

From an Unholy Alliance to a Concert of Powers

By Johan Norberg. Presented at the Mont Pèlerin Society Regional Meeting in Hamburg, April 2004

*"You're thinking of Europe as
Germany and France. I don't.
I think that's old Europe"*
Donald Rumsfeld, 2003

In 2003 the Paris-Berlin-alliance seemed stronger than it had been for a long time. Germany and France led a popular opposition to the Iraq war together with Russia. The two countries reached agreements on agricultural spending and the European constitution and promised more cooperation on crime and foreign policy. When German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder had to leave on the final day of an EU summit in October 2003, he chose French President Jacques Chirac as his spokesman – despite the fact that he knows only a few words of German. France and Germany announced that they would seek to adopt common positions in international bodies, such as the UN Security Council and that they would hold joint cabinet meetings, and each appoint a senior official to oversee Franco-German cooperation. Some visionaries even discussed integration of economy, education, social affairs, the defence and foreign policies – in effect, a merger of the two countries.

So what is this? Are Germany and France standing behind the wheel in a bigger Europe? Can they get the smaller powers to follow their lead, and put a stop to the domination of the Anglo-Saxon powers, like the Holy Alliance tried to do in Europe in the early 19th century? After the cold war, America does no longer need to protect the continent from communism, and it might also have lost some of its interest in the continent. At the same time, mutual interest in trade and investments will make Russia a more important partner to the EU. Is the Gaullist vision of a strong Europe, rivalling US domination, now to be realized?

Not quite. I will argue that the unity between France and Germany is weaker than it seems, and that their recent behaviour is more guided by the fear of completely losing control in an enlarged EU. In the end, American strength and domination will be in the interest of most European countries.

The beginning of a beautiful friendship

The size and importance of France and Germany made their determination both necessary and sufficient for every new step in the European project. And they got it going in the first place. The European Union has been described as a deal, in which French farmers got subsidies in exchange for German access to French industrial markets. Of course it would have been easy to implement economic integration by simply breaking down the barriers, but they chose another way to implement free trade and liberalism – with French dirigisme and German corporatism. I am sometimes tempted to think that they had a hidden agenda: Perhaps they thought that the best way to unite the former combatants was to force them to have regular, endless meetings to discuss prices and standards. Instead of fighting over frontiers, they could fight over sheep quotas, and milk prices.¹

¹ There is an easier explanation. The ideas of central planning were in vogue in the 1950s. That was the only way they thought a market could work. The architect of the Coal and Steel Community, Jean Monnet, was a planner who constructed the French Commissariat General du Plan.

It was an unholy alliance from the start, with a lot of hostility and suspicion from both sides, where a leading French politician could talk about “the suicide of France”, and a leading German politician could say that “he who signs this treaty ceases to be a German”.² And the relationship was not really driven by enthusiasm for the European idea as such, which is the historic interpretation of the idealists. Instead, both countries saw the European project as a way of promoting their national interests. Because of the recent history of the Nazi dictatorship and the war, German leaders like Adenauer thought that Germany could regain its position as a major European country only if it was embedded in a strong European community. The resources spent on the Community bought Germany a new respectability and status. And French leaders, like de Gaulle, wanted to see France as a world power again, which could only be achieved with the combined power (and money) of neighbours.

As in Otto von Bismarck’s famous explanation in 1876: “I have always found the word ‘Europe’ on the lips of those who wanted something from others which they dared not demand in their own names.” As Timothy Garton Ash has observed, it’s hard to distinguish when a French and German politician talk about Europe and when they talk about their own countries, whereas a Swedish or British politician talk about “going to Europe” for a meeting.³

The French-German partnership was amazingly successful, the enemies became friends and allies, and the duo was the architect and promoter of every step of the way from the Coal and Steel Community, to the European Community, to the European Union and the European Monetary Union. France and Germany used to have a meeting before every EU summit to decide the fate of all Europeans.

