



**FOREIGN POLICY ASSOCIATION**  
[www.fpa.org](http://www.fpa.org)

## **“State and Challenges for the Transatlantic Relationship”**

**Remarks by Joschka Fischer,  
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Vice Chancellor of the Republic of  
Germany**

World Leadership Forum  
September 21, 2006

From a European point of view, the presence of the United States in Europe is key. The European state system collapsed at the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century twice – in two World Wars. It was twice the United States who intervened and defended the Western part of Europe against the Soviet Union and also against the totalitarian challenge of Nazi Germany.

It was key for the development of the European Union that in 1945 and 1946 wise American statesmen made the decision to stay committed with troops in Europe. This was, I think, the most important basic decision for the development of a free, just and peaceful Europe – by the way, a very rare situation – we are used to it now, but don't forget that my generation, and I was born in 1948, was the first generation in Western Europe not called to the battlefield to fight wars against the neighbors.

The second very important decision was that Europeans understood that the European system, the balance of power in Western Europe must be exchanged with a new kind of system. Sovereign and independent states should no longer try to balance power and their conflict of interest against its neighbors – the risk that this would lead to war between neighbors was and is too high. The decision made by the United States 150 years earlier was to move to bring states together in a union, which was the very idea of the European Union: to not balance the conflict of interest, but create integrated institutions and try to organize the conflict of interest within the framework of these institutions. We started with strategic industries – coal and steel - and created the European economic community - this was the very beginning.

Nowadays we have 25 member states and as we have heard from the Greek Foreign Minister, others will follow. Romania and Bulgaria are at the brink of membership. Negotiations are taking place with more member states in Europe, so the idea of a unified Europe is a very powerful one.

Unfortunately there are also major setbacks and one would look toward the present situation of the transatlantic relationship, so let me be quite frank: we have seen better days on both sides of the Atlantic. America is stuck in Iraq, Europe created a disaster with the referendums about the constitution. It means delays to moving forward to a more unified Europe to the political sphere.

The core of the constitution, and many times I was asked “why did you need a constitution?” A constitution was the answer to the negotiations to the needs inside the intergovernmental conference where it was clear that 15 states were at the brink of enlargement but we failed completely. To prepare the union for 10 more member states and institutions that could really act in an efficient way....this is the key problem on the European side.

Nevertheless, we had our disputes about Iraq. I was from the beginning a pro-American, pro-Western transatlanticist, against the idea of waging war in Iraq. From my point of view, I didn't think it would be a positive step to move forward in the fight against the terrorist challenge and the new totalitarian challenge was visibly counter-productive. We have to see today that we are together whether we were pro or against waging war in Iraq that the challenge we are facing today in the region is a common challenge. From the European point of view, we see a growing, overall crisis in this region and this is our direct neighbor region. The Greek Foreign Minister mentioned during her speech that Cyprus is very close to the shores of Lebanon and Syria – we are direct regional neighbors. The United States has high stakes in the region, Israel, other partners, energy interests, not only security but also economic. For Europe there is another coil: we are regional neighbors and cannot change our geopolitical situation. What we must understand after this terrible crime of 9/11 is that our common transatlantic security is not threatened any longer by the Soviet Union, but is threatened by the challenge of a jihad terrorism of regional conflicts in the Middle East. The Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East will be key for our common transatlantic security, but especially key for Europe.

Europe is often criticized for not investing enough in security - that our military budgets are not effective and we don't spend enough money for military expenditures. I wouldn't deny that. On the other side, from the American audience it sounds very easy to talk about enlargement and Greece is a success story, as are Portugal and Spain. In the 1960s, military dictatorships left many countries in Europe poor. Nowadays, many of these are successful market economies. Immigrants are coming to these countries. In Greece, if you go to the construction sites, you will see that a lot of foreign workers are working there.

It is the first time in history for Ireland too. Ireland now is per-capita the second richest country in Europe. Knowing Irish history and the tragedies it has faced, it sounds like a miracle, but is based on the commitment of the Irish people to move forward and also based on the help of the European Union. What I want to explain to an American audience is that we cannot spend one Euro twice. Though we invest a lot in the European enlargement, and while that not only creates new economic opportunities and stable democracies, but creates security too.

