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## The EU-US Partnership: Delivering Results?

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### *The Themes and Findings*

- **The Impact of the US Congressional Elections** – the immediate impact of the elections on transatlantic relations will be small although US foreign policy is likely to evolve.
- **The Middle East and Iran** – there remains a gap between the EU and US approaches towards Iran.
- **Energy Security** – the sector is increasingly vulnerable. A transatlantic dialogue on the issue would be desirable.
- **Is the Transatlantic Partnership Delivering Results?** – Mixed record and the most difficult challenges (Iran, the Arab-Israeli conflict) are still unresolved.

### *Organisational Context*

This year's EUISS Transatlantic Conference concentrated on the state and effectiveness of co-operation between the US and the EU at a time of domestic change in the United States following the mid-term Congressional elections.

The new format of the 2006 conference was one of the results of the expansion of the EUISS transatlantic programme and the growing focus on outreach and communication with our partners across the Atlantic. The following organisational innovations were introduced into this conference:

- **Venue:** for the first time the EUISS transatlantic conference was held in Washington DC at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).
- **Transatlantic Partner:** the conference was organised in co-operation with the Center for Transatlantic Relations at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (CTR-SAIS), which is a partner institution of the EUISS.

- **Outreach:** A considerable number of Congressional and State Department staff (both senior and junior) were invited to the event. Among the US speakers were: Congressman Van Hollen (D-Maryland), senior figures from the States Department (James Jeffrey, Kurt Volker), a National Security Council official (Tracy McKibben) and various figures from think tanks as well as from the media, including *Washington Post* columnist Dan Balz.
- **Timing:** the conference was held less than two weeks after the Congressional elections, allowing the participants to reflect on the impact of this political change in Washington. The timing of the event was also coordinated with the Finish Presidency.

### ***Congressional Elections and Transatlantic Relations***

The Congressional elections on 7 November 2006 have certainly proved to be an event of historical proportions in US politics. The Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives for the first time since 1994, and of the Senate for the first time since 2002. The Democrats did not lose a single seat and made gains in all races (including gubernatorial races). Very few commentators predicted that the Republicans would lose control of both Houses and especially of the Senate (where only one third of the seats were contested).

The panel, consisting of both liberal and conservative commentators, addressed separately the reasons for the Democratic victory in the elections on 7 November 2006 and their impact on US foreign policy, as well as the elections' implications for transatlantic relations.

#### Why have the Democrats won?

- As clearly evidenced by pollsters these elections, unusually for Congressional races, were dominated by **national issues** and especially by the issues of corruption, the war in Iraq and discontent with President Bush.
- The Republican-dominated **Congress** has been perceived as **ineffective**, light on legislating and not performing its role as a check on the Executive. The Republican Congress failed to exercise scrutiny and oversight regarding the Administration's Iraq policy and internal security measures. In other words, this Congress often limited its role to 'rubber stamping' some of the President's most controversial decisions.
- The Republicans (GOP) lost their advantage in terms of the national security discourse. In 2004 Bush's message to 'stay the course' in Iraq proved successful. In the run-up to these (2006) elections Bush argued that voting for the Democrats was tantamount to aiding terrorists but on this occasion this argument was rejected by the electorate. In other words the **electorate no longer accepts that there is a link between 9/11 and Iraq**.

### The Impact of the Elections on US Foreign Policy

- The elections were to a considerable degree a referendum on Bush's Iraq policy. The result means that the electorate expects a 'change of course' and it appears that the President has begun to accept that some (still rather timid) change is indeed needed. The appointment of **Robert Gates** at the Defense Department is the clearest evidence of this.
- The Democrats went to the elections demanding a radical change of policy on Iraq but, despite their victory, their powers are limited and there is no consensus in the party on the issue. It is also clear that although the Congress could force a decision on the matter by cutting funds for the troops in Iraq, this would be politically suicidal for the Democrats and therefore it will not happen. However, the Democrats can influence the Administration's Iraq policy indirectly by extensive **oversight** of how the government handles Iraq, and indeed this they have promised to do.
- The elections have increased pressure on the Administration to consider the recommendations of the **Baker/Hamilton** Iraq study group. These will include scaling down and eventually withdrawing combat troops by 2008 as well as a shift from combat to training and supporting the Iraqi Army. The study group will also recommend diplomatic engagement with Iran and Syria. Some panellists, however, questioned the impact of the study group.