Problem 1: Germany unbound

But the very success was also the doom of the strong alliance. When Germany got back to being a normal European power, and the shame back home and the fear abroad began to give way, Germany started to behave more like a normal country. And as the generation brought up after the war has come into power, Germany is no longer afraid of itself as it was before. And in that case, why would it need the moral approval of France? Why should Germany be the biggest net provider of EU funds when the equally rich France is one of its biggest recipients?

It is logical that the French only approved of German unification if the country gave up the Deutsche Mark.⁴ But when that was done, and when Berlin replaced Bonn as the German capital, it was the end of the Paris-Bonn alliance. And not in name only. In the new spirit, combined with economic problems at home, Germany began to be assertive, to demand and to complain. In short, Germany has begun to act like France, and France doesn’t like that.

This was most noticeable at the EU summit in Nice in 2000. For the first time, Germany broke out of the parity between the two countries by demanding greater voting rights than France. Chirac saw it as an attempt to “unhook” the French-German partnership. The year before,

² Quoted in Paul Johnson: *A History of the Modern World – From 1917 to the 1980s*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983, p 592f.

³ Timothy Garton Ash: “Catching the wrong bus?”, in *History of the Present*. London: Penguin, 2000.

⁴ “The whole Deutschland for Kohl, half the Deutschmark for Mitterrand”, as the joke went.

Schröder had presented a declaration with British Prime Minister Tony Blair, where they explained the need for reforms and a Third Way for Europe. There was a constant disagreement on how the CAP should (or shouldn't) be reformed to make way for the enlargement. And soon after the meeting Germany was ready to accept responsibilities like military intervention abroad.

Problem 2: A European project without European support

There are also limits to how close a union can become if the people are unwilling. Membership in the European Union requires “democracy, the rule of law” and “the existence of a functioning market economy”. According to these requirements, I don't think that the EU would be allowed to become a member of the EU.

The opaque way of making decisions, the attempt to harmonize detailed regulation and taxes, plus 80 000 pages of law and regulation, a full-fledged planned economy in the agricultural sector, and billions put into structural funds and subsidies – they all point in the other direction. So does the lack of a common European debate, and of public control of the Council and the Commission. In 1999, Luxembourg's Prime Minister, Jean-Claude Juncker described the EU way of making decisions for *Der Spiegel*:

”We decide on something, leave it lying around and wait and see what happens. If no one kicks up a fuss, because most people don't understand what has been decided, we continue step by step until there is no turning back.”⁵

This strategy of boring people into submission has its limits. Voters don't like being governed by bodies they don't understand, especially not when national politicians blame unpopular decisions on them. In most countries, nationalist sentiments and popular suspicion and hostility to the EU makes it difficult to continue as if nothing has happened. “When we ask voters a European question, the answer is either no, or yes by only the narrowest of margins”, a disappointed official of the European Commission said after the Swedes rejected the Euro, in September 2003.⁶

Partly this is a result of the elitist, top-down attitude with which many of the projects have been enforced. This arrogance was revealed when Ireland voted against the Nice treaty in June 2001, and the at the time President of the European Council, Göran Persson and the President of the commission, Romano Prodi, explained in a statement that: “We fully respect the outcome of this democratic process”, but added “We trust that the Irish Government will make every effort to secure ratification within the agreed time frame.”⁷ In other words: We are going to build an ever closer union, like it or not! So the people are going to be invited to vote again and again, until they vote as they are instructed. Which is what the Irish did in 2002, by the way.

This hostility is also the result of finding ever more economic and political questions turned into European questions. This means that countries have to fight against other countries over the same resources and in order to get their own rules implemented instead of those of their neighbours. Already, about half of the national legislation is born in Brussels. If this goes too

⁵ Quoted in “Why Brussels isn't boring”. *The Economist*, 14 December 2002.

