

# *Europe and America After Bush*

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If we were to have met one year ago, and I would have predicted that in one year we would be in the midst – not in the midst, maybe the *beginning* – of a world economic crisis as severe or maybe more severe than 1929, everybody would have said ‘that’s a little bit too much of a doomsday prophecy.’ To be honest, I did not foresee this big bang. Today I think that all the gloomy assessments of the economic situation were proven by the development of the crisis as too optimistic in light of the reality.

And if you were to ask me today, what are my expectations for Obama, well, if we are honest, the world was never as pro-American as it is today. Even the enemies of the United States – though they will not confess this in public – hope that Obama can fix this very severe crisis. Expectations are extremely high. If he was to walk on water, everyone would applaud and say ‘that’s exactly what we expected.’ There is a certain messianistic hope that reflects the sincerity of the crisis, because, you know, usually, human beings, and definitely politicians, are not designed for messianistic expectations. So from my point of view, we are in a very, very serious situation.

First, there will be a political outcome. I can’t describe to you the impact or the scheme of this political outcome. In the old days, one would say, everything is in place for a major confrontation between the huge powers. Fortunately, this is not a real option nowadays.

Second, I don’t believe that a certain form of protectionism is a serious option. There is a strong drive to protectionism in the US, and within almost every member state of the EU. Of course, people in a serious crisis ask their own government to put the tax payers in the first position. But look at the interconnectivity of our globalised world! When I was born sixty years ago, there were only 2.5 billion

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people living on this globe – without the internet, without the communication revolution. Many states didn't even exist at that time. Today we have more than 190 states and a global reality, with internet and TV, free access of ideas and people, and 6.7 billion people. This new interconnectivity is a strong factor which will at least reduce the threat of a new protectionism.

Thirdly, based on nuclear deterrence, fortunately, I don't see that there will be a major confrontation on the highest level of the international system, because war between world powers is not any longer a serious option.

On the other side – and this is not a result of the crisis, but the crisis will accelerate it – there is a new distribution of wealth and power in the 21st century. It's very interesting to listen carefully in Washington to the ongoing strategic debates. America is turning away its face from Europe. Europe is still important, and the European economies are still key factors, of course. But when they look to the future, they are looking to the North Eastern Pacific rim, to China, Japan, South Korea, and a little further south, to India, Indonesia and other Asian powers. Why is that so? Because there was a transfer of power from West to East. Look to the interconnectivity between the People's Republic of China – in their self definition still a communist power – and the United States today. It's a very odd relationship, which nobody could have predicted twenty years ago.

The big question will be, 'what will happen with the transatlantic relationship?' My position was always very simple; it will always be seen as a – how shall I say – ancient and historic relationship, and it will not disappear. But with a weak Europe it will not have serious impact for the future of the world.

I don't want to discuss the past, and whether Iraq was reasonable or not. Definitely the US has learnt some lessons. Driven by their negative experiences in the Middle East, and by their not so negative but still frustrating experiences with us, the Europeans, and also driven by their interests, the US will be more and more a Pacific power, and less and less an Atlantic power if Europe is not ready to invest more into the future of the transatlantic relationship.

Everybody talks about Europe, but does that Europe exist? It's a political, geographic concept, but in terms of power, it's an entity with very limited capabilities. I'm not in favour of a pro-European ideology, do not misunderstand my position. My first visit to this house was very important because it was the first time I really

understood why there is such a strong hesitation in British politics. The House of Commons reflects the great history of the English, later, British people. So, to hand that over to an abstract body named 'European parliament,' or 'Commission,' or whatever, well, I understood perfectly your hesitation. I'm interested in history and here you can smell all the great history as you walk through! So, my position is very simple. If we could continue in an efficient way with our structures as they exist now, with some minor changes and improvements, I would say 'Yes, I'm fine with that.' But can we? This is the big question, especially as it relates to the transatlantic relationship.

Now, before it ended up in the ruins of Mesopotamia, Tony Blair, the former prime minister, had a great idea. He said the national interest number one of the UK is the special relationship with the United States. But to preserve that special relationship in the twenty first century Britain is not big enough any longer. Britain must be able to deliver Europe more than it has in the past. And to deliver Europe, Britain must move into the centre of the European Union and not sideline itself with opt-outs or whatever. I think the idea was the right one, unfortunately it was not implemented as the former prime minister developed this plan.

