



## **U.S.-EUROPEAN RELATIONS 2009**

**by Jeremy Black**

Looking at developments in Europe and the U.S.-European relationship today, like all things in history, in part we have been here before but in part what we are seeing is new. The current strains and issues in U.S.-European relations in some respects are resonant of the situation in the late 1960s-early 1970s, when tensions in those relations were far worse than they are now.

Forty years ago, the U.S. was involved in a difficult and intractable struggle as part of its worldwide commitment to stopping communist expansionism, and Americans were angry and bitter that the Europeans were not helpful. In fact, there was a spectacular row in autumn 1964 between the new British PM, Harold Wilson, and U.S. President Lyndon Johnson. Similar rows occurred in U.S.-French and U.S.-German relations.

Moreover, American commentators were convinced that Europe was going nowhere. They saw chaos and confusion. The big demonstrations of 1968 were far more politically disruptive in Europe, particularly in France, than they were in the U.S. There was a sense that Europe couldn't cope, that it was drifting into chaos, that it was no longer an appropriate partner or ally for the U.S. Conversely, Europeans complained that the U.S. couldn't control its public finances, that because of this the Breton Woods system was under strain, that inflation was differential between Europe and the U.S., and that the world's financial architecture would be destroyed.

One needs to bear this history in mind in looking at the present situation. In all alliances in world history, there have always been potent strains, differences of assumptions, and irritations on one side about the internal situation of the other.

Europe at the present moment is coping with a governmental crisis that precedes the current economic crisis: European integration, and in particular, the determination of the European Union, which now comprises the vast majority of European countries, to press on with greater integration and to issue a constitution. When the attempt was made to pass the constitution, in most countries it was automatically passed by the legislative body without any recourse to referenda, but because there were two spectacular upsets, in the Netherlands and France, in which the electorate rejected the constitution, that led to a situation already prior to this economic crisis in which Europe had lost direction.

There were many Euroskeptics who doubted integration would work, and by 2005, even the integrationists had accepted that things were going wrong. Moreover, the EU countries differed in their willingness to accept the fiscal and monetary constraints of the EU Stability Pact. With the exception of Britain, Denmark and Sweden, they all issued the euro, which was seen as the key element of integration. The Stability Pact required them to have debt only up to a certain percentage of their GDP. In fact, a vast majority of the countries have exceeded the debt, including Greece, Italy, Portugal and even Germany and France, countries that usually pride themselves on being virtuous by the European model. Indeed, the only people that have played to the rules are the Scandinavians and the Dutch. So you have already prior to the current crisis serious weaknesses in the fiscal and economic policy, weaknesses that reflect countries' unwillingness to discipline themselves by the obligations of EU membership.

Europe has also been experiencing a series of social strains and stresses. The positive way of looking at these would be to say that Europe, like most of the world since 1945, has had a high level of social change, in particular a large-scale movement of people from the countryside to the cities; deindustrialization and the expansion of the service sector; atomization in society, in particular the decline of the nuclear family; and widespread secularization; and that all of those processes have been accompanied by relatively little internal violence and disorder. There is some truth in this optimistic account, which is bound up with the myth of European progress encapsulated by the EU. That myth holds that Europe has become a more benign place; that the curses of the past, including nationalism, have been put aside; that the Europeans are now more reasonable; and of course that they have had their reward, which is that having created a more benign political space in Western Europe, that space now includes Eastern Europe as well.

But there are also less benign aspects of social developments within Europe. For American and other travelers to European cities, the most obvious instance of this is large-scale immigration. Immigration per se does not cause political collapse or social disorder. Australia, for example, has experienced larger levels of immigration than Europe over the past fifty years.

America, like Australia, is a quintessential example of a society in which large-scale immigration has sustained and developed a vibrant society and successful political model. So the question is why immigration has played out differently in Europe.

The immigration issue has been pushed up the political agenda of many European countries over the past decade because of the concern about Muslim immigration. The reason for that concern is that most previous immigration streams, both within and into Europe, were people who were willing to accept most aspects of European civil society. In Britain, the most obvious group of immigrants are not Muslims, but West Indians, who on the whole have fitted in British society. Certainly, there have been race riots and disagreements, but the great majority of the West Indian population has absorbed behavioral patterns that are very similar to those of their native English counterparts in the areas in which they live. So there's not inherently a clash between immigrant groups and the values of the dominant society. The same is true in France, where for example the great majority of the black African immigrants into France from French West Africa--countries like Niger, Mali, the Ivory Coast--have not engaged in large-scale civil problems. Islam hasn't worked out that way, which has come as a rude shock for the Europeans.

