

# The Transatlantic Community: Reasons for Optimism

BY DARIO ZUDDU

“**T**ransatlantic Community” is a term that describes the complex set of institutions, forms of co-operation, shared values and strategic views that shape the relationship between the USA and Europe. The Transatlantic Community has found one of its most prominent institutional expressions in NATO. The Alliance has proven capable of outliving its primary mission of deterring the Soviet Union. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO has undergone an internal and external transformation. Eastern European countries from the former Soviet bloc have joined the Alliance, which has also acquired new tasks in terms of peacekeeping operations and disaster relief. Transatlantic partners have also broadened their economic integration. In spite of the rise of large, third-party economic players, the US and Europe account by far for the bulk of world trade and investment. Far from declining, reciprocal transatlantic investment has escalated in the last decade, passing the impressive amount of \$1.8 trillion.

The special nature and importance of the transatlantic relationship also cause the US and many European countries to act as the driving force in key multilateral institutions. Whether the matter is politics, security, economics or academic debate, the US and Europe often set the agenda of such different organizations as the UN, the WTO, the OSCE and the OECD. Agreement or disagreement between transatlantic partners ultimately determines whether these organizations

work or fail. In this sense, the Transatlantic Community acts as the engine of global change and development.

None of the achievements described above would have been possible without a fundamental cultural sharing and understanding. That is the actual rationale behind the very idea of a transatlantic community. Nevertheless, recent events, and the reemergence of long delayed issues, have increasingly challenged transatlantic relations. Occasionally, the relevance of the Transatlantic Community has come into question. Strategic divergences over the Middle East, the rise of new global players like China and India, disputes over climate change and the International Criminal Court have all caused some commentators to discount the transatlantic relationship.

The truth is that the USA and Europe have so far overcome their disagreements, displaying a notable ability to evolve and adapt to new challenges. The remarkable achievements in terms of security and economic integration, spelled out above, have taken place during the same difficult moments for the transatlantic partnership. More importantly, the Transatlantic Community is broadening by undertaking new commitments and initiatives.

As early as December 1995, the USA and EU launched The New Transatlantic Agenda, aiming at unprecedented heights of institutional integration at every level of transatlantic co-operation. The wording of the New Agenda’s introductory remarks is self-commenting: “[...] *Today we face new challenges at home and abroad. To meet them, we must further strengthen and adapt*



Picture credit: Enterprise Europe Online

*the partnership that has served us so well. Domestic challenges are not an excuse to turn inward; we can learn from each other's experiences and build new transatlantic bridges. We must first of all seize the opportunity presented by Europe's historic transformation to consolidate democracy and free-market economies throughout the continent."*

Additionally, not all of the recent disagreements have undermined the US-Europe relationship. On the contrary, they have represented a powerful motive behind the evolution of the Transatlantic Community. For example, the new threat of terrorism has tested the ability of the Allies to devise a common strategy. By the same token, however, it has also brought about enhanced security cooperation. Concrete, institutional steps have been taken to establish a Transatlantic Homeland Security. The Allies have also implemented measures to create anti-terrorism tasks and units within existing transatlantic institutions.

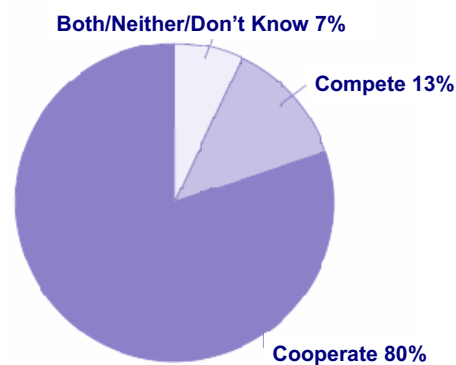
Similarly, current economic globalization has sparked investment and new opportunities in areas other than the transatlantic region, namely China. At the same time, though, world trade and capital liberalization have provided opportunities to deepen transatlantic economic integration. New initiatives, such as The New Transatlantic Marketplace begun in 1998, have set the ground for the future creation of a Transatlantic Market.

In conclusion, the real question is not whether a Transatlantic Community is of any relevance today, but what can be done to reinforce it. What new tasks are necessary for existing transatlantic institutions? What new institutions should be devised to build up the Transatlantic Community? What about a common transatlantic foreign policy? Equally important, how can the Transatlantic Community expand as to include new members?

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**PERCENTAGE OF EUROPEANS (EU9) THAT THINK A MORE POWERFUL EUROPEAN UNION SHOULD COMPETE OR COOPERATE WITH THE US**



**Large majority of Europeans want EU to cooperate with U.S.**

While 55% of Europeans (EU9) want to take a more independent approach in security and diplomatic affairs, this does not imply competing with the United States. On the contrary, our data show that a large majority (80%) of Europeans (EU9) want a more powerful EU to cooperate rather than compete with the United States.

Source: German Marshall Fund, *Transatlantic Trends*, 2005