



20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE EUROPEAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS REVIEW
**TRANSATLANTIC LEADERSHIP
IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:
CHALLENGES AND
OPPORTUNITIES**



College of Europe
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Transatlantic Leadership in a Global Perspective: Challenges and Opportunities

Conference report, 18-19 October 2015

On 18-19 October 2015, the Department of **EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies** at the College of Europe in Bruges, with the financial support of the European Commission, Google Belgium and Wolters Kluwer Law and Business, organised an international conference on transatlantic leadership. The high-level conference also celebrated the 20th anniversary of the European Foreign Affairs Review (EFAR), which two decades earlier had been launched with a conference on transatlantic relations. The aim of the conference was to critically explore the potential and limitations of joint US-EU leadership and to discuss how the existing challenges and opportunities could be turned into a building block for a 'new transatlantic leadership approach'.

During the speakers' pre-conference dinner on 18 October 2015, **the Rt Hon. Lord William Wallace of Saltaire** reflected on transatlantic values and the question of a widening gap across the Atlantic. He argued that the idea of an 'Atlantic Community' of shared 'Western' values was a creation of the Cold War. In the past 25 years, however, people appeared to be less aware of how closely both sides continue to share commitments to democracy, the rule of law, open societies and to market economies and more aware of the differences. He argued that what has pulled European states from their North American counterparts since the end of the Cold War is the increasing divergence of interests and priorities, not of values. The European publics are more risk-averse regarding the costs of international engagement, and they are reluctant to accept that their own interests require Europe to share global responsibilities.

On 19 October 2015, **Rector Jörg Monar** opened the conference by recalling the double 20th anniversary of EFAR and of the 'New Transatlantic Agenda' (NTA). He presented the conference programme and thanked the organisers and sponsors for their support. **Nanette Neuwahl** outlined EFAR's history, highlighting the multidisciplinary approach that characterises the journal and its focus on the European Union's (EU) external relations.

After this introduction by the EFAR editors, Session I was devoted to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Chair Nanette Neuwahl pointed out the strategic relevance of an agreement. **Daniel Hamilton** first touched upon the rationale behind the 'New Transatlantic Agenda', launched in 1995 to re-invigorate US-EU relations. While the idea of having a transatlantic free trade deal was one of the centrepieces of the NTA, trade negotiations materialised only with the TTIP idea many years later. He argued that the TTIP negotiations are driven by both economic and geopolitical considerations. On the one hand, the multilateral trade system has undergone significant changes and the TTIP negotiations constitute a 'window of opportunity' for the





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transatlantic partners to still shape the trade rules of the 21st century based on key norms of a liberal rules-based order, at a time when the global value chains are rapidly transforming the flows of trade in goods and services. On the other hand, at the geopolitical level, TTIP is important for the transatlantic relationship itself because it further interlocks the US and the EU, allowing them to jointly relate to rising powers and offering an instrument for the future multilateral order. Therefore, TTIP represents an assertive initiative of the transatlantic partners.

John Peterson argued that TTIP was more important for Europe than for the US and that the political benefits for Europe were bigger than the economic ones. TTIP would signal the emergence of a real strategic transatlantic partnership, while so far the EU's strategic partnerships have rather remained an aspiration. As the EU regularly still fails to punch its weight and use its economic power strategically, TTIP would be a truly strategic initiative in contrast to the NTA, which had been perceived as a kind of 'laundry list' of bureaucratic deliverables without much appeal. More should be done to raise the EU's profile in the US and also to explain why TTIP is a chance to develop common rules and values for a strategic partnership across the Atlantic in an increasingly multipolar world.

Sieglinde Gstöhl opened the discussion by enquiring about the US respectively EU perspective on (1) TTIP as an 'open agreement' in terms of a possible multilateralization or accession of third countries, (2) TTIP as a 'living agreement' in terms of future governance and its democratic implications, (3) the most sensitive points in the negotiations for both sides, (4) the reasons for the stronger politicisation in Europe than in the US, as well as on (5) the scenarios in case TTIP negotiations would fail.

