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Introduction: a year of transition – and frustration?

In retrospect, 2006 is likely to be seen as a year of reassessment and transition for the Euro-Atlantic community. It witnessed the gradual crumbling of the main pillars – theoretical and practical – of the distinctive strategy associated with George W Bush's Presidency since 2001; but it was a time when the enterprise of European integration seemed not to stand on very firm foundations either. By the end of the year, a wholesale change-over of political leadership was either under way or in prospect on both sides of the Atlantic, promising at the least a new tone and possibly a new agenda both for trans-Atlantic disputes and trans-Atlantic cooperation.

2006 was not a year for major transatlantic anniversaries, aside from the sombre day of remembrance five years after '9/11'. It was 2005 that saw the 15th anniversary of the first Transatlantic Declaration between the USA and the EU as a collective actor, and the 10th anniversary of the New Transatlantic Agenda adopted on 3 December 1995. The EU-US Summit of 21 June 2006 (held in Vienna) was a relatively workmanlike event, notable for focusing less on the headline strategic issues and more on the kind of economic and regulatory questions where Washington and Brussels have always found it easier to approach each other as equals. (The new agreements signed were on intellectual property rights and higher education). Nevertheless, it was an interesting sign of the political mood that both sides felt a need to play up the practical progress being made. President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso was quoted as saying that 'EU-US relations have strengthened considerably over the last year.... With shared values and interests, the EU and the US are natural

partners to take the lead.' He cited successes in working together on 'common economic, political and environmental challenges'.

Continuing frictions

While the elites on the two sides of the Atlantic struggled to find a common constructive language, however, the evolution of popular attitudes continued to follow a largely negative trend. The widely-respected 'Transatlantic Trends', one of several opinion-monitoring programmes that carried out a special survey to mark the passing of five years since '9/11', was forced to conclude in its report of October 2006 that 'the image of the United States in the eyes of the world has not recovered from its steep decline after the war in Iraq'. In Europe specifically, this survey found that the overall percentage of European respondents who regarded US leadership in world affairs as desirable had fallen from 64% in 2002 to 37%, and the corresponding figures for Germany were 68% to 43%. (The only countries that still took a positive view on balance were the UK, Netherlands and Romania). European feelings of 'warmth' towards the USA as pictured on a 100-degree thermometer had fallen over the same period from 64 to 51 degrees. Conversely, the proportion of US respondents wanting 'close relations' with Europe had fallen from 60% in 2004 to 45% in 2006. It was noteworthy that the figures on both sides showed only the most marginal of upward turns over the period 2004-6 when official dealings between the two sides had been striving for a more positive tone. Perhaps the only ray of light for longer-term trans-Atlantic relations was that Europeans seemed to be able to distinguish clearly between their views on the US in general and on President George W Bush in particular – the latter's leadership got only an 18% approval rating in 2006 as compared with 37% approval for US leadership in the world in general.

Reasons for European concern, or even fear, about the implications of the US Administration's policies were not far to seek – and were equally obvious to opinion in other regions of the worlds which showed a similar negative set of indicators. According to polls taken by the US-based Pew organization, approval for US policies in Turkey and Indonesia fell from 52%-12% and from 75%-30% respectively from 2000-2006. The

increasing tide of internal violence in Iraq, combined with the increasingly obvious bankruptcy of the US-led coalition's attempts to contain it, was probably the main source of disapproval everywhere: reinforced at times by the fear that the USA might also be contemplating military intervention to 'decapitate' Iran's potential nuclear weapons programme. In mid-2006, the price that might have to be paid for the Bush Administration's confrontational policies was further illuminated in the flare-up of hostilities between the Hizbollah movement and Israel that led to a short but destructive Israeli invasion of Lebanon's territory in July-August. Even if Washington could not be credibly blamed for starting this crisis, it was criticized variously for failing to restrain (or even inciting) Israel and for having little to offer for the eventual solution - when European nations had to lead the way in building up a UN-led peacekeeping force. The same event highlighted the lack of progress, or even backsliding, on the prospects for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement since Bush had come to power, and the failure of three years of explicitly anti-Iranian diplomacy by Washington to stop Iran further strengthening its position and that of its Shi'ite allies within the region.. Last but not least, issues related to law, governance and human rights continued to drive wedges between the USA and even its more faithful allies in Europe: the plight of the prisoners held by the USA beyond the scope of legal protection at Guantanamo Bay, the Administration's constant proposals for more extreme internal security measures that might impinge on civil liberties at home and abroad, and (a particularly inflammatory issue) the accusation that the CIA had used European airfields when illegally abducting and transferring terrorist suspects. There was plenty of fuel here for the thesis, much debated since 2001, that the US might not only take *ad hoc* actions problematic for European interests but might be operating according to profoundly un-European beliefs and values as well.

