

CRS Report for Congress

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The European Union and the United States: Political Aspects of the New Transatlantic Agenda of December 1995

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441.2(103)
A factual + concise
description (pp 1-4) +
fair + balanced comment
(pp 5-6).

SUMMARY

On December 3, 1995, the United States and the European Union (EU)¹ signed a "New Transatlantic Agenda" to guide their relationship into the next century. The Agenda is based on a Framework for Action with four major goals: (1) promoting peace and stability, democracy and development around the world; (2) responding to global challenges; (3) contributing to the expansion of world trade and to the deepening of economic relations; and (4) building bridges across the Atlantic. Many observers argue that the Agenda is of largely symbolic, rather than practical, importance for transatlantic political ties.

BACKGROUND

Since the end of the Cold War, concern has arisen on both sides of the Atlantic that western Europe and the United States will drift apart because the cement that held together their alliance for 50 years -- the Soviet threat -- is gone. Transatlantic differences in policy over the war in Bosnia, NATO's future, and relations with Iran have been identified as evidence of this drift. Further, and perhaps more fundamental, the European Union has been focussing on its deeper integration and on plans for eastward expansion. U.S. policy-makers have appeared consumed by a pressing domestic agenda, and many Europeans have perceived a "Pacific tilt" in U.S. foreign policy, which has given priority to Asia and Latin America and has seemed to lack direction when it came to Europe. Many Europeans also have worried about political trends in the United States toward what they regard as neo-isolationism and unilateralism.

These concerns engendered a discussion, primarily on the European side, as to how one might revitalize the European-American relationship. In the first half of 1995, this topic was addressed in speeches by a wide range of European officials. Much of the discussion concentrated on ways to broaden the alliance

¹The EU has 15 members: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.



beyond the traditional security focus and to integrate the political, economic, and security components. Various options were suggested, including an EU-U.S. treaty and a trans-Atlantic free trade agreement (TAFTA).² Officials wanted to build on the Transatlantic Declaration, adopted in November 1990, which provided a strengthened framework for regular EU-U.S. consultations, by supplementing that consultation with joint action.³

In a major address on the Clinton Administration's policy toward Europe, Secretary of State Warren Christopher on June 2, 1995, stated that the goal of the Administration was, by the end of 1995, to develop a "broad-ranging transatlantic agenda for the new century -- an agenda for common economic and political action to expand democracy, prosperity, and stability." In discussing a comprehensive strategy for European security, the Secretary pointed out that "security comes first" and is "the bedrock of our partnership." However, he explained that for this partnership to thrive, it must be comprehensive. Thus, "specific steps in the economic and political arenas" are needed to "complement and reinforce our security relationship."⁴ The speech was welcomed in Europe, and seen as the strongest backing the Clinton Administration had given to calls by European leaders for an initiative to strengthen and broaden transatlantic links.

THE U.S.-EU MADRID SUMMIT OF DECEMBER 3, 1995

Secretary of State Christopher's speech marked the beginning of a six-month period of U.S.-EU negotiations focussed on revitalizing the transatlantic relationship, which culminated in the Madrid summit in December 1995. President Clinton, Spanish Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez, whose country held the EU's rotating presidency, and European Commission President Jacques Santer signed the New Transatlantic Agenda on December 3. In Madrid, President Clinton pledged that the United States would remain as closely tied

²See U.S. Library of Congress, CRS, *European Proposals for a New Atlantic Community*, by Stanley R. Sloan, CRS Report 95-374 S, Mar. 10, 1995; *A New Transatlantic Initiative? U.S.-EU Economic Relations in the mid-1990s*, by Glennon Harrison, CRS Report 95-983 E, Sept. 15, 1995.

³These meetings include biannual (twice-yearly) consultations between the President of the Commission and the U.S. President; consultations between EU Foreign Ministers, with the Commission, and the U.S. Secretary of State; and biannual consultations between the Commission and the U.S. Government at cabinet level.

⁴"Charting a Transatlantic Agenda for the 21st Century," Address by Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Casa de America, Madrid, Spain, June 2, 1995.

to Europe as it was during the Cold War: "Our destiny in America is still linked to Europe."⁵

The United States and the European Union adopted two documents at this summit. The first is a 10-page political declaration called the New Transatlantic Agenda; the second is a 28-page action plan containing more than 150 concrete steps to be taken in various fields by the two sides. In the words of Spanish Foreign Minister Javier Solana, who is currently NATO's secretary general, "[t]he two documents outline the most ambitious program of cooperation ever established by the European Union with another country, clearly recognizing that the relationship with the US is vital."⁶

In the declaration, the parties "reaffirm the indivisibility of transatlantic security" and declare NATO to be "the centerpiece of transatlantic security, providing the indispensable link between North America and Europe." They also note the need to adapt NATO's political and military structures to reflect the developing European Security and Defense Identity.

