

USA and Europe – the Best of Enemies

By Mads Fuglede

Europe and the USA have, despite their mainly close and friendly relationship, always regarded each other with due scepticism, each reflecting the other to define what they are not.

The best thing that happened to the European Union in 2004 was the re-election of George Bush as President of the USA. Bush belongs to an exclusive society of Americans who Europeans love to hate. What he has in common with the other members of the society, including Ronald Reagan, Richard Nixon and Lyndon B. Johnson, is his compliance with a number of stereotypes toward Americans constantly displayed by Europeans in our ill-concealed attempts to account for our own excellence. George Bush and parts of his administration furthermore acted with such clumsiness on the international stage after 11 September 2001 that they lost an unbelievable amount of goodwill, culminating during the run-up to the Iraq war in an actual collapsed relationship to Germany and France.

Bush's personal character seemed to provoke a good deal of Europeans to fall on each other's necks in shared anti-American euphoria. Now, everybody had to realise that further binding and determination in the European community was the only way to counterbalance the full-powered Americans. It was a unique opportunity, but it was blown.

Instead, 2005 proved the worst year in the entire history of the union: the efforts to obtain a very urgent constitution went down the drain at the Dutch and French referenda, radical economical reforms are missing in the most important European economies, and the longwinded farce regarding the budget left you feeling that the EU had been at a crossroad and chosen the road to disaster. Even an ego the size of Jacques Chirac's must realise that it was a mistake to try the constitution by popular vote – but now it's too late.

It didn't get any better when the three most important economies of Europe turned their gazes inward:

France wasted its time on protectionism and race riots, the London bombs took away the Brits' already scarce interest in the surrounding world, and the German election gave no one the necessary authority to carry out the reforms required to put an end to the economical limbo of the nation. Moreover, the WTO negotiations in Hong Kong revealed that the agricultural policy of the EU was the greatest obstacle to free trade and an economical boost for the world's weakest economies.

Change of Attitude

The Americans stand as spectators to the European collapse, knowing that their former arrogance had to be changed – especially after the democratisation of Afghanistan and more so Iraq has proven a far bigger task than the American administration imagined. We need a strong partnership across the Atlantic which is not controlled by domestic policy in Washington, Paris nor Berlin. It is not a big problem for the USA that EU is often reluctant or in direct opposition to American proposals and conduct. The criticism of the missing Kyoto support and the indignation over the torture scandals make an impression, but have not gained much coverage in American media. Europe generally plays quite an unimportant role in the American public. This is due to the fact that USA's problem with the EU is exactly the same as Europe's, namely that EU does not function very well. EU needs to resolve its many crises, be they constitutional, economical or related to the problem of providing EU with an identity and a goal which the Europeans wish to support.

If we were able to achieve all this, our relationship to the USA would become equal and an extraordinary catalyst for a better world – nothing less.

Boks:

European Stereotypes:

- 1: USA is all about money
- 2: USA means to control everything
- 3: USA is culturally substandard
- 4: Americans are over-religious
- 5: USA is a particularly violent society
- 6: Americans are ignorant
- 7: There is no social safety net in the USA
- 8: There are more poor people in the USA than in Europe
- 9: Americans missionize excessively
- 10: USA is not a well-functioning democracy