

## BERLIN

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## Change in the White House?

IMPLICATIONS FOR TRANSATLANTIC CO-OPERATION

*Check against delivery!*

Ladies and Gentlemen, distinguished guests.

Thanks to Konrad Adenauer Foundation, American Jewish Committee and US Embassy for inviting me. Not used to speaking at receptions like this – in UK would be expected to make lots of jokes. Understand that this is not the tradition here. Will try to remain serious.

Honoured to be speaking on transatlantic relations in Berlin – in a city and indeed a building that has attracted so many distinguished speakers on this topic. My German teacher and perhaps even my Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner would be unhappy to know that I am not speaking German. Recall that German almost became the official language of the US in 1794. Wonder how that would have altered the course of history.

Illustration perhaps of a broader point – that isolated events can have far-reaching and unexpected effects. May also be true of the results of the US elections. Certainly the success of president-elect Obama is the result that most Europeans were hoping for. Result should be a significant improvement in the anti-US public sentiment in Europe especially if the new Administration delivers on promises like closure of Guantanamo.

But beyond that, it is difficult to say anything very new or original on foreign policy priorities of President-elect Obama and the new Administration. Many wise commentators have already said many wise things. And, as ever in foreign policy, events are

likely to take us in unexpected directions that nobody can forecast now.

For what it is worth, my own expectation is that less will change than many people think or hope. Bush II already took important steps back from neo-con driven US go-it-alone in reaching out to EU and rebuilding support for multilateral solutions to global challenges. Dealing with the ongoing financial crisis will be at the top of all our agendas both domestically and internationally. And I expect the domestic aspects to take up most of the time of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic.

High hopes in Brussels of the openness that President-elect Obama has signalled on climate change and his commitment to multilateralism and multilateral institutions. Very much at the top of EU agenda too. Can also expect renewed focus on Afghanistan/Pakistan (especially following the tragic events in Mumbai) and Iran (with little reassuring news about either the pace of Iranian enrichment programme or the political mood in the wider region). On both of these issues US expectations are high and if we are honest the EU will be struggling to deliver either on more troops for Afghanistan or on tougher sanctions on Iran outside the UN. It is clear however that we must be ready to try – and that will be easier if we are working in genuine partnership with the US on the basis of an agreed common strategy. There are also issues where the EU will want to encourage the US to do more – for example in resisting the temptation to protectionism in a last push for a WTO deal and early engagement in the Middle East Peace Process.

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Looking forward to getting into these issues more in detail in our debates tomorrow.

Against the background of all this uncertainty, perhaps more interesting to discuss the how than the what of transatlantic relations. Rather than trying to look into the future on the various issues that we will confront together, would like to think about how we go about it. And in particular for the EU, how we could do better in managing our most important relationship. Four recommendations:

- firstly, we need to get better at defining what we want. Means speaking among ourselves before taking lead from US. Encouraging that one large MS no longer defines policy in opposition to US. And hope that another large MS less inclined to slavish defence of US line. Congratulate French Presidency on Gymnich initiative setting out clear EU priorities for engagement with the next Administration: globalisation, including climate change; the wider Middle East, including Iran; Afghanistan/Pakistan and Russia. An unsurprising list – but interesting and potentially important change in method;
- secondly, the EU needs to take a lead in involving other international actors where we can. Common message that emerging powers like China, India and Brazil have emerging global responsibilities. Same is true of Russia. G20 welcome culmination in long-running trend towards better representation of emerging powers in global governance. Keep up pressure on UN reform. And redesign of IFIs. If EU could streamline representation = better still (cf Lisbon Treaty - another story).
- third, concentrate on substance not process. New Administration will have a lot on its plate with the economic crisis and health reform. Will want to know what international partners can bring in support of foreign policy priorities (political and material), not endless discussions on new transatlantic institutions or grand design new agreements. In this context however, would want to mention the Transatlantic Economic Council that was launched by President

Bush, Chancellor Merkel and President Barroso during the last German Presidency. Even if the first meetings have spend more time that they should on chickens than on more important aspects of our \$6bn a day economic relationship, TEC is something that would have to be invented if it did not exist. Very much hope that it will continue and flourish with the new Administration.

- finally, show that we can do things on our own. Important in winning the argument with our own public opinion in the EU that demands eg for more defence spending are not only so we can be a junior partner in US-led operations. Recent success of ESDP missions – including most recently a first naval mission against Somali pirates – encouraging. Welcome emphasis in the conclusions of this week's European Council conclusions on the need to go further, including with the revised European Security Strategy. No coincidence however that most EU-led foreign policy challenges are close to home – through the enlargement process and the stabilisation of the Western Balkans; Russia and the impressive show of EU unity in response to the conflict in Georgia; and the European Neighbourhood Policy, encompassing both the Union for the Mediterranean and more recently the upgraded Eastern Partnership. Also means continuing in our role as international standard bearer on important globalisation issues – climate change, development; non-proliferation. Results of this week's European Council on energy/climate change will be particularly important in this respect.

To conclude, as we witness the beauty contest of EU ambassadors paying court to the transition team over which EU country will have the honour to host the first visit of the new President, I am reminded of a visit of the EU troika to Azerbaijan when the many official and diplomatic cars were racing to be closest to the front of the convoy. I do not know what impression the resulting unseemly drag race had on the local population. But it had little impact on the results of the visit.

Berlin of course is ahead of us all with the historic visit of Candidate Obama earlier this

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year. So I can perhaps feel safe in putting in a bid for Brussels to underline the point that the EU has most influence when it acts collectively than as a patchwork of national policies. And as we look beyond the breathless excitement of these early meetings, let us remember that we face a moment of opportunity in transatlantic relations. As many others have said before me, when the US and the EU work together there is very little that we cannot achieve.

Thank you for your attention.