

Europe and Atlantic relationship

A brilliant French thinker summed up in one lucid phrase what the Atlantic relationship and NATO had meant until the fall of the Berlin wall: "Keep the Americans in, the Soviets out, and the Germans down."

On Sept. 11, along with the Twin Towers, many of our securities and certainties were destroyed as well. From 1998 until 2001, the world in general, and the West in particular, lived a moment of placid and dangerous complacency. We did not recognise the profound changes that were occurring in the world for some time. We suddenly awoke to those changes on a terrible September morning. For a while, horror and solidarity drew both sides of the Atlantic together. However, some differences in the perception of risk and the geostrategic future of the world have separated us again, hopefully not in an insurmountable way.

Sept. 11 should have profoundly strengthened the trans-Atlantic link, since Islamic fundamentalism — and not Islam — attacked with bloody savagery and brutal effect the whole of the West. That day, the thousands of American victims represented the values of democracy, freedom and pluralism. That day, more than any other, we should have understood that the same community of values and principles exists on both sides of the Atlantic. Almost everyone recognises this and yet the practical effects of this perception have not materialised in a clear way, for which we can state that the gulf that separates us is the perception

of risk.

Europe could have turned into the most prosperous and affluent battleground in history if the theories of containment and deterrence had failed during the cold war. However, Europe did suffer from the lacerating scourge of terrorism, which adopted distinct faces, forms, ideologies and excuses from country to country. Europeans suffered intensely from the destabilising effects of international terror and we responded with the rule of law and the respect for the civil rights and fundamental liberties of all citizens, terrorists included.

Today the threat has changed. In reality it has been changing for years, as was foreseen in 1998 by Bruce Hoffman in his book 'Inside Terrorism'. This change was recognised at the NATO summit of April 1999, as well as in the official publication of the Rand Corporation, directed by Ian Lesser, about the new terrorism. All foresaw that it would be ever more daring, dangerous and effective and that the most a democratic society could do would be to anticipate or defuse the existential risk terrorism poses for democracy and freedom.

It seems paradoxical that despite our painful experience, Europeans of today do not perceive in the same way and with the same intensity the risk posed by this new terrorism, organised crime, the relation between the two and finally the lethal combination of these, instability and "rogue states". This is exactly what can be inferred from the European opinion polls about the war in Iraq.

Europe The Post 13.6.03 Gustavo de Arístegui

Perhaps, we have taken peace for granted and think that we do not have to fight for it, while it is evidently a fragile thing, requiring a constant struggle.

There are those who say that Europeans and Americans do not know how to be competitors and allies at the same time, but I do not believe it to be an insurmountable problem. When General Marshal presented his plan before the Congress of the United States, he received sharp criticism from those sceptics who argued that Europe would become their competitor with the help and financial support of the American taxpayer. We have to be thankful that the majority of senators and congressmen did not believe the doomsayers and that the plan of the visionary general and the trans-Atlantic relationship proved them wrong.

Today, trans-Atlantic scepticism is not the exclusive province of the Europeans. I fear that American thinkers in certain circles, besides some Democrat intellectuals and not just the Republican Robert Kagan, are convinced that the division between us, what they call "drifting apart", is inevitable. It is sometimes said that the worst disagreements between friends can be resolved by a crisis that ends well. This could well be one of those times. When these times occur, there is no doubt that only loyal friends have real influence. This is what the United Kingdom and Spain have done all these months.

The true nature of the trans-Atlantic relationship has to be balanced, clear and based upon mutual respect, without any submission or subordination, which would be not only profoundly negative and humiliating for Europe but would also provoke a vigorous rebirth of anti-Americanism on our continent. But neither can the relationship be one of confrontation and competition. Some contend that Europe must become a military counterweight to the United States, when in reality the only way to consolidate the relationship is through coordination, cooperation, the search for positive synergies and teamwork. Together, we should seek to consolidate peace, stability and security in a world full of risks and uncertainties shared by both parts.

In terms of defence, there has been insistent talk of task sharing and specialisation between Europe and the United States. The goal of this strategic co-responsibility is not only greater European spending on defence, as some have erroneously affirmed, but also more rational and better distribution. This also means that we, Europeans, have to participate in a decisive way in peace-making operations, although our strategic potential and military capabilities are markedly less than those of the United States. With reference to peace keeping operations, Europe and other developed nations around the globe have played a key role, as demonstrated by the positive precedents of Bosnia, Macedonia and Kosovo.

Finally, we have to point out the spe-

cial importance of democratic reconstruction or nation building in countries affected by wars or serious disasters. In these operations, Europeans, Canadians, Japanese, Australians, New Zealanders and others from democratic and developed nations have enjoyed some notable successes. Europe is the most generous donor of development aid and our experience and decisive contributions to peace, stability and development in the Balkans has afforded us great experience, which could be of use in other parts of the world and certainly in Iraq.

The new international order begins with a strong and united Europe, a solid trans-Atlantic relationship, a division of tasks in strategic terms and stabilisation after serious conflicts. However, it is also indispensable to think about a profound reform of the international system that emerged after World War II. It has been overtaken by events and must be replaced by one that is more flexible and effective in the face of a changing world filled with new risks and uncertainties.

We, Europeans, have been worried in recent years by a supposed lack of interest by the United States. However, this is no doubt due to the fact that, with cold war at an end, Europe is no longer the principal geostrategic problem in the world. Now we have to learn to be an essential part of the solution. The challenge is not small and in the face of it, uniting our strength is not only essential, it is but the first step on a long and difficult, but unavoidable, road.