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Operation Renewed Hope: The EU Foreign Policy Agenda After the U.S. Election

Posted by: [Jan Techau](#) Wednesday, November 7, 2012



Now that the U.S. election is over, Europeans have a unique chance to get back to real life again. Their obsessive attention to this election was never really backed up by any kind of rational analysis. In reality, very little was at stake for transatlantic relations in the [Obama vs. Romney contest](#). Interests don't change overnight, and even a President Romney would not have fundamentally altered the transatlantic agenda. Getting emotionally engaged in the U.S. election was an easy and exciting escape from the malaise Europeans face at home. Not only can you forget about the crisis for a while, you can also feel good about being engaged and supporting the morally preferable candidate. Knowing what's right for America is a lot more comfortable, less charged with issues of responsibility, and a lot cheaper than talking about what Europe can do to make a difference in the world.

Europeans often overlook that the quality of transatlantic relations depends a lot more on themselves than on who occupies the White House. If Europeans want to be taken seriously as partners, have a modicum of influence on U.S. foreign policy decisions, and keep the

United States interested in Europe, the homework is theirs to do, not America's.

Contrary to common belief, this has only partly to do with military assets. Naturally, the Americans look with concern at the dwindling military capabilities in Europe, which undermine NATO's credibility and *raison d'être*. Being relatively weaker themselves, Americans hope that, in the future, Europeans can provide more and more of the services required to keep the Balkans, Eastern Europe, and North Africa stable, peaceful, and democratic. What they see is a Europe that spends €180 billion on defense but plays no role in global strategic affairs. That's not viable, and it is weakening transatlantic relations.

But beyond the well-discussed military issue, there is also a wider concern about EU [foreign policy in general](#). It is about the fact that Europe, even in fields where it already has all the instruments and all the leverage, is not acting decisively as a foreign policy power. [As I have written before](#), it's the lack of ambition that bothers Europeans, Americans, and other observers alike. Just imagine the reputation and standing Europe could have, not only in the transatlantic relationship, but across the board, if it just tackled some of the obvious and urgent issues at hand.

Here is my priority action list for "Operation Renewed Hope", the European program to regain credibility as a foreign policy player, impress the Americans, and feel better about themselves:

1. **Turkey**

Everyone knows that membership is not a viable option anymore. Which means we can finally continue the accession negotiations in all seriousness. Sound paradoxical? It isn't. Neither the Europeans nor the Turks [want full Turkish membership anymore](#). But what both sides want is a reformed Turkey. For the Europeans, the negotiations are the only real tool they have to bring about reforms and to influence Turkey at home. For Erdogan, the negotiations are a tool to push through reforms that he otherwise couldn't. Yes, Erdogan is a more difficult player now, with worrisome ambitions and positions. But he is a realist first and foremost. He wants Turkey to be strong. So do we. So let's keep silent about the end goal, and continue in the negotiations with full zest.

2. **Ukraine**

[After the fraudulent elections](#), Europeans are dumbfounded about what to do with Ukraine. But they already own the perfect tool for

dealing with the regime in Kiev, the Association Agreement, which is waiting to get signed but has been put on hold. The EU should sign the agreement because it gives them real leverage with Ukraine. Here, conditionality, if played right, could work. Use the human rights clauses in the document, and apply them. Play hardball in return for preferred access to EU markets. This would have a very positive geopolitical impact on Russia as well.

3. **Russia**

Use the European Commission's [anti-trust case against Gazprom](#) as the starting point for a really unified European energy policy vis-à-vis Moscow. For too long Europeans refrained from using their leverage in the buyer-seller relationship with Russia, and for too long they allowed Russia to play them against each other. It is now time to create a European unity using a strategic issue of the utmost geopolitical importance.

4. **Military**

Three words: [Pooling and sharing](#). The case has been made so often, it's tiresome to repeat it, but it must be done: Europeans must start spending their huge overall defense budgets in smarter ways. It makes sense militarily, it makes sense financially, and it makes sense within the transatlantic framework. There is no convincing reason why it should not make sense politically. And yes, some European countries should stop using their military spending as social programs aimed at subsidizing government jobs.

5. **Transatlantic Free Trade**

Creating a zone of free trade across the Atlantic is the second big geopolitical project that needs to become a reality. What better gesture in the emerging Pacific Century than to eliminate trade barriers between Europe and America? It would create countless jobs, stimulate investment, boost trade, increase tax revenue, and increase the West's influence in multilateral organizations such as the WTO, the IMF, and the G20.

None of these things would cost a lot of money, would require new treaties or instruments, or even fundamentally new thinking. All it requires is some ambition to make your own life, and that of others, better, and some unity. The fact that despite their relative easiness, they are still deemed revolutionary, is a sign of our real weakness in the world. It does not come from demographics, or lack of military capabilities, or even the euro crisis. It comes from a lack of daring,

ambition, and resolve. Do I sound naïve here? If so, that's a good thing, because that means I am on to something.

COMMENTS

• Verena Ringler November 8, 2012 6:17 AM

Thank you, Mr. Techau, for your clear words.

The irony is that in foreign and global policy, European leaders do not face harsh winds of public opposition. To the contrary, Europeans have consistently demanded for years more European unity in all the matters Mr. Techau is listing. According to the regular "Eurobarometer" polls, people in Europe want to dismantle the national cages their leaders cling to.

People have been asking for a Europe in the world that sticks to its unique selling points at home and abroad—a concern for evolving debate on the commonwealth, and the rule of law as the foundation. And yet, Europe's list of missed opportunities is relevant and even longer than Mr. Techau's, extending way into the fields of public and cultural diplomacy.

The Erasmus generation's potential—a well-educated post-national cohort that's ready to contribute—is not used in any of the policy items Mr. Techau elaborates on. Europe's private sector and social entrepreneurs' potential—globally connected, contemporary, and smart players—is not used either. Nor is European academia's potential—interdisciplinary, interconnected future-driven.

Europe's bustling innovation milieu's rationale, how to be an actor rather than victim, of our future and how to find sustainable foundations for our wealth at home and abroad is not used.

To summarize: not only would mass public opinion support a more

decisive EU in the world, but also, the persons, institutes, movements, and ideas to bring a new rationale and fresh drive into the EU's foreign and global ambitions exist (but have so far been living and working far away from political and institutional affiliations).

Enlarging the list of stakeholders that are asked to devise Europe's future foreign and global policy could be a first step: let "governance Europe" meet "innovation Europe". Open the rooms beyond full-time EU experts, enlarge the roundtables, and extend the advisory boards in foreign and global policy. Our most pressing global problems are of an interdisciplinary, systemic nature and ask for interdisciplinary, systemic paths to solutions. Respectful matchmaking between "innovation Europe" and "governance Europe" might point the way and reveal that Europe's soft power emanates from the people.