European enlargement policy is a very costly effort and it's quite a challenge for our populations. For an American audience, it's very easy to talk about the secession of Turkey, but comparing it would mean talking about the secession of Mexico to the American Union. Mexico would knock at the door of the American Union, but that is exactly what we have to deal with and let me start with Turkey. Turkey is key for European and transatlantic security in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

When 9/11 happened here in New York and created so much pain for the victims, families and the nation, it was quite clear that the challenge of terrorism is a double sided one. On the one hand, by the use of the police force, intelligence and cooperation – this was and is a success story between both sides of the Atlantic. We must fight against terrorism not only on the level where we have to destroy their structures, but we also must dry out the roots of terrorism.

To do this, we need to strengthen all the democratic forces. Modern Muslim societies, democratic societies, in which the rule of law is constitutive where the successful modernization of societies in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East will be key against this fight against terrorism. Turkey is in the center – and is on the road to democracy and the rule of law. The United States and especially the EU contributed a lot to the modernization of the country. It will be crucial that we move forward on this long road and, with common efforts, modernize this country.

I am very concerned about the negotiations this autumn, the commission will present a report and if this report is negative, it is possible that this whole process toward modernization will be derailed. The issues of Cyprus and Turkey is a very delicate issue, but I think we together - the transatlantic community – have any interest to move forward on this path to the secession of Turkey, because this means modernization and transformation of this country. Speaking with Arab intellectuals, they all watch very closely, whether Turkey can move forward and will be supported by the Europeans and by the West. This might be an excellent example for other countries in the Middle East.

However, we see old regional conflicts in the Middle East. At the top: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We see on the other side the situation in Iraq where the perspective is very gloomy. We see a blocked modernization process in many Arab countries, but at the top we see a new challenge: Iran – its ambitions and its nuclear program.

I think there is a serious challenge. As I said before, I was opposed to waging war in Iraq because I was not convinced about the wisdom, about the reasons, and about the so-called

positive consequences, which I could not see in my analysis. Nowadays, Iran is a serious challenge. We saw the war in Lebanon and the influence of Iran was a very important one. The Iranian nuclear program, if you analyze the design, makes no sense if you are interested in a civil nuclear program. Iran is working very hard to close the fuel cycle. What for? It makes no sense to produce fuel without having a car. What will you do with the fuel? First, you need a car, but there is no car. The only reactor in Iran is the Bushehr reactor and the fuel for Bushehr will be sold by the Russians. An own Iranian reactor design is far away.

What is the purpose of a water reactor? What is the use for that? The whole design for this program makes no sense if there is an interest in the development of civil nuclear power. The West offered Iran exactly what they need. If you are interested, we are not discriminating against you, we are not denying you of your rights, we offer you cooperation to construct light water reactors - the best technology. This is an offer now on the table and hopefully it will not be rejected.

But from my point of view, we must understand the character of this challenge. If Iran will go nuclear, this will have very serious consequences. Some states in the region, Israel at the top, would see that as a major threat. This will also lead to a nuclear arms race. Neither Saudi Arabia, nor Egypt, nor Turkey, would stay on the sideline and applaud. They would react. The Middle East, with terrorism and old conflicts there, with all these very serious threats for security in the region and world-wide. The Middle East in a nuclear arms race is a nightmare for all of us. This would have tremendous consequences for the European security posture and would change it completely.

On the other side, I hear a lot about the so-called "military option". I don't believe that this is a good idea. I don't believe that this will lead us into a positive future. A military confrontation means an overall regional confrontation. Given the situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the decision makers on both sides of the Atlantic should carefully assess all of the potential consequences. I think this would be a decision which would lead us into a dark tunnel and no one will see the light on the other end. What to do? I think it is crucial to make clear that together we will isolate Iran if they move forward against the decision of the Security Council of the United Nations to close the fuel cycle. This is not a denial of their rights, but is based on mistrust of the past behavior of Iran. Closing the fuel cycle would leave only one political decision between the capability, the possibility and the reality to go nuclear. This is a common concern that it should not take place.

What to do? I think economic sanctions are key. I was in Tehran on August 1, 2006 and my impression is that Iran is watching very carefully how united and determined the international community is. The final decisions are not made and hopefully the present negotiations here in New York and the coming ones might lead to a breakthrough. Until I see it, I won't believe it. That is my experience-based position.