European weaknesses

At the same time, Europe was not a continent in any position to boast of its own unity and successes during 2006. In the European Union, the impasse caused by the rejection of the new draft Constitution by French and Dutch voters in Spring 2005 dragged on, with no-one seriously hoping a solution

could be found before the French Presidential elections in April/May 2007. Efforts to find other ways of permitting at least small reforms in – especially – the machinery of EU external action ran into a stone wall of technicalities, and inter-institutional bickering within the unreformed Brussels machinery died down only gradually towards the end of the year. With its grand internal venture still on ice, the EU found itself driven largely by external pressures and was not conspicuously successful in mastering them. Relations with Russia became a major theme already in January when gas supplies to Europe were temporarily endangered by Russian action in cutting off exports to and through Ukraine. EU leaders were spurred to call for a collective energy security strategy, but immediately ran into a controversy over the need for their own competing and often monopolistic power companies to create a more genuine and efficient *internal* energy market. Taking a firm line with Russia also proved more easily said than done, not only because President Putin played a strong hand of cards skilfully – exploiting, for instance, the issue of Russian companies' access to the EU market – but because of basic differences in EU countries' relative dependence upon, and trust in, Russian suppliers. The fact that the USA, while generally growing frostier towards Putin, was pressuring Russia at this time over a quite different set of (mainly proliferation-related) issues; and that the former Soviet countries who had experienced 'colour revolutions' in the previous years started to run into serious internal and external problems, partly of Russia's own making, did nothing to ease Europe's dilemmas or to strengthen Europe's hand. It was almost a foregone conclusion that Putin, hosting the G8 Summit of 15-17 July at St Petersburg, would succeed in evading any firm new commitments on energy security (or anything else) and would be hailed as the tactical victor of the event by the international media. The EU scored a further own goal before the end-year EU-Russia Summit by failing to overcome a national Polish veto on a new comprehensive partnership agreement (Poland was protesting against a Russian ban on its meat exports), and thus leaving itself looking both negative and divided. The German Presidency that took over in the EU from January 2007 will face the task of negotiating a new overall EU-Russia framework as the current one expires this year - and this could become one of its larger headaches, not just because of the intrinsic

policy difficulties involved but because Berlin is widely seen as one of the 'softer' of European capitals towards Moscow.

Europe also struggled inconclusively throughout the year with the linked problems of migration, multi-ethnic societies and enlargement. The Westward migration of workers from the new EU members entering in 2004 turned out to have been higher than forecast and although the European Commission's analysis showed the net economic effects to have been positive, popular sensitivity on the issue grew even in countries like the UK and Sweden which originally took the most liberal stance. When EU leaders confirmed their decision to admit Bulgaria and Romania as the Union's 26th and 27th members in 2007—despite some lingering concerns about criminality and corruption—British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that the UK would impose tough immigration controls on their citizens. It was just one symptom of a shifting official and popular mood as West European governments interrogated themselves over whether their past tolerance of diversity among immigrant groups had actually worsened the problems of inter-group tension, lack of social and economic integration, criminal violence and terrorism. Added to long-standing reservations about enlargement in countries like Austria, Germany and France, these signs of a part-retreat from the 'open door' philosophy led many observers to speculate that further additions to the EU's numbers beyond 27 might be postponed indefinitely. The problem was that the next set of prospective entrants, even if they represented the most difficult national cases that Brussels had yet had to cope with, were also the countries that perhaps needed the experience of European integration most desperately. The vote of the people of Montenegro in May to secede from Serbia in June and the difficult negotiations over Kosovo's claims for independence underlined that in the Western Balkans, the EU had the ultimate non-choice of either incorporating all the local entities to guarantee their peace or trying to stabilize them through an open-ended and costly military, administrative and economic trusteeship. The handling of Turkey's EU application, for its part, was famously described by the EU's Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn as a train-wreck and by many experts as a train-wreck that had been waiting to happen. Ankara predictably refused a deadline to fully implement

its recognition of the Republic of Cyprus (now a full EU member), and the EU was obliged to retaliate by freezing parts of the detailed Turkish accession negotiations that had started barely one year before. Regardless of the rights and wrongs over Cyprus, many pro-enlargement observers feared that this setback would further erode the Turkish people's already declining appetite for EU-related governance reforms, and – given the Turkish alienation from the US already mentioned – would risk leaving a strategically vital European neighbour dangerously adrift.

