Trans-Atlantic Parliamentary Forum*

Washington, 3-4 December 2001

(...) I. Introduction

1. As concerns have grown about a transatlantic "drift" in attitudes and policies, the Assembly's Standing Committee decided to hold a "Transatlantic Parliamentary Forum" to help to determine the nature of transatlantic divergences, and perhaps develop ideas for redressing them.

2. Following the terrorist atrocities committed in the United States on 11 September, it also became evident that the Forum would be a valuable occasion for members to assess the long-term implications of these attacks.

3. The Forum, which took place in Washington DC on 3 and 4 December 2001, showed that Europe and the United States continue to share values and interests, and a deep sense of commitment to the indivisibility of transatlantic security. However, it also showed that this cannot be taken for granted. In many areas, ranging from the practical to the philosophical, trends are emerging that could undermine the future solidarity of the Alliance.

* Versão on line.
http://www.nato-pa.int/publications/special/av013gen-tac.html
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II. Defence Capabilities

4. Defence capability was identified as one of the most tangible examples of transatlantic "drift". This was highlighted during the discussion of the United States' recently completed Quadrennial Defense Review which looked at all aspects of defence: policy, programmes, posture, and forces. It represented a dramatic change in strategic direction for the United States.

5. Among the key features was the abandonment of the goal of prevailing simultaneously in wars in two theatres. This "win-win" criterion had been replaced with a "win-hold" standard, that, in effect, freed forces for other missions.

6. The Review called for the ability to counter a wide range of potential threats, both geographically and in terms of capability. Threats included terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and ballistic missiles. Homeland security was also emphasised as were alliance relations and peacetime international co-operation: the United States must be safe at home in order to effectively project power abroad.

7. The Review introduced a new concept of deterrence, based as much on denial and protection as on retaliation. For instance, if limited missile defences could thwart ballistic missiles, nations might be dissuaded from building them.

8. The Review stressed the urgency of transforming defence forces. Emphasis was placed on the protection of bases, the defeat of weapons of mass destruction, information technology for command and control, the denial of enemy sanctuaries, space operations, and power projection.

9. Building on the military transformation that had been taking place since operation "Desert Storm", American armed forces will focus on area denial, joint operations, global strike capability, dispersed forces, and massed firepower. The Review also stressed the notion of forward deterrence, which implied a reinforced, forward posture. There was also a shifting geographic focus so the emphasis was now on the "arc of instability" from the Middle East to North-East Asia.

10. In sum, the goal was to reassure Allies, deter foes and if necessary defeat them.

III. The Transatlantic Capability Gap

11. While a forward posture suggested that the United States would maintain a global military presence rather than withdrawing from engagements abroad, concerns have arisen on both sides of the Atlantic about a growing gap in the ability of the Allies to fight alongside the United States in high-intensity conflicts.

12. The United States was adopting new technologies and operational concepts more rapidly and on a larger scale than its Allies. Although Europe had adequate technical and intellectual capacities, the defence budget gap was a major reason why it did not exploit these capacities.

13. The United States spent about 3.2% of GDP on defence, and this figure was now rising, while Europe spent approximately 2.2% of GDP on defence and this figure was essentially static. Furthermore, the gap in spending was particularly acute in the modernisation of forces with only Turkey and the United Kingdom spending the same proportion of their defence budgets on research, the development, and procurement as did the United States.

14. Thus, there was a transatlantic defence capability gap: Europe had some good systems, but not enough of them and it had particular weaknesses in command, control, and communications, the ability to conduct all-weather operations, precision strike, and logistics.

IV. A Division of Labour?

15. This gap in capability was fuelling notions that in future Europe should focus on regional missions, mainly peacekeeping, while the United States should focus on high-intensity conflict. This trend should certainly be resisted: NATO had survived because it shared risks and responsibilities. For this to continue, Europe must retain the capability to fight with the United States in high intensity conflicts, although this did not mean that it would have to fight all high-intensity conflicts. Nor was it necessary for all European nations to have "spearhead" forces that could join the United States in rapidly mounted, high intensity operations.

