



Some remarks on Trans-Atlantic Convergences and Divergences

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Only a few short years have passed since we bade farewell to the 20th century and ushered in a new millennium. Generalised assessments always include the question of whether the glass is half empty or half full; and so there have been differing evaluations put forth on the outcomes of the passing century and the prospects of the new one. However, we can quite safely say that we bid farewell to the 20th century – the century of two world conflicts, totalitarian ideologies and systems, of the holocaust, concentration camps, the gulag – with a sense of relief. The cold war came to an end, the Soviet empire collapsed, and the spread of democracy and freedom around the globe seemed to justify proclamations of the advent of a Hegelian “end of history”. The United Nations Millennium Declaration announced the undertaking of new and effective action that would liberate the world’s population from the plagues of hunger, poverty and fear.

Today, these hopes have vanished. More than ever before we perceive a chaos in international relations and the particular fragility of world peace. The events of September 11 did not cause this change, but they both revealed it and catalysed it. They demonstrated that the world order was powerless in the face of hatred and fanaticism, that the balance of mutually assured nuclear destruction no longer exerted a stabilising influence in international politics, and that access to weapons of mass destruction had become absurdly easy. It became all too obvious that international political and military strategies were insufficient to cope with the challenges of the day and would have to be defined anew. This is the

context in which we should consider the present crisis in Euro-Atlantic ties and the crisis in relations between the United States and Europe. It is not worth it to subscribe to the new catastrophist philosophy that posits the disintegration of American power; or a permanent marginalisation of Europe on the international political arena, or permanent axiological differences between the American political style - which “comes from Mars” – and the European one, which “is from Venus”; or even the „clash of civilisations” between America and Europe. The modern world is more interdependent than ever before, and this has far-reaching implications for America, for Europe and for their mutual relations.

I

The last decade of the 20th century showed to what a surprising degree the world had been unprepared for the end of the cold war: there was neither a clear exit strategy from the old system nor a definition of the main parameters of a new political strategy. One of the few certainties in world politics in the Nineties was the key role that the United States played in all major crisis situations. The U.S. fulfilled this role effectively – or let us perhaps say, keeping in mind the status of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, did so in most cases. This role resulted not only from the United States’ willingness to act, but also from the attitude of international public opinion toward a superpower which no longer had a counterweight on the international stage. Using Joseph F. Nye’s terminology, I would say that in those years, America’s “soft power” reached its apogee. In 1990 the Gulf War allowed President George Bush to assemble an impressive political coalition, empowered not only by a clear international mandate, but also by the considerable support of public opinion: America could be trusted. It was the same in 1995-1996, when as member of the International Commission on the Balkans established by the Aspen Institute and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, I took part in talks with various ethnic and social communities in the former Yugoslavia: everywhere I encountered the belief that only the United States could guarantee a resolution of the crisis. Significantly, this unwavering trust in America was communicated to

a commission, the majority of which was made up of Europeans. Today there is much evidence that this situation has changed dramatically.

The debate on transatlantic relations does not concern only particular nations or political elites, but also general public opinion. There is certainly a feedback relationship in this area. The anti-American tone adopted by European countries in their politics and political discourse, as well as the anti-European – actually, mostly anti-French and anti-German – tone heard from the other side of the Atlantic, have created a practically unprecedented state of mutual ill-will. (Simon Serfaty described the dialogue between America and Europe, as well as Europe and America as: „I lead you, hear you and like you – and neither do I.”). This is not just a question of faulty political discourse, but also an expression of mutual distrust. What has happened is really a weakening of the appreciation of the Euro-Atlantic community’s common interests, which during the cold war had served as a bulwark against the communist threat. European and American short-term economic and political interests have also diverged to a greater degree. Such divergences are unavoidable, but surely their interdependency - commerce between America and Europe accounts for nearly one-half of the world’s international trade and the enormous extent of their mutual direct investment - should also create and strengthen a feeling of common interest. Instead, however, this feeling has weakened.

Recent world opinion polls – The Pew Global Attitudes Project and German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Trends 2003 Survey – show a disturbing erosion of mutual trust and friendly attitudes. There is much truth in the assertion that the mass media on both sides of the Atlantic have had a lot to do with creating this state of events, but the actual reasons have to do mainly with the development of the situation in the Greater Middle East – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iraq, and the internal tensions within the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

II

The first reactions to the tragic events of September 11th did not foretell this rise of tensions. On the first page of the French *Le Monde* daily – a newspaper that can hardly be accused of being pro-American – the day’s headline proclaimed: „We Are All Americans.” Even more significant was the reaction of the North Atlantic Council which, led by Secretary-General Lord George Robertson, declared its full support for the US, going so far as to invoke Article 5 of the Washington Treaty in reaction to the terrorist attack on the United States. Subsequently, however, came mutual disagreement intensified over the situation in Iraq and the decision to wage war there. The fiasco of the efforts undertaken within the UN to provide an international mandate for this operation, as well as the problems with getting the North Atlantic Council to accept Turkey’s request for security guarantees if it found itself threatened during the Iraq operation, demonstrated the existence of a crisis in Euro-Atlantic relations. The fact that this occurred at a time when four European Union member-states were on the Security Council demonstrates that this was also an intra-European crisis.

Even exercising caution in judgement, we can say that Euro-Atlantic tensions are currently weakening. NATO has successfully started work on redefining its operational model, and the several rounds of expansion it has planned are proof that this most powerful alliance of our time has not lost its attractiveness to potential members. Even if the premise that “the mission makes the coalition” were to become the principle of modern strategy, the North Atlantic Alliance seems to have an enduring mission that lasts beyond short-term challenges, while at the same allowing for effective response to such challenges, both within NATO’s territory and „out-of-area”. NATO’s taking over responsibility for Afghanistan fully bears this out.