I think economic sanctions combined with an offer that if we agree about the nuclear dossier and regional security structure, then there should also be the offer of security guarantees. I don't believe in the wisdom of military-based regime change. Communism

was not changed by military intervention. It was changed by a transformation process from inside and outside and it was a very successful strategy in the end. If Iran is challenge number one, then I think we should also learn the lessons from the recent conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah. If this is true that the most serious threat for Israel and Germany, based on our historical and moral responsibility - and this is bi-partisan in my country and the Parliament, shared by all in the Parliament – that the right of existence, we are committed based on our responsibility for our history to the right of existence of the state of Israel.

What we must learn from the recent war is that the new threat is not the threat of armies, but the threat of missiles and of strategic weapons. This threat is linked to Iran and if this analysis is true, then everybody should understand that Syria is playing a crucial role. If we would be able to bring Syria over, Iran would be isolated in the region, Hezbollah and Lebanon would be disconnected from Iran – it would be much more problematic for them to rearm. Without Syria's negotiations between Syria and Israel, I don't believe that there will be a change of coalition in Damascus.

Last but not least, I think it would be very wise to understand that unilateral solutions will not solve the problem of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – of the security of the people of the state of Israel. I think everything should be done carefully but in a substantial way to move forward and try to open the paths for a restart of negotiations between Israel and Palestine. It will be complicated, but with the help of a viable third party – and this could be the transatlantic community – and knowing the connection of all these problems in the region, I think such a new approach for negotiations between the two parties in this tragic conflict should be the perspective.

This is our common security. When we talk about transatlantic relations in terms of security, we are talking about the Middle East. I think this is a common challenge and what we need is a common, strategic, transatlantic understanding. During the Cold War, we had such an understanding – different perceptions, of course – but I think the basic line was defining a common policy. We need a similar approach after the rifts of Iran, and moving forward – maybe in a severe crisis with Iran- we need a similar approach because it is very important. Our security will be defined there.

Once again, the European Union must understand how important its decision will be this autumn about Turkey. If we isolate Turkey, then the Europeans will create a negative, impossible coalition. Turkey is in a complicated situation. Where do they belong: to Europe, to greater Turkey in central Asia, or back to the Islamic world?

I think only the European option will work, or Turkey will be left alone outside the door. Then we will create an impossible coalition because Turkey will not stay alone. Russia, Iran and Turkey, it never happened before in history, because they were rivals in the same region. However, if the Europeans act the wrong way, we will create the impossible. Turkey will be key for any Western strategy – to guarantee peace and stability in the Middle East. Once again, this is our European contribution.

Now, if this analysis is true, then Russia will also be an important player. But, I don't understand the wisdom of a policy where on the one way you call the....by the way, with reasons I share. I am not saying that there is not a lot to criticize in the present Russia politics. If my analysis is right, we need Russia as a partner, not a policy which will lead us to some sort of confrontation with Russia. We need Russia as a partner in security in that region.

We shouldn't stop our frank language about human rights, minorities, Chechnya – the independence and territorial integrity of the Ukraine – I'm not asking for "soft language", but what I am asking for is that we have an agenda with priorities.

If the Middle East is the major threat to our common security – United States and Europe – then we need partners and Russia is one of those partners. We also need Russia in the Balkans. Kosovo must be solved. So the West needs a carefully defined political strategy. Without a grand strategy, I don't think we can make it.

There are other challenges: values. I think a really innovative and unique contribution of the United States to the modern foreign policy, is that it's not only power and interest based. It was the United States who developed the foreign policy and this reflected the founding of your nation. It was always power and value based. It was about democracy and rule-of-law and individual freedom at the top of the values and the responsibility of those who are free: a free society.

This means that we have to stick to our values. We know what the terrorists are fighting for: "We love the death"- this is the message of the terrorists. What are we fighting for? We are fighting for our security and the defense of our values of a free society. Even under fire, we have to stick to these values and not give them up. This is an important dispute at the moment in the transatlantic community and I hope that the majority in the United States will understand that America was always strong when it combined hard power with a moral high ground. This is the important message based on historical experience.

A fourth element will be trade. In Germany now, is a discussion about a transatlantic, free trade zone. It would be a fine thing, especially if you look to the Pacific Rim. But If I look to the reality, things are much darker, especially in trade, agriculture, WTO – we failed. We failed because there was rift between Europe and the United States not in agreement and we failed also in open skies and other issues.

Hopefully in the long term, this might be a project, but in the short term, I think we also need serious negotiations – how we can adjust our conflicts of interest in the transatlantic zone in the field of trade.