

Summary of Discussions

SWP / AICGS Working Group

"New Stimulus or Integration Backlash? EU Enlargement and Transatlantic Relations "

2nd Colloquium, Berlin, June 4, 2004
at Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik

The Outlook for the Relationship between the New EU and the US

From the US perspective, EU enlargement is a positive step for Europe, but at the same time, it will make working with the EU more problematic, unpredictable and complex. There is a strong likelihood that there will be multiple competing camps within the enlarged EU and the US hopes that these will include some with more Atlanticist inclinations. Until the EU has sorted out internally its approach to foreign policy, the US will primarily continue to work bilaterally with individual member states for all issues except for trade which forms a highly integrated policy area of the EU and will therefore be discussed with the EU level, i.e. the EU Commission. As far as the US is concerned, the EU as an entity still will not be capable enough to the point where the US counts on its resources in terms of political security issues.

A key question is what kind of EU the US prefers. Does the US want a militarily strong EU, a possible ally, or does the US want to maintain its dominance? The US seems to be interested in a wider EU, but not a deeply integrated one.

It is not clear that the new "Atlanticist caucus" will have much influence within the EU, as the US hopes, in part because the protagonists (UK, Italy, Portugal and CEE countries) do not have enough voting power, financial means or personnel resources. Moreover, past expansions (especially Portugal, Spain and Greece) have shown that the views of the new members will grow closer to the older members over time. However, the majority of new members are more likely to act as a bloc on budgetary issues, i.e. structural funds and they will likely resist more and faster harmonization on social policy and fiscal policy.

The new members tend to see the EU as a regional rather than a global actor, giving priority to increased relations with the eastern and southern neighbors (Malta, Cyprus and partly Slovenia). However, they would not necessarily oppose global action (although they might not participate), unless they believed that it was taking attention away from unfinished business closer to home, i.e. Transdniestria.

Each new member state is in the process of defining its strategic goals because the last two goals of NATO and EU membership have been fulfilled and it is not clear where to go from there. This lack of strategic vision will complicate the development of the EU's common foreign and security policies.

The Reform of ESDP and EU-NATO Cooperation in the larger EU

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The EU has been importing security for years and now ESDP is a chance to export security as part of a new transatlantic security compact. Such a compact would shape expectations and set the direction for EU-US relations that would transcend personalities in the administrations.

It would seem that the US has no other partner, other than the EU, with whom it can address global security issues. However, the EU does not—and presently cannot—act as a single entity. The use of military force will remain a national decision, not a European one. As a result, the US focuses on the bilateral relationships rather than with the EU as a whole. It needs to find a balance between cultivating both relationships.

Part of what hinders the direct EU-US relationship is the fact that the EU talks a lot about having capabilities but seems unwilling to pay for them. The lack of a financial commitment to the military ultimately places significant limitations on ESDP. So long as EU does not have its own defense budget, the member states will continue to act more or less independently.

The main practical problem between ESDP and NATO is not one of capabilities; it is more of a problem of manpower. Smaller countries have even bigger problems because they don't have enough people to leave in NATO and set aside for EU battle group operations. There are some beginnings on pooling of assets, etc. but it will not happen very quickly.

On a political level, the US seems to be interested in an autonomous EU only where US has no direct interest, i.e. Congo. Where there is a shared interest, the US does not really want to see an autonomous EU. However, there may be a point when the EU will want to use its forces and the US will be opposed; the US must prepare for it and accept it. As the EU remains committed to the UN system, any EU move towards military operations is likely to be conducted under the authority of UN law. Transatlantic conflict on the need and the activation of military forces remains to be channeled through the UN system. Overall, transatlantic tension will not lead to the end of NATO, but perhaps a more mature relationship.

Impact of CEE Countries on CFSP and Transatlantic Relations

Most CEE countries have not fully developed their own foreign policy thinking—apart from joining NATO and the EU—and so they will follow the EU on most issues. For the past several years these countries have been practically identical to the EU-15 on many foreign policy issues, especially with regard to UN voting and on transatlantic trade issues. But now that they are inside their behavior could change: did they adopt their policies because of a genuine confluence of interests or did they just want to make sure that they were admitted to the EU?

Although most CEE countries have strong relations with the US, those relations will have little or no impact on CFSP unless an issue arises where there is a direct conflict with US interests.