⁶ “Voters can be such a nuisance”. *The Economist*, 18 September 2003

⁷ Available at http://www.eu2001.se/eu2001/news/news_read.asp?iInformationID=15745

far, it sets country against country, and turns neighbours into enemies. The temptation to blame other countries for bad decisions or a weak economy will be overwhelming for some politicians. Recently, the German Minister for Employment, Wolfgang Clement, said that the German economy has had to “sacrifice itself” to European integration. With rhetoric like that, it’s not surprising that many voters begin to question the benefits of sacrificing to Brussels.⁸ Since 1991, the proportion of Germans with an “unfavourable” view of the EU has grown from 19 to 39 percent.⁹

Late last year, the European Commission's own opinion polls showed that less than half of EU citizens (48%) agreed that their country's membership in the EU was a good thing, the lowest level ever recorded. The proportion of people in the member states who identify themselves as “Europeans” has fallen by 10 percentage points during the 1990s. In Britain, Finland, and Sweden 30-40 percent consider themselves “European”, in France, Belgium and Germany 50-60 percent do. The trust felt for people in other EU countries also fell in all countries except Italy.¹⁰ These new reactions make even staunch centralizers hesitant to proceed, in order not to encourage nationalist sentiments back home.

Problem 3: Enlargements

It was possible for France-Germany to dominate a small Europe with relatively like-minded countries, where Eastern Europe had been forced out by communism. De Gaulle saw this as the chance to create a rival to the Anglo-Saxons, and accordingly he vetoed the British membership both in 1963 and in 1967. But that merely delayed the inevitable. The visionaries wanted to unite Europe by economic means. If the economies were integrated, the people would follow. But foreign governments were even more attracted to the benefits of the Common Market than the people. The open economy is such a strong unifier, that it constantly attracts new countries. But the new members also destroy the possibility to construct a close-knit and deep political union. You have to be a de Gaulle to stop it, but, as it is, it would clash too much against the rhetoric of the united Europe. The community became bigger and stronger by waves of enlargement, to the North, the South, and now to the East. Every wave of enlargement has changed the union and caused new problems for the French-German ambition to dominate.

The most important challenge is the forthcoming enlargement by the Central and Eastern European countries. These are countries which differ from the old members in many respects. With their less developed economies, they will be more reluctant to accept economic regulation that imposes new costs. In many ways they will find more common ground with the British and the Scandinavians.¹¹ Since they feel more gratitude to the US than to the EU, they will oppose ideas to transform the union into a rival against the US. It is quite possible that their gratitude will diminish with time, as the French and German gratitude has done after the end of the Cold War. But at the same time, their deep-seated anxiety of being bullied by big European powers will probably be sufficient for them to hold on to an American presence

⁸ “Tyranny of the tiny”. *The Economist*, 25 January 2003

⁹ *A Year After the Iraq War*, The Pew Center, Washington, 16 March 2004, p 25. Available at <http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=206>

¹⁰ “Mer svensk än europé”. *Välfärdsbulletinen*, No 2 2002.

¹¹ Britain's Ambassador to Poland, Michael Pakenham, has observed that “The problem of the British-Polish relationship is simply that we agree on everything. We need, like all good friends, to have a little bone of contention, something to argue over, to actually bind us closer together.” Matthew Tempest: “Poles of attraction”. *The Guardian*, 16 May 2003

in Europe for a long time. As one Eastern European statesman told an American observer, in an unusually blunt way:

“We are a highway between Germany and Russia; we don't care that they are nice for this minute. We will do what it takes to be seen as good allies in Washington to make the American security guarantee stick.”¹²

Furthermore, their mentality is quite different from that of the EU-conspiracy of politeness, where you gain respect by giving up your interests and arguments when they are not consistent with the expansion of the project. The new member states have not been socialized in the EU way of doing business, and they have no intention of becoming so. They were suffocated by a centralized system, and they are not about to suffer the same fate again. So it will be difficult to intimidate them to accept a union dominated by big countries. When asked what is the greatest lesson to be learned from the Communist period, the Polish poet and Nobel Prize winner Czeslaw Milosz replied: “Resistance against stupidities.”¹³ This is an attitude that will come in handy when they deal with the EU bureaucracy.