16. The Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) – intended to address the shortcomings in Alliance defence capabilities – was only making slow progress. In the United States, disillusionment was growing at the "coagulation" of the DCI. Of the 59 force goals, only one – a conceptual study – had been completed, and progress on many had been extremely limited. It was felt that the Defence Capabilities Initiative should focus on ensuring the interoperability of Alliance forces.

17. In order to address the differences in doctrine and close the operations gap, Europe should exercise more with the United States. Regarding the industrial gap, there was a danger of creating a "fortress United States" and a "fortress Europe" in defence industries. To avoid this, there was a need to forge new transatlantic partnerships, and the United States should, for instance, reform its export control laws to facilitate a better sharing of technology.

V. European Security and Defence Policy

18. The DCI's failure was a source of American scepticism about ESDP: Europe was not seen as seriously addressing the transatlantic capabilities gap, and the European Union's headline goals met similar scepticism, with questions being raised about the actual capabilities lying behind the numbers. Although the United States agreed with the need for Europe to enhance its military capability, concern was growing that ESDP was producing more bureaucracy than capability, and that this would undermine NATO.

19. The United States accepted the European Union's decision to move ahead with ESDP, but it would have preferred a European Security and Defence Identity to have been developed within NATO rather than within the European Union. The United States was particularly concerned that its differences with the European Union could "pollute" the transatlantic security relationship. For instance, the United States felt that the EU mounted unfair trade barriers, and on many issues the European Union's position was often based on negotiation and was therefore inflexible. At the same time, summits between United States and the European Union seemed to lack ideas. There was certainly a need for more constructive dialogue. In any event, NATO and ESDP must be compatible and complimentary.

20. A European participant agreed that European defence budgets should be increased, and that defence markets on both sides of the Atlantic should be opened up. Europe should have the capacity to conduct high-intensity operations and to operate alongside United States and Canada. However, Europe ought to have the means to be able to act in the security field if the United States did not want to intervene. Thus, Europe needed adequate means for planning, command, and precision strike. It also needed its own ability to gather information autonomously and analyze crises. ESDP should be a tool to create Alliance cohesion, not undermine it.

21. Another European commentator noted that the European Union was at its best when it used all three pillars. It needed a military capability to be politically credible, and Europe had successfully conducted military operations in its own right such as mine clearance and the enforcement of embargoes. If NATO was engaged in an operation, it should be the primary organisation. If NATO was not engaged, there might be a need for the European Union to be so. It was not appropriate to compare the EU's headline goals with NATO's entire capability: the European Union should focus on what it was able to do in quite specific missions.

VI. Stabilising the Balkans

22. One American participant argued that Western policy on the Balkans was fundamentally flawed, and that since Balkans were not vital to United States' interests, the United States should not invest its energy and credibility in them. ESDP had been boosted by experience in the Balkans, and the United States should support ESDP while evolving an exit strategy from the Balkans.

23. Another American commentator was less pessimistic, stating that there had been improvements in the Balkans over the last ten years. While it was true that the Balkans were not a high United States strategic priority, they had the potential to disrupt other relations such as those with the Alliance and with Russia. However, the United States did have other priorities, and Europe should bear more of the burden in the Balkans, which was only natural since European interests were more at stake. Unfortunately, Europe did lack credibility in the Balkans since it was seen as having neither a unity of purpose nor a unity of command.

24. He asserted that the basic choice in the Balkans was to make all the states multi-ethnic or to redraw borders on ethnic lines: the United States tended to favour the former, while the latter had more support in Europe. Repartition would mean moving people on the point of NATO bayonets, clearly an unpalatable prospect. Furthermore repartition would not have helped deal with organised crime, one of the key problems in the region.

