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Article

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CES Working Papers

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Suggested Citation: Hincu, Roxana (2014) : The EU-US Relations in An Emerging Multipolar World, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 6, Iss. 2a, pp. 111-122

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/198325>

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THE EU-US RELATIONS IN AN EMERGING MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Roxana Hincu*

Abstract: *In the context of an emerging multipolar world, the transatlantic partnership faces various challenges in the attempt to maintain the Western-shaped and dominated liberal order. This article aims to synthesize and rationalize the central argumentative positions on the ever-evolving transatlantic relationship provided by the following theories of international relations: neorealism, neoliberalism and constructivism. A combination of the main assumptions of the three approaches brings useful insights into the policy debates on the role of the transatlantic partnership in the process of forging the global governance. Nevertheless, where the systemic theories such as neorealism and neoliberalism fall short in explaining the transatlantic relations, constructivism, with its focus on actor identity succeeds in offering a dynamic account of them.*

Keywords: transatlantic partnership; security; neorealism; neoliberalism; constructivism; multipolarity; global governance.

JEL Classification: C01.

INTRODUCTION

The transatlantic partnership is considered to be the most important alliance in international relations. Despite the fact that there are cases when EU and US have problems engaging with each other, they share fundamental values such as democracy and capitalism but also strategic interests to an extent not matched by any other global partners in the world. In the context of the shift to a multipolar world, the transatlantic relations appear to be vital in managing international interdependence.

On the one hand, the US was an inspiration to European leaders who created the European project as a means to a United States of Europe. On the other and, the European integration aimed to match US and Soviet superpower or at least to try to create a third important voice in international relations.

It is not surprising that the development of EU-US relations has been accompanied by debate, controversy, and the proposal of different, often strongly conflicting, models of the way the relationship could or should develop. This analysis facilitates an understanding both of ways in which the EU-US partnership produces international action and of ways in which the international dimension enters into transatlantic policy making.

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1. OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Most analysts would describe the EU-US relation as balanced in some areas (political economy) but massively unbalanced in others (especially matters of hard security). Economic interdependence has always been at the core of the EU-US relations- e.g. the Marshall Plan in the 1940s and 1950s initiated the European integration. In 1950s a prosperous and united Europe was central to US interests. The Marshall Plan aimed to reconstruct Europe through \$ 13 billion in economic and technical assistance within a period of 4 years, starting in 1947. The outcome of inter-European negotiations on the use of Marshall Plan aid produced the Organization for European Economic Co-operation. In 1952 the forerunner of today's EU- European Coal and Steel Community was created (by the Treaty of Paris 1951 signed by Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Luxemburg). In 1953 the European Union and the United States of America established diplomatic relations.

The transatlantic partnership is ambivalent, being called “competitive cooperation” (Smith and Steffenson, 2011, p. 405). Their relationship encompasses a number of profound ambiguities emerging from the internal evolution of both parties and their shifting roles in the broader world arena. The logic of the American power is seen as essentially rooted in the hard end of the power spectrum while the EU was constructed around a predominantly soft notion of power.

When relations were troubled in the political and the security field (for example the period leading up to the war in Iraq during 2002-2003), economic relations continued to advance and widen. The economic field is also the field in which EU and US are equals as both are advanced industrial and service based economies of continental size (Smith and Steffenson, 2011, p. 407). The transatlantic trade partnership is characterized by a much greater degree of cooperation than conflict due to the unprecedented level of interdependence between the two sides of the Atlantic.

The EU and the US are two dominant actors in the capitalist world economy. The transatlantic economy makes up about half of the world's GDP (Anderson, 2013, p. 7). Also, the EU and the US remain each other's biggest economic partner. Furthermore, they are each other's main investor: the US continues to invest at high levels in Europe with a steady share of 56% of FDI going to Europe since year 2000. In turn Europe invests 71% of its total FDI in US (Anderson, 2013, p. 7).

Beside the economic and political interdependence that has always been at the core of the EU-US relations, the security field is also of central importance in the transatlantic partnership. In fact, it is considered that the two allies form a “security community” within which war is unthinkable. Nevertheless, numerous works on the transatlantic relations emphasize the dominant American

position in a number of areas of international relations. Therefore, the success of the EU as a power is related to its partnership with the US. Also, the EU and US exist in conditions of uncertainty challenging the possibilities of collective action in international relations.