### Elections and Transatlantic Relations

- The elections are likely to have little impact on the narrowing of the transatlantic divide with regard to the **Arab-Israeli conflict** (see the section on the Middle East below). The US-EU discrepancy with respect to **Iran** might be narrowed in the event of further Democratic advances (2008) but differences with regard to the use of force are likely to persist (see the section below).
- The war in Iraq demonstrates the **limits of unilateral actions**. The Democrats would be far less likely to support an intervention that does not have a multilateral mandate (at least from NATO).
- The anti-European **cultural** strands will weaken or disappear from the Democrat-controlled Congress. Symbolically, in the Congress 'freedom fries' will revert to their original name 'french fries'.

### *The Middle East and Iran*

This session focused respectively on Iran, Syria and Lebanon as well as the Arab-Israeli conflict. The discussion revealed that significant transatlantic differences persist.

## Iran

**American views:** It is the official view of the US Administration that Iran is developing a nuclear bomb. The Administration also insists that no negotiations with Tehran are possible without Iran's suspension of the enrichment process. However, some leading Democrats have voiced dissent from this position, arguing that even conservative President Reagan negotiated with the USSR and (citing the case of the DPRK) taking the view that the current position is harming US interests. Still, both Democrats and Republicans have argued that a military option – whilst unlikely and undesirable – must remain a possibility.

**European views:** *Three types of issues were addressed in the interventions by European speakers: Iran's government and its people, European interests in Iran and policy choices vis-à-vis Tehran.*

1. *Iran's government and its people.* It was argued here that any strategy towards Iran must differentiate between the current President and the Iranian people. Whilst the President may be pushing for confrontation with the West, the prevailing concern in Iran is how to get out of the current stalemate without humiliation. A diplomatic boycott of the Iranians only strengthens the conservative elements around the President, whilst engagement changes the mood in the country and weakens the siege mentality there.
2. *European interests in Iran.* Iran is Europe's neighbour. In the event of Turkey's accession, the EU will share a border with Iran. Developing close energy relations with Iran is the best viable option for the EU to counter its growing dependency on Russia.
3. *Policy Choices.* European speakers were sceptical about the idea of the use of force or sanctions against Iran. Regarding the military option, it was argued that it remains not only undesirable but also unrealistic in current circumstances. In addition, keeping the military option on the table, as a bargaining factor, may only have the effect of fuelling the mistrust of the Iranians. As regards the possibility of imposing joint US and EU economic sanctions, it was argued that, in reality, this policy choice would only concern the Europeans since the US has not had economic relations with Iran since the late 1970s. A point was also raised that any possible sanctions could only strengthen the current Iranian regime and give the President a welcome means of justifying his mismanagement of the economy.

## The Arab-Israeli Conflict

- The pro-Israeli tendency that dominates US foreign policy is not a matter of partisan divide – it enjoys the support of both parties as well as of the American population. However, the Democrats are more likely to promote Washington's diplomatic engagement in the peace-process (possibly along the lines negotiated by President Clinton in Camp David). The Democrats are also more consistently opposed to the Israeli illegal settlements than the current Administration. Still, no

US Administration would cut America's military and other forms of aid to Israel in order to extract concessions from Tel Aviv.

- The Europeans, on the other hand, view the Palestinian cause with a degree of sympathy. The EU has been the biggest aid donor to the Palestinians. Should a government of national unity emerge, it is likely that the EU would resume its aid to the Palestinian Authority.

