

**Toward a New Transatlantic Space?
Changing Perceptions of Identity,
Belonging and Space in the Atlantic World**

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The perception and relevance of the transatlantic space – the area in which the United States and Europe observe each other, interact, cooperate, and sometimes wrangle with each other – has changed over the last years due to geopolitical, economic, and security developments. Whereas Western Europe used to be at the center of American interest in the Cold War era, and Western Europeans relied on the United States as their strongest and most reliable ally vis-à-vis the East, a rift has appeared since 1989. Lately, this rift has been widened by the second Iraq war and the United States' turn toward unilateralism, parallel to the increasingly blunt articulation of West European positions critical of the United States. Simultaneously, some of the new EU members in Central Eastern Europe have made it clear that, in some respects, especially with regard to security considerations vis-à-vis Russia, they feel closer to the United States than to the European Union. These were some of the topics discussed at the conference's opening roundtable, in which Milos Calda, Beverly Crawford, Hartmut Keil and Frank Tromm-

ler participated.

The conference's panels dealt with three complexes, which together define what the transatlantic space has been, how it is changing, and what it might become in the future: culture, media, and religion; migration; security interests, economics, and environmental politics. Frank Trommler opened the first panel with a discussion of how Self and Other are being defined across the Atlantic. He argued that conflict and confrontation are essential parts of the transatlantic relationship, and that each side needs to define itself by contrasting one's own interests with the other side. While transatlantic cooperation on the economic and technological level remains strong, national or regional identities increasingly need to be defined on the cultural level, Trommler argued. This becomes especially urgent with regard to the weakening of the formerly solid basis supplied by common Western values (Wertegemeinschaft) and the growing indifference on both sides, which is partly a result of the de-centering effects of globalization.

Beverly Crawford challenged this position by arguing that interests were more important than values in constituting the Self, thus emphasizing the conflictual rather than the integrative character of the transatlantic space. Analyzing the establishment of American practices of religious life in Germany, Crawford showed how American marketing concepts are being copied by German evangelical churches and sects. As a result of this transformation, which runs parallel to the growth of the Muslim population in Germany, religious belief as a constitutive political element is introduced into the formerly secular public domain. Thus, the formerly dominant concept of „belonging without believing“ is replaced by the American concept of „believing without belonging“. Connections between German and American religious groups are strong, hinting at the continuing importance of the United States as a „role model“ for parts of German society, despite all critical talk of „Americanization.“

With regard to the media, Karin Johnston showed that, although there is much debate about the „Americanization“ of the European media culture, the second Iraq war has

led to a clear divide in the transatlantic media sphere. Whereas the American media strongly supported the war and, for a while, practiced self-censorship, the German media portrayed increasingly skeptical positions not only toward the war but also toward their colleagues in the US, bolstering German discussions about *amerikanische Verhältnisse* and strengthening positions critical of the United States' hegemonial role in the world. However, as Johnston made clear, „Americanization“ is often used by Europeans as a metaphor for phenomena that are not genuinely American but have their roots in globalization and modernization processes. Thus, one needs to look more closely at the dynamics between globalized and national media cultures when assessing the changes taking place in the transatlantic arena.

The problem of „Americanization“ was also a topic discussed in Helke Rausch's paper on the impact of private American foundations on Western European social sciences after 1945 as part of the effort to spread and strengthen democracy in the American sense. While the impact of American money on Western European research was strong under the umbrella of the Cold War, funding policies were not solely defined by this overarching political constellation, Rausch emphasized: Not the end of the Cold War but the overall shift of American attention from Europe to the non-European world in the 1970s marked the outphasing of the foundations' engagement in Western Europe. Non-governmental players thus deserve more attention as important actors in „soft politics“ – a sphere that might turn out to be decisive for the future course of transatlantic relations.

What followed was a diachrone study of the Czech Republic's relation to the United States. Whereas the Czech-American relationship was hardly burdened by historical conflicts, its harmonious nature became disturbed when many Czechs began to revise their idealized picture of the US after 1989, Milos Calda stated. With the ability to travel to the US and to buy American goods, the idea of the United States as a „wonderland“ gradually turned into a more critical view of the US as an overly commercialized „Disneyland“. In addition to this standard critique of Ameri-

can mass culture, the bombing of Belgrad by the United States and the conflict over the return of Czech gold stolen by the Nazis and extradited to the US after the war began to undermine the Czech sympathy for America. However, the Czech Republic's willingness to join NATO and its self-perception as a member of the West never left a doubt about its general support of and expectations toward the United States.