Washington, for its part, continued in 2006 strongly to advocate the EU's taking over more responsibility for Europe's growth and stability through enlargement, and would indeed have liked see a more forthcoming attitude by Brussels towards former Soviet aspirants like Ukraine. While the USA's pushiness on enlargement made the issue a prickly one both in the EU and NATO contexts, the underlying logic of the US attitude was a recognition that the EU had a unique role as an engine of security-building and reform at least in its near neighbourhood, and could only be expected to play that role if it could stay confident and united. (Interestingly, the Transatlantic Trends 2006 poll found 76% of Americans wishing to see stronger EU leadership in the world, only slightly less than the average of 81% among Europeans) The tactics used by US hard-liners in 2002-3 when they played off the more sympathetic 'new Europeans' against countries like France and Germany seemed thoroughly out-dated in 2006, also because of the political swings in countries like Poland, Slovakia and Hungary where inward-looking nationalist parties either seized power or did their best to push more conventional pro-European governments out of it during 2006. The Europe of 25 in 2006 looked united, if in nothing else, at least in its crisis of governance and confidence.

Overall, the image that comes to mind for the transatlantic relationship in 2006 is that of two boxers at the end of a long fight, who lean together with their arms round each others' necks both to snatch a rest and to try to hold back further blows. Shared doubts and weaknesses, not a firm new action programme, drew the two sides together - and did not rule out that they might find the energy or excuse to start punching again! The middle

part of this chapter will look in more detail at this thesis of 'reconciliation through weakness' and at how US and European agendas may have drawn closer as a function of shared inadequacies and fears. The final section will touch on the role of institutions and of personalities in current transatlantic dynamics, before closing with some questions about the way ahead.

More Problems, Less Tension

Three different syndromes might be detected among the events of 2006 which all had the effect of reducing overt tensions and reviving the sense of a common plight between the USA and Europe. First and most obvious was the syndrome of US '*learning by failure*', in Iraq but also elsewhere. The gains made by the Democrat Party in the November 2006 mid-term elections and the dismissal of the hard-line Secretary for Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, were both result and cause of a more open recognition throughout US society that Iraq had been neither made safe for its own people nor for the world by the US-led coalition's invasion. US troop losses as well as civilian casualties were mounting, the economic burden with its effect in widening the national trade and budget deficits was causing increasing concern, fresh evidence of atrocities and corruption within the occupation machine was constantly revealed, and even the Northernmost and Southernmost parts of Iraq that had earlier looked like success stories started to reveal intractable problems. Saddam Hussein's execution in the last days of 2006 may have been a kind of justice but was shockingly mishandled in style and presentation. The bitter lessons of Iraq had at least four elements with wider application: a) the realization of the limits of military force (and high technology), reinforced by Israel's failure to gain its objectives in the 2006 Lebanon campaign; b) a disillusionment with the neo-conservative agenda of actively imposing democracy, given that free polls brought Hizbollah into government in Lebanon, Hamas in the Palestinian territories, and anti-American populists like Hugo Chavez and Evo Morales in South America; c) an understanding that fighting terrorism with the sword only seemed to generate more terrorists to fight back in more places (also a relevant lesson in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Colombia); and d) a return to the eternal truth that no stable solution

compatible with broader Western interests could ever be hoped for in the Middle East absent progress in the Israel/Palestinians conflict.