The Europeans have different models of integration. The French model, which is to treat everybody as a French citizen equally and to assume that they should abandon separate cultural tropes and methods, has not worked any better than the British model, which is more tolerant of cultural variations among immigrant groups. For each of these societies, the problem of adjusting to what are now large groups who are rejecting the authority of the state and rejecting social norms has been exacerbated by the demographic or population situation--the extent to which the indigenous population in most European countries is not reproducing itself. Indeed, backing out the first-generation immigrants, most European countries no longer have population growth, but rather decline. The percentages are most dramatic in some of the Eastern European states. In Western Europe, this decline is also the case, both in Protestant and Catholic countries.

This decline creates two particular social problems. First, it exacerbates the issues of immigration; second, a generally aging population exacerbates the issue and problem of social welfare in the context of societies that have very high expectations and assumptions about welfarism. Of the major European states, the one with the highest population growth rate is France, which follows very natalist policies, offering grants to encourage having children. But the groups that take up these grants most readily are the Algerians, so that in effect, although the French protect their figures and resist efforts to analyze them, they've got the same problems as are being confronted elsewhere.

Indeed, American commentators have drawn attention to these points, asking whether European states, precisely because they now have significant Islamic populations which are politically mobilized, are willing to take roles which are appropriate from the perspective of American policy, or maybe European policy as well, in terms of relations with the Islamic world. These are entirely legitimate concerns.

The social welfare issue is another serious problem for Europe. During the long boom period, 1945-73, there was high sustained economic growth, particularly in France, Germany, and Italy, which were then the economic motors of Western Europe. Over those years, practices developed of essentially bribing the workers. This had a clear political background. The European right was politically discredited by its association with fascism (except for in Britain, which hadn't had collaboration). The left, and particularly the far left, was discredited because of its association with communism. In country after country, there was a leftward move, an alliance between Christian Democratic parties, with the emphasis on democracy and Christianity and a social welfare model, rather than the traditional pro-business conservative policies of the American Republicans of the 1950s-60s, let alone the blood-and-soil rightwing fascism of the type of many interwar political parties.

These parties established pro-labor social welfare policies in an effort to woo organized labor away from the left, and in particular away from communism. This was also the nature of the social welfarism that the Catholic Church strongly pushed in the 1950s-60s in Christian Democratic parties. Christian Democrats dominated Italy in what was in effect a one-party state in that period; they were extraordinarily influential in Germany, the Benelux countries, and France.

A series of social models were established in which, in effect, the real cost of providing high levels of social welfare was ignored precisely because this was a period of general economic growth. Moving cheap labor from the countryside to the towns, catch-up borrowing of American industrial technology, the ready availability of investment capital, partly from America--all helped to ensure cheap energy prices and major economic growth.

This model came to a grinding halt in the 1970s, a decade of real crisis in Europe. There was political crisis--the revolution in Portugal, instability in Greece, major problems in the transfer of authority in Spain culminating in an attempted coup d'etat in 1981--and also serious social and economic problems, both east and west of the Iron Curtain. Because the communist states, which were relatively inefficient as well as brutal, had nevertheless also benefited from the long boom. But neither the Eastern nor Western European model worked well in the 1970s. The result was a decade of high levels of social problems, economic difficulties, and political instability.

The 1970s also saw, partly as a result, an unwillingness within Europe to confront the international situation. Americans complained in particular about a dramatic under-investment by the Europeans in their defense, their reliance on the American Cold War umbrella, and a lack of certainty of where they were politically.

In the 1980s, growth resumed, accompanied by a resumption of the bad social habits of European governments. Margaret Thatcher's maverick conservative government aside, European governments essentially resumed their 1960s habits, especially

in countries such as Spain where the left had come to power. Then as it proved impossible to sustain the welfare assumptions of the 1980s into the 1990s, again, there was a resumption of the problems of the 1970s, even if less seriously. In some countries this led to political chaos. In Italy, for example, the Christian Democratic order finally collapsed, and a large number of government ministers found themselves guests of the judiciary.

From that perspective, the movement to European integration does not look so benign. Indeed, one of the ways of looking at the movement to the euro in the 1990s was that these were failed states that could not cope with the social welfare assumptions they had created, or with the aspirations of large numbers of their citizenry, who found it easier to think that if only we joined together, we could get stability forced on us or get the Germans to pay for us. Rather than seeing the move to the euro in the way it is generally seen, in a triumphalist light, which then went wrong in the 2000s, which is the usual narrative that's adopted in Europe, the 1990s move to integration was in part a product of the failure of the European system at that stage.