Břetislav Daněš took this idea further by stating that the Czech support for the United States' plan to install a defense system on Czech grounds was realistic and necessary. Arguing in terms of deterrence and defense, he stated that NATO did not guarantee the Czech Republic's defense vis-à-vis Russia, which, he said, made it necessary for the Czechs to cooperate with the US. As a by-product of this cooperation, the implementation of the defense system would help to keep the United States inside Europe and would allow the Czech Republic to take on a more active role within the European Union, Daněš believed. The underlying argument thus ran that strategic national interests could provide a means to strengthen, and even renew, the transatlantic alliance.

Looking at Mexico, Thomas Cieslik made a similar argument. He presented the case of TAFTA, the proposed Transatlantic Free Trade Agreement, which, if realized, could function to integrate Mexico into the transatlantic alliance more fully, he stated. With Mexico already being an established economic world power, the idea of TAFTA is based on broad political rather than on narrow trade interests. Therefore TAFTA, as a political project, could help to support common Western values, stability, prosperity, and credibility across the Atlantic, according to Cieslik. He suggested that TAFTA could counter the growing Socialist tendencies in Latin America, improve the transatlantic security situation, and strengthen the relations between the United States and Europe.

The two following papers returned to Central Europe, dealing with migration within and across the transatlantic space. Adam Walaszek described Polish migration patterns to the United States between 1870 and 1914. He argued that Polish migration pragmatically

followed the development of the labor market, whereas national borders played only a marginal role in the emigrants' considerations. Once abroad, many Poles, afraid of losing their identity, actively began to define a national identity. As a result, many of the regional and cultural differences that had been dominant in Poland quickly became overwritten in the „new world.“

Dorota Praszalowicz approached the problem of Polish national identity in the context of migration on a microlevel. She analyzed the personal experiences and narratives of Polish emigrants who returned to Poland after many years abroad and who, as part of a reverse brain drain, constitute a strong international and/or transnational element in Polish society today. While several generations of Poles have lived with multiple national identities for a long time, some of them feel a need for greater „authenticity“ which, they believe, can only be found in Poland. Here, globalization and its inherent possibility to overcome national limitations, might be seen to increase the need to stabilize one's national, or regional, identity.

In the last paper, Crister Garrett presented an overview of the concept of „transatlantic space“ by analyzing concepts like the „spatial turn,“ the „Atlantic community,“ the „West,“ and „transnationalism“ – concepts that all play a role in the construction of the „transatlantic space.“ In a case study of environmental politics and the efforts to establish a global green regime, Garrett showed how knowledge, networks and environmental culture have become more integrated on the transatlantic level in recent years despite the existence of strong national interests and cultures. This finding suggests that new political problems requiring multilateral efforts in order to be solved might encourage the development of new transatlantic alliances.

The final discussion made clear that the problem of the transatlantic space needs to be looked at both from a historical and a contemporary/future perspective. While the importance of the transatlantic space as a political and cultural construct seemed obvious during the Cold War, the question arises if there is the need and/or the willingness to keep this construct alive beyond the point of stra-

tegic urgency – although the threat of terrorism might well be regarded as a „replacement“ for communism as the defining element of identity formation for the West. In this sense, the West might gain a new importance as both a political and a membership category. However, it seems questionable whether a renewed transatlantic space should be defined exclusively in terms of negation, deterrence, and containment. A project as challenging as a new transatlantic space urgently needs positive, constructive elements to develop a coherent identity and to be able to survive internal conflicts – which it is certain to experience in a setting as politically fragmented as the current international situation. One of the most convincing aspects in this context seems to be many European countries' success in overcoming nationalism and embracing postnationalism as their common demoninator, without giving up their individual traditions and cultures. Also, the United States, in gradually turning away from unilateralism, might rediscover the advantage of cooperating with a unified Europe, especially with regard to its potential of providing a bridge to Islam. On the other hand, constructing yet another transatlantic space centered on Europe and the West seems out of the question in the twenty-first century. Without the integration of Latin and South America, and without taking into account the Asian countries both as competitors and partners, a new transatlantic space will be a product of the past even before it has come into being.

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