

## The year of Europe?

by Simon Serfaty\*

'1973,' declared Henry Kissinger in late April of that year, 'is the year of Europe'—a time, he insisted, for the allies to join in 'a fresh act of creation ... equal to that undertaken by the postwar generation of leaders of Europe and America.' Now, in 2008, we are on the eve of a new era that awaits the decisions that will define Europe and its relations with the United States after the departure of George W. Bush, Europe's least-liked postwar US president, and take us beyond the war in Iraq, one of the most divisive issues in Euro-Atlantic relations ever. In this, the thirty-fifth year of "the year of Europe," the time has come for the states of Europe and their union to respond to this long-standing call.

The moment is propitious, and it is one that a new generation of European leaders cannot afford to spurn. First, on the whole, these national leaders are political pragmatists who can relate to each other, and also appear ready to work with the United States – including in France, the traditional focus of transatlantic estrangement. Second, with the constitutional debate settled at last, the EU can return to debating what it must do, as compared to discoursing over what it is or should become. That will be the point of what may be the last two six-month presidencies of the EU, assumed by Slovenia and especially France: much of what will follow in 2009 will depend on what is achieved during the year ahead.

For Europe to sit passively while America proceeds with a presidential contest that is already doing a great deal to restore the nation's image in the world would be a profound mistake. Now is the time to be heard, and to create a climate that confirms the US's new appreciation of its allies across the Atlantic as countries that may be not only willing to follow but also able to lead. Given this year's known schedule, four such initiatives stand out in terms of US (and EU) interests, EU (and US) capabilities, and US-EU and even EU-NATO feasibility.

First, and prior to the NATO Summit that will be held in Bucharest in April, there is the matter of Afghanistan. Whatever mistakes were made in not ending the war in 2002, this is not a war that NATO can afford to pursue unsuccessfully much longer. By or prior to the NATO summit, at least one European country, acting on its own or on behalf of the EU, will have to respond to the Canadians' urgent call for help in contributing to active combat missions in the southern and eastern parts of the country. With both Spain and Italy on the eve of difficult national elections, and with Germany clearly hostile to the idea, France is the country best suited and most able to respond to this call, not only in its own name but also on behalf of its EU partners. Reports that such might be the case, and that a decision to send the needed forces, and permit their use accordingly, are the clearest signal yet not only that France is back, but also that she is back in the leading role to which she had aspired from the sidelines and which she now stands ready to assume from within the Alliance.

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Second, coupled with France's expected return in NATO as a member *à part entière*, such a French initiative would end a bilateral quarrel with the United States that has repeatedly defined the US ambivalence toward a European Security and Defence Policy, thus clearing the way, if needed, for renewed Anglo-French efforts in that direction. Together with, or preceding, these efforts, steps should be taken to update and revise the initial security paper prepared in 2003 by Javier Solana on behalf of the EU. Such a process need not await ratification of the Lisbon Treaty: although a good document at the time, the Solana paper, which was already lacking specificity when first released, no longer fits the global conditions that have shaped the end of America's unipolar moment in Iraq. In 2009, a new EU security strategy might influence parallel efforts by the new US administration to revise the US National Security Strategy, and thus provide a timely opportunity for a conceptual convergence between the US and the EU strategic approach to post-Cold War, post-9/11 security and defence issues of shared concern. In turn, such a convergence would facilitate the preparation of a new NATO Strategic Concept, as early as November 2009 and as a follow-up to the Comprehensive Political Guidance endorsed at the NATO Riga Summit in November 2006.

Third, this spring's agenda includes a new round of important decisions over Kosovo, whose forthcoming independence is imminent, and over Iran, in relation to which new UN sanctions are unlikely to be sufficient. EU support is very much needed in each instance. That means a quick implementation of the EU commitment to deploy a so-called law and order force of policemen, judges, prosecutors, and custom officials in Kosovo even before independence has been declared, coupled with a pre-accession pact that can be viewed as an unequivocal step toward EU membership for Serbia, though by a date that the principals – EU members and Serbia – will not be able to confirm for some time to come. But it also means renewed efforts to exert the required pressure on Iran to ensure compliance with international demands over its nuclear activities, possibly including a new set of EU measures going beyond what continued opposition from China and Russia prevent the UN Security Council from endorsing and enforcing.

Third, past the Slovenian presidency, all EU members and the United States should continue to seek the European and Euro-Atlantic compromises needed for a global trade agreement in Doha, or else be exposed to the domestic pressures that will follow its failure on both sides of the Atlantic. Reaching a deal prior to Pascal Lamy's departure from his leadership position at the World Trade Organization will also demand the application of coordinated US-EU pressures on third countries to adapt their positions, including China but also India. A Doha agreement achieved on the basis of coordinated EU-US action would have considerable value even if it does not meet the early expectations of the Trade Round, and the willingness to engage in such a last-ditch effort would also be of consequence during the post-Doha years even if that effort fails to have the desired objective. Unless some progress is made during the balance of this year, in 2008, it will be difficult to expect much in this area from the new US president and his or her reinforced democratic majority in Congress in 2009.

Finally, and as a matter of process, EU-NATO cooperation, which is now widely viewed as vitally important to their members, has repeatedly suffered from a lack of policy harmonisation between the United States and the EU. To this end, the French presidency should engage the incoming US administration in the related contexts of the Atlantic Alliance (including a full return of France in NATO no later than for the sixtieth anniversary of the Alliance in April 2009) and of EU-NATO relations, with a call for a Summit meeting of all 32 EU and NATO countries for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 2009 (including the participation of a newly named EU president). To reinforce the new US president's commitment to working closely with the EU, an invitation to address the European Parliament should be promptly extended by the President of the Parliament and, unlike Bush in February 2005, accepted in the context of the activities that will shape the NATO anniversary summit.

## Opinion

As President Bush runs out of time to do effectively what he says he is going to do in 2008, the new leaders of Europe should state convincingly what they will do in 2009. That is why 2008 presents a rare opportunity to be the long-awaited year of Europe. It might not be enough to produce the 'fresh act of creation' that Kissinger called for 30 years ago. But, at least, it might produce a new beginning that the new US administration will be in a position to embrace and capitalise on when its identity becomes known later in the year and when it comes to power early next year.