But we [Europeans] are now in a very serious situation. America – and this was the decision between McCain and Obama – had to decide whether to go on with its decline (and if you compare the United States in 2000 with 2008, nobody can question the relative decline of American power). The choice was: we can go on with that decline, or, in the midst of the most severe crisis since 1929, we can *reinvent ourselves*. And that was the election of Barack Obama. America will go through a very painful period, but with this decision I think they have a very serious chance to come out of the crisis. Now, if you compare this [decision] in the midst of a crisis, to go for a reinvention of the country, with the reaction of all of us in Europe, the results are very different.

For the first time, ladies and gentleman, I say there is a serious possibility that the Euro zone could collapse. The Euro zone and the Common Market are very closely linked. European member states, and non-member states like Switzerland and Norway or Iceland, have an interest in the success of a Euro zone. The consequence of a collapse of the Euro zone would be disastrous also for the non-members of the Euro zone.

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Secondly, the contradictions between EU member states are growing. The strains are getting stronger and stronger. The integration of the new member states is also at risk, for they are in a situation very different from the end of the bubble in the Western economies. Their refinancing has completely collapsed. That is not a bubble bursting. In Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, it's investments in infrastructure, in education, in jobs – the real economy, not a bubble. But with the collapse of the international financial system, and with the threat of the collapse of the European banks, they are now on the brink. These are not very stable democracies. They made tremendous progress, but [it was] based also on economic progress. So the situation might also be very challenging in Eastern Europe. And don't forget the Ukraine, and even Russia.

Our capabilities are very limited. Thank God that we had a European Central Bank and the Euro. Otherwise, I think the attack on several weaker European currencies would have defined our actions and absorbed our energies. What we see today is that while we can make some progress as Europe we are stuck. We are not united enough for decisive action, but we are so united and integrated with our interests, beyond all ideologies, that we have serious problems if we don't act together.

As regards the transatlantic relationship, what we will see is that Obama will confront all of us. He wants a reliable partner on the global stage in Europe. France and Britain – oh, I have to apologise, Britain and France – are the most powerful European nations. Germany has the biggest economy and the biggest population. Italy is in a very, I will use the diplomatic word, complicated situation. Don't laugh, it's the fourth biggest economy, still. And then there is Spain and Poland, not to mention Romania. This is the European reality. If the United States comes to us and asks for a partnership, if we would be honest we would say 'Yes, that's what we need, but unfortunately we are not ready.' And this, in turn, will encourage the US to act on a more unilateral level. The US is by far the most powerful nation, around the globe, and I think it's a big achievement and a definite break with the unilateralism of Bush, that the Obama administration is asking us to contribute not only in discussions, but also in real terms by the implementation of a multilateral approach: 'Let's do it together, let's decide it together, let's implement it together.' But if we can't deliver we will push the US back into a more unilateral approach. We shouldn't fool ourselves.

This has nothing to do with whether I am a pro-European or a 'Euro-Sceptic.' It's about capabilities: 'Can we deliver?' This will be the real question. This is not just

about security policy – it's also about the fight against climate change, terrorism, poverty. In all these issues, the question will be, 'Can you deliver?' From my point of view, we can't deliver as we should. I am not saying we can't do anything, but for a real partnership in the twenty first century between both sides of the Atlantic our capability might be too weak.

If we sum up the situation, I think we face a bumpy road ahead. Look to our neighbourhood. As long as the United States does not apply for membership of the EU, I think the Western border is clearly defined. In the North I used to say Europe ends where the polar bear is running the government, but this has changed. Climate change has a political outfall immediately in that region. Any discussion with the Canadians leads immediately to the Canadian concern with what will happen north of the polar circle. There is now politicisation of this region based on expectations about oil, gas and other resources. We should not underestimate that, and this leads us directly to the East, where our neighbour is Russia.

Russia is a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, I think it's good news that the oil price is today closer to forty than to one hundred and forty dollars per barrel of oil. But on the other hand this may lead again to the destabilisation of Russia. Some of you will remember the nineties, when we were directly addressed by these economic and financial disasters in Russia. On the one hand we cannot accept that Russia will go back towards an imperial policy of zones of influence. On the other hand, how will we define the role of Russia in the new Europe? If we will not accept an imperial policy, then what is our view about the role of Russia? It should be seriously thought through. If NATO is a must, and I think NATO *is* a must, and not just because of Russia, was it wise to exclude a different relationship inside NATO between NATO and Russia, something more than keeping Russia on the sidelines? I experienced that for years in the NATO-Russia council, and I understand why the Russians were not happy with that, because this was not a serious structure to integrate them.

