

## The Current and Future State of Transatlantic Relations

*Transcript of Uffe Ellemann-Jensen's keynote speech at AmCham Denmark's Annual General Meeting - March 23, 2010*

Ambassador, ladies and gentlemen...

Thank you Stephen for those kind words of introduction and thank you for inviting me here today to share with you some thoughts about transatlantic relations.

Let me give a word of warning first – some may be provoked by what I have to say, but what I'm saying is totally on my own behalf. So don't blame anyone in government or elsewhere for my viewpoints.

Well I guess that many of us were sitting anxiously waiting for the outcome of the (healthcare) vote in Washington on Sunday. Some of you were sitting up at the red eye times. I was the lucky one sitting in Bangkok Thailand and there it was early on Monday morning when we finally got the result.

And I was almost late coming here because I watched on CNN when the President signed the bill in Washington and I still got a lump in my throat. This was indeed a very moving moment, that when the result came Monday morning it even over shadowed the defeat of our Danish tennis star Wozniacki somewhere else on the globe.

This event also gave us all something that we all need, in particular we Europeans – it gave us a strong American President. Because with such a victory at home, he will have a much better chance to deal with a tremendous list of problems and challenges elsewhere.

And that list really reminds me of the old Chinese curse: "May you live in interesting times" There are the wars being fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process with Benjamin Netanyahu giving the Vice President the finger, there's an Iran fiercely resolved to become a nuclear power, there's an ever more fragile Pakistan, there are franchises of Al-Qaeda popping up from Northern Africa to Yemen, and there or some increasingly self-confident and in some cases rather quarrelsome major powers like China, Russia, Brazil and India. And then there are traditional allies who disappoint because they are either bent on pursuing their own goals like Turkey or Japan or because they don't seem have all that many strategic goals of their own, like Europe.

And then there is, of course, but I won't get deeper into that, the financial crisis, the nuclear proliferation terrorism, pandemics, climate change and a host of cross-border challenges requiring not only cooperation but also a comprehensive overhaul of the institutions and the rules of global governance. So this is quite a list to deal with, once you have dealt with the most pressing homegrown problems.

Now where do the Trans-Atlantic relations fit into this picture? Or to put it in another way, we Europeans, we finally got the American president that we so intensely wanted, and we received him with misty eyes. But what has Europe given him? Apart from a premature Nobel Prize that would have been an embarrassment had it not been for the speech the President gave in Oslo, which caused some of the misty eyes to dry up.

The answer is we haven't given him that much. It is as though the Europeans tend to forget that this exceptionally gifted, intellectual politician he is not just the American President, he is first

and foremost president of and for America. And the sad fact in my view is that Europe in the aggregate (as well as at member state level) still appears to be mostly unprepared to partner with America in handling global challenges – or to do so - on its own. And worse that this inability seems to not be merely a question of capabilities, but of political will.

When judging by the furor with which President Obama's election as President of the United States was greeted here in Europe, his inauguration last year ought to have heralded the beginnings of a new golden age in transatlantic relations. Yet today more than a year later, the mood in Europe is rather gloomy, enthusiasm for the new president has paled and attitudes towards America have become more reserved. At best, Europeans are being cautiously and selectively cooperative.

And I think it is fair to say that the respect for Europe has not reached new peaks on the other side of the Atlantic. I'm sure we all know Henry Kissinger's old joke: "Give me a telephone number, so I can call Europe". Well, after we in Europe had live through a long and agonizing period of "reflection", we finally got the Lisbon treaty in place and then we produced the new telephone number for Europe that Henry Kissinger had called for in vain 30 years ago.

But, if Kissinger's successor, Hilary Clinton, or the White House calls, they will be met with something like this: "ello, 'ello, this is Europe, dial one if you want to speak to our President van Rompuy, dial 2 if you wish to speak to the other President, Mr. Baroso, dial 3 if you want to speak to the rotating President, Mr. Zapatero, dial 4 if you want to speak to the High Representative for Foreign Policy Baroness Ashton, dial 5 if you want assistance to be directed to other places like Berlin, London, Paris" and so on...

