



Europe and the United States: for a new partnership

Laurent Fabius



Recently, relations between the United States and Europe have experienced a period of serious turbulence. Iraq was the apogee of a real crisis, of which the worst is today behind us, even if the wounds have not healed. Our economic relations (from the failure of Cancun to numerous other commercial contentions over the past years) have been equally damaged since the launch of the 'New Transatlantic Agenda', in 1995. The situation at which we have arrived on either side of the Atlantic shows that no one has benefited from this drifting apart of our two continents. My conviction is that Americans and Europeans need a more balanced partnership. Any policy which does not take account of this fact is harmful. It is therefore time to envisage a re-launch of the transatlantic relationship for our mutual benefit. This relationship will not be equal unless Europe is more united. This is what I call the 'new partnership' which must unite our two continents.

Such a re-launch is not utopian. To understand it, let us turn our minds back to the past. Leaning on America's superpower status, the government of George W. Bush was isolated by the large international opposition and the absence of an explicit mandate for the launch of a military expedition in Iraq. On the ground, the United States carried off a rapid military victory, but this was the only success they have achieved. Unilateralism and the hegemonic tendencies of American neo-conservatives have seriously damaged the reputation of the United States. The war in Iraq's official objectives - the establishment of democracy, peace in the Middle East, and the struggle against terrorism - are far from being met. Iraq is a divided country, where religious factions and terrorist groups proliferate. The troops of the coalition have been spending more time on their own security than on re-establishing security and the rule of law for the Iraqi people. The virtuous circle that the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime was supposed to ensure for the region has been an infernal spiral. And, unfortunately, terrorism prospers as has been demonstrated by the attacks in Madrid and the attacks of Al Qaeda against Saudi Arabia or elsewhere. The absence of a legal basis for the war, the inability to find the weapons of mass destruction which provided the pretext, the exactions of the American army, all of this facilitates in a certain way the actions of extremists and provides the elements of their discourse. Nothing proves that a real betterment of the situation will take place.

On the European side, France has clearly demonstrated its opposition. France was justified to oppose the American decision to go to war. Nonetheless, the form of our opposition contributed to the alienation of support from traditionally Francophile countries, such as Poland. Like our German friends, we could not be a truly credible opposition whilst European opinion was divided. This is the limitation of Jacques Chirac's policy: in preferring diplomatic posturing to real strategy, we were deprived of a part of the influence that would justify an authentically multilateral world. Whatever the cause, the path to European unity has to be recaptured. This is an absolute priority if social democrats are to return to power. For me, it is not about constructing this identity by all means in opposition to the United States, but in the form of an equal partnership with it.

The history of the past two years, on both sides of the Atlantic, is a mess. The American government has begun to realise perhaps, that despite their power, the United States cannot part company with

its traditional European allies, notably Germany and France. Today, it has turned to Europe to obtain assistance in Iraq. The United States cannot secure the whole region from the Near East to Afghanistan on its own. Numerous Americans recognise that it would be safer for them to take account of the experience of these 'old countries'. We have an understanding of the history of the Arab-Muslim world, which allows us to avoid certain mistakes - be they psychological, moral or political.

In Europe, in the first instance, the attitude towards American policy divided governments, and the postures of some of them transformed these divisions into resentments. The Iraq crisis weighed on the debate over the European Constitution. In a more serene climate, our states would probably have arrived at a more ambitious and profitable project. At the same time, the opposition to the conflict unified the people, giving birth to a truly European form of public opinion. A second act began with the victory of the PSOE in Spain and the election of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. The British strategy to stick with the Americans in order to better influence them undermined, for some, serious discussion, and amongst many there is profound disillusionment. As for the members of the coalition, many have recognised today that opposition to the war was not unfounded and that it would have been more useful for everyone if Europe had been able to unite to form a true alternative.

The unilateralism of George W. Bush is evidently not a factor of stability in international relations. I believe that it even represents a danger for the long-term interests of the United States and the American people. In the same vein, I am convinced that a united and strong Europe is a means of avoiding in the future the mistakes of the last year. But a political Europe must be accompanied by a real partnership between the two sides of the Atlantic. It is this equation that must be resolved. A political Europe has no reason to present itself as ruptured from the United States. It is the precondition of a balanced relationship and a partnership that would be useful. It is necessary for us to re-found our relations. In this perspective, there is no doubt that the election of a Democratic president in the United States would, in my view, facilitate this. This election would be a victory for America, with which we share our principal values, and with whom we have celebrated the landings on the Normandy coast 60 years ago that delivered us from Nazism. This is the America of Roosevelt, magnificently generous, whose memory is the best antidote to anti-Americanism, politically and intellectually, which I have always challenged.

But we should not simply turn about face. Beyond the events of the past two years, the crisis in transatlantic relations had profound causes. The end of bi-polarity between East and West and the disappearance of the common enemy automatically made the transatlantic partnership less central, as much for Americans as for Europeans. For West Europeans, American power's priority no longer exists to protect us. From the American point of view, the main priority is no longer the maintenance of the Western camp in the face of the Soviet menace. The preservation of this alliance obliged the Americans, in the context of the Cold War, to accept certain concessions vis-à-vis their allies, notably France, which allowed for diplomatic autonomy without calling the alliance with the United States into question.