And of course, the pure mathematics of the enlargement promises a different union. The new Europe will have some 455 million inhabitants who speak 21 different languages. According to the present rules (they are bound to change soon), Poland will get 27 votes in the new European Council, as many as Spain. The Visegrad countries – Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Hungary – with their 58 votes will have as many votes as Germany and France combined. And if Turkey gets permission to start negotiations in December 2004, Paris-Berlin must start to prepare mentally for another kind of union.

In this New Europe, French ideas and German money cannot be the engine, because French ideas are unpopular, and Germany is out of money. Their determination will definitely no longer be sufficient for decision-making in the new EU – the Iraq war and the proposal for the new constitution are examples of that – and there is a real possibility that it won't even be necessary. Therefore, they are beginning to change their positions, from forcing through their own ideas, into making sure that they will be able to block the initiatives of others. From having been the engine, they might become the breaks. The discussion of more harmonization and even a merger between the two countries is an expression of their fear losing influence in a bigger union. (So far, the most concrete result is a harmonization of VAT on restaurant bills in the two countries!)

The attempt to include Britain in a “Big Three” alliance, as seen in the trilateral meeting in February 2004, is an expression of the same fear. It could very well work, but because of the British scepticism towards further centralization, it would be more of a big country interest group than an engine of European integration. They only “compromise by adding” – they simply add all their different preferences on to one and the same paper. And the immediate criticism of their positions in a statement from Italy, Spain, Poland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Estonia, prove that the other countries are very observant and suspicious of a new dominant axis in Europe.

¹² John C Hulsman: *Cherry-Picking : Preventing the Emergence of a Permanent Franco-German-Russian Alliance*. Backgrounder No 1682, The Heritage Foundation, 28 August 2003, p 3.

¹³ Quoted in Kjell Albin Abrahamson, “The states that came in from the cold”. *Axess Magazine* No 7, 2003.

Problem 4: Problems enlarged

The enlargement has made some cooperation necessary and urgent. The Paris-Berlin alliance seemed to gain ground in October 2002 when they reached an agreement on the Common Agricultural Policy, to freeze spending until 2013. But that was a compromise, with which nobody was really happy. Only those who are nostalgic could think of this as a re-born alliance. It wasn't a bold suggestion for the future of the EU, or even the WTO-negotiations, where the CAP is one of the biggest obstacles to a new round of free trade deals. The CAP deal was just the lowest common denominator, to solve the most pressing issue before the enlargement.

The new member countries' belief in the benevolence of the old member states has also been greatly reduced when it became clear that, for example, a Polish farmer will only get a fraction of the subsidies a French or a Spanish farmer gets, combined with all the new regulations on health and security they have to impose.

The temporary restrictions on the mobility of workers, which in some places is up to seven years, has had the same effect. Since the freedom of movement was to be the proof that they were now equal, this has caused a lot of anger in the accession countries. An Eastern European ambassador commented: "I will still open the champagne on May 1st. But it won't taste as good." A letter to the editor in a Slovak newspaper put it more bluntly: "Fuck EU!"¹⁴ Most of the new countries have decided to impose the same rules against the old members. Not because they think they need them, but to get even. They won't take it.

But most devastating for the credibility of France and Germany has been their destruction of the Stability and Growth Pact of the European Monetary Union in November 2003. They didn't merely break the rules by having more than 3 per cent deficits for more than three years – they insisted that the rules didn't apply to them, and that they shouldn't be fined for the breach. This showed that they embrace the European idea only when and if Paris-Berlin need it.

When big countries opt out of important areas of cooperation – the euro, the stability pact, Schengen etc – it becomes less risky for other countries to do the same.

Coalitions of willing and unwilling

The French-German alliance did resurge during the Iraqi crisis, when they both, together with Russia, emphatically opposed the American invasion. But when we evaluate how this might help or hinder a new French-German alliance, we must recognize that they were fairly isolated in their position in the European Union. In late January 2003, eight European leaders, led by Blair, Berlusconi, and Aznar, signed a statement saying that Saddam's regime was a "clear threat to world security" and urged Europe to join the United States to disarm Iraq.¹⁵ This was a conscious provocation against Paris-Berlin by a possible alternative alliance in European politics – England-Spain-Italy, now strengthened by Poland.