At the end of the year, both Donald Rumsfeld (on his way out) and an independent policy report by James Baker and Lee Hamilton urged the Bush Administration to prepare an exit strategy from Iraq that would entail major policy adjustments, including a readiness to talk to Iran and Syria as players in a possible wider regional stabilization scheme. It became almost commonplace to liken the Iraq challenge to the USA's former national debacle in Vietnam and to suggest that the nation must now, once again, settle for the least bad of the available bad outcomes. George W Bush himself reacted (in his strategy statement of January 2007) by taking the opposite course, proposing to raise his investment in Iraq with a major troop reinforcement: but (at the time of writing this) it was by no means clear if he could either get this policy past Congress, or stick with it for long. For those who continued to believe that the medium-term result must be a down-turn in US adventurism and militarism, the implications for relations with Europe were not simple to work out. It might be hoped that Washington would no longer be in as much of a hurry as its hard-liners were in 2002-3 to castigate Europe's 'softer' policies on modern security threats, when the USA's latest and most ambitious alternative to them had broken down or (at least) been exposed as just too costly. Though few observers openly made the comparison, developments in Northern Ireland and the Basque country during 2006 showed European governments quite near to historic breakthroughs in ending at least the former of these age-old conflicts by methods of patience, persuasion, and public order policies that were kept (at least latterly) within the limits of the law. The European-style solution to Iran's nuclear challenge through direct negotiation and a mixture of sticks and carrots had not succeeded by the end of the year, but remained the only faint thread of hope for staving off Tehran's emergence as an overt nuclear power. On the other hand, analysts who believed that US policy-makers might become more ready to acknowledge the benefits of Europe's special ways also warned that they could be expected to start demanding greater practical investments from Europe—of men, money and

political capital – in the new generation of shared policy programmes that ought to become feasible as a result.

The second dimension of trans-atlantic convergence in 2006 could be found in areas where the US and Europe had not been seriously divided since 2001, but where they were thrown closer together as '*companions in misfortune*' as their shared objectives foundered and their joint resources became over-stretched. The classic case was Afghanistan, where the previously distinct tasks of the predominantly European peacekeepers in ISAF and the US-led combat mission against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda were more closely conflated under NATO command in 2006, thereby exposing European as well as US forces to significant losses in the Southern part of the country. Combined with the limited and sometimes counterproductive impact of the Pakistani government's attempts to root out militants on its own side of the border, the turn of events aroused growing public concern on both sides of the Atlantic about the 'winnability' of the Afghan conflict and the inadequate supply of Western troops and equipment. The very significant decision of the German Government in late October 2006 to re-design its whole armed force structure for the purposes of external deployment should be seen against this background, as well as in the light of the Europeans' difficulties in scraping together the minimum forces needed to launch the new Lebanon peace operation. It may be used also to point up the fact that military operational cooperation and convergence continued to be a relative success story for the EU, while other aspects of building the European defence identity ran into trouble (notably, the tasking and funding of the European Defence Agency), and differences in defence *cultures* remained contentious—such as the reluctance of Germany itself to expose its troops to potentially violent roles in South Afghanistan. In trans-Atlantic terms, it now seemed more illogical than ever for Washington to complain about a strengthening of European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) which in reality offered the best, if not the only, chance of squeezing more deployable defence resources out of Europe for the ever-growing demand.

Another shared Atlantic headache that contrasted with the case of Afghanistan was that of Sudan and, especially, the vicious internal conflict in the province of Darfur. While NATO and the EU competed to provide support services for the African Union contingent struggling with a peace-keeping task there, neither the USA nor the EU had any appetite for spear-heading a *peace-making* intervention despite their shared assessment that genocide or something very like it was going on. The only progress made towards the end of the year was in the context of the UN: highlighting the somewhat unfashionable lesson that both sides of the Atlantic are sometimes dependent on a global institution to achieve their respective goals and, indeed, to work effectively together. (More will be said on this below). Another quite different field where the same lesson may become clearer over time is that of global trade, where Washington and Brussels were both faced with difficult issues by—and both partly blamed for!—the breakdown and suspension in July 2006 of the World Trade Organization's (WTO's) Doha Round of trade liberalization negotiations. The problems that the USA and EU *caused* for the WTO talks had a lot in common (demands for governance change in developing countries combined with reluctance to reduce one's own subsidies), and their *reactions* to the breakdown also included a common reflex to seek bilateral agreements (and in the EU's case, group-to-group agreements) as a fall-back. By the end of 2006, however, it was becoming clear to many observers that there was no real substitute for global progress in handling an increasingly globalized trade system: and equally clear that such progress was never going to happen without some joint or coordinated new trans-Atlantic initiative. The US Trade Secretary and EU Trade Commissioner duly launched a joint initiative to get the Doha round moving again in 2007, re-affirmed when Commission President Barroso visited President Bush in January. What will make it tough for governments on either side of the Atlantic to follow through with real policy changes to this end is the parallel trend seen on both sides during 2006 towards 'economic nationalism' - often just a polite synonym for protectionist instincts - at popular and parliamentary level: a challenge made no easier by the success of the Democrats (including many anti-free-trade candidates) in the US mid-term elections. Putting this rising phenomenon together with the relative decline of US-European

philosophical clashes over Iraq, one might speculate that for the next few years the most prominent field where Americans and Europeans will be seen as 'divided by shared values' could be, not the promotion of democracy, but the future of the free market economy.