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However, even if and when the US position might induce conflict within the EU, the CEE countries need to evaluate their own positions according to the binding commitments of the EU. The heads of state and government of the EU-25 have recently adopted the draft Constitutional treaty (*provisional consolidated version of the draft Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, Document CIG 86/04*, Brussels, 25 June 2004) which provides that, in Article I-40, the EU may use "the operational capacity [...] on missions outside the Union for peace-keeping, conflict prevention and strengthening international security in *accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter*." Moreover, "if a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power, in accordance with Article 51 of the United Nations Charter." Finally, according to Article III-206, Member States which are also members of the United Nations Security Council "will, in the execution of their functions, defend the positions and the interests of the Union, without prejudice to their responsibilities under the United Nations Charter." And "when the Union has defined a position on a subject which is on the United Nations Security Council agenda, those Member States which sit on the Security Council shall request that the Union Minister for Foreign Affairs be asked to present the Union's position."

Today there are different shades of pro-Americanism among the 10 new members, usually in proportion to anti-Russian sentiment, with the Baltic countries being the most anti-Russian. Where for the EU-15 the most important foreign policy concern is the Middle East, for the CEE member states, the predominant concern is Russia. In this context, the "Letter of 8" and "Vilnius 10" can be viewed not so much as support for the war in Iraq but rather as support for maintaining transatlantic relations as a security belt against Russia.

This general attitude towards Russia is not likely to change in the near term. Although the dangers of aggressive Russian nationalism are real—nationalists won 20% of the December parliamentary vote—there is still a very strong asymmetry in the perception of Russia. Until the CEE countries and the rest of the EU come to a common understanding about the threat posed by Russia, the US will continue to be an influential "outsider" because the CEE countries see the US as a guarantor of security in Europe. These overriding security concerns lead the CEE countries – as well as the UK, Portugal, Italy, the Netherlands and Denmark – to argue that CFSP/ESDP should be compatible with NATO and not the other way around. They see EU-US relations, not EU-NATO relations, as the key to their security.

The eastern orientation of the CEE countries also creates differences of opinion with regard to the EU's Neighborhood Policy. The Baltics and Poland seem to ignore the association of the Maghreb countries with the EU and are more supportive of EU candidacy for the Ukraine whereas the others are more focused on the Balkans and the integration of the Stability Pact into the EU's Neighborhood Policy agenda.

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Eventually, however, the new member states will see that they are in a safe haven within the EU and gradually feel comfortable and trust the EU – even in the face of Russia. In addition, the CEE countries could have no choice but to put their trust in the EU if they become suspicious about what Washington is doing with Russia, i.e. if there is a perception of fraternization.

Wider Europe

The past and future transformation in eastern Europe is mainly due to the influence of EU and NATO and the desire to one day join those organizations. The overlapping character of specific transformation tasks seem to be mutually reinforcing: the EU and NATO seem to be asking for many of the same standards to be met: NATO increasingly requires reforms in the political sector while the EU is becoming more involved in defense.

US interests in Wider Europe are determined by general national security and economic interests plus democratic values. Key US interests include: political stability, political independence for former soviet states, especially Ukraine, in order to prevent reassertion of Russian dominance, economic access to these countries for US exports and investors, support of US foreign and security policy goals, democracy and human rights and territorial integrity. These interests are largely congruent with EU policy and the integration of eastern countries into Euro Atlantic institutions.

There are, however, potential conflicts with the EU. The US does not want to lose business opportunities due to the creation of exclusive partnerships between the EU and its new neighbors. The US has tended to be tougher than the EU on Russia. The EU views Russia more as a valuable economic partner, source of energy and potential stabilizing or destabilizing force, while the US sees it more as strategic geopolitical partner or rival. The US is applying pressure on EU to integrate even more countries into the EU, especially Turkey, which in some ways conflicts with EU neighborhood policy which is designed to push off further accessions.

There seems to be a general dissatisfaction with foreign policy efforts on the EU level. The EU is criticized for either not have a coherent foreign policy or for formulating theoretical plans that it does not implement. From the US perspective, it would be better for the EU to focus regionally (Belarus, Ukraine, Caucuses, the Balkans) and get successes there before it attempts to become a global power. The practical considerations of having to vet foreign policy with 25 member states means that EU foreign policy might represents the lowest common denominator unless rule making becomes more flexible. There is also room for the EU to become more “activist” in the implementation of its foreign policy and accept the fact that although intervention may not always work, it is sometimes necessary to effect change. However, without a military to back up its statements, the EU can not be very effective. Plans alone do not have enough leverage to force change.

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In the Middle East, the US needs the support of the EU if its Broader Middle East Initiative is to succeed. There are no guarantees that the initiative will work, but there is no viable alternative. The EU member states need to define what they can do to help resolve some of the issues within the Middle East and the US needs to listen and accept their help, especially with regard to involving Arab States in any plan for the Middle East.