¹⁴ Ingrid Hedström: "'Fuck EU' hörs nu i öst". Dagens Nyheter, 15 mars 2004.

¹⁵ Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2708877.stm>

In February, ten Eastern European countries signed another letter saying that “Our countries understand the dangers posed by tyranny and the special responsibility of democracies to defend our shared values,” and thus that the Trans-Atlantic community must stand firm against Iraq.¹⁶

Six present EU states (including two old core countries, Italy and the Netherlands), seven countries who will join in May 2004, plus Bulgaria and Romania, who are currently negotiating for EU membership, all joined the “Coalition of willing”, in favour of forcibly removing Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq. France and Germany were joined by only six other EU members in condemning the war. And some of them, for example Sweden, never opposed the war in itself like France and Germany, but only because it never got the support of a UN resolution. The Iraq war did not cause a US-EU divide, but an internal European divide, which opened up for many new possible alliances.

Table 1: Positions on the Iraq war
Present and future EU members

Opposed to war	Coalition members
Austria	Bulgaria
Belgium	Czech Republic
Finland	Denmark
France	Estonia
Germany	Hungary
Greece	Italy
Luxembourg	Netherlands
Sweden	Latvia
	Lithuania
	Poland
	Portugal
	Romania
	Slovakia
	Spain
	United Kingdom

The governments who joined the coalition were rarely supported by their people. Most surveys showed strong resistance to the war. Perhaps France and Germany could have used that to their advantage, to criticize the arrogance of these governments who ignored their people. But instead, Chirac chose to attack their right to express their opinions. In response to the letter of the Vilnius ten he said:

“These countries have been not very well behaved and rather reckless of the danger of aligning themselves too rapidly with the American position. It is not really responsible behaviour. It is not well brought-up behaviour. They missed a good opportunity to keep quiet.”

The “danger” Chirac was referring to was apparently the danger that they would be punished by France, because he went on to say that “Romania and Bulgaria were particularly

¹⁶ Available at <http://www.bulgaria-embassy.org!/02052003-01.htm>

irresponsible. If they wanted to diminish their chances of joining Europe they could not have found a better way.”¹⁷

And if Chirac wanted to diminish his chances of having an influence on the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, he could not have found a better way. The problem was not so much this statement by itself, the problem was that it seemed to prove the fears and suspicions that the new states had about how France and Germany looked at them as sheep to be led. In many of the accession countries, they started talking of the “Chirac doctrine” – that they were supposed to shut up. At the end of 2003 I asked a foreign minister of one of the new member states if they had been surprised by the accession process, and the treatment from the old members. The minister said “No, we’re not surprised. We have known all along how arrogant France and Germany are.”

Also problematic is the internal rift between Paris-Berlin-Moscow. That is because they did not at all have the same reason to oppose the war. For Schröder, it was an opportunistic stunt to win him the German election by playing on the pacifistic instincts of German voters. For Chirac, it was a way of standing up to the US, and avoiding an attack on an important buyer of technology and weapons from France. For Putin, there were also important economic interests in Iraq, but the decisive factor was probably traditional hostility to Washington among Russians, especially in the bureaucracy and the armed forces. It is very hard to see how these different reactions could form a strong alliance.

Hostility to all kinds of military actions is very widespread among West Europeans, especially when used in a “pre-emptive” way. That is a major reason why the pro-war governments rarely got the support of their voters. There is a lot of truth in Robert Kagan’s analysis in *Of Paradise and Power*, that Europeans have become so used to peace and security that they now instinctively rely on multinational bodies and international law, instead of military action. This attitude has gone so far that the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi after the bombs in Madrid on 11 March 2004 could say that “using force is not the answer to resolving the conflict with terrorists.”¹⁸ Meanwhile, the Americans made this very peace possible by continuous military activity on several continents, and by a nuclear stand-off against the Soviets. The US still lives in that Hobbesian world and would never dream of excluding military action against terrorists and dictators.