Many studies point to the trend of power diffusion in nowadays international affairs (Santander et. al. 2012, National Intelligence Council 2012). Although in the emerging powers, problems such as growing inequality, pollution, rural poverty, an inefficient state sector and low domestic consumption remain, the consensus opinion is that the relative decline of the US and Europe is irreversible (Schweller 2011, p. 285). Therefore, the EU and the US are projected to decline (The National's Intelligence Council's Global Trends 2030, 2012, p. iv) while Asia "is expected to overtake Europe and North America combined in terms of power (calculated from GDP, population, defense spending and investments in technology)" (Anderson 2013, p. 3). Therefore, the transatlantic partnership faces numerous challenges in terms of global governance coordination.

The multipolar world pictured by the studies on multipolarity is formed by 6 major powers: US, China, India, Brazil, Russia and the EU. In this context, the efficiency of global governance—understood as "the sum of laws, norms, policies, and institutions that define, constitute, and mediate transborder relations between states, citizens, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, and the market" (Weiss and Thakur 2009, pp. 31-32) is challenged. Also, leading scholars emphasize a "crisis of global governance" as the Western establishment of the multilateral architecture that emerged from the Second World War, as reflected in the United Nations or the Bretton Woods systems, risk a dramatic loss of legitimacy unless representation within them is adjusted to reflect new constellations of international power (Peterson, Tocci, Alcaro 2012, p. 9).

2. NEOREALIST APPROACH OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

The literature on the transatlantic relations contains more works emphasizing an optimistic outlook on the utility of the transatlantic partnership. Nevertheless, scholars who argue the inevitable decline of transatlantic relations stress the scenario of a structural drift as US and EU become caught in the "vortex of centrifugal global systemic and internal forces" (Tocci and Alcaro, 2012, p. 9).

Neorealist scholars (Mearsheimer, 1990) provided such a scenario at the end of the Cold War. In accordance with the neorealist assumption that the balance of power is the main determinant of international relations, the transatlantic partnership faced uncertainty as the perceived common

Soviet threat disappeared. With the end of the bipolar system, neorealists expected EU and US to become estranged as the “ideological glue” disappeared (Simoni, 2013, p. 22), leading to divergent interests. Therefore, with the end of bipolarity, neorealists expected that the structural conditions for the transatlantic cooperation would be altered. Still, from the very beginning, the transatlantic partnership was ambivalent. Therefore, the US has always been a key partner but also a potential rival for the EU. Also, the neorealist assumption of the supremacy of the national interest accounts for the stability that served US interests that required restoring the European states to great power status.

It is now widely accepted that the decade after the end of the Cold War 1990-2001 was dominated by the American hegemony (Hook and Jones, 2012, p. xi). Also, more than two decades after the Cold War the United States of America remains the predominant world power. Still, during 1990s the American military forces, economic relations, diplomatic relations and cultural influence pervaded the international system while the European Union took the path of advancing the domestic integration process. During 1990s the transatlantic partnership was an asymmetric alliance, Washington-led as the EU lacked the political and military force in order to become a powerful player in world politics. Some have indeed argued that the project of closer European cooperation during the 1990s could be the result of attempts to balance the overwhelming power of the US after the bipolar era (Posen 2006).

The neorealist theoretical framework also explains the most severe drift in transatlantic relations from 2003 when the US decided to attack Iraq without the support of the United Nations or major European allies such as Germany, France, Belgium or Austria. The three principles of neorealism: the ordering principle of anarchy, the functional similarity of all states, and the distribution of material capabilities account for the US unilateral turn after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Disregard for multilateralism was fuelled by neo-conservative thinkers that unilateralism was the policy of choice in a unipolar world.

Studies on the scenarios concerning the future of transatlantic relations informed by neorealist theory provide two conflicting visions. On the one hand, the transatlantic relations will erode as the EU and US become competitors for international influence and status in a multipolar world. On the other hand, the transatlantic relations could become more integrated in order to balance the new emerging powers.