The dramatic events of the 11th of September have not been analysed in exactly the same way on either side of the Atlantic. For the United States, these attacks legitimised an approach to international relations founded on the recourse to force and the exercise of their power. For Europe, the war against terrorism also carried a political aspect more global than that to which force alone may respond. The Americans considered that their European allies no longer shared the same appreciation of the menace as they themselves. They have thought that a unilateral approach to international relations was then necessary. In the long term, they can consider that the pattern of their relations with the Asian giants, led by China and India, will be more decisive than those with European nations. The Pacific identity of the United States could detract from the Atlantic component. Whilst in Europe, its vocation is incontestably to become closer to its Mediterranean and oriental partners.

Economic and commercial relations have equally experienced the new consequences of the new American political agenda. Whilst the 1990s gave hope of economic, commercial and regulatory rapprochement in a breadth of areas, the situation has been deteriorating. While being enthusiastic supporters of economic liberalism, at the same time the United States are now manifesting a rampant protectionism across a number of domains. They have imposed to-date \$150 billion of trade sanctions on Europe. These discords explain in part the failure of the Cancun negotiations and the Doha round,

which were supposed to have development as their priority. But here there is another reality: when the transatlantic relationship suffers the whole world is affected. Good transatlantic relations are not a sufficient condition but they are, nonetheless, a necessary condition for a real global strategy for development. This is our common responsibility.

Certainly, there are essential differences. The Americans have, in terms of their societies' choices, shown a much greater tolerance to the growth of inequalities than most Europeans. On the environment, the approaches are opposite today: Europe is favourable to the Kyoto Agreement, George W. Bush is hostile to them. But American society is evolving, and the Democrats are in any case closer to us. The themes of convergence can be numerous. On security, our interests are often neighbouring. The struggle against terrorism and against the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are shared priorities. Democracy and human rights are a common cause. It is the question of what strategy to put in place against these threats that has separated us. Military and unilateral for George W. Bush's America; global – that is to say taking into account the economic and social aspects – and multilateral on the European side. It is necessary for Europe to unite now to extend its voice.

In economic affairs, common interests are equally manifested. It is urgent that the transatlantic dialogue become stronger to answer the challenges. I am thinking, for example, of monetary stability. As long as the preoccupations are numerous (disequilibrium in the current American balance of payments, the under-valuation of the Chinese currency and so on) a better coordination is urgent. Another shared domain: development, as much for moral as political or economic reasons, development aid is a priority recognised on both sides of the Atlantic. The fall of the Cancun talks has demonstrated the need for a transatlantic agreement. The same is true in the areas of employment and social norms on the interior of globalization. Europe and the United States possess certainly different social models, but this opposition does not exclude common fears faced with the effects of globalization on employment, particularly in industry, and on social norms. The question of outsourcing in the American presidential campaign is and will be also at the heart of debates in Europe. The struggle against deindustrialisation, the development of ethical trade and the social responsibilities of companies are or should be common preoccupations. The Democrats recognise as we do – the European Left – that the promotion of international social norms is a necessity. On the environment, the evolution of American public opinion could engender changes in the position of the United States.

On these bases, a new partnership is possible on both sides of the Atlantic. It could be articulated around three principal axes.

The first axis, is the affirmation of Europe as a political and strategic actor on its own. No rebalancing of transatlantic relations will be possible without a better coordination of Europeans and without a reinforcing of their capacity for collective action. Europeans should in particular provide themselves with credible means of defence. I am favourable to the development of European military means, by a pooling of military procurement. In the longer term, our horizon should be the constitution of a real European army. At the heart of NATO, Europe should step by step constitute an integrated pillar.

On this basis – and this is the second axis – Americans and Europeans should engage in active cooperation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Since 1995, the European Union has launched the Barcelona process – a strategy of association for Mediterranean countries. Recently, the United States advanced its project of the 'Greater Middle East'. They need discussion. The association of our efforts would allow us to build a bridge between the West and the East. It would constitute the best antidote to a 'Clash of Civilisations'. A common policy by our two continents could be launched without delay within the Geneva agreements: the situation between the Israelis and the Palestinians must be changed, what has been concluded with the Geneva agreements would allow us to do this.

Final axis: form a true social and economic transatlantic dialogue. Beyond trade talks in the strictest sense, there is no lack of subjects of common interest. I mentioned these at the outset: better steering of the euro-dollar exchange rate; responses to outsourcing; the financing of development; the struggle against global warming. Let us try to advance on each of these points and to propose new solutions.

This new partnership would re-enforce a positive relationship with the United States and it would

demonstrate that Europe can work concretely for world stability. It would re-launch the European project: the European army could provide the basis for a new deepening; in Mediterranean cooperation, it would contribute to the fleshing out of the third circle that Europe must construct, together with its new members. All this would have seemed utopian a few months ago. Recent developments, in Iraq as in Europe, and the hope for change in the United States, allow us to seriously envisage an alternative in the United States, and permit us to envisage seriously the re-launch of cooperation and transatlantic friendship. We are stronger when we are united. It is imperative that once again Europe and America are able to advance together.

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