

## **Report**

Panel Discussion, 5 May 2010

### **America and Europe: Transatlantic Ties or Global Responsibility?**

Melanie Pichler

#### **Panelists:**

Daniel Hamilton (Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation, John Hopkins University)

Heinz Gärtner (oiip, University of Vienna)

#### **Moderation:**

Christian Ultsch (Die Presse)

Approximately 60 people attended the panel discussion at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs – oiip to discuss challenges and changes in the transatlantic ties.

After opening remarks from Christian Ultsch **Daniel Hamilton** started the panel discussion with a reference to the title of the event as a false choice. Today the very nature of transatlantic relations is about global issues and there is no either transatlantic ties or global responsibility. This change is embedded in a new world order where new problems with global reach arise. Whereas in former times the transatlantic relations were mainly about stabilizing Europe in the context of a bipolar world priorities today have shifted.

Although there is a common value-oriented basis between Europe and America that is based on democracy and free markets both regions see problems and challenges in the

relationship. On the one hand many Europeans look at the US as a steadily declining power as other regions gain greater importance. Despite the popularity and support for Obama from Europe there is a growing frustration because nothing has really happened. For the USA on the other hand, Europe is not really a functional partner as it has too much problems to solve on its own territory and does not have a common voice in many crucial topics.

Hamilton pointed out that the emergence of global problems like climate change, international terrorism, etc. call for new strategies. These global problems cannot be faced alone but America needs a strong partner. The EU-US relationship is therefore no longer sufficient as the EU is a rather uneven partner. For many topics the EU as a common actor is not present (military, Middle East, Russia) whereas in other areas it plays a crucial role (climate change, development assistance, migration politics).

**Heinz Gärtner** started his remarks in support of the title of the discussion. Of course it would have been easier to put an “and” between the phrases but the “or” highlights the challenges we are facing today in terms of transatlantic ties.

Gärtner pointed out that the current situation is a unique and interesting one at the same time. Both the bipolarity and the unipolarity in international relations are gone. So the current situation is difficult to describe. One could speak about a multipolar world, an unpolar world, the importance of informal agreements or an interpolar world.

As Hamilton did, Gärtner referred to new and global topics as important issues for the transatlantic relations. Beside traditional areas like trade or democracy there are global problems like non-proliferation, climate change, poverty, demographic changes as well as regional topics with a global reach (Iran, North Korea, Middle East). If Europe does not participate in these issues it will become politically powerless. Another important topic for the future will be new security strategies as there is a shift from traditional military strategies that focus basically on the territory to concepts of human security.

Gärtner agreed with Hamilton on common norms and principles (democracy, free market) between Europe and the US. Although these economic and political ties are traditional and important they are actually neither sufficient nor necessary to address the mentioned global problems. In this context the political strategy of Obama is interesting and crucial because he goes beyond the traditional ties and reaches out for new partners. He speaks with China, Russia or even Iran as nothing can be done without them in terms of climate change, non-proliferation or regional problems in Asia.

In the following discussion **Christian Ultsch** tied in with this point and asked about the actual importance of Europe and the US, if for global problems – as we could see in Copenhagen –

nothing seems to be possible without China and India. **Daniel Hamilton** agreed that there is a new constellation in which Europe and America alone can't get anything done anymore but it's the same way around as well. The two regions remain important but there is a range of states as well as civil society organizations that have to become strategic partners to solve the global problems. **Heinz Gärtner** responded that non-state actors are important but not as important as we thought them to become. Eventually states make the decisions and therefore are the main players to address. Furthermore he agreed that not only climate change but also the threat of nuclear terrorism or non-proliferation cannot be solved without allies, especially with China, India, and Russia.

The next discussion round focused on the US interest in relations to Europe as the common threat of the Cold War is gone. **Daniel Hamilton** agreed that Europe is no longer the problem. The problems that America faces today lie mainly in Asia (North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Middle East). In fact Europe could or should be of help in these issues but does not really engage. The main problem for the US is the ever changing and diversified position of the European Union and that Europe has no common strategy regarding many major challenges. **Heinz Gärtner** agreed on this point. Germany, France and Great Britain are still the big players in the EU and often have quite different positions to global topics and regional problems. This situation strengthens bilateral relations rather than common European positions.

An interesting point was brought to the discussion from the audience about Russia as the most important unsolved problem for transatlantic relations. **Daniel Hamilton** agreed that one of the biggest challenges in Europe is Russia. But the major problem is not the difference between American and European position towards Russia but the absence of any common European position at all.

At the end of the panel discussion possibilities to learn from each other were discussed. **Daniel Hamilton** pointed out that a learning process between Europe and America actually happens every day but in informal ways. For example there is a growing movement for passive houses as well as car sharing models that are based on European best practices. **Heinz Gärtner** highlighted not only the possibility for learning from each other but also the potential for shared competences, for example in military and security politics. Whereas Europe needs the US in traditional warfare, European's competences in nation building, peace keeping etc. are crucial for future challenges.

To sum up the panelists agreed that we are moving towards a new world in which the traditional concepts and strategies do not apply any more. Although traditional transatlantic

ties remain important we have to reach out for new partners and new strategies to meet the requirements of global problems and constellations.