25. European commentators were more optimistic about progress in the Balkans, feeling that considerable progress had been made, and co-operation between the European Union and NATO had been particularly fruitful. Participants cited the relative stability in many parts of the Balkans, the genuine progress towards democratization, the gradual drawing down of peacekeeping forces, and the reconstruction efforts taking place.

26. There was opposition to a division of labour where the "United States would do warfare and Europe would do peacekeeping". Nor should peacekeeping be undervalued: apart from anything else it was a resource in the fight against terrorism.

VII. Missile Defence and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction

27. Strategic thinking on weapons of mass destruction had evolved over the last ten years. In the early 1990s, it was thought that chemical and biological weapons would be acquired as substitutes for nuclear weapons: as the "poor man's bomb". Such weapons were also seen as weapons of last resort, if national survival were threatened. It was also thought that they would be difficult to use, and the relevant technologies would be hard to master. The United States believed that the threat was largely regional in nature, and that the threat of nuclear retaliation could be relied upon to provide deterrence.

28. The current view was that nations acquired chemical and biological weapons to counter the West's conventional superiority. They were no longer seen as weapons of last resort, but weapons whose early use was possible or even likely. They were still capable of mass destruction, but could also wreak havoc at low levels of use. They could also have operational utility since the battlefield now extended to all areas needed to sustain forces such as ports, airfields, and communications facilities.

In addition the United States homeland was clearly at risk from such weapons. Traditional deterrence could fail because those holding such weapons need not be rational.

29. If the decision were taken to overthrow a regime, perhaps because it harboured terrorists, the leader of that regime would have no reason to exercise restraint. In other words deterrence would no longer apply. If that regime possessed long-range missiles, it was perfectly feasible that these would be used.

30. Missile defences were not a panacea: they would not have prevented the attacks of 11September, nor would they have dismantled Al Qaida. But there was an increasing tendency to look at deterrence through denial. At the same time, there was a need to strengthen non-proliferation efforts, improve counter-proliferation capabilities, and move to a new deterrence concept based more on defence. Hence, missile defence was increasingly considered as a means to protect the United States, its Allies, and their forces.

31. For deterrence it was necessary to show the aggressor that the risks outweighed the gains. Thus defences against cruise missiles, aircraft, missiles, weapons of mass destruction, information assets and greater civil protection could all influence an aggressor and persuade him that he could not achieve the result that he sought.

32. Although many people would prefer to see missile defence take place within the context of an amended ABM treaty – and this could be done with relatively few modifications – there was little doubt that missile defences would proceed with or without such a framework. Europeans who hoped that the Democratic Senate majority would block the Administration's plans for missile defences would be disappointed. There was enough Democrat support to ensure that the Senate would not oppose missile defence deployments or save the ABM Treaty.

33. American commentators favoured the deployment of European missile defences, and did not feel that these would be prohibitively expensive. As well as protecting against direct attacks, they would also allay fears about the effects of debris over European territory from American interceptions.

34. It was felt that China intended to modernize its nuclear forces regardless of decisions about United States missile defences.

35. It was generally believed that even if the ABM Treaty was no longer ideal, some kind of framework with Russia was desirable. However, if a framework could not be worked out, the United States would proceed with missile defences to protect its national territory.

36. A European participant noted that in Europe, America's plans for missile defences were originally seen as "Star Wars 2", but a more refined debate had then emerged. Most would now agree that the days of traditional deterrence were over. The United States, for its part, should recognize that the Europeans were no longer dreaming of a return to that form of deterrence and the preservation of the ABM Treaty at any price. Discussions between the United States and Russia were important, as were discussions within NATO. There should be more consultation with Europeans. There was also a tendency to overlook the case of China, and it would be useful to get China "on board", although China might well use America's planned missile defences as an excuse for modernising its own missile arsenal.

37. Europeans were generally more sceptical about the missile threat, but it certainly could not be ruled out. The question was how to address it. In general, Europeans preferred to use other instruments: political, economic, and multilateral arms control. If missile defences were to be deployed, Europeans would prefer a modified ABM treaty, and in any event supported a broad non-proliferation strategy including multilateral arms control. Ideally missile defences would curb the arms race not escalate it, and would take place within an arms control framework.