Of course, it is far too early to pass judgment on the new leadership structure that was finally created by the Lisbon treaty and it would be unfair to judge the two persons chosen to fill the new top jobs on the fact that they were nearly unknowns - even in Europe. But the contrast, the contrast between the 2 key game changing events on either side of the Atlantic in 2009 highlights a deeper strategic imbalance between the United States on one side and Europe on the other side.

The United States has at least in modern times always had a globally oriented foreign policy. The same is true of some European states, particularly the two nuclear powers and permanent members of the United Nations' Security Council, Britain and France, even though their claim to great power status is ringing increasingly hollow. Germany, well Germany is a great economic power, but they are, and remain to be wary of exercising power and responsibility commensurable to their size.

The EU is a global actor when we look at global trade, but only began to attempt the beginnings of a globally oriented foreign and security policy in the 1990's spurred by the war at genocide in the Balkans. I was active at that time, and I still remember in my sad moments when the then President of the European Council ministers, the Foreign Minister of Luxembourg said after a visit to what was still Yugoslavia, but was breaking up – he said: "This is the hour of Europe, this is not the hour of the United States". We all know what happened, and we all know who had to come and deal with the problems that the Europeans themselves were not able to deal with. But the fact is still that where America does strategy, the EU chooses processes and summit meetings.

The European Union simply does not possess anything like a global foreign and security policy or even a transatlantic policy. Take European defense policies, which is mainly and in some cases entirely driven by budget cuts. European soldiers today make up 36% of Nato's ISAP

force in Afghanistan, but most of them are covered by caveats that prevent them from participating in the most dangerous operations.

And those European countries that are using these caveats (I am proud to say that my own country is not one of them) those European countries have not reciprocated by enlarging their efforts in for instance police training - even though the training of the Afghan police force is a European responsibility. No, the stark truth remains that the EU's 27 militaries are both bloated and inadequate for today's requirements. Therefore, burden sharing, which was a concept that we knew by heart back in the 80's and 90's, back in the cold war days, this is still very much the issue in transatlantic relations.

The relationship between the United States and Europe is old, broad and deep, but it is not strategic – at least not where it matters to America. As for President Obama's initiatives, the Europeans have been enthusiastic about arms control, responsive on Iran, and finally came around to offer some more support on Afghanistan. But on many other issues, from closing Guantanamo to standardizing Iraq, re-launching the Middle East peace process, preventing Pakistan from becoming a failed state, reaching out to the Muslim world, where the President gave his brilliant speech in Cairo last year, or the reform of international institutions like the United Nations, NATO, World Bank, IMF - where Europe appeared to have very little political clout and even fewer ideas to offer. However, President Obama and the Lisbon treaty have stripped the Europeans of our two main excuses for doing nothing – those two excuses were “Dubya and Deadlock “, and it has exposed our lack of collective ambition and imagination.

So it's no wonder that some Europeans feel so profoundly disappointed with President Obama, because he is the mirror that reveals their own inadequacies to them. Yet this situation appears to have had at least one healthy side effect: The competition among non- European thinkers to depict the EU as a moral counter Utopia to America seems to have come to a halt – it is a long time ago, I have heard somebody talking about the “counterweights” to the United States and so on. It has been replaced by sobering, self-critical realism.

Now, if we try to put the transatlantic partnership in a global context, I think it should give all of us in Europe a warning about our place in the new world order of the future. Asia, first of all China and India, are emerging and in the new world power balance Europe's role is shrinking. We have known this for some years, but the financial crisis has certainly accelerated this process.

So, what role is there for Europe in the worldview of a President like Obama? Can we expect to maintain the role that we had for over half a century as the first among America's key strategic relationships? On the surface all seems well – President Obama inherited a relationship that had deteriorated dramatically in George W. Bush's first administration, but was pragmatically repaired by both sides during the second. Washington gave up its determined opposition to independent European security and defense arrangements, and the Europeans on their part as I said before dropped the notion of counterbalancing the American hegemony.

