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Do Transatlantic Relations Still Matter?

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The first plenary session started off the 2010 CES conference with a provocative question: *Do transatlantic relations still matter?* This is a timely query as Europeans are questioning President Obama's commitment to the transatlantic relationship and Americans are questioning the relevance of Europe in the 21st century.

On the European side, the election of Barack Obama did wonders to the image of the US, which had been tarnished after the end of the Cold War and especially under the presidency of George W. Bush. Quicker and cheaper than any public diplomacy program, the election of an internationally-minded, highly educated African-American Democrat with a penchant for subtlety and compromise improved the favorable opinions of the U.S. abroad almost overnight, often by more than thirty percentage points in Western Europe. More than a year into his presidency, Obama still benefits from a prolonged honeymoon period in most of Europe, much more so than he does at home. Yet the same time, Western and Eastern European leaders feel they have been "neglected" by Obama. They deplore that Europe is no longer on the American radar screen. It is as if Europe was no longer the solution to the world's problems, nor the source of the world's problems, so why care? A series of public snubs and disappointments, such as Obama's absence at the Berlin Wall celebration in November 2009, his skipping the US-EU summit in May 2010, and the failure of the Copenhagen climate conference in December 2009, are reinforcing many European policy-makers in their assessment and worry that Obama is indeed, sadly, a "post-European".

On the American side, the importance of the transatlantic economic relationship is obvious, and so is the feeling that Americans and Europeans are part of the same political and economic family. However, the nagging European fear that Europe is no longer the source or the solution to the world's problems seems confirmed by American actions. In trade, the US has all but given up on a meaningful multilateral agreement and is instead focusing its efforts on a multitude of bilateral deals in which Europe is not a party. In foreign policy, the US is concerned about appeasing its relations with Pakistan, Iran, Russia and China, and the transatlantic relationship seems increasingly irrelevant to deal with these issues, especially as long as the Europeans cannot get their own house in order and speak with a single voice.

So, do transatlantic relations still matter? Two of the panelists argued that they have lost relevance and don't matter as much as they used to, while two argued that Europe is a major power to be reckoned with, making the transatlantic relationship more vital and vibrant than ever.

Peter Baldwin, Professor of History at UCLA and author of *The Narcissism of Minor Differences: How America and Europe Are Alike* (Oxford University Press, 2009) asked whether transatlantic relations still matter to anyone else besides the transatlantic partners. Not really, he argued, and for other countries, the differences between Europe and the United States appear invisible and inconsequential, even though the processes by which they have achieved these similarities have

been different. In four areas, however, Europe and America exhibit sharp contrasts and their powers of attraction over the rest of the world differ accordingly. In the military arena, the EU is not much of a model to be emulated, since security is a global public good that has to be provided by someone ultimately. Similarly, with respect to knowledge development, whether it be genetically modified organisms or Google for instance, the rest of the world is not following in European footsteps. When it comes to religion, Europe appears pretty unique in its post-religious, though not post-Christian, secularity. By contrast, in the area of demography and immigration, the American model seems pretty unique and unlikely to be emulated. Nevertheless, these differences are small overall, and the rest of the world increasingly looks elsewhere to come up with their own model of economic development and social organization.

For Jeffrey Kopstein, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Centre for European, Russian, and Eurasian Studies at the University of Toronto, transatlantic relations still matter but not as much as they used to, in large part because of the inability and unwillingness of the EU and key European players to act or think strategically vis-à-vis the outside world. The world has changed, but the transatlantic partners have not fully adapted. The evolution of NATO is a case in point: nobody would invent it today if it did not already exist. It is not clear what purpose it fulfills, what security dilemma it responds to, or how it surpasses other, competing international security fora. Whereas the Americans pushed hard for EU and NATO expansion, a policy that ran through both Bill Clinton's and George W. Bush's presidencies, this now appears to have been taken off the table. Instead we now have the realist "reset" with Russia. The reset, undertaken in the hopes of eliciting cooperation on Iran, entailed the end of missile defense installations in Poland and the Czech Republic, the abandonment of the push to expand NATO to Ukraine and Georgia, some sort of deal not to make waves regarding Russian meddling in Kyrgyzstan, and an acquiescence in Europe's tacit decision to suspend or slow down on EU enlargement to Turkey and other destinations on the new European periphery. This new American policy departure, it must be said, is having profound effects on the continent, some of them perhaps unintended. For one thing, the West Europeans have made their peace with Russia's new assertiveness and have quietly suggested to the new EU members that they do the same. At the same time, elites of the new accession states and especially the elites of the new European and Eurasian periphery are paying an extraordinarily high price for the reset and, in the case of those outside of the EU, for their diminishing prospects of being admitted in the medium term. And so, while transatlantic security relations may not matter as much as to the traditional transatlantic allies, it remains true that their impact on those traditionally outside of the European alliance remains profound.