At the beginning of the 2000s, European and a certain number of American commentators (e.g. John Kerry) very much advocated aspects of the European model. They believed it offered a more benign social welfare system and provided an opportunity for a third way--classic European doublespeak--that would enable Europe to punch above its weight. We cannot know whether this would have worked--the French and Dutch electorates rejected the concept in 2005, even if their votes were influenced by other factors as well, with the unpopularity of their domestic governments playing a role in both countries.

In the present crisis, a number of European states are unable to balance their books in any viable fashion. It's not clear what those that are currencies in their own rights--e.g., Iceland, which is not a member of the EU; or Britain and the Czech Republic, EU members that aren't members of the Eurozone--are going to do. As recently as three months ago, it was being strongly suggested in Britain that the fiscal crisis would force these independent European countries to move into the Eurozone. Now that looks much less clear-cut, because the Eurozone itself is facing enormous problems in reconciling the serious financial difficulties over issues of bonds and the fiscal weakness of in particular Spain, Ireland, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and most recently Austria, whose banks have been over-lending to Eastern Europe. It's by no means clear that the Germans will be able to fulfill their promise of stopping these countries from going bankrupt.

On top of the problems in the Eurozone, there are problematic issues about some of the Eastern European states, Bulgaria and Romania being prime examples, that have been joined to Europe as it were but have not yet fully signed up into the Eurozone.

The instabilities in Europe at present are helping to encourage retrograde, unfortunate political developments at the populist level. There is populism on the far left and the extreme right, both of which are unattractive and each of which enjoy significant electoral appeal in particular constituent areas. For example, extreme rightwingers, self-proclaimed fascists are being elected to parliament in a number of countries, places like Belgium, former East Germany. Equally, extreme leftwingers are adopting highly visible radical positions in countries like Greece.

These are serious issues that in some respects are as troubling for the political systems, maybe even more so, than the issue of extremist Islam, since the latter issue is in the end contained to the Islamic community, whereas the rise of fascism on the extreme left and right--in Russia you have a curious kind of leftwing fascism as well--are really troubling.

Again, we are forced to examine the myth of the European Union, which essentially holds that the way to deal with the extremes is to have a strong EU representing the centralist tradition and holding forth against extremism. But the EU's central institutions have failed to address the very social, economic, and political problems that are encouraging political extremism. In many European countries, you have the contrast between incompetent, self-satisfied governing groups and political populists. The centralist groups find it easier to maintain inefficient levels of social welfare, economic support, high levels of indebtedness, than to address issues like how to price young males into jobs, since it's they who seem to find populist fascism attractive.

All of these phenomena are very troubling. As to relations with the U.S., Europe's hard left, which was fairly unwilling to take pro-American views, is largely now a minority in the government. One doesn't see the kind of sustained agitation that existed in Europe in 1983, when the Europeans were pressed to deploy Pershing and cruise missiles. The major problem for American policymakers is no longer opposition to the U.S., particularly now that there's been a shift in France under the more pro-American Nicolas Sarkozy, but the unwillingness of the Europeans to take a role in the defense of Western interests that is proportionate to their population or their cumulative economic resources. Europe has roughly four times as many men and women under arms as the U.S., but its ability or willingness to use these forces is not particularly provident. Indeed, in the current fiscal crisis, many European governments have been cutting their military expenditures. In Germany, the wealthiest and most populous of the European states, the cuts have been quite significant.

There is therefore a real challenge for American policymakers. In part, this is not a challenge unique to Europe. One of the frustrations for American policymakers in looking around the world is that their allies may well be willing to invest money in their own defense, but don't necessarily project their power to distance to help the U.S. For example, Japan, the world's second largest economy, has invested heavily in its defense forces over the last few years and sent a few small forces out, and there are one or two Japanese warships in the Indian Ocean at the moment, but pro rata for the size of their military, the Japanese are even more inadequate as allies than the Europeans. In part, this inadequacy reflects the Japanese constitution.

Furthermore, as Washington looks around the world for other alternative strategic partners, the possible countries have problems. India, in which the U.S. has invested significantly as a strategic partner, faces an enormous issue in terms of its own

domestic stability. Furthermore, the Indians' willingness to project power at any distance to further American interests is remote, to put it mildly. They might be willing to play a role if Pakistan becomes totally unstable, but the prospect of their doing what they did when they were part of the British empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Indian troops were deployed in Europe, the Middle East, East Asia, and Africa, is not going to happen. So the idea of a strategic partnership there can only be taken so far.

