



ATLANTIC MEMO #10

Time to Start Transatlantic Relations Afresh

Atlantic Community members are in agreement that adjustments will have to occur on both sides of the Atlantic: the United States needs to accept the post-unipolar world order and embrace multilateralism, while Europe needs to finally develop a proactive foreign policy profile. One potentially catastrophic issue – climate change – has to be tackled immediately.

1. Ignore EU bashing and rethink anti-Americanism.

Barack Obama's pledge to re-engage allies is a welcome departure from the unilateralism of the Bush administration. To that end, an excellent starting point would be a concerted effort at public diplomacy (Leonie Holthaus) following the transatlantic nadir of "freedom fries" diplomacy. Although anti-Europeanism in America exists, Europeans have to recognize that it is used as a symbolic issue and is localized to the right (Andrew Hammel). On the other hand anti-Americanism appears to be entrenched in European elites – a standard which must be mitigated for productive relations to be restored (Marek Swiercynski).

2. The US must come to terms with its post-unipolar moment.

In order to overcome the challenges of the 21st century and successfully work with Europe toward that end, the US must first embrace the realities of a multipolar international order. Currently, only Europe can provide the US with the legitimacy it desperately craves, and only America can fulfill the "strategic actor" role Europe longs to occupy (Eckart von Klaeden). A historic US capacity for self-criticism (Francisco J. Ruiz), coupled with a far more amenable new administration, will hopefully facilitate such a break and provide the framework for a renewed, cooperative, and fruitful rapprochement of transatlantic relations.

3. Europe needs a proactive foreign policy approach.

Any disdain Europe may still harbor toward the US due to the invasion of Iraq must not manifest in the form of an obdurate position with regard to stabilizing Afghanistan (Patrick Edwin Moran). To help America with its international "headache" (John Hadjisky) and expedite the transition to a truly multilateral world, it is critical for Europe to develop a singular foreign policy posture (Ruiz) and ratify the Lisbon Treaty or its successor (Adam K. Svensson). A militarily relevant Europe would benefit the US (Ruiz), but only if utilized as an operative for peace (Svensson). Other members feel that military capability no longer constitutes the "core element of political power" (Thomas Bauer) and, thus, call for greater soft power initiatives. Given an almost pan-European reluctance to contribute caveat-free combat troops to NATO missions, Europe can bolster the relationship by enhancing development aid (Ari Rusila) and taking the lead in post-war reconstruction projects (Christia Flourentzou). A majority of members therefore agree with the Atlantik-Brücke's recommendation that the US and Europe must develop more comprehensive approaches, integrating "humanitarian operations and civilian capabilities," to effectively resolve conflicts.

4. Take immediate action toward combating climate change.

While a global agreement to limit carbon emissions is imperative (Rob Steer), EU leadership could flounder on that front once Vaclav Klaus chairs the EU Presidency in January. When coupled with the economic downturn, we should not expect to see the EU maintain its "vanguard role in climate protection" (Petra M. Gramer). Therefore, determined US leadership prior to the Copenhagen Conference in 2009 is exigent. Still, skepticism exists as to whether President Obama can manage to include China and India in a binding agreement to a Kyoto successor (Daniel Korski) and Moran impugns whether the underlying currents of globalization preclude the effective combat of climate change while simultaneously accommodating a growing scarcity of natural resources.

Atlantische Initiative e.V.

Wilhelmstraße 67
10117 Berlin
Germany

Tel: +49.30.206 337 88
Fax: +49.30.206 337 90

Atlantic Memo Contributors

Authors:

Atlantik-Brücke's Young Leaders
Thomas Bauer, Center for Applied Policy Research
Andrew Hammel, German Joys Blog
Eckart von Klaeden, Member of German Parliament
Daniel Korski, European Council on Foreign Relations

Commenters:

Christia Flourentzou, Cypriot Embassy in Berlin
Petra M. Gramer, ex-Unimaas
John Hadjisky, Blogger
Leonie Holthaus, Philipps-Universität Marburg
Bernhard Lucke, BTU Cottbus
Patrick E. Moran, Wake Forest University
Francisco J. Ruiz, Spanish Center for the Studies of National Defense
Ari Rusila, Freelancer
Rob Steer, Freelancer
Adam K. Svensson, Lund University
Marek Swiercynski, Journalist, Polish Television

Atlantic Memos showcase the best ideas and arguments from debates in the Open Think Tank on atlantic-community.org. All policy recommendations in this document were made by authors and registered members of the Atlantic Community.