

Transatlantic Relations at the Start of the 21st Century

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The cold war has not left the stage to a world of peace, harmony and universal understanding. Globalization, accelerating at a breathtaking pace over the last twenty years, has created tremendous new challenges. Transatlantic relations that were geared to the cold war era, should evolve and adapt to these new realities. The current contrast between a globally active and interventionist US, with public opinion supporting a unilateral and power-based approach, and an inward looking Europe trying to build a system of governance based on constant negotiations and compromise has made transatlantic relations difficult and is more fundamental than just the disagreement that emerged over the nature of policy toward Iraq. The challenges of the future require both the United States and Europe to alter their current stance. The United States will soon recognize that despite all its military might, it needs the active support of other major players on the world scene to protect peace, stability and its own security. Europe, on the other hand, must realize that it must turn outward again, that it cannot simply ignore threats to stability and decency. Turkey has a key role to play in helping promote the right kind of transatlantic spirit. Turkish foreign policy should rise to the challenge by looking beyond our traditional narrowly defined interests, to make Turkey into a global leader in the realm of the ideas and values that will build the 21st Century.

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In a fundamental sense the 21st century started in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall. The era of ideological, military and economic rivalry between two alliances built around two superpowers ended more rapidly and more peacefully than most expected. In May 2003, fourteen years later, I was present at a reception in Berlin where the German social democrats were celebrating their 140th anniversary. There were many prominent guests that day at the reception, including European Prime Ministers such as Tony Blair from Britain and Goran Persson from Sweden. Chancellor Schroeder singled out one guest, however, for special thanks from him and from the German people. It was Mikhail Gorbachov who had ordered Russian troops not to shoot during those fateful days fourteen years ago.

While it was Gorbachov`s realism and humanity that prevented a possible bloodbath that could have taken place not just in Berlin but throughout Eastern Europe, it was the United States that had protected western and southern Europe from the Stalinist Soviet threat, which had been greatest after right after the second world war but had continued for decades. Turkey, at the southeastern most corner of Europe had benefited from that protection. Turkey also had contributed a great deal to the alliance, including the second highest number of casualties among the allied troops in the Korean War.

Today we live in a very different world. Neither Europe nor the Turkey needs US protection from a Soviet threat. The Soviet Union has collapsed and while Russia remains a significant military power, its per capita income is below Turkey`s and it is struggling to establish a market economy rather than trying to export a totalitarian system of government. The Soviet threat has disappeared and with it one of the defining characteristics of transatlantic relations. History has not ended, however, contrary to what Francis Fukuyama had thought and hoped for in the beginning of the 1990`s. The cold war has not left the stage to a world of peace, harmony and universal understanding. It is true that liberal democracy and market economy have become the twin systemic features that almost all societies today aspire to. In that sense Fukuyama was right. But globalization, accelerating at a breathtaking pace over the last twenty years, has created tremendous new challenges.

The spread of new technologies and the increasing integration of the world economy has stimulated the diffusion of knowledge and unleashed an unprecedented potential of productivity growth and economic expansion. At the same time it has increased volatility and the frequency of serious financial crisis and widened the gap between the richest and the poorest peoples and countries. Globalization has also increased the vulnerability of all nations to the threats from terrorism, crime, infectious disease and environmental degradation.

On September 11, 2001 the terrible terrorist attack on the United States showed everyone how lawlessness and extremism that was allowed to develop in the remote

mountains of Afghanistan, amidst poverty and ignorance, could have devastating consequences tens of thousands of miles away in the financial and political centers of the advanced world. The nature of the threats that endanger security, peace and economic progress has changed, but powerful threats exist and must be dealt with. The possibility of terrorists getting hold of chemical, biological or nuclear weapons does exist and could lead to a catastrophe much worse than September 11 anywhere in the world. Epidemiologists consider the probability of an infectious disease much more contagious than AIDS emerging as quite high, with the potential of killing more people than died in the world wars of the past. In the economic and financial sphere lack of policy coordination is leading to excessive volatility and causing employment and income to be well below potential. Transatlantic relations that were geared to the cold war era, should evolve and adapt to these new realities.