The debate on TTIP was further deepened by the [keynote address 'Towards a New Strategy'](#) of the European Commissioner for Trade **Cecilia Malmström**. She reminded the audience that the European Commission, based on a clear mandate of all EU member states, was negotiating TTIP because Europe needed an economic boost and because the agreement would strengthen the transatlantic partnership with the US and their collective global influence. According to the Commissioner, the controversial debate surrounding TTIP shows that people want more trade but that they do not want to compromise on the core principles of European society in order to obtain the benefits from trade. The lessons learned from this debate are reflected in the new EU trade strategy 'Trade for All', which is based on three core principles: effectiveness, transparency and values. The Commission has in an unprecedented way opened up the negotiations to public scrutiny, proposed a deeply reformed approach to investment protection, and pledged that TTIP would not undermine or restrict the way EU regulation protects citizens. Despite a brief disruption by a handful of vocal protesters among the external participants of the conference, who attempted to 'sing away the TTIP', the Commissioner delivered her speech as foreseen and answered many questions from the audience reflecting a broad range of opinions.

Session II on the state of the Transatlantic Alliance was introduced by Chair **Dieter Mahncke**, who highlighted the fact that during the Cold War the 'soft power' of the United States was strong and





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attractive. However, he argued that nowadays the US was no longer the shining white knight, while the EU was no longer the burdened young princess that needed to be rescued either.

James M. Goldgeier stressed that had NATO not enlarged to Central and Eastern Europe, EU enlargement would have been much more difficult. However, the US and the EU were not able to work with Russia to find it a place in post-Cold War Europe. Since the end of the Cold War, whenever it seemed that NATO had lost its purpose, world events – such as the Balkans crises, terrorist attacks, the mission in Afghanistan, the rise of piracy, humanitarian disasters, and most recently Russian military aggression – brought back the sense of necessity of the Alliance. Goldgeier argued that the term of a US 'pivot' to Asia, implying that the US was trying to 'leave' Europe and the Middle East to focus on Asia, was unfortunate and that 'rebalancing' was a far better term. There was no reason for the EU to rejoice that somehow Russia's intervention in Ukraine brought the US back into Europe. Europe should take care of its neighbourhood. He welcomed the fact that in Libya, for example, both the UK and France had taken the lead, first in pushing for a response, and then in conducting the operation, although the support of the US was necessary, given the lack of capabilities on the European side.

Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer assessed the Transatlantic Alliance through three dimensions: leadership, risk sharing or responsibility sharing within the Alliance, as well as solidarity. With regard to the first, she stressed that the debate should not focus on who leads, but who is able to lead, be it the Europeans or the Americans. In terms of risk or responsibility sharing, the geographical approach to the division of labour, whereby the US would concentrate on the Asia-Pacific region, while Europe would focus on its neighbourhood, Africa and the Middle East was argued to be unsustainable. Instead, Americans and Europeans should act together. Indeed, solidarity between the EU and the US was considered to be the best deterrent to countries like Russia. Nonetheless, the challenge represented by the fact that the EU is made up of 28 Member States with different geostrategic interests is not to be underestimated. De Hoop Scheffer pointed out that NATO is still primarily a military alliance. It reacts to a changing political environment and to the emergence or disappearance of threats, exemplified through the adoption of two Strategic Concepts, formulated because of key events occurring in 1999 (Kosovo) and 2010 (Afghanistan). The members of the Alliance have failed to forge a consensus on NATO's long-term goals, making it more of a reactive alliance, visible through the fact that there still is no agreement on the kind of relationship the Alliance wants to have with Russia in the future.

The discussion was opened by **Wyn Rees** who agreed that a rebalancing of US foreign policy was a more accurate depiction than speaking of a 'pivot'. He analysed the different views in the EU and the US on burden-sharing and on an increase in defence spending and other challenges that NATO faces today such as the changing nature of security and new threats. Arguing that the transatlantic strategy had worked well in the past, he interrogated the speakers about the impact that upcoming developments on each side of the Atlantic, for example a possible 'Brexit' or a new – Democrat or Republican – US President, were likely to have on the future of the alliance.





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In Session III on 'Transatlantic Leadership in a Multipolar World Order', Chair **Alan Henrikson** elaborated on the deeper meaning of the notion of polarity. He raised the question of what exactly a 'pole' is today, with different scholars referring indistinctly to states, coalitions of states and geopolitical regions. Could 'Transatlantica' be a pole? Similarly, the Chair insisted on the need for clarification on the notion of a 'multipolar world order'.