This links up with the third area of *de facto* trans-Atlantic convergence in 2006, which concerned *converging nightmares*—in other words, a closer alignment of the range of the USA's and Europe's respective security concerns and of their relative priority at popular and governmental level. This development can be traced clearly through the opinion polls, which show—for example—a rising concern on *both* sides of the Atlantic about the security implications of Islam: in the European case driven largely by the concerns already mentioned about internal cohesion in multi-ethnic societies, but also about immigration and enlargement. The fact that major terrorist attacks had taken place in Europe (Madrid and London), but not the USA, since 9/11 helped to bring the two populations' general levels of concern about terrorism closer than before, just as the respective governments worked even more closely together on standards of transport security and travel documentation after the security scare at Britain's Heathrow Airport on 10 August 2006. Energy security was another case where US and European levels of concern rose in parallel during 2006, even if Americans were worried more about dependence in the Middle East and Europeans more (as discussed above) about Russia. Last but not least was the field of environmental security and global warming, where Europe's already high level of national and collective concern was further boosted by the report of the British expert Sir Nicholas Stern in October stressing the economic case for early investments to slow down or mitigate the process. Change in US policy at the official level on this issue was slow, though still discernible; more striking was the surge in bottom-up initiatives by US states, business lobbies and NGOs to take action into their own hands on the curbing of harmful emissions and other aspects of environmental protection. Already by end-2006 US and European policy-makers could have readily agreed that the decisive challenge in this field of policy would be to persuade China and other large developing countries to accept more environment-friendly routes to growth for themselves. The next few years'

challenge will be to see if a similar consensus can be built on the need for large Western economies to set a better example, as former US Vice President Al Gore argued they must in his influential film 'An Inconvenient Question'.

Institutions and Personalities

In 2006 it was clearer than ever before that institutions as such could not mend and drive forward the European relationship: the question was rather the opposite, whether the two sides could find sufficiently solid and dynamic new agendas to keep their joint institutional structures moving forward. The United Nations as a theatre for this process was, as so often, the scene of several contradictions. The USA and Europe had both had their motives for resisting any major change in the UN's own governance during the reform debate of 2005, but they also carried with them into 2006 some long-standing differences on how best to use (and how far to subordinate their own actions to) this global institution. The notorious hard-liner John Bolton remained the USA's Permanent Representative until early December 2006, when Congressional politics forced him to step down; and predictably, the US and Europe clashed on various institutional issues during the year including the conditions for establishing the new UN Human Rights Council. However, the most significant part of the story was perhaps that these latter problems were overcome in time to let the new body be set up on schedule. The USA and Europe also found a fairly easy consensus on the *degree* to which the proliferation challenges of Iran and North Korea, respectively, should be dealt with through action by the UN Security Council, even if they had varying views on the precise content and timing of action (and the nature of sanctions). The battle over a new Secretary-General proved a non-event since the USA and Europe led the way to a consensus on South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-Moon's appointment already in the first days of October. Nor were there any major trans-Atlantic differences over decisions on establishing or re-mandating UN peace missions, including the various options that were mooted for Darfur. By the end of the year, some observers concluded that US-European tensions in the UN were starting to take second place—or would soon do

so—to the common ground shared by all Western democracies in face of Russian and Chinese obstructionism in the Security Council, notably over issues where the issue of ‘interference in internal affairs’ came into play (e.g. Darfur, Iran, and Kosovo/Serbia).