Nowadays, in the context of rising multipolarity it is not clear if EU and US have common views on the global governance and world order. European versions of international order concern: a stabilization of the “near neighbourhood model”, an “inter-regional model” involving competition

as well as collaboration, a “global values model” involving the elevation of global institutions and norms, and the “conservative trading state” (Hill and Smith, 2011, p. 15). Jørgensen (2009, p. 13) notes that it “is often claimed that the European Union’s embrace of effective multilateralism is caused by the Union’s own genetic code”.

According to the second scenario, the transatlantic partnership could balance the rising power of Asia- especially China- set to become the leading economic power in the world by 2016 (Rapoza, 2013). Still, in this scenario, China, as the fastest rising power in the international system, is an indispensable economic partner but also a political rival with a different vision of international order than those of the transatlantic partners. Nevertheless, the future appears likely to bring multipolarity without multilateralism. Therefore, it will fall to the United States and Europe to act as a convenor of like-minded countries to ensure that the integrity and effectiveness of the international order is preserved while holding open the door for China and other emerging powers to participate as responsible stakeholders to the degree that they desire (Wright and Weitz 2010, p. 18). Also, the power and security interests remain important drivers for transatlantic cooperation in face of potential threats.

Neorealists are in general skeptical about the possibility of international cooperation, given the constraints of anarchy. The anarchical order, theorized at great length by neorealists, entitles each state to use force more or less when and how it sees fit. According to the “might makes right principle”- in anarchy, authority and justice are largely reducible to power (Donnelly, 2000, p. 90). Beside the anarchic principle of the international system, the function to provide for its security- common to every state and the variations in capabilities or the distribution of power (Waltz, 1979, p. 88) constitute the basis for the analysis of the American hegemony.

The anticipated split of the military alliance has never taken place as NATO managed to adapt to a new security environment and even to effectively respond to its challenges. Tocci and Alcaro (2012, p. 1) argue that in the “structural drift scenario” the historic partners are torn apart by diverging interests and identities. This scenario was largely invoked in the immediate post-Cold War period when a future role for NATO was difficult to conceive and during the first term of the President Bush (2001-2004) when a sense of estrangement engulfed the elites and the people of the transatlantic allies. The scenario is likely if the transatlantic partners can not converge to a joint strategy whenever it is needed.

3. NEOLIBERAL APPROACH OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Neoliberals are generally more optimistic on the prospects of international cooperation: actors can seek more than mere survival and their policies can move beyond national security. Also, the chronicle of the American and EU foreign policy and the European one is composed by the liberal tradition. Liberal thought provided ideological orientation, policy direction and rhetorical tool to justify EU and US foreign engagements. The advocacy of free-market capitalism, the creation and use of international organizations, the commitment to human rights, and the promotion of democracy are all indicative of the liberal agenda's realization in US and EU foreign policies. Today, liberalism remains central to the era of globalization, the post 9/11 security environment, and the "post-American world" (Zakaria, 2009).

Keohane and Nye (1977) explained how the institutional cooperation between the actors in international relations leads to a more normatively regulated international system. The growth of economic interdependency and institutions create rules, decision-making procedures that create the possibility for states to engage in collaborative policy formation. Overall, neoliberal scholarship predicts increased state cooperation, the dissemination of liberal values, the expansion of markets, and the growth of international institutions. Therefore, neoliberals tend to hold a linear and progressive understanding of history. The logic of neoliberal institutionalism is that institutions should have emerged as considerably stronger than there are at the moment.

Taken as a whole, the liberal research agenda concerns the promotion and protection of human rights, the creation of international society based on shared norms, free trade, promotion, support for open markets, attempts to spread capitalism as an economic system, creation and utilization of international organizations for governance, norm creation, and enforcement, promotion of democracy and confrontation toward non-democratic systems.

American leadership has been crucial for the development of European integration. The US during the Cold War wanted to increase the power of the Western coalition against the Soviet Union and wished Western Europe to contribute to its own defense, and therefore favored measures that reduces inter-allied conflict and increased collective economic and military integration. As Keohane (1998) observed, "superpowers need general rules because they seek to influence events around the world." Also, repetitive interactions lead to enforcing credibility, reputation and future engagements. In this manner, transatlantic institutions create rules, decision-making procedures, and enforcement mechanisms that enhance cooperative collaborations.

