

## COLUMN

### The United States and Europe: A question for the Twenty-First Century

What role will the United States play in European politics at the beginning of the third millennium? In my view, the answer to this question depends on the way in which Europeans and Americans will be able to cope with the following dichotomy in their mutual relationships. On the one hand, as both American and European politicians are aware, America is a European power. The whole history of the 20th century demonstrates convincingly the importance of transatlantic cooperation. Since American military forces intervened for the first time in Europe in the final stage of World War I, American participation in European matters has proved to be essential for the defence of fundamental principles and values of Western civilization, endangered in our century by the rise of totalitarianism. On the other hand, from the very beginning, politics in the United States have always been heavily influenced by a deeply rooted belief in what S.M. Lipset characterized as American 'exceptionalism'. The dominant creed in America has always been that the foundation of the United States is a revolutionary event which gave rise to the unique, exceptional character of the American 'way of life', American values, the American form of government and American institutions. It was this creed, that resulted in American interventions in the 'old' continent being perceived as mere international interventions, principally disconnected from the domestic project of *nova ordo seclorum*; and that the United States, participating in European matters in the name of American ideals, never intended to open up its own political system to the world at large and to forsake its isolationism.

The dichotomy is above all clear in the field of human rights. The process of internationalizing their protection of human rights after World War II was in fact initiated by the Americans and their respect for human rights became a 'central feature' and 'a principal goal' of United States foreign policy. At the same time, however, the attitude of the United States toward international legal instruments, as far as their domestic application was concerned, was more than reserved. Until 1988, no single major international human rights treaty had been ratified by the United States and only in the last decade has their policy changed from total non-participation to one of ratification 'with reservations, understanding and declarations'. Although the Bricker Amendment finally was defeated in 1957, there is still very strong resistance among the American political elite to 'nationalize' human rights and accept the international human rights legislation as 'self-executing'.

The CSCE created by the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, initiated a negotiation process whose dynamism surpassed all original expectations. The

link between security concerns and human rights dramatically changed the agenda of East-West relations, inspired East-European dissident movements and resulted in the wave of anti-totalitarian revolutions at the end of the 1980s. The objectives and goals of the Helsinki Process were consistent with the objectives and goals of U.S. foreign policy. The fact that CSCE commitments were not legally binding, explains why the U.S. Congress did not need to raise traditional objections against American participation. At the same time, however, the argument of 'non-intervention in internal affairs' raised by the socialist countries, which were repeatedly criticized for human rights violations, could be rejected by the West, because what was at stake was not a legal procedure — an action under international law — but a political process with the aim of improving relations between the participating states and to promote their friendly cooperation.

There is no doubt that the revolutions in Eastern and Central Europe fundamentally changed the scene in which the Helsinki process had been operating. Its nature, however, the unique connection between the sphere of international security and human rights, remains the same. The OSCE (the CSCE was renamed in 1994) is still a very specific and very unique player in international politics in Europe and current developments clearly indicate that its role will not diminish. On the contrary, OSCE enthusiasts have quite good reason to believe in its future, in spite of its momentary low efficiency and inability to cope with all the military conflicts which have emerged after the collapse of communism on European soil.

Let us return to the original question of this text: What is the place of the United States in the security model which we foresee for Europe in the twenty-first century? First, there is no doubt that the participation of the United States in European matters will develop primarily through the defence system of NATO. The gradual expansion of NATO and the consequent redefinition of both its military and non-military tasks will represent, at least in the foreseeable future, the dominant theme of all discussions and debates concerning transatlantic cooperation. More challenging, however, and I dare say also more important, is the question of the OSCE. Here, with regard to the central position of the human rights problem and the direct connection between human rights and security matters, it will be less and less possible to escape the fundamental political dilemma Western or European civilization is facing: should the United States still protect its own exceptionalism and see itself as a unique experiment which started as a revolution against the old world dominated by Europeans, or should America give up its self-proclaimed special status and enter, together with the Europeans in the transatlantic context — and together with others inhabiting other regions of the earth — the new world of global civilization?

Martin Palous



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