VIII. Managing NATO's Enlargement and Relations with Russia

38. NATO had transformed itself since the end of the Cold War. This transformation had included the development of co-operative frameworks such as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnerships for Peace and the formulation of criteria for membership including democratic control of armed forces, relations with neighbouring states, private ownership, treatment of minorities, and a free market economy. NATO had already admitted three new members, and a further nine nations were candidates for NATO membership.

39. The attacks of 11 September had changed the values that would be used to judge enlargement: co-operation in anti-terrorist activities would have a profound impact on NATO and enlargement. At the same time, NATO would have to rethink what was needed to deal with security risks. This might mean yet another strategic concept and the reconsideration of priorities within the DCI. Regarding candidates for NATO enlargement, South Eastern Europe was important in terms of the anti-terrorist campaign, and this suggested admitting more, rather than fewer, of the candidates, perhaps in a regatta style enlargement.

40. Regarding the relationship between NATO and Russia, it was time to move beyond the Permanent Joint Council, and to revisit the Founding Act. NATO-Russia co-operation had been increasing before 11September, and had stepped up substantially since then. President Putin had been the first foreign head of state to speak to President Bush after the attacks, and had offered immediate co-operation. Russian support had been very extensive, and the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) had become more effective. Indeed, the PJC had been used to brief both Russia and the NAC members on Al Qaida. Furthermore, a great deal of progress was being made in the strategic area, with reductions agreed in offensive weapons and both nations looking beyond the ABM Treaty.

41. The Founding Act already provided for working together on issues such as weapons of mass destruction, proliferation, terrorism, and peacekeeping. There was scope for consultation, common action, and joint decisions, perhaps within a new "NATO-Russia Council". This would still allow Russia and NATO scope for independent action. Of course, it was important to decide what issues would be kept in and kept out of such a body.

42. A European commentator agreed that the case for NATO enlargement had been strengthened by the attacks of 11September. He believed that after the end of the Cold War, the task had been to restructure Europe, and the European Union had had a better concept of this than did NATO. The process of European Union membership was longer and more complex than NATO's. Partnership for Peace was essentially a waiting room. In 1999, NATO had finally produced a list of potential members, but the lack of clarity about who would become a member was destabilising. NATO and EU enlargements should be complementary: all European Union nations should be permitted to join NATO.

43. Regarding relations with Russia, he felt that the problem between NATO and Russia in 1999 had been over Kosovo not NATO enlargement. The improved NATO-Russia relationship meant that future NATO enlargement would be easier. At the NATO summit in 2002, it would be better to invite a larger number than a smaller one, and to schedule a further round of NATO accession invitations for 2005.

44. A representative from a candidate country said that public support for NATO enlargement was crucial. Furthermore, candidate countries should think about regional security rather than their own national security. The Membership Action Plan had initially been seen as an obstacle to membership, but was now seen as useful and had provided motivation for change. Russian opposition to aspiring NATO members only rekindled memories of the former relationship with the Soviet Union. The improvement in NATO-Russia relations was a welcome development that provided hope for the future.

45. One European participant said that the term "enlargement" was misleading: it would be better to talk about the "opening" of NATO. Regarding Russian opposition to NATO enlargement, he noted that Russia's problem was a lack of stability towards its southern border rather than its eastern border.

46. A Russian participant said that NATO had been created to fight the Soviet Union which no longer existed. At the end of the Cold War, Russia had been promised that there would be no expansion of NATO, and there was certainly no reason for small countries to join NATO. If NATO was only a political organisation, countries should simply join the European Union instead.

