EU/USA relations: reinforcing the transatlantic cooperation, strategy and results

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PURPOSE : to assess the New Transatlantic Agenda and offer proposals to reinforce EU-US co-operation.
CONTENT : In 1995 the New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA) extended EU-US co-operation beyond questions of EC core competence to the full range of political and economic issues, thus recognising the growing role of the EU as an international actor. At the outset of a new US administration, we need to assess this partnership. Many of the objectives set out in 1995 have been achieved, but there have been difficulties in setting priorities to ensure a focused and sustained co-operation. The six-monthly cycle of EU-US summits and ministerial meetings has not developed its full potential. No amount of strategic planning can guarantee fewer disputes or deeper co-operation. Although trade relations are generally harmonious, there will always be some disputes, but they must be managed and kept in perspective. EU-US leadership on new global challenges is necessary if international action is to have any impact on issues such as organised crime, spread of infectious diseases or the proliferation of weapons. European Security and Defence Policy and the Euro will also bring new challenges. Summits should concentrate on the most important challenges - strategic themes- facing the EU and US. Possible themes could be emerging security challenges, globalisation and the multilateral trading system, the fight against organised crime, energy issues, consumer protection, macroeconomic issues, the fight against poverty in developing countries and the digital economy. The bi-annual summits should be slimmed down reverting to the original format of a restricted leaders meeting. The US has formally mentioned the need to review the format and frequency of summits. A reduction in the number could have a knock-on effect on other high level meetings with third countries. Fewer meetings, better prepared might be more productive. It is necessary to ensure that the political leadership exercises close control of a process that risks becoming too bureaucratic and cumbersome. Strong political leadership is needed to set a co-operative agenda and to garner the true potential of transatlantic co-operation.