

Roland Freudenstein
Deputy Director and Head of Research
Centre for European Studies

EIN Summer University
18 September 2010

Report about WG 9, Transatlantic Cooperation

Transatlantic relations are today determined by three core developments:

- The Obama administration which was enthusiastically welcomed by most Europeans in 2009 but which has led to some disappointment recently, because of a perceived continuity of US policies.
- The entry into force of the EU's Lisbon Treaty has created new instruments (Council President, External Action Service) and enhanced the decision making power of the European Parliament, but this has so far not resulted in an improvement in cohesion, and in some cases even led to a loss of transparency and clarity.
- An increasingly difficult international environment in which, in the financial and economic crisis, economic and political power has been shifting away from the West towards China, India and a host of emerging economies.

On that backdrop, Transatlantic relations are played out on two levels: On the psychological level, ritualised incantations of cohesion and consensus are accompanied by a number of implicit mutual recriminations. On the policy level, some successes have been achieved (in data transfers in the fight against terrorism) while in other fields, progress is slow in coming (regulatory framework, climate policy). Both levels are intricately connected: In order to achieve progress, a breakthrough on the psychological level is indispensable, but this in turn is only possible with new deliverables in substance.

Psychological issues:

1. Below the rhetorical surface, there is still a mutual *schadenfreude* at the relative decline of the respective other side: Paradoxically, this leads, on both sides, to the notion of the end of Atlanticism and to thinking in terms of a 'post-Atlantic' world.
2. On the EU side, there is also the perennial question of how interesting Europe still is to the US. This is usually accompanied by the complaint that the EU still has to get its act together, improve decision making and speak with one voice.
3. At the same time, a constant feature of the debate on Transatlantic relations in Europe has been the question to what extent the US is really interested in a strong EU. Of course, the US want a strong partner, but when the EU threatens to strategically disagree with the US, Washington still prefers to deal with individual member states.

4. The debate on Transatlantic relations also has important domestic components on both sides (such as in 2002 and 2003 in Europe), today especially in the US: While Democrats praise Europe as a model in social and health policies, Republicans use EU advocacy for austerity and against exaggerated stimulus for their critique of Obama's economic policies.
5. Despite much success in distancing himself from the recent past in US government policy, strong Transatlantic differences persist over such questions as security culture, Middle Eastern policy or the question of Turkey's accession to the EU.

In the end, and on both sides of the ocean, we will have to ask ourselves whether there is any credible alternative to a strong Transatlantic relationship: in view of the still overwhelming strength of Transatlantic trade and investment, and above all the closeness in fundamental values. If the answer is that there is no alternative, then both sides should become more serious in acknowledging each other's strengths instead of emphasising each others' weaknesses, and turning the vicious circle of hidden mutual recriminations into a virtuous circle of concrete cooperation.