47. Another Russian participant observed that a free Europe was the key to a new world order. The goal was strategic stability in Europe, and Russia wanted to play a role in that process. Russia could provide transport and other assets, and could make a greater contribution to peacekeeping operations. Russia was already making a substantial contribution in Afghanistan, and there were many other areas where it could assist. He concluded that there was a particular need for dialogue on NATO enlargement, and Russia remained strongly opposed to enlargement.

IX. Transatlantic Approaches to Global Challenges in the Wake of the 11 September

48. Throughout the 1990s the transatlantic partners had searched for a long-term basis for co-operation and to build a new framework for security. Important progress had been made in the security field and on other issues such as the environment and international crime.

49. All Americans had been touched by the sympathy and assistance provided by Allies, and the implementation of Article 5, in particular, had made a deep and lasting impression. It had always been assumed that Article 5 would be invoked in defence of a European nation, rather than for the United States. Co-operation involved NATO Allies and partners, and the European Union's response had been breathtaking in speed and ambition. Relations with Russia had also been transformed, with unprecedented co-operation in areas such as intelligence. The United States was now looking to apply this co-operative spirit to the rest of the transatlantic agenda.

50. The United States' preoccupation was now out-of-area, and it was clear that the Alliance must be able to deal with out-of-area threats. However, the current consensus might not hold after the operation against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. In particular, the consensus could break down on taking action against Iraq. In addition, while there was broad Alliance agreement on the nature of the threat from weapons of mass destruction, there was not yet agreement on how to deal with those threats.

51. It may be that in the next phase of anti-terrorist operations, the United States would choose to "go it alone", which could marginalize NATO.

52. The events of 11 September had underscored the indivisible security of the transatlantic Alliance, but the question was whether this solidarity would be sustained in the future. This would depend upon the response beyond the immediate challenge. It would be necessary to determine the future targets and to develop the appropriate strategy such as the use of military force, as well as diplomatic and political instruments. Questions would also have to be answered about consultation mechanisms and the means of making collective decisions.

53. A European commentator noted that there were transatlantic divisions on the role of government and the adequacy of international institutions. The United States

was becoming more aware of the need for co-operative international decisions, and the events of 11 September had arrested the United States' slide to unilateralism, although there was still a lot of rhetoric about the right to act unilaterally. The importance of the nation state was in decline: issues such as climate change, genetically modified food, proliferation, international trade, and interest rates simply could not be addressed by nations acting alone.

54. He felt that the United States had acted wisely over Afghanistan. There was now a need for greater dialogue between cultures and a need to address the religious and economic sources of confrontation. The West must address the economic divide between North and South, and must deal with poverty.

55. Another European commentator suggested that the attacks of 11 September had provided a new "glue" for the Alliance, giving it a sense of unity and purpose not seen since the end of the Cold War. The war against terror would last for many years, but this was not a "normal" war on terror. Terrorist acts were usually part of a negotiation, an attempt to extract political concessions. The events of 11 September were not accompanied by any demands: they were a declaration of war against democracies, and the goal was to create an Islamic superstate. He was also deeply concerned about the removal of the psychological block on the use of biological weapons.

56. He believed that in the wake of 11 September, new transatlantic relationships were emerging. There would be a rekindling of the United States-United Kingdom "family relationship" and a new role for Germany. United States-Russia relations would also be strengthened. However, he expressed concern that France's role might become more marginal.

57. Even so, there was a grave risk of future "decoupling" in terms of military capabilities. Only a few British and French units had the capacity to fight alongside the United States. Unfortunately, Europe was not properly addressing defence budget shortcomings, nor was it re-appraising its defence doctrine in an effort to redress transatlantic gaps. It simply was not serious on these issues, and it could not demand political control of military operations if it could only contribute symbolic forces.

58. If Europe itself was only a civilian power, there was no way that it could really influence events in the world. If the United States did not have a "counterweight",

it would not accept the need to share power: this could lead to greater unilateralism in the United States, and this would be the fault of Europe.

59. Nevertheless, this was a time of opportunity. In many ways this was actually the beginning of the post-Cold War world. It was an opportunity for the United States and the Allies to build a new world security architecture, and to bring the Islamic world into the democratic fold.