The problem for the Paris-Berlin alliance is this: *Neither would the French*. Chirac’s actions are not guided by pacifism. France’s interest is to build an autonomous Europe capable of taking military action outside of Europe as well. In the Iraq conflict Chirac’s wanted to tame the Americans, and in that process he had to use the means available for the moment: the United Nations and international law.

During the Iraq crisis, the French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin, was a dove who fought for peace and international law against president Bush and the US. You would guess that he felt nothing but scorn for “great men” who “feel as much as they think” and ignore “rules”, “authority”, “facts” and “public opinion”. But he does not; it is exactly those characteristics (in those words) that he applauds in his admiring work on Napoleon, *The Hundred Days*. As the historian David A Bell concludes in his review:

¹⁷ “Chirac lashes out at ‘new Europe’”, CNN.com, 18 February 2003, <http://edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/europe/02/18/sprj.iqr.chirac/>

¹⁸ “Spanish PM-elect vows to pull troops out of Iraq, lashes Bush”, Yahoo News, 16 March 2004, <http://sg.news.yahoo.com/040315/1/3irv0.html>

“[de Villepin] has no trouble with a powerful nation imposing its will by force, taking potentially dangerous risks, and possibly violating international law. He just prefers that the nation in question be France.”¹⁹

The American dream vs the European daydream

So there is a difference in objectives in Paris, Berlin, and Moscow. And it's quite possible that in time all three of them will see that cooperation and close relations with the US will promote those interests best, simply because for quite some time it is the only superpower in town.

According to the OECD, the economic growth in the last 25 years has been 3 percent per annum in the US, compared to 2.2 percent in the EU. That means that the American economy has almost doubled, whereas the EU economy has grown by slightly more than half. The purchasing power in the US is \$ 36,100 per capita, and in the EU 26,000 – and the gap is constantly widening. According to the European Commission, on present trends, the EU share of world production will fall from 18 percent today to 10 per cent in 2050 and that of the US will rise from 23 per cent in 2000 to 26 per cent in 2050.

In 25 years the American population has grown by 30 percent, in EU only by 8 percent. American nativity is 2.1 per woman, against 1.5 in the EU. In 2050 every retired American will be supported by three workers, but a retired European will be supported by only two workers. 28 percent of Americans are university-trained – twice the European figure.

America spends about 50 percent more on defence than the rest of NATO combined. Europeans spend roughly 2 percent of their GDP on defence, whereas the US spends about 3.5 per cent. And even if we created a common European defence policy, it would be hampered by different foreign policy goals.

The problem, in other words, is that Europe does not put its money (growth) where its mouth is. It cannot cash all the rhetorical cheques it signs. If France and Germany really wanted to rival the US, they must begin to borrow some American features: free labour markets, low taxes, less regulation and more immigrants. And not much points in that direction.

Therefore, there is not much chance that the EU will become a global superpower. It can only hope to become a small trouble-maker – protesting, criticising and withholding support, perhaps also robbing the US of European allies, but not in any way pointing out a different direction. This is also the evidence from the Iraq war. Even though Paris-Berlin condemned the war, it's hard to believe that they would want the US effort to fail. Because in the end, despite differences in degree, they share the same belief in security, democracy, and open markets. The Gaullist idea that an EU-US split would be beneficial for Europe is not shared by Europeans in general, and definitely not by Germany.

The fact that Europe is from Venus, and the US from Mars, might make it difficult to live together,²⁰ but it also makes good trans-Atlantic relations necessary for Europe. When

¹⁹ David A. Bell: "The Napoleon Complex". *New Republic*, 14 April 2003.

²⁰ Less than 40 percent of the French and Germans hold a favourable view of the US (fewer than the proportion of Russians), and Americans have the same attitude to the EU. See *A Year After the Iraq War*, The Pew Center, Washington, 16 March 2004, p 24.