What is equally important is the recent experience of the Security Council’s work on its last resolution (No 1511) on Iraq. The Security Council’s unanimity on this issue is not only a great personal success of US Secretary of State Colin Powell, but also proof that America and Europe can reach understanding on issues of global importance.

III

It is necessary to clearly define the role that the progressing European integration; the development of the European Union's political dimension; and the deepening of Europe's internal unity in the course of work on a European constitution, should play in the new system of relations between America and Europe. Support for European integration had always predominated in American politics. Today this is changing: the support is being replaced by doubts as to whether this integration of Europe is really in America's interest, and whether the United States should not instead support the „desegregation” of the European Union, i.e. a division of Europe.

Poland extended its political support for the military operation in Iraq because the Poles trust America, they feel that their newly gained alliance with the USA is important, and they themselves have experienced the world's indifference toward the plight of nations stripped of their freedom and put under the yoke of a totalitarian system. We also undertook the difficult challenge of participating directly in the building of peace and democracy in Iraq. However, I don't think this should be construed as Poland's coming out against Europe and in favour of America. Poland's identity as a country is a European one, and taking part in European integration and in the political strengthening of the EU is in Poland's national interest. This, I believe, is also the motivation of the other European countries that took the same position as Poland. We share the strong belief that Europe and America need each other, as borne out by the history of the entire 20th century.

The most important feature shaping the current situation in Europe is not the appearance of new divisions, but on the contrary, their overcoming through unification. The current round of EU expansion that will lead to 10 new members joining the Union constitutes a final departure from the divisions introduced in Yalta and a real unification of Europe. This is what

the nations subjugated by the Soviet Union had been waiting for, this is what Poland's Solidarity movement and the anticommunist opposition in other Central and Eastern European countries fought for. The United States should welcome this unification process because it did much to make it possible. Regardless of the differences within the European Union – after all, Europe has always been known for its propensity to differ – it is the unification process that has become the trend of the times. And it is a united Europe that can become the United States' most important partner on the world stage – a partner, as opposed to a vassal. Isn't it in the United States' interest to have the European Union - as a superpower - become just such a partner.

It is worth noting that according to the German Marshall Fund survey I referred to earlier, as many as 71 percent of European respondents would like to see the European Union become a superpower (although so far, only half would agree to raising military expenditures), which means that the present process of strengthening the Union's political dimension can count on the understanding and support of its citizens.

Certainly, Europe and America still differ in many of their positions, and even in their basic values. Europeans are less willing to put their trust in the self-regulating role of the market and expect the state to ensure a certain level of social welfare; the Americans are less convinced of the need to separate religion and government: these are significant cultural differences. However, they have only limited bearing on political strategies. Of much deeper political consequence is the opposition between American unilateralism and Europe's multilateralist approach. Although in 2003 both Europeans and Americans feel less confidence in the UN than they did the previous year, they differ clearly in their acceptance for bypassing it (the Pew Project), while at the same time agreeing that the organisation should be strengthened (the GMF Survey). A reform of the United Nations system, involving both changes to the UN Charter and in the way the organisation operates – as boldly proposed by Secretary General Kofi Annan – could remove the radical differences between America's and Europe's attitude toward the United Nations. Both unilateralism and multilateralism are

pragmatic positions – orientations and not political doctrines – and so may provide a practical groundwork for a greater co-ordination of positions.

To ignore the strategic divergences between Europe and America is to hide one's head in the sand. The only way to counteract these divergences is to accept them, but still appreciate the importance of the common purpose that connects Americans and Europeans. Both the proposed European political strategy presented by Javier Solana in the spring of 2003 and George W. Bush's Krakow speech, offer indications of the base for debate on common European and American interests. This, however, requires political will and courage in thinking like those demonstrated by George C. Marshall in the years following World War Two.

IV

The strategic differences between Europe and the United States were most recently revealed by the situation in the Middle East – both in Iraq and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is against this dramatic background that transatlantic ties must be reconstructed. Scenarios of appropriate solutions are already becoming apparent.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the dynamic for a peaceful resolution may be provided by the recognition of both nations' right to exist, the implementation of successive "road maps," and the use of the "quatuor" formula. This scenario should be supplemented by a clear division between the two states by an international peace-keeping force – this solution is supported by a majority of public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic. Instead of a conflict-generating competition between Europe and America, we need understanding and partnership that can lead to peace – or enforce it.

In the matter of Iraq, differences in opinion - both between Europe and America and within Europe itself - are obvious. However, everybody agrees that after the overthrow of the bloody dictatorship of Saddam Hussein Iraq needs peace – this is the only possible solution, since chaos in

Iraq would have a catastrophic impact on the region and the entire world. Avoiding this catastrophe requires America and Europe to co-operate; in this case the deepening of their differences would have disastrous results.

Although in both these cases the United Nations proved powerless, it remains a necessary force for lending international legitimacy to actions. Several months ago, Javier Solana foresaw this in his Albert H. Gordon Lecture: „not everyone sees the war as legitimate – a fact we need to face. We must make sure that the peace is legitimate.” I fully share this view. It should be the objective and responsibility shared by America, Europe and the United Nations. Security Council Resolution 1511 on restoring order to Iraq is the first step in this direction. It is now time to take the next step. The convergence of political strategies within transatlantic relations is now a question of political willpower.