The declaration goes on to explain that the New Transatlantic Agenda is based on a Framework for Action with four major goals. First, the parties agreed to promote peace and stability, democracy and development around the world. Specific mention is given to the former Yugoslavia, Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Ukraine, Turkey, Cyprus, and the Middle East. One concrete initiative mentioned in this section is the establishment of a High-Level Consultative Group to improve coordination of development and humanitarian assistance activities, in light of shrinking financial resources on both sides of the Atlantic.

Second, the United States and the European Union agreed to respond to global challenges, such as international crime, drug trafficking, terrorism, and environmental issues. Both sides pledged to support training programs and institutions for crime-fighting officials in Central and Eastern Europe, and the former Soviet Union, as well as to develop an early warning system for communicable diseases such as AIDS and the Ebola virus.

Third, they agreed to contribute to the expansion of world trade and closer economic relations. The parties pledged to implement fully their Uruguay Round commitments and support the World Trade Organization, among other things. One analyst pointed out that in "promoting trade, the thrust is...to seek

⁵Andres Wolberg-Stok, "EU, U.S. Sign Covenant for Transatlantic Relations," *Reuters*, Dec. 3, 1995.

⁶Javier Solana, "Spain Shepherds Move to Strengthen EU-U.S. Links," *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 2-3, 1995, p. 10.

nitty-gritty progress in areas such as product certification and testing, which are of immediate interest to business and consumers."⁷

Fourth, the parties agreed to build bridges across the Atlantic "to ensure that future generations remain as committed as we are to developing a full and equal partnership." The United States and the European Union felt that by deepening commercial, social, cultural, scientific and educational ties, they could strengthen public support for the transatlantic partnership. Among the examples offered is the transatlantic business dialogue. The declaration also advocates enhancing parliamentary links and states that parliamentary leaders on both sides of the Atlantic will be consulted about what steps ought to be taken.

The question of how the New Transatlantic Agenda will be implemented receives brief mention at the end of the declaration. The Senior Level Group, which includes sub-cabinet-level officials from the U.S. Administration, the European Commission, and the EU Council Presidency (Italy succeeded Spain in January 1996), will oversee work on the Agenda. The U.S. members of the Senior Level Group are Peter Tarnoff, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, and Joan Spero, Under Secretary of State for Economic and Agricultural Affairs. The regular U.S.-EU summits will be the forum in which progress can be reviewed and priorities revised.

The Joint U.S.-EU Action Plan which accompanies the declaration follows precisely the same outline, reviewing and then expanding on areas appropriate for common action and cooperation within the four major categories. At 28 pages, the action plan offers greater detail than the declaration on possible joint initiatives. For example, in the declaration the two sides pledged to work more closely on preventive and crisis diplomacy; in the action plan, they single out specific countries for mention in this context, such as Rwanda, Burundi, Nigeria, Haiti, Cuba, and Burma. How precisely joint diplomatic efforts would be reinforced is not spelled out. Thus, the action plan has been referred to in some circles as little more than a catalogue of issues of interest to both sides.

The purpose of the Madrid summit was three-fold: to affirm the broad basis for transatlantic cooperation which already exists; to extend that partnership to additional political, economic, and cultural areas; and to broaden participation to include not merely the executive branch of government, but also the legislative branch and non-governmental actors, such as those in the business, scientific, and educational communities. Stuart Eizenstat, U.S. Ambassador to the European Union, said: "We see this as...giving us a joint

⁷Reginald Dale, "A Fresh Agenda for the Atlantic Rim," *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 12, 1995, p. 15.

agenda so that we march into the next century as united as we were during the Cold War and restimulate this marriage."⁸