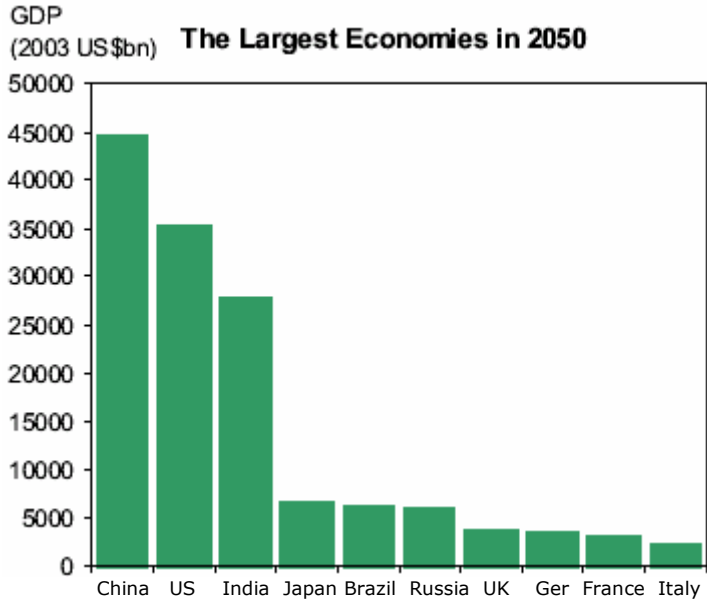
conflicts appear on the Balkans, it is not sufficient to talk about the UN and international law. Terrorism will strike again, and even though it might divide the West in some instances (Madrid, 11 March 2004), it will tend to strengthen the bond between those exposed. And then, Europe needs a strong ally, which is still prepared for a Hobbesian world.

Bill Emmott, the editor of *The Economist*, has expressed it shrewdly:

“During the past five years, in particular, the Europeans have often sounded like a bunch of adolescent teenagers, insisting that they must be consulted and listened to, and losing no opportunity of finding small ways in which to rebel. But in the end they are happy that the real adults, the Americans, are there to sort things out, to provide a secure home and to pay the bills.”²¹

America’s global dominance will certainly be challenged in the future, not by Europe, but by fast-growing countries like China, India, Russia, and Brazil. And in the presence of such challengers, the differences between the EU and the US will probably be dwarfed. Few Europeans would feel safer without close cooperation with America in that future.

Chart 1: Possible challengers



Source: Goldman Sachs BRICs Model Projections²²

For the moment, Russia also needs friendly relations with the US, to promote its own economic interests, to gain membership in the World Trade Organization and to get some legitimacy for its brutal war in Chechnya. The American-led war on terrorism is much more popular in Russia than in France or Germany. As shown by Russia’s acceptance of NATO’s Eastern expansion and US military presence in Central Asia to fight terrorism, Russia is pragmatic and is not looking for a fight against the US at the moment. Furthermore, the authoritarian style of president Putin does not go down well with the EU. It’s easier to look

²¹ Bill Emmott: *20:21 Vision*, London: Penguin Books, 2004, p 103.

²² Dominic Wilson & Roopa Purushothaman: *Dreaming with BRICs : The Path to 2050*, Global Economics Paper, No 99, Goldman Sachs, 1 October 2003, <http://www.gs.com/insight/research/reports/99.pdf>

away from authoritarian behaviour, when it's not coming from your next-door neighbour. In the years to come, the EU has to fight with Russia over issues like border regimes, trade relations and the environment – and in the future, a possibly stronger EU cooperation with Russian key allies like Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus.

Likewise, France's only present option of reviewing an important global role is to join the US in areas of common concern, which include peace-keeping efforts and the war on terrorism. It is easy to forget now, but at a time when Russia and Germany strongly opposed a war on Iraq, France still kept some options open, and many thought that it would in the end join the coalition. Before France came out as a strong opponent, I remember how the Swedish foreign minister Anna Lindh expressed her support for the "pragmatic" French attitude to the war, whereas she condemned the "irresponsible" German view, that even a war fought with UN legitimacy would be wrong.