If one focuses just on Europe, one sees inadequacy. But if one looks at a wider perspective, the situation is more complex, because the Europeans, however inadequate, are some of the only people who are still willing or able to project their forces at a distance. At present, obviously, many European states have troops in Afghanistan--fewer than the U.S. would wish and many of them hedged around with qualifications about their use, particularly the Germans. But nevertheless, they're there, and some of them are actually fighting and taking casualties. The French have shown an ability to project force both within France itself--to Guadelupe and Martinique, which are part of metropolitan France, and also within the former Francophone Africa, for example, to the Ivory Coast. Britain has sent troops to Sierra Leone. So the difficulties for Americans is that it's not as though you can simply write Europe off. The problem for American policymakers is that in many cases the Europeans are heavily inadequate as allies but there aren't many alternatives for particular regional areas where the Europeans could be cajoled into being active.

Where does this leave America? In some respects, mood music plays a role, because you can have exactly the same policy and make it sound different so that people are more sympathetic. There is no doubt a shift in the mood music at present, which makes it easier for European politicians to make nice remarks about the U.S. than it was even if the U.S. was pursuing precisely the same policy a year ago. To that extent, there is an opportunity for different policies on the European part.

Equally, for the perspective of military hardware, given that the Europeans are in favor of investment policies that actually help to jump start the economy, the idea of modernizing their military is not that far off--for example, the notion of building aircraft carriers or new generations of army transport planes, both of which have been discussed in Europe and both of which Washington wants Europe to do, is actually not that foolish from the point of view of the European economy and politics. So there are things to play for there.

As far as the European space itself is concerned, Washington has also told the Europeans pretty clearly that it's up to them to sort out the Balkans at a policing level, and on the whole the Europeans are doing that--not terribly well, there is still instability in Kosovo, but on the whole the Europeans have taken the lift there. In a way, the model of what happened in the Balkans is a fairly good one if it can be made to succeed. The model is of the major power, in this case the U.S., providing the military technology and it is hoped the political willpower, to take the leading edge, and then clearing out and telling the others, "We've done our share, now you've got to do the policing share." That is a sensible way for an imperial power to act. If, in contrast, you are a great power and you have to do all your own fighting, then things are seriously the matter. This was the case in Iraq in 2003, that despite having spent large sums of money on supporting the armies of Islamic states who are American allies--e.g., Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt--none of them were willing to send combat units to help the U.S. in Iraq. That is a political failure on the part of both them and the U.S.

What now needs to happen is for the Americans to speak more clearly to their allies, while accepting that some of the allies will go the directions they want and others won't. As long as you can find functions for those who won't, this is still a sensible recourse. For example, the Americans do not wish to spend their time having ground troops engaged in Francophone Africa at the present time. The more that the French are prepared to take a role there, as they are, the better for the U.S.

Finally, in any political relationship, one can always find enormous sources of frustration, particularly if one focuses on them. There is particularly, and especially among older Americans, frustration given the fact that America played a major role in freeing Western Europe from tyranny in the 1940s and then helped protect it until the 1980s. But on the other hand, alliances work if one tries to understand other people's points of view, even if one doesn't agree with them. The basis in terms of dealing with Europe is you have informed publics who are not inherently antithetical to American values, who are not run by authoritarian states, who are heavily influenced culturally by the U.S. In fact, America's influence culturally is very strong across Europe. Given that that is the context, the possibility for America to exert either soft or hard power in Europe is greater than the possibility to do so in most other parts of the world. The opportunity is there. Most of the faults are on the European side, but Europe is a large part of the world, with more than 400 million people and several of the top-10 economies. To write it off because one is worried about whether these states are sound is understandable as an emotional response, but it's not practical in a competitive world.

*Jeremy Black is professor of history at Exeter University and an FPRI senior fellow. His numerous books include Rethinking Military History (Routledge, 2004), America as a Military Power 1775-1882 (Praeger, 2002), The World in the Twentieth Century (Longman, 2002), Visions of the World: A History of Maps (Mitchell Beazley, 2003), and War: An Illustrated World History (Sutton, 2003). This essay is based on his February 25, 2009 presented by FPRI's Center for the Study of America and the West.*

FPRI, 1528 Walnut Street, Suite 610, Philadelphia, PA 19102-3684.

For information, contact Alan Luxenberg at 215-732-3774, ext. 105 or email [fpri@fpri.org](mailto:fpri@fpri.org) or visit us at [www.fpri.org](http://www.fpri.org).