Transatlantic relations

2005/2056(INI) - 01/06/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report by Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, DE) on improving EU-US relations in the framework of a Transatlantic Partnership Agreement. It stated that the Transatlantic Partnershipwas a cornerstone of the external action of the Union, being founded on shared values such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The resolution was, however, critical of certain aspects of US policy. The report passed by a large majority in plenary, and mentions both common threats and challenges, as well as several current irritants to transatlantic relations.

General framework of the EU-US Partnership: Parliament stressed the need to update the fundamental basis of the Transatlantic Partnership by replacing the existing New Transatlantic Agenda with a Transatlantic Partnership Agreement to take effect from 2007. It was convinced that it is only by means of such an agreement that the transatlantic relationship can be anchored in a firm institutionalised structure. Such an agreement would allow comprehensive restructuring and harmonising of the diverse and uncoordinated initiatives presently under way, and that it would also encourage other international actors to assume the vital principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Parliament also underlined the urgent need for the forthcoming EU-US Summit in June 2006 to fix the goal of completing the Transatlantic Market by 2015, without impediment, as repeatedly proposed by Parliament, by the US Congress and by leading politicians, academics and business stakeholders.

Political dimension of the proposed Transatlantic Partnership Agreement: building up a "community of action" for global and regional cooperation: the Transatlantic Partnership Agreement should expand the existing agenda in the political, economic and security fields, seeking a "community of action" for global and regional cooperation in all those areas where the common interests and values of both partners are at stake. Parliament also recommended the promotion of a common approach to relations with other major geopolitical actors including China, India, Japan, Latin America and Russia, the revival of negotiated arms control and disarmament agreements at multilateral and bilateral levels and a more active joint commitment to reform of the United Nations and its Security Council. China, Russia and Ukraine should be prioritised for actions with regard to EU-US collaboration and coordination of technical assistance and enforcement training.

Parliament regretted that the US Administration remained so reluctant to enter into any meaningful international partnership on climate change, but noted as a modest step forward, that it was now willing, as agreed at the December 2005 Montreal Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to engage in a thorough forward-looking dialogue. A common strategy should be developed to ensure security of energy and raw material supplies, based firstly on a multilateral policy agreed by all major consumers and secondly on the principle of diversity in supply, production and transportation.

Parliament moved on to encourage the partners to reinforce their common efforts to promote peace in the Middle East on the basis of the successive initiatives undertaken by the Quartet, and stressed the importance of a common approach towards the newly elected Palestinian Authority. It supported the determination of the partners to work with the Iraqi authorities, the UN and relevant regional actors in order to help Iraq achieve peace, and expressed its profound concern at the continuing violations of human rights;

On Iran, Parliament underlined the need for the partners to work closely on the Iran nuclear issue and to maintain a coherent policy towards the region as a whole, focusing on the Iranian people, its government

and the democratic opposition. It recommended that Iran's legitimate security interests be taken into account by a comprehensive regional security system backed by the strong commitment of the transatlantic partners.

Parliament felt that the EU and the US should give policy priority to the substantial reduction of poverty and should reaffirm their commitment to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals by 2015 and their previously expressed commitment to devote 0,7% of their GDP to development assistance by 2020 at the latest.

EU-US security and defence matters: The importance of NATO's role together with the European Union's foreign and security policy was underlined. NATO remained a crucial guarantor of transatlantic stability and security. It was in the interests of the partners to strengthen both NATO and EU capabilities. NATO in particular should develop its potential as a forum for political debate in a true partnership of equals, with a sensible balance being struck between the instruments of prevention, crisis management and military capability. Parliament welcomed the commitment by both partners in seeking an effective global response to the key threats to international peace and security posed by the proliferation of WMDs and their delivery systems. It encouraged the United States to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. It also encouraged the EU and the US to continue cooperation towards a comprehensive system of international agreements on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, in order to jointly reinforce the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a key element in preventing the spread of nuclear weapons.

Parliament strongly regretted the mistrust due to suspected violation of human rights and international law involved in the so-called extraordinary renditions in Europe. The partners must act at all times in full respect of international law, the UN Charter and the principles of democracy. Any joint or unilateral activity which did not fully respect international law would weaken the way in which western societies were perceived, making them vulnerable and less credible in their fight against terrorism and the quest for peace, stability and democracy. There must be an end to the current legal limbo in which the detainees held in Camp Delta, Guantánamo Bay Naval Base have been placed since their arrival there. This issue should be on the agenda at the next EU-US Summit. Parliament again called for the immediate closure of the Guantánamo detention centre.

Parliament went on to urge the US to extend the Visa Waiver Program to cover all EU citizens so that they all receive equal, open and fair treatment without delay.

Economic and commercial dimension of the partnership and completion of the Transatlantic Market by 2015: Parliament was of the view that the transatlantic economic partnership should be enhanced within the framework of the proposed Transatlantic Partnership Agreement and should be complemented by a Transatlantic Aviation Agreement, rather than pursued in the present cumbersome and sometimes contradictory way. It called on the leaders on both sides of the Atlantic to reinvigorate transatlantic economic cooperation by establishing early warning systems to operate at an earlier stage in the regulatory and legislative processes, at the point of problem specification and solution identification. Parliament condemned the extraterritorial approach that typified much of the United States' foreign policy and foreign economic/commercial policy, as exemplified by the Helms-Burton Law, the Torricelli Law and Section 301 of the US Trade Act.

Institutional framework of the partnership: Parliament referred to the need to strengthen the parliamentary dimension of the Transatlantic Partnership by transforming the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue (TLD) into a transatlantic assembly scheduling legislators' summits in the run-up to EU-US summits. Moreover, the idea of launching new, jointly-funded programmes for exchanges between legislative staffers needed to be considered. The EP budget for 2007 should establish a permanent post in Washington DC, so that both Parliament and the TLD may maintain permanent contact with the US House of Representatives and Senate.

Finally, it should be noted that this report joins a related one by Erika MANN (PES, DE), which calls for a barrier-free transatlantic market to be established by 2015, and the creation of a bilateral trade dispute settlement system. (Please refer to INI/2005/2082.)