The shock of September 11 was deeply felt throughout the world. In Turkey people from all walks of life and spanning the entire political spectrum spontaneously expressed their solidarity with the people of the United States. In the United States, however, the shock was of a nature that many Europeans could not fully understand. The United States had not faced warfare on its continental territory for more than a century. In Europe millions had died within the living memory of generations still alive. The memory of these horrors has led to a deep-seated pacifism in post-war Europe which has greatly facilitated the building of the transnational European Union. In the United States, September 11 gave impetus to the plans of projecting long-term American power globally that had been worked on by some leading thinkers and opinion makers for some time, moving a potentially isolationist Republican administration deeply into international engagement. The new global activism of the United States relies heavily and rather openly on the fact that the US will have overwhelming military superiority over any potential rival or group of rivals for the foreseeable future. This superiority has reached a level which seems to free the US in purely military terms from the need for any ally; reflecting this degree of superiority, the US appears more unilateralist and more unwilling to work through international institutions than at any time in recent history.

The opposite can be said for Europe. The challenges of building the institutions and mechanisms of governance for an enlarged Europe to include the Eastern European countries and Turkey and then also the western Balkans, are absorbing almost all the attention of public opinion and of policy makers. Recent examples of this ongoing process include the adoption of the Euro in eleven EU countries, something Alan Greenspan thought impossible just a few years ago, and, now, the draft new constitution proposed by the European Convention after a painstaking but ultimately successful 16 month process of generating compromise. This is an amazing and remarkable experiment in building supranational governance based not on conquest but on consent unprecedented in history. Coming on the heels of difficult decolonization, this process of building of the European Union has turned Europe inward and has led to a lot of soul searching in Europe, often a little oblivious of the outside world. It is important to stress here that the objective is not the creation of a new European superstate, but the development of an institutional and legal framework of cooperative transnational

governance that allows nations to preserve their individuality but helps them integrate and harmonize their policies in a way that responds to the demands of the 21st century.

The current contrast between a globally active and interventionist US, with public opinion supporting a unilateral and power-based approach, and an inward looking Europe trying to build a system of governance based on constant negotiations and compromise has made transatlantic relations difficult and is more fundamental than just the disagreement that emerged over the nature of policy toward Iraq.

The challenges of the future require both the United States and Europe to alter their current stance.

The United States will soon recognize that despite all its military might, it needs the active support of other major players on the world scene to protect peace, stability and its own security. Three hundred million Americans cannot hope to manage or govern a complex world of soon seven billion people. It is one thing to deploy force, and destroy conventional military targets, it is another to control large areas of land or establish functioning democracies in countries such as Afghanistan or Iraq. Formidable challenges remain throughout the world, not least linked to the inherently unstable nature of most of the regimes in the Middle East. International activism, if it is to be successful, also requires large amounts of financial resources, a burden which the US taxpayer is quite unwilling to shoulder. Whether it is Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine and, tomorrow, North Korea or other trouble spots, the United States very much needs both the financial support of Europe and the moral legitimacy that can only come from a multilateral and broad-based approach to solving global problems. The United States needs global legitimacy also to protect its own citizens and its own security.

Europe, on the other hand, must realize that it must turn outward again, that it cannot simply ignore threats to stability and decency, as it did for too long even in Europe itself during the Yugoslav wars, and that it must develop a common foreign and security policy to translate the potential influence it has into effective and timely action. Europe must also show how the cooperative and gradualist approach it has successfully used to build the Union can be an example for all in the search for a more democratic, more legitimate and more effective form of global governance.

I do believe that transatlantic relations will overcome the Iraq crisis because the United States needs Europe, Europe needs the United States and the world needs the leading stabilizing role of transatlantic cooperation. It will be a different relationship than in the past, more balanced with an increasingly more coordinated Europe, and hopefully a more sincere strategic focus than in the past age of cold war rivalry, on promoting a common set of democratic values and standards across the world, while respecting diversity and cultural pluralism.

Turkey has a key role to play in helping promote the right kind of transatlantic spirit. Through our location and historic roots in Southeastern Europe, through the values we share with other Europeans, through our extensive economic relations with Europe

and because we embarked on the European “project” since the early 1960s, Turkey is part of Europe and will become part of the European Union. This will ultimately make Europe stronger, more diverse and a more effective global player. It will be instrumental in making Europe more outward looking.

Turkey has also been, for decades, a reliable friend and ally of the United States, joining the US in many causes, including Korea, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. While European, Turkey will want the transatlantic relationship to be cooperative, not antagonistic. Perhaps most importantly, a Turkey that has become secure, prosperous and fully modern through its integration into Europe, will greatly contribute to the security of Europeans and Americans alike, by setting an example that will build a strong bridge between the first and third worlds and resonate with particular strength in the Moslem countries of the Middle East and Central Asia who are searching for democracy and modernity. Turkish foreign policy should rise to the challenge by looking beyond our traditional narrowly defined interests, to make Turkey into a global leader in the realm of the ideas and values that will build the 21st Century.

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