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Taking a contrarian view to these assessments about the withering significance of the transatlantic relationship, François Delattre, Ambassador of France to Canada, argued by contrast that transatlantic relations have never been as important as today for meeting the challenges of globalization and a new strategic environment. When it comes to globalization, both pillars of the transatlantic relationship display a remarkable convergence of interests and objectives, mostly because their economies are so interdependent, being each other's main economic partner. Whereas the media often focuses sensationally on the growing importance taken on by the Chinese economy, the fact is that today the European market is five times larger for the US than the Chinese market, and 56% of total American investments are currently in Europe. North America and Europe also share the same objectives when it comes to the downsides of globalization, such as preventing social dumping. This interdependence and the commonality of their social and economic interests lead Europe and the US to be crucial anchors of global economic governance, whether in the WTO or in the G20. The transatlantic relationship is also crucial for dealing with a changing strategic environment. In an "era of relative power", in the words of French president Nicolas Sarkozy, where no single country is able to impose its vision by itself, Europe has become not only a major player but also a model and reference. Europeans have learned to cooperate and seek everyday solutions that take into account the interest of others. Therefore it is a natural pillar of the multipolar world, with North America as another crucial pillar sharing the same goals and aspirations.

For Andrew Moravcsik, Professor of Politics and International Affairs and Director of the European Union Program at Princeton University, and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, transatlantic relations matter immensely because it is Europe, not China or India, which will be the second global superpower, both in military and civilian terms, for most of the 21st century. This is already true today, though few people, including Europeans, realize it. Excessive pessimism about Europe's decline stems in part from a tendency to focus on headline-grabbing problems, such as those that often dominate the US-China relationship, rather than stable and incremental cooperation, such as dominates the US-European relationship. But, more fundamentally, it stems from a basic theoretical misunderstanding by realists, who continue to hold 19th century views about the primacy of "hard" power population, aggregate national income, and military force in great power relations. Many scholars and statesmen would concede that most 21st century global problems can be managed only using "civilian" power, which rests on high per capita income, high technology, international institutions, a robust civil society, close alliances with influential actors, and attractive of social and political values. By this measure, Europe is the world's second superpower. Yet when these same people assess the relative geopolitical standing of nations, they revert to 19th century categories: only big countries with big populations, large aggregate income, a single sovereign state, and massively manned military are

treated as superpowers. They fail to understand that active global power projection is increasingly a luxury good available only to those states with high per capita incomes—which is why China and India do so little of it. Even in the military area, Europe, with 21% of the world's military spending, has 100,000 troops active in global combat situations, compared to China or India, with 4% and 3% of global military spending respectively, and a couple of thousand troops abroad each. Hence, the endless debates about institutionalizing, centralizing and strengthening of European foreign policy as preconditions for the exercise of Euro-power are beside the point: power does not need to be centralized to be usable in the networked world of the 21st century. The transatlantic relationship is more crucial than ever. One pillar, the US, provides the hard power (and is the "second superpower" on the civilian side) while the other pillar, Europe, specializes in the use of economic influence, international law, and power of attraction (while remaining the "second superpower" on the military side). None of this is likely to change for two or three generations.

Whether Europe has been weakened by its successive difficulties, from the constitutional debate to the Greek crisis, or whether Europe does not get enough credit for being an actual superpower, what is indubitable is that it is in need of a new narrative in order to be taken seriously. Until then, transatlantic relations may not seem as attractive to the US as they used to be. Yet with the rise of new global and regional powers, it increasingly seems that Europe and the US are in the same boat when it comes to globalization. Maybe transatlantic relations do not seem to matter as much as they used to the rest of the world, as our panelists argued, but to Europeans and Americans, they seem to matter more than ever.

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