### Lebanon and Israel

- Following the recent Israeli-Hezbollah war the political situation in Lebanon has been redefined. On the one hand, there are some positive developments such as the deployment of the Lebanese army to the North for the first time in the country's history. On the other hand, the pro-Western government of Senora was weakened whilst Hezbollah was strengthened. The war has boosted Hezbollah's morale, leading the organization to adopt a more assertive stance towards Senora's government, increasing its demands etc.
- The war has also had a major impact on Israeli politics. It has undermined the moderate forces – the popularity of Prime Minister Olmert and of the leader of the Labour Party Amir Peretz has collapsed, whilst the conservative Likud has benefited. The Israelis are aware that the war failed to increase their security; however, there is no consensus as to what alternative policy should be pursued.
- European diplomatic and military involvement in resolving this conflict has been a crucial factor allowing for the maintenance of fragile stability between Israel and Lebanon. The EU's involvement in the region is growing at the same time as the U.S. is rethinking its strategy. Perhaps it is a good time to work out a transatlantic strategy towards the area (as argued by some Europeans).

### Syria

- The context of this discussion was the idea of engaging Syria (alongside Iran) in finding a solution to the future of Iraq (as, for example, promoted by Prime Minister Blair). However, according to the US officials, America is more likely to talk to Iran than to Syria about Iraq's future.
- Americans and Europeans agreed that there is a serious problem regarding the reliability of the Syrian regime. In the past both the EU and the US made certain offers to Damascus to which the Syrians either failed to respond or, when they did respond, they failed to deliver.
- Syria continues to be on the path of self-isolation and it remains a close ally of Iran. However, Syria's future is in the Mediterranean and North African region. The question for the EU and the US is how to pull the country out of its current self-isolation.

## *Energy Security*

### Context

- The global energy sector is increasingly vulnerable because of the combination of the following developments:
  - Galloping increase in demand caused especially by the rise of China and India.
  - No meaningful increase in the supply capacities – low investments in the energy-producing sectors.
  - Growth in terrorist activities targeting energy networks, including cases of suicide-bombing of oil-producing facilities.
  - Valuable crude-producing facilities – such as in Nigeria – remain unsecured against acts of sabotage.
  - Most energy-producing countries are politically and economically unstable.
  - The lack of transparency concerning data on oil reserves, which remains strictly classified in the energy producing countries.

### Energy Security for Europe and the US

- The energy sector is divided between electricity (produced from coal, gas and renewables) and transport (90% of which is dependent on oil). For the Europeans it is electricity and for the Americans it is transport that constitutes the major challenge. **When Europeans talk about energy security they mean primarily gas, whilst the Americans mean oil.**
- Over the last 30 years, oil consumption has declined or stabilised in Europe whilst it rose in the US – the primary reason for this difference is the difference in taxing petrol. The **Americans feel entitled to cheap petrol** and the price at the pump remains one of the most important political issues in the US.
- European emphasis on gas means that in practice **energy security for the EU involves its relationship with Russia**. This is very different for the US, which does not have meaningful energy relations with Russia.
- The **Americans tend to militarize energy security** whilst the Europeans see this approach as ineffective in enhancing the security of supplies. For example, before the US invasion Iraq produced 3.5 mb/d, currently it produces just 2-2.5 mb/d whilst it has the capacity to produce at least 6.5 mb/d.

### What strategies for the EU and US?

- The EU and the US must retain or enhance the high level of their reserves as well as encourage other energy consumers to do the same. For example, China, which is the world's second consumer, has no significant reserves.

- A free market in energy to be promoted through the EU energy charter (so far rejected by Russia) and the development of LNG terminals.
- Investments in the renewables – e.g. sugar cane – to be promoted.
- Transatlantic dialogue on energy security to be developed. For example, the EU and the US could share their intelligence reports on the matter.

### ***Transatlantic Partnership: Delivering Results? – Round Table***

#### Worldviews

- Europe and America remain united by similar threat perceptions and values. However, they disagree on how to deal with these threats.
- In the globalised world of today, nobody, not even the US, can solve a political crisis by military means alone. A military solution should be considered as a last resort option – the US and the EU have a quarrel with the government of Iran but should a military solution be pursued it would be the people not the government of Iran who would suffer.

#### Delivering Results

- It is getting harder for the EU and US to deliver, even when their co-operation is as good as it has been in recent years. The two account for only 10% of the world's population and they are faced with the dynamically growing 'Asian giants' China and India.
- The areas where co-operation has been both good and effective are: the Balkans, Ukraine and to a lesser extent Belarus, homeland security and cutting funds for terrorists networks.
- Afghanistan is one of the most obvious cases of transatlantic co-operation; however, a success there remains uncertain. Darfur and the DPRK were cited as the cases where allies failed to deliver.