Being a rival – pros and cons

Should we feel sorry for this lack of a European challenge? There is one obvious argument for a strengthened and independent Europe. As Lord Acton might have said if he had lived today: "Power corrupts, and superpower corrupts super much". If the US feels it is completely unchallenged it might distort rules and behaviour in a way which would put Europe at a disadvantage. The US might for example introduce protectionism or twist the rules of international law, for example by denying European citizens at Guantanamo due process and a fair trial. A strong Europe could stand up for its interests. We must understand the importance of this in a time when the American presidential election is being fought between a president who imposed steel tariffs, and several other protectionist measures unilaterally, and someone who is complaining that this didn't go far enough. An election between an insincere free-trader and a sincere protectionist reminds us that we cannot put trust in the goodwill of American politicians.

On the other hand, the United States is the strongest democracy the world has ever seen. Its strength might lead to corruptive behaviour in some instances. But it is also an exceptionally strong advocate of freedom. It is the first global dominant in history with an interest in the strength and freedom of countries it dominates and even invades. Just witness how the US did not colonize Japan in the 1850s, but opened it up to global influences and technologies which made the country much stronger, how it went about rebuilding the conquered Europe with trade and the Marshall plan in the 1940s, and how it wants to build democracy and market economy in Iraq and Afghanistan today.

Because of its strength, the US has created a Pax Americana, similar to the peace created by the British dominance during the 19th century. It sets an example with an open society and a strong, dynamic economy, which other people want to emulate. And challengers to the peace, like aggressors or tyrants with (or without) weapons of mass-destruction, are stopped before they become threats to the entire world order.

Just ask yourself if Europe, or the world, would be a better and more secure place if the US suddenly ceased to exist. I think that few would be able to say that it would. We have experienced the lack of a globally dominant power before, in the early 20th century, when no European power was sufficiently strong to dominate international politics and keep the trade

routes open. It did not lead to security and understanding, it led to suspicion, alliance-building and the First World War.

It goes without saying that Europe has a special interest in this Pax Americana. Again and again the US has stepped in when Europe has tried to destroy itself. For decades, the US was willing to expose its cities to Soviet nuclear attack to protect Europe. And right now American intelligence and troops are fighting against the common threat of terrorism. If Europe alienates the US, Americans would certainly lose its interest to come to our aid again. In that case, Europe should certainly prepare for a time when it takes care of problems like that by itself. But for the moment nothing suggests that it wants to, and even if it would, it begs the question why we shouldn't work with those with whom we share security interests, which, judging by our history, is particularly the US.

My view is that we should be happy that America is the only super power in the world. In a couple of decades, when US dominance will be challenged, there is a great risk that we are going to look back at these days as a golden era, and we are going to wonder why we didn't enjoy and use these days better than we did. I say this from a classical liberal persuasion, out of my own interest in open markets, freedom of movement, the rule of law and human rights. But in most respects, this is also what European countries find in their interest, and therefore the conclusion goes for Europe generally. Therefore Europe should try to work together with the US on questions of common concern, and at the same time of course complain and criticize the US when it acts against liberal ideas. But when it comes to trade conflicts, I don't think that tense relations and threats of strong retaliation is a better way to avoid American protectionism, than a general policy of free trade and friendly relations with the US.

Conclusion

The discontent with the EU, the forthcoming enlargement, and their own breach of the stability pact, makes a French-German predominance of the EU less likely than ever. With the new member states in Central and Eastern Europe, it will be more difficult to centralize and harmonize, and the opportunity will grow for London from within, and for Washington from the outside, to balance the Paris-Berlin alliance.

This balance is so chaotic and unpredictable that you can make the case that the fall of the conservative Spanish government – taking place as I write these words – might make my analysis a thing of the past. Perhaps the new socialist government in Spain will help to rebuild the Paris-Berlin domination. But it's not unlikely that the stronger economy and the new self-confidence in Spain have changed the country's attitude to Paris-Berlin irreversibly. The New Europe is a result of stronger forces than a few election results.

The situation in Europe in the early 21st century does not resemble the era of the Holy Alliance, when the big powers suppressed the small ones. It looks more like the shifting alliances of the “concert of powers”-era.