The development of the transatlantic relations is of great importance as it is central to the institutions of the global system. Transatlantic institutional framework is formed by a mixed network of all types of actors with a leading intergovernmental role played by the European Commission and US executive (Pollack and Shaffer 2010, p. 287). The historical evolution of the institutional framework of the transatlantic relations (Table 1, p. 7) shows the importance of the European integration process in forging a well coordinating transatlantic partnership.

Table 1 - Main elements of the institutional framework in transatlantic relations

1990	Transatlantic Declaration (TAD)
1995	New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA)
1998	Transatlantic Economic Partnership (TEP)
2007	Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC)
2013	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)

The Transatlantic Declaration (1990) sums up the utility of the multi-institutional transatlantic system: “To achieve their common goals, the European Community and its Member States and the United States of America will inform and consult each other on important matters of common interest, both political and economic, with a view to bringing their positions as close as possible, without prejudice to their respective independence.” The New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA) in 1995 expanded the areas of joint action between the EU and the USA and now governs the transatlantic relationship. Also, the Transatlantic Economic Partnership (TEP) in 1998 focused more specifically on the achievement of mutual recognition agreements and other technical agreements dealing with the management of trade and competition. The Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) was created in 2007 to take forward efforts to boost the transatlantic economy. Under the TEC umbrella, a High-Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth was established by the 2011 EU-US Summit, tasked to identify policies and measures to increase EU-US trade and investment to support job creation, economic growth, and international competitiveness.

The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) is a trade agreement that is presently being negotiated between European Union and the United States (talks started in 2013). It aims at removing trade barriers in a wide range of economic sectors to make it easier to buy and sell goods and services between the EU and the US. On top of cutting tariffs across all sectors, the EU and the US want to tackle barriers behind the customs boarder- such as differences in technical regulations, standards and approval procedures.

Neoliberals, unlike neorealists, believe that NATO is based in common values and ideologies. Therefore it survived the end of the Cold War and stronger European profile. In fact, nowadays NATO represents the major institutional framework for the coordination of the security policies of its members and it is the only organization that can effectively mobilize forces in times of crisis (e.g. Operation Unified Protector in Libya 2011).

According to Jørgensen and Laatikainen (2013, p. 410) crucial to the understanding of multilateralism in the twenty-first century is exploring the relationship between multilateralism, multipolarity, and the interests and values of the emerging powers of the Global South. The sole shared values of the international community that are undoubtedly universal are those that protect systemic plurality. The norm of state sovereignty as domestic authority and non-intervention by foreign actors is widely supported by all emerging powers. Ruggie (1992) stresses general principles of conduct that the emerging powers would prefer: meaning that all parties treat each other the same.

Hill and Smith (2013, p. 14) emphasize that the EU is a relentless generator of framework agreements and strategies, and is consistently searching for settled, stable, and predictable frameworks within which to define and pursue its international relationship and activities. Although the US is the predominant player in the creation and funding of many international organizations, its relationship is often conflicted and contradictory. The arrival of the Obama Administration was supposed to bring a new era of US multilateral leadership, but policy initiatives in support of nuclear non-proliferation and membership of the Human Rights Council were rapidly replaced by cautious pragmatism. The EU favors the rule of law while the US has always been much less willing to accept legally binding commitments, evidenced in its fewer treaty ratifications.

According to Jørgensen and Laatikainen (2013, p. 411) during the years of US unilateralism, the EU portrayed itself as a bridge-builder between the Global South and the US. Today, it seems that roles are being reversed, as the EU becomes the staunchest supporter of new multilateralism, robust international law and strengthening international organizations, while the US finds common ground with the emerging powers over the preservation and maintenance of the Westphalian status quo.

By definition, multilateral cooperation is essentially institutionalized. Bouchard, Peterson and Tocci (2014, p. 19) claim that multilateralism, in its modern, twenty-first-century form may be defined as “three or more actors engaging in voluntary and (essentially) institutionalized international cooperation governed by norms and principles, with rules that apply (by and large) equally to all states.”