THE NEW TRANSATLANTIC AGENDA: AN APPRAISAL

Outside comment on the initiative has been mixed, and has focussed on four issues. First, is the Agenda primarily symbolic? The short answer is yes. Even some officials in Europe and the United States have criticized the plan as a glorified laundry list that is long on rhetoric, but short on substance. The two sides agree on many principles and general goals, but few specific initiatives are outlined. U.S. officials concede that the Agenda is not as ambitious as a U.S.-EU treaty or a free trade area, ideas floated in the first half of 1995, but they contend that the Agenda's limited aims and pragmatism are precisely what they sought. They claim to have achieved a focus on concrete steps that can be carried out, though others see the Agenda proposals as nebulous. The Clinton Administration may have wanted to produce a somewhat bland document that avoided domestic controversy while at the same time reaffirming the closeness of U.S.-European ties and assuaging European concerns over transatlantic drift. Ambassador Eizenstat remarked: "We believe this demonstrates the continued U.S. commitment to the primacy of the trans-Atlantic relationship in the post-Cold War era."⁹ Thus, the value of the Agenda may lie precisely in its symbolism.

Second, does the Agenda demonstrate that the Europeans and Americans will not drift apart in the post-Cold War period? Many observers would argue that it does not. To take one example, a *Financial Times* editorial argued that "for all the professions of good will and close cooperation," the truth is that "the US and EU are still struggling to find common ground and a clear framework for their relations, since their common Soviet enemy was removed." The editorial points to the lack of consensus over NATO enlargement to the east, the "unseemly squabble" over appointing a new NATO secretary general, and differing opinions about how the cost of rebuilding Bosnia should be apportioned. The article concludes that "[t]he new transatlantic agenda will help a bit by providing a practical road map. It will not fill the vacuum in leadership apparent on both sides of the Atlantic divide."¹⁰ Nonetheless, while agreement on a declaration and action plan cannot erase fundamental concerns about transatlantic drift, the decision on both sides to expend political capital to negotiate this agenda indicates the importance they attach to the relationship. For the United States, the countries of the EU represent major

⁸Jeremy Lovell, "Transatlantic Vision on Agenda for Madrid Talks," *Reuters*, Nov. 30, 1995.

⁹Tom Buerkle, "U.S.-EU Agreement Goes Part Way Toward Rescuing Relations," *International Herald Tribune*, Dec. 2-3, 1995, p. 6.

¹⁰"Transatlantic Leadership," *Financial Times*, Dec. 4, 1995, p. 17.

political allies and critical trading partners. The agenda, at the least, serves to reassure those allies and, at best, will lead to deeper ties.

Third, how "new" is the New Transatlantic Agenda? Agenda boosters contend it will ease European concerns about U.S. isolationism and protectionism by committing the United States and the EU to act together on a wide range of issues. However, most observers would argue that transatlantic cooperation on these matters has existed for some time. Further, the limits that hampered past cooperative efforts remain; those limits result from the fact that European governments have not given the EU the power to be a full partner in anything beyond commercial areas. Many of the issues outlined in the section on "responding to global challenges," such as fighting international crime, drug trafficking and illegal immigration depend on intergovernmental cooperation within the EU and do not fall within the jurisdiction of the European Commission.¹¹ Thus, EU countries must first decide on how closely they want to cooperate with each other on these challenges before they collectively could work with the United States on meeting them. The wording in the declaration is instructive. For instance, on combatting international crime, the document reads that "we commit ourselves to active, practical cooperation between the U.S. and the *future* European Police Office, EUROPOL" (italics added). European decisions on foreign and defense policy also depend on intergovernmental cooperation and thus, while the declaration reaffirms the centrality of NATO to European security and identifies the need for some adaptation of NATO's political and military structures to allow for a greater European role, it engages in no discussion of how this might be accomplished.

Finally, for many analysts the true test of transatlantic solidarity will be the ongoing response to the war in Bosnia. U.S.-European policy differences over Bosnia led to considerable strain in that relationship, but in recent months, with the signing of the Dayton peace accords and the deployment of the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR), transatlantic cooperation has been strong. Most observers would agree that the problem of Bosnia has overshadowed all other aspects of U.S.-European relations. One senior U.S. official noted that there was a collective sigh of relief after the Dayton peace accords were concluded and President Clinton committed U.S. troops to IFOR, because the Madrid summit no longer had "to hold together the open wound of Bosnia." The extent and effectiveness of U.S.-European cooperation in Bosnia over the next year are likely to have profound consequences for transatlantic ties -- consequences that will overshadow the diplomatic initiative reflected in the New Transatlantic Agenda.

¹¹For more on this, see U.S. Library of Congress, CRS, *European Union: The European Community Evolves*, by Karen Donfried, CRS Report 94-412 F, Updated August 2, 1995.