convincing and efficient structures for the interpretation and implementation of political actions. Political power derives from effectively dealing with the risks and challenges that have snuck into our homes and lives: energy security, climate change, financial crises, demographic change, migration, over-stretched health care systems, and social security.

The EU needs to go strategic

Consequently two things need to change if the EU's role within the transatlantic partnership is to be saved from marginalization. First, the U.S. needs to give up its reluctance to accept the reality of a multipolar world order. This step goes further than merely dealing with multilateral instead of unilateral solutions. It means accepting the growing influence of other actors and the decline of Western dominance on world affairs. Second, the European nations need to become a credible partner for the upcoming administration in Washington, capable of dealing with the major tasks of our time. The first step cannot be achieved without the latter, but it is primarily the European Union that holds the key to this development. Europe needs to go strategic if it wants to convince Washington of the transatlantic partnership's efficiency within a multipolar system. One move in that direction could be the introduction of a conceptual hierarchy for the European Union's strategy papers, especially in reference to the European Security Strategy (ESS), leading to a set of priorities and connecting them with the necessary means to achieve them (see also Bauer/Baumann: "ESS 2.0 – Establishing strategic hierarchy in Europe", C·A·PERSPECTIVES 1/2008). The EU's activity in the Caucasus with Nicolas Sarkozy's efforts to negotiate a cease fire agreement between Russia and Georgia, Brussels' decision to launch an observation mission in that area, and the EU's initiatives concerning the financial crisis have been good steps forward. Europe needs to continue on that road in order to keep up with the pace that was set by the dynamics of political, economic, financial, and social interdependencies, not only on a regional but also on a global level. Therefore the question is less of an if, but more of a when the EU is ready to take up its role as a global partner for cooperative organizations or

entities that wish to shape globalization and its implications for societies. More identity, more efficiency and more political willpower support the development of necessary decision making structures and capabilities, leading to more political options, but also to more responsibility. This might also mean having to handle unprofitable tasks or tasks that are not preferable. On the other hand fewer identity, less efficiency, and less political will limit any structural or capability oriented effort for improvement and almost certainly lead to the marginalization of Europe.

Issues that need to be prepared

In order to launch a new era of cooperation between the United States and Europe after November 4, 2008, and in order to roll back the unfruitful militarization of the transatlantic relations since 9/11, when NATO for the first time in history invoked article 5, there are certain areas of interest and specific tasks that need to be prepared by the Europeans in advance, in order to discuss them with the new administration in Washington.

- 1) Creating internationally approved guidelines for a new global financial system that help overcome the current deficits of and the public mistrust in the banking sector, and which provide options for future business by supporting the progress of finding answers to shared challenges. The restructuring of the global financial market system has to be founded on the economic reality of today, meaning to accept the continuing shift of economic power to Asia. Especially the emergence of China has to be seen more as an opportunity for multilateral solutions instead of being perceived as a threat to the dominance of the West.
- 2) Energy security and climate change have to remain top priorities for further political and – even more important – economic dialogue between the United States and Europe. Especially with the financial crisis affecting national budgets and funding plans for research and development the topic of restoring ecologic stability and safety for our children and grandchildren needs to be preserved as a – if not the – major priority for political action.

3) Fostering the global non-proliferation regime through a commitment to open dialogue. Europe and the United States have to show endurance and patience in terms of identifying options for further improvement of international relations. Weapons of mass destruction (WMD) should never become an instrument in securing the dominance of a unipolar power system against the constant dynamics of political and economic power in a whole web of centres of gravity. In the case of the nuclear dispute with Iran, Europe needs to increase the political and economic pressure on the regime. It is therefore necessary to convince China and Russia to follow a more substantial system of sanctions in the UN Security Council.

4) Developing forums for strategic transatlantic and international dialogue by restructuring and reanimating the G8, NATO, and the United Nations. In particular with regard to NATO, the transatlantic partners need to develop options beyond the article 5 Alliance in order to overcome the militarization of transatlantic relations since 9/11. In the case of Georgia, NATO and its limited options for action (membership or no membership) have proven to be more of a problem than a solution in this area of overlapping neighbourhoods with Moscow. Therefore the EU needs to commit itself substantially to a diplomatic solution and more stability in the Black Sea area. Certain pressure has to be put on Moscow in this scenario without provoking Cold War-like reflexes in the Kremlin. The same accounts for the issue of missile defence in Europe and the continuation of peace talks between Palestinians, Israel, and its neighbours.

5) Different ways of interpreting values and human rights and their role in the fight against transnational terrorism have to be addressed very frankly in order to find common solutions. Therefore, the European Union member states need to take in prisoners being released from the Guantanamo Bay detention camp and facing the danger of falling victim to persecution and torture in their home countries. Currently there is no agreement on that issue within Europe. However, if one argues against Guantanamo and calls for the

protection of human rights, then one has the obligation to help when there is an opportunity to put an end to the Guantanamo system.

6) The United States need to be involved in any plan for further strengthening European autonomous capacities and capabilities for civilian and military operations. Every effort directed at the consolidation of the industrial and technological base, or the market for the goods produced through it, any attempt to establish further planning and command structures in the European Union, and every initiative for the establishment of consolidated European armed forces has to be prepared in consultations with Washington. This creates the necessary confidence and sense of partnership on both sides of the Atlantic.

Topics such as Iraq or Afghanistan should be avoided in the beginning, because they have poisoned any attempt to reanimate the transatlantic partnership in the past. However, sustainable and measurable progress in the areas mentioned above could provide the common ground and public support for touching the sensitive issue of more European commitment to those areas of conflict. This optimistic approach is based on one key conclusion: We may not always share the same opinions, but we are doomed to cooperate because we are bound to each other. That is the true nature of what Barack Obama called the "community of common destiny" in his speech at the Berlin Victory Column this past July when he was referring to the transatlantic partnership.

If Europe is not capable of getting its act together in terms of strategic thinking and strategic action it will make no difference whether John McCain or Barack Obama wins the election. There is this one opportunity to convince American policy-makers: It not only makes sense to talk to Europe, it is even worth it. Not being prepared to meeting the next administration's expectations in terms of bigger strategic involvement and more substantial commitment could mean the end of closer political US-EU relations for quite some time.

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