Tocci and Alcaro (2012, p. 1) support the “functional relationship scenario”- informed by the neoliberal theory. In this mid-way scenario the transatlantic partnership would undergo a process of functional adjustment in which cooperation is maintained and may even be strengthened in all those policy areas in which a partnership presents advantages to both sides.

4. CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH OF THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

Constructivism, by using social theory aims to understand the development of common normative expectations between states engendered by participation in multilateral institutions. According to constructivists, actors’ interests are not exogenous but are produced by the social relations in the international arena.

In Wendt’s (1999) formulation of constructivism, anarchy is “what states make of it”. Therefore, for each state the material world could have different meanings. These meanings are intersubjective, that is, each actor ascribes meaning to, or makes sense of, the actions and words of the other. Specifically, international relations are a social activity. Wendt (1999) specifies three cultures of anarchy: Hobbesian, Lockean, and Kantian. In the first, actors see each other as enemies, in the second actors see each other as rivals and only in the third one states conceive each other as friends. According to Wendt (1999), US and EU collaborate in the context of a Kantian anarchy where armed conflict is unthinkable.

Constructivists would also argue that the notion of “transatlantic interests” reflects the shared understandings of what constitutes EU’s and US’s role and interests in the world respond both to the demands of their partnership and of the outside world through a process of social learning. This constructivist assumption explains why over time, the quality of the transatlantic interaction, and its accompanying identities and interests become embedded so that partners can not imagine behaving toward one another in any other way. Risse (2012, p. 4) conceptualizes the transatlantic order as a security community rather than functional cooperation or traditional alliance.

From a constructivist perspective, institutions are durable when all states accept them as legitimate and behave accordingly. The identity of the transatlantic bloc as a promoter of the liberal-democratic order is one of the most important driver of cooperation. Despite the fact that the EU is not yet projecting hard power abroad because of the lack of the military component, significant levels of cooperation were attained due to its soft power.

The transatlantic crisis in 2003 revealed that “on major strategic and international questions Europeans are from Venus whereas Americans are from Mars”, meaning that “Europe is turning

away from power, (...) entering a post-historical paradise of peace and relative prosperity”, while “the US remains mired in history, exercising power in an anarchic Hobbesian world” (Kagan, 2004, p. 3). Although Kagan is considered a realist the metaphor of planets is suitable for understanding the international profile of EU and US in 2000s. The logic of the American power is seen as essentially rooted in the hard end of the power spectrum while the EU was constructed around a predominantly soft notion of power.

Tocci and Alcaro (2012, p. 1) support the “enduring partnership scenario”. The partners will broadly agree on long term visions and policy platforms. Also, their policy goals, means and action patterns will tend to converge and be complementary. At the core of this scenario is the ideational similarities of the partners: democracy and capitalism. Multipolarity along with domestic challenges under way in America and Europe will induce Americans and Europeans to join forces so as to retain their relevance in international relations. The allies would either preserve the existing international order or they would work on the restructuring of the system to make it more viable and inclusive.

CONCLUSIONS

It is thus far from clear that the EU and US have a unified view of the model of world order they would wish to bring about. Moreover, the complexities of the post-Cold War period have made it genuinely uncertain as to whether the EU should aim to be a major world power, or will have to settle for being a constellation of like-minded actors, acting in broadly the same direction and perhaps representing a pole of attraction in an emerging multipolar system.

The future of global governance and international order depends on the capacities of these two partners to strike a balance between the pursuit of their interests and the maintenance of a context of cooperation and support. Both sides face powerful incentives to work together especially when their interests overlap, otherwise they open a political space of opportunity for other states.

In terms of global governance, a reform based on inclusive representation is compulsory in order for the Western allies to maintain their yet hegemonic position in the international system. The three theories analyzed here provide useful insights into the likely developments of the transatlantic partnership. Still, neorealism and neoliberalism, with their focus on systemic elements of international relations do not account for the changing identities of EU and US that proved out to be central in shaping the transatlantic partnership.

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