#### Current and Future Challenges

- Iran remains the most challenging case for both the US and EU and the transatlantic cooperation.
- For the Europeans, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains the key to other issues in the Middle East including Iraq.

- Climate change: Some European speakers conceded that the American opposition to the Kyoto protocol has not been unsubstantiated. However, it is time to move beyond this dispute and deal with the looming environmental crisis.
- Doha – It is imperative that the US and the EU co-operate during the forthcoming trade negotiations.



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## Les espoirs des Européens risquent d'être déçus

WASHINGTON

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

Les Européens ont accueilli la défaite des républicains aux élections américaines de mi-mandat – et par ricochet celle de George Bush – avec satisfaction, voire avec enthousiasme. « *Ils étaient encore plus heureux que les démocrates* », écrit Jeffrey Gedmin, directeur de l'Aspen Institut de Berlin, dans le très néoconservateur *Weekly Standard*. Les socialistes du Parlement européen ont même parlé de « *fin d'un cauchemar de six ans* ».

Or cette euphorie est tout à fait déplacée, à en juger par les propos entendus, cette semaine à Washington, de la part de responsables de la politique étrangère américaine et d'observateurs conviés à un séminaire par l'Institut d'études et de sécurité de l'Union européenne et la Johns Hopkins University.

Pour ceux qui s'attendaient à un changement de politique étrangère avec l'arrivée d'une majorité démocrate à la Chambre des représentants et au Sénat, les propos tenus ont fait l'effet d'une douche froide.

Plusieurs raisons expliquent la continuité à laquelle il serait sage de se préparer au lieu de se bercer d'illusions. Dans le système institutionnel américain, les décisions en matière de politique étrangère appartiennent au président, et pas à

l'exécutif. George Bush a sacrifié son secrétaire à la défense, Donald Rumsfeld, au lendemain de la « *raclée* » reçue par son parti. Cela ne veut pas dire qu'il va changer ses convictions.

Sur l'Iran, le président a des « *positions très fermes, qu'il maintiendra* », dit-on au département d'Etat. On privilégie encore, pour régler la question nucléaire, la voie de la négociation ouverte par la « *troïka* » européenne, mais les Américains sont agacés par les attermolements des Russes et des Chinois à accepter des sanctions contre Téhéran.

### Continuité diplomatique

Aux Européens qui répètent que « *l'option militaire n'est pas une option* », les représentants de l'administration répondent : « *Si, l'option militaire est une option. Ce n'est peut-être pas la bonne, mais elle est toujours sur la table.* » Et à ceux qui espèrent plus de modération avec le retour en force des « *réalistes* » dans l'entourage de M. Bush, ils répliquent que ces « *réalistes* » n'excluent aucune solution.

A propos de l'Irak, les discussions vont bon train dans l'administration, dans les centres de recherches et chez les démocrates sur la stratégie qui doit être mise en place pour sortir du borborygme. Mais personne n'a d'idées très précises.

Les démocrates sont divisés entre ceux – très minoritaires – qui souhaitent un retrait rapide des troupes américaines et ceux qui s'inquiètent des conséquences d'une telle décision.

La nouvelle majorité du Congrès dispose, certes, de l'arme budgétaire, mais il lui est très difficile de l'utiliser pour faire pression sur l'exécutif sans se voir reprocher de laisser tomber les « *boys* » sur le terrain. Tout le monde espère le salut des recommandations de la commission bipartisane présidée par James Baker, en ajoutant dans la même phrase qu'il ne faut pas en attendre des miracles.

Quant au conflit israélo-palestinien, que les Européens considèrent comme crucial pour l'avenir de la région, il ne paraît pas prioritaire aux républicains comme aux démocrates, les deux partis maintenant, avec des nuances, leur appui inconditionnel à Israël. Ni les uns ni les autres ne croyant possible une solution à court terme, il est peu probable qu'un de leurs leaders s'investisse dans la recherche d'une issue.

Un dernier élément, enfin, plaide pour la continuité diplomatique : les préoccupations de la majorité démocrate concernent d'abord la politique intérieure. ■

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