For NATO, traditionally the centerpiece of trans-Atlantic relations, 2006 was a year of mixed signals that gave little clarity or reassurance as to the organization’s ultimate fate. On the one hand the Alliance was busy, and stressed, as never before as a result of its responsibility for the Afghanistan operations already referred to. On the other hand, the trends continued which during the early twenty-first century have steadily carried the main currents of trans-Atlantic interaction (positive or negative) on the most urgent security headlines away from the North Atlantic Council and towards US-EU Channels, the G-8 and—as already noted—the UN itself. It has been increasingly obvious since 9/11 that NATO does not have the functional competences, economic resources or legislative powers to tackle the core issues of terrorism or proliferation, let alone climate change or epidemic disease. More recently, NATO has found itself on the sidelines of such specific geo-strategic crises as the Iranian proliferation issue, the latest Lebanon war, North Korea’s first nuclear test and of course, the whole development in Iraq. Yet when NATO policy makers react by trying to find new ways for the Alliance to ‘go global’, differing national philosophies as well as the functional limitations already mentioned get in the way; and finding new places where all Allies will agree to NATO’s using its one truly unique skill - for *robust* military intervention – will be very tough as long as the bad taste of Iraq is poisoning the trans-Atlantic chemistry. If the NATO Summit of end-November 2006 at Riga had made a major effort to confront issues like these it would most likely only have highlighted the lack of trans-Atlantic consensus, not least since several Allies had worked out that President Bush’s incipient ‘lame duck’ period was not the ideal time for new Atlantic experiments. As it turned out, NATO leaders chose effectively to shelve some of the more divisive issues, such as Ukrainian or Georgian membership and a formal new ‘global partnership’ structure, in order to focus the Summit on the relatively safe ground of the Afghan operation and on modest forward moves in the process of partnership and/or overtures to

accession for various Balkan states. It was a result that disappointed the more lively thinkers advocating the 'renewal' of NATO, but that came as a relief to those with a stronger sense of the Alliance's current fragility.

Over the year, there were some hints of a further shift in the extreme, generic anti-institutional stance adopted by hard-liners at the start of the George W. Bush Presidency. The revised US National Security Strategy published in March was criticized by many for maintaining the post-9/11 doctrine of 'pre-emption', as well as for painting Iran as the single greatest threat to the USA. However, buried deeper in its pages were some positive statements about the world's need for strong multilateral institutions and about the special value of regional cooperation for stabilizing weak and post-conflict states. The USA joined other members of APEC in November in adopting a (long-term) plan for an Asia-Pacific free trade area. At *Realpolitik* level, also, the North Korean nuclear test pushed US diplomacy towards a stronger effort for an East Asian coalition of interest that would not completely or permanently exclude China. While some distinct false notes remained in Washington's regional diplomacy, notably its mainly rhetorical reaction to anti-US leaders in South America and an exaggerated witch-hunt against Chinese advances in Africa, it might be fair to say that Europe lagged even further behind in 2006 in adjusting its strategy to the steady rise of non-Atlantic regional powers.

A New 'Dramatis Personae'

At the level of personalities, trans-Atlantic relations were marked in 2006 by the arrival of one new-generation leader—Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany—and the promise of several others. Frau Merkel achieved an atmospheric improvement in US-German relations and a re-balancing of Germany's partnerships in Western Europe, but could not overcome a sharp cooling of relations with Poland over energy and other issues. Even so, it was interesting how the welcome for her as a 'new face' lingered even while an objective balance-sheet of her first year in office showed little in the way of breakthroughs. In Britain at the time of the Labour Party's autumn conference, Prime Minister Blair was obliged to promise that he would stand down the following Spring, with Gordon Brown almost universally expected

to succeed him. The difficulty of guessing Brown's precise line on foreign affairs—he was thought to be pro-US, but also expected to pull back as soon as he could from the Iraq commitment—kept speculation active during the year's closing months, as did the emerging battle in France between the Presidential candidates Mme Ségolène Royal (representing the socialists) and Nicolas Sarkozy (for the Right). Both promised a break-away from the Chirac tradition towards less 'particularist' and more innovative French policies, though both were hard to pin down on specifics and not immune from populist rhetoric. Put together with the prospect that George W. Bush in his final two years would either have to voluntarily adjust his policies or see them adjusted by the Democrat majority in Congress, these factors created a mood at the end of the year in which the feelings of fatigue already mentioned were blended with cautious hopefulness for the future. Trans-Atlantic relations would clearly never be the same again, but perhaps they could turn into something more like an effort to keep a marriage together for the sake of the children than a complete and rancorous divorce.

In sum, it could be said that 2006 was a year when trans-Atlantic relations improved somewhat but when the aggregate contribution of the Atlantic community to European and global security was found increasingly wanting. No-one could expect a real breakthrough on either front until the constellation of leading personalities had changed—and not necessarily even then. It is tempting to apply to the current Western political leadership what a British poet said about Queen Elizabeth I at the end of her long reign:

'Thy wars brought nothing about,
Thy lovers were all untrue;
'Tis time to ring an old age out
And time to ring in a new'.

Endnotes

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