

Letter from the Publisher

Don't Wait for the Last Judgment

*"I'll tell you a great secret, my friend. Don't wait for the last judgment.
It happens every day." Albert Camus (La Chute, 1956)*

Europeans and Americans are in a waiting mood. After years of hyperactivity, in which the European Union progressively expanded across the Old Continent and Washington performed a variety of international actions to transform the world, leaders on both sides of the Atlantic now seem to aspire simply to managing current affairs in the hope of minimizing problems. Europe and America still face all sorts of mounting challenges, including upheavals in the Middle East, budget deficits and irritated public opinions. But the apparent trend is merely to cope with these difficulties in order to escape them, rather than cure them, until better times come.

European elites now seem universally convinced that no new grand design will emerge on their side of the Atlantic before at least late 2007 or 2008, when Tony Blair may no longer be Prime Minister in Britain, the new coalition German government will have demonstrated its longevity (or have been replaced) and Presidential elections will have taken place in France. Meanwhile, some Americans are beginning to call President George W. Bush a "lame-duck" even before the next Presidential election is in sight, presaging three long years of leadership vagaries between the White House and the U.S. Congress.

Wolfgang Munchau of the *Financial Times* does not find it too early to envisage a hypothetical situation in which a future Prime Minister Gordon Brown cares so little for European policies that he serves as a reminder of just how pro-European his predecessor Mr. Blair was in comparison; Angela Merkel, as Germany's first Chancellor from the former East Germany, focuses on domestic issues and world affairs outside the European Union, with Europe hardly featuring in her thinking; and in France a newly elected President Nicolas Sarkozy still espouses the idea of a European *directoire*, composed of the six largest EU member states, a concept which only antagonizes the 19 other members. All this leads Mr. Munchau to predict that "further political integration in the European Union will remain on hold."

But how can we be sure who the new leaders will be? And what will happen if the next British Prime Minister gets on better with the new French President than Mr. Blair does with President Jacques Chirac (which is not too difficult to imagine), and if Angela Merkel turns out to be more likable across the board than anticipated? With better personal relations, would the European institutions function more effectively even without structural changes, such as the grand scheme envisaged in the doomed EU constitutional treaty? Was it because of flaws in the institutions that the leaders in place in the run up to the Iraq war did not use them to coordinate their positions more seriously? Or was it the fault of inflated egos, which aggravated policy differences and clashes of national interests? It is not forbidden to hope for a better future.

One positive sign is that, while European and American leaders are in a waiting mode, their civil servants keep digging into the intricacies of technical Transatlantic agreements on trade, civil aviation, bio-security, mutual recognition of standards, intellectual property

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protection laws and other obscure topics. Largely out of public view, experts and officials are focusing on deals that, if successful, will undoubtedly contribute to our common goals of peace and prosperity. While the leaders disappoint a grumbling populace, the bureaucrats – often treated as public scapegoats – continue to work behind the scenes.

Meanwhile, the more things stay the same, the more they change (contrary to the well-known French proverb which says that the more they change, the more they stay the same). A look at the table of contents of this issue of *European Affairs* will give the reader a notion of how much is in fact changing, even though many people think that nothing is happening. “Harsh realities, including cars burned in the suburbs, are forcing France to adapt its economic and social policies; the EU’s Mediterranean policy is becoming a certainty, albeit slowly; the euro is stabilizing the region, and economic reforms are starting to be made, however timidly; even the common agricultural policy is undergoing fundamental reforms that are not widely acknowledged; European energy policies are inspiring some aspects of new U.S. policies (such as conservation), as the higher cost of oil makes changes necessary; the European Union is again jump starting its research and information technology programs to follow in the footsteps of the United States; and the U.S.-EU dialogue has significantly improved in 2005.

Without the inspiring leaders we all hope for, things are still changing. There is no point in subordinating our hopes and ambitions to some Last Judgment expected to come later from the divinely inspired electorates of the larger countries. New ideas, such as the proposal floated by Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt for reinforced cooperation in the euro zone, are worth considering seriously. The search for ways to strengthen collaboration, in the euro zone and the European Union and across the Atlantic, cannot wait. As Albert Camus implied, it is a sounder bet to act today than to wait for an event that may neither come nor solve our problems if it does. Let us admit that each of us can take action every day, and believe in the meaning of what we do. Provided we are sufficiently committed to success, this kind of determination should facilitate European integration and improve Transatlantic relations. Happy New Year!



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