X. Differing "World Views"

60. Before 11 September, Alliance solidarity was feared to be waning as transatlantic views diverged in a broad range of areas. The United States seemed to be increasingly at odds with its Allies on issues such as landmines, the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, the ABM Treaty, verification of the Biological Weapons Convention, the Kyoto Treaty, the International Criminal Court, and the death penalty. What the United States saw as protecting its national sovereignty and interests, its Allies saw as being more unilateralist, and even isolationist.

61. As an American speaker noted, Europe tended to take a more multilateral approach, and this had served Europe well. He acknowledged that there was a tendency for some in the United States to see treaties as limiting the United States' ability to defend its own interests, and the advantages of such treaties were sometimes overlooked. Even so, Americans generally placed less faith in international organizations than did Europeans. He noted, for instance, that, had the United Nations maintained the mandate for forces in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, that nation's stability might have been preserved. Thus, while the United States preferred to have United Nations approval for any actions, it would always reserve its right to defend its vital national interests and obligations unilaterally.

62. One participant suggested that Europe was essentially constructing itself as a civil power and that it therefore lacked the political will to deal with its military shortcomings. Thus, there was a real risk that the transatlantic divergence in military capability would worsen.

63. Some of the European press analyses of the events of 11 September were highlighted by participants from both Europe and the United States as particularly striking and

alarming symptoms of transatlantic divergence. A European participant expressed grave concern about certain "elite" European opinion, citing press articles suggesting that "the United States deserved it", and articles that were profoundly hostile towards American action against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Although most people on both sides of the Atlantic felt a strong sense of common purpose in the wake of 11September, the flurry of anti-Americanism in the European press was extremely reminiscent of anti-Semitic attitudes in the 1930s, and was a source of serious concern.

XI. United We Stand?

64. Despite real transatlantic differences, the overall validity of the transatlantic partnership was not called into question. As one American participant put it, the Alliance was strong, but there was a need to address some potential problems to prevent them from becoming serious challenges to Alliance cohesion.

65. The terrorist attacks of 11 September had underlined the fact that despite their differences, the Alliance nations were firmly united by common values and ideals, and in the face of a serious challenge, disputes could be set aside. For example, as one American participant explained, in previous years, arguments about burden sharing within the Alliance had always featured in the United States House of Representatives debate on the defence budget. This year, however, there had been no such argument: Europe was clearly involved in the war against terrorism, making both military contributions, sharing intelligence, granting overflight rights, blocking funding for terrorism, etc..

66. Although there was concern that this solidarity could break down depending upon the conduct of the "second phase" of the war against terrorism, the view was expressed that the opportunity should be seized to address differences, essentially strengthening the Alliance's foundations.

67. For example, the United States and the European Union were enhancing co-operation in areas such as intelligence, police, international money laundering, and border controls: it would be appropriate to extend these efforts to produce broader consultation and co-ordination mechanisms between the United States and the

European Union. Trade would be one obvious area, but it would be equally useful to improve co-ordination and consultation on policies concerning the Middle East, Russia, China, the environment, education, etc.

68. In sum, the Forum showed that while there was a healthy plurality of opinion on most issues within Europe and within the United States, it was legitimate to talk of divergences in transatlantic opinion. On many issues the "centre of gravity" of opinion in Europe and the United States differed substantially. In the long term, some of the issues could certainly threaten to undermine the Alliance. For instance, concerns about the future ability of Alliance forces to operate jointly must be taken extremely seriously.

69. The Forum highlighted areas of convergence and divergence. It did not set out to produce recommendations or conclusions on how to deal with the areas of divergence, but it did indicate very clearly that Alliance must seriously address transatlantic political "drift" in order to ensure the Alliance's future.

[1] This summary does not provide a comprehensive account of the proceedings, but instead focuses specifically on the transatlantic dimensions of the subjects addressed.