Is it possible to integrate them? If yes, I think we should move in that direction. If not, we have a challenge, because we need Russia on the world stage in the Middle East, Iran, climate change, North Korea, whatever. Russia is no longer a 'Superpower,' but it is still a world power which can create a lot of troubles. These are open questions and I think, forty dollars a barrel of oil, offers the west an opportunity for a second beginning with Russia. There is no guarantee for a positive outcome. Don't misunderstand me – my name is Fischer and not Schroeder! But

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the question is whether there are good reasons to invest some strategic thinking in that direction.

I was not happy with the NATO enlargement in the second round. In the end NATO is a military alliance, and if you can call a military alliance's bluff, it's not a good idea to go in that direction. So from my point of view I think this should be reconsidered. We should work very hard to create a common European position which will always be a compromise between different national positions.

Secondly, I think it will be very important to achieve a unified position with the Americans. Now, some steps we could do immediately and nobody could block us. After the cold war ended and Putin took over, in Christmas time usually came Santa Claus, and Christmas night, holy night. Now, with Putin, there is another phenomenon at Christmas time. It's called 'gas prom' and the cutting off of gas deliveries. This never took place during the decades of the cold war. Why are they doing this? The answer is very simple. It's because they think we are weak. They think we depend on them more than they depend on us, us being Europe. They think we are weak and disunited. So to form a common European wide gas market with a European wide pipe-line grid would change the situation a 100 percent. But we are not doing that.

And allow me to say here in the House of Commons, without being banned immediately, that it would be even more efficient to integrate the common gas market if we had one European commissioner for energy security and energy foreign policy. Look, nowadays the EU is not taken seriously in Moscow, and we all pay the price for that.

The Middle East is our neighbourhood not America's neighbourhood. America will stay there, and whether the Middle East explodes or not, it will hurt the United States, but much less than Europe. We are losing Turkey. Turkey is turning away its face from Europe and the West, thanks to the wise policy of the EU. Everybody will immediately say 'Austria,' 'Merkel,' 'Sarkozy,' right? And I add 'Great Britain.' Why? Because from the very beginning it was quite clear, there will never be Turkish membership of the EU without substantial progress in integration. This was a quid pro quo, from the very beginning. Sorry to say that, and I apologise to be so frank. So, we messed it up, and Turkey is now looking more to the East. Not a re-Islamisation but a re-Ottomanisation is taking place. And Turkey is our strongest lever in the region. I don't just mean the Middle East. If you look at the

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geopolitics of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea and Iran, Turkey is a key factor in European security. But we were not able, or we lacked the common will to draw the conclusions. And this will be one question the American administration will ask, 'what about Turkey?' And we will hum and haw as usual, the European answer.

The Iraq war has transformed this region in a strange way. It was not the intention of the Bush administration to increase the power of Iran, but it was the result. Today, Iran and its nuclear aspirations, although not only its nuclear aspirations are the core of the crises in the region, including that between Israel and the Palestinians. Iran has moved more eastwards towards Iraq and the Gulf, and this is a very sensitive region. Once again, I think Europe – with a more ambitious and united foreign policy, which was impossible as the Constitution failed and the Lisbon Treaty is in limbo – could have been a key player.

And think about the peace process in Israel. Yes, America will be the driving force and the chief guarantor, but once the parties agree to a compromise, Europe will have to take over, not only in terms of nation-building and the economic integration of the region, but also security.

So we are in the situation where we are in the midst of a deep crisis, and the Europeans are asked to play a much stronger role. But we can't deliver enough, at least not so much as we should. But knowing European history, I remain optimistic. We Europeans have been beaten up many times by history before we reacted decisively in the right direction. I hated to be beaten up, so this is not my first option, but on the other side I think the crisis will give a very severe lesson. I am hopeful that then, whoever might be in the government, they will be forced to do the kind of things which, today, would lead to a party revolt if they were even spoken of. Thank you.

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Joschka Fischer was a 68'er, a leading figure in the German Green Party, and German Foreign Minister from 1998-2005.