Jeremy Shapiro discussed the political contestation of the liberal world order created by the US, identifying six main challenges to the Western-led system. The first one is the security threat posed by Russia, which opposes the United States' exceptionalism within the system. It is important to note, however, that while contesting the privileges enjoyed by the US, Russia's rhetorical attack is not directly aimed at the rules of the system itself. The second challenge is the erosion of the US hegemonic authority brought about by China's rise and its attempts to adjust the system without threatening it systematically. The third challenge comes from the 'bystanders', that is, emerging powers like Brazil and India. While broadly obeying to the rules and recognising the advantages of the current order, these countries tend to 'free ride' and do not see a role for themselves in enforcing international rules and sustaining the system. The fourth challenge is the implosion of the Middle East area. While threatening the international order through violence and regional political instability, this challenge is the least serious one in terms of danger for the system, mainly because there is no state actor behind it. The fifth challenge is the backlash coming from Europe. If, on the one hand, European governments support the idea of global governance, at societal level there is a growing opposition to this elite consensus. Lastly, the sixth challenge comes from the United States itself. Despite being at the core of the creation of the current system, the US is pulling back from leadership in the international system, which implies giving more room to power diffusion and allowing other actors to challenge the system. In addition, the system itself is based on 'American hypocrisy', stemming from the constant effort to enforce 'liberal principles' through the use of force.

Stefan Fröhlich built upon Jeremy Shapiro's contribution in order to elaborate on EU-US common global challenges, whilst having different priorities: the EU is concerned by the crisis in the Mediterranean, increasingly powerful Turkey or the Russian interference in Ukraine and Syria, while the US is worried about China's new assertiveness. The rise of the BRICS and other emerging powers marks the beginning of a new geopolitical competition and multipolarity, a development that has weakened the liberal international, rules-based order. Diffusion of power and multipolarity can be understood as opportunities for the European Union to strengthen its relative weight on the world stage. This is why the EU portrays itself as a champion of multilateralism, while the US still clings to a more unilateral approach. Despite differing priorities, EU-US relations have experienced a relative convergence in positions and responsibilities, insofar that the two sides have come to understand that there is no feasible, quick fix for the most pressing issues. Though the US continues to play a security role on the global scene, it has also become less prone to take risks. At the same time, the EU has developed a security strategy, increasing its presence in conflict areas. Yet the allies need to come up with common positions in the relevant bodies of the international system to obtain greater Chinese and Russian compliance.





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The discussant **Simon Schunz**, while highlighting the convergence of the two speakers' views, played the 'devil's advocate' and raised doubts about the willingness and ability of the US and the EU to exert joint leadership for shaping the future global order beyond a few specific issues such as trade. He kicked off the discussion by asking whether a joint US-EU vision for a future global order existed. One of the key components of such a future global order would be its precise institutional underpinnings, and the question could therefore be raised whether the US and the EU can agree on a forum (e.g. the G20) that would allow taking full account of the increasing importance of the emerging countries.

The [closing address](#) of the conference was delivered by **H.E. Anthony L. Gardner**, Ambassador of the United States to the European Union. Ambassador Gardner gave an overview of the accomplishments of the 'New Transatlantic Agenda' during the past twenty years, and pointed to what the priorities should be during the next two decennia. Amongst the accomplishments of the NTA he highlighted the promotion of peace and stability in the Balkans region, the expansion of world trade and the fight against global challenges such as terrorism. Common priorities for the next twenty years include a focus on battling climate change, stronger cooperation in law enforcement and military matters, combatting corruption on a global scale, and exploiting the benefits of new technologies and of the digital economy. In order to ensure effective cooperation for the latter and to build more bridges across the Atlantic, Ambassador Gardner also announced a new Fulbright-Schuman initiative: the **Fulbright-Schuman Innovation Grants** are designed to support researchers and mid-career professionals who work at the intersection of technology and policy, allowing for a transatlantic approach to harnessing the potential of new technologies. The first group of recipients will focus on data privacy, while future recipients may focus on issues such as cybersecurity, health care, or other issues.

Sieglinde Gstöhl concluded the conference by summarizing the main threads of the day-long discussions: the EU and the US need to position themselves in the context of the global power shifts, and they need to address the gaps of public trust on different levels. The public opinion surveys of the 'Transatlantic Trends 2014' indicate that both Americans and Europeans alike appreciate the need for Western leadership in global affairs. Their views have in fact converged over the years. Majorities on both sides of the Atlantic expect strong global leadership from the US and the EU, while they consider neither Russian nor Chinese leadership desirable. Despite their differences, the US and the EU are like-minded partners sharing many values, more than any other global players.