It's worth to note also that Obama gave only one speech abroad during his candidacy – that was in Berlin – and European leaders flocked to see him after his election. He came to Europe as a President only two months after taking office. Summits and meetings from London via Strasbourg and Prague to Ankara – in all he made six trips to Europe last year. And in his graceful Strasbourg speech he noted a casual yet insidious anti-Americanism in Europe. But also reached across the drift noting that and I quote:” In America there is a failure to appreciate Europe's leading role in the world, there has been times when America has shown arrogance and being dismissive, even derisive”, and the President emphasized that he had come to, as he

said: "renew our partnership, one in which America listen and learns from our friends and allies, but where our friends and allies bear their part of the burden".

So for those who cared to listen there were also passages that foreshadowed a sudden shift in the relationship, and they are worth quoting in detail:

- "America cannot confront the challenges of this century alone, but Europe cannot confront them without America."
- "America is changing but it cannot be America alone that changes."
- "I know it can be tempting to turn inwards, but our fate of time together, not just America and Europe but the fate of the entire world, we must not give up on one another."

..."We must not give up on one another" Well, that certainly was an entirely new note.

Despite some initially favorable reactions, Europeans enthusiasm for this new president did not make them any more willing to take in prisoners released from Guantanamo - of course it did not help that Congress had previously forbidden any release of prisoners within the United States - but still!

And several European countries firmly resisted Obama's call for more calesian measures against the financial crisis. U.S. pleas for more troops in Afghanistan were met with stony silence for many months, and a bank data-sharing agreement aimed at tracking suspected terrorists was flatly rejected by the European Parliament.

On the other hand the announcement of a shift in missile defense policy on the American side was bungled diplomatically by the administration. That caused unnecessary bad blood in an already skeptical Eastern Europe that had been one of the strongest supporters of American global policy. Also, the Obama team does not seem to have offset a policy of Georgia and Ukraine or on the post-Soviet states as such.

Let me add some interesting observations that were pointed out to me recently by a friend in Germany. When, then senator Obama chaired the Senate Forum Relation sub-committee on European affairs, he never used this post to travel to Europe or even hold a committee policy hearing on Europe. His first U.S. EU summit meeting as President was in Prague, it was compressed to less than 3 hours, and he sent his Vice President to attend a lunch for Heads of State at the next summit in Washington.

So perhaps European leaders ought not to have been surprised when the President decided only last month not to attend the subsequent meeting in Spain later this spring. Obama is undoubtedly sincere when he says that European support matters for much that America does in the world, but he is also manifestly the first president who is not - as you could say - "an Atlanticist" by default. I think that in order to stay interesting in the eyes of our transatlantic partner, there are some things we Europeans ought to do:

- We have to attend to the unfinished business in the Balkans. We Europeans have to do that.
- We have to take responsibility for handling Russia as well as for the future development of the post-soviet states – and here is a point where I am very worried, because the EU as such does not have a policy on Russia and does not have a common policy on it's neighborhood and these two things interlink. Some of the larger countries, no names mentioned, are more interested in getting gas and oil from Russia that they are interested

in trying to prevent the present Russian regime from using energy as a power tool and recreate “spheres of interest” in contradiction with the rules established at the end of the Cold War. We have to deal with that.

- Also, Europe must assume a greater role in the Middle East and in South Asia.
- And Europe should use this clout as a normative power to work with others towards reforming the institutions of global government, and it would gain us enormous credibility if we Europeans were to go ahead unilaterally and give up some of the seats in these institutions where we are outrageously overrepresented.

So in short, Europe should become a genuinely strategic actor in international affairs. Perhaps that would also enable a reset of the U.S. – European relationship. But one thing seems certain at least in a world of increasing disorder, president Obama offers an extraordinary opportunity to us – Europe will not soon find its’ like again, so I hope that we Europeans will wake up and try to use this opportunity.

Thank you.