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Fachgruppe CLPL

Session II

American Foreign Policy and the Future of Transatlantic Relations

Having analyzed the differences and similarities between Germany and the United States, the second session on Constitutional and Public Law was divided between an overview on American Foreign Policy by Dr. Andrew Denison of Transatlantic Networks and a discussion on the future of transatlantic relations by the President of the Young Transatlantic Initiative Jacob Schrot.

Both presentations and the discussion that followed shared the common idea of a pax atlantica.

As Dr. Denison points out, this ideal solution would feature a strong, unified US and a strong, unified Europe. It would enable the “West” to tackle the threats that face all of us, namely the hotspot states causing instability in the Middle East, transnational civil wars and the global commons, such as cyberspace, air and climate issues. A common approach by the US and Europe would enable a much stronger and effective response to these threats, hence the interest of the US in Europe. Whilst a pax Americana is also desirable, a split Europe is not as strong as a unified EU. A multipolar world in which the power of the US is balanced out by the power of the EU neglects to take into account the influence of other global players such as China and Russia. An isolated US might struggle to take on global issues on its own. The question therefore arises: How to achieve a pax atlantica?

American Foreign Policy is based on three main pillars: the constitution of the United States, the rivalry between universalism and isolationism and the core principles of the United States, namely the right of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

The constitution sets the framework on who yields power in regard to foreign policy. The balance of power between Congress and the President makes foreign policy a fine balancing act between the deals and accords a president can reach

with other nations and whether Congress ratifies such treaties. Whether such treaties are even reached depends on whether the United States are going through a phase of interventionism or isolationism. Throughout its history, the US has shifted back and forth between these opposing views, intervening very openly in world affairs at times whilst retreating into introspective behavior at other times. Regardless of which of these philosophies is followed, one thing is clear: right now, Europe is a vital interest for the US. Why?

The third pillar of foreign policy is shaped by the task the US Government is supposed to undertake: enable life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These values are what binds Europe and the US together.

The core of the transatlantic partnership has two elements as Jacob Schrot points out. The internal element revolves around the shared values of American and European societies. Basic freedoms and common philosophical approaches show the similarities but also the differences between these two forces.

Whilst these commonalities bind the EU and the US together, the external element of the transatlantic partnership is more tangible: external threats.

Nothing brings two forces closer together than an external threat. Be it the Axis of evil during the Second World War or the Cold War, Europe and the US stood together to face such threats.

However, the world has shifted from a good vs. evil, us against them division to reveal far more complex and multilayered threats. The rise of transnational civil wars and terrorism have diluted the idea of the common enemy. The US and Europe still see terrorism, regional instabilities and economic crisis as issues that cannot be solved by one country alone. However, allegiances and the preferred methods on how to deal with these dilemmas vary. The rise in complexity of the external element is one reason why the future needs to be focused on what binds us together, rather than what tears us apart.

The younger generation of Europeans and Americans has not experienced the traumatic events that shaped Europe in the last centuries. Yet, European and American society has never been more tightly connected. This can be attributed

to globalization and the advances of social networking in general but also to the ideas and morals that the younger generation share.

Jacob Schrot gives us the example of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. Rather than focus on and argue on the specific issues of an agreement that has yet to be completed, one ought to focus on what this agreement represents: the approach of the two forces that are already so closely bound together. Trade between the EU and the US has flourished and the two powers remain the biggest trading partners despite the rise of the Asian markets. Why does the German public then still so openly reject such an agreement? The problem is not a battle to win the logical arguments for trade and collaboration, but the lack of trust that reigns between the EU, mostly Germany, and the US. This lack of trust is not going to be mended by arguing logically on the banning of chlorine chickens or standards of drug testing. We need to dig deeper and remind Europeans and Americans alike of what truly unites us: namely the common values of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

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