

Europe in Transition

Lesson 6: Europe in World Affairs

From trade, to colonialism, to warfare, to diplomacy, Europeans have long had contact with people living outside their borders. Today the region's foreign ties are as dynamic as ever. This update focuses on Europe's connections to the United States, Russia and the other former Soviet republics, and other regions of the world.

EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

(insert before "Defense" on page 255)

The close bonds between Europe and the United States were highlighted by Europe's response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. For the first time in its history, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invoked the mutual defense clause of its founding charter. The mutual defense clause states that an attack on one member is an attack on all members. NATO sent five AWACS early warning planes and crews to the United States to help patrol and secure American airspace. This was the first time that the NATO alliance had patrolled and protected American territory. Still, despite the political, economic, and cultural connections between the United States and Europe, they differ on a variety of issues, from the U.S.-led war in Iraq to greenhouse gas emissions and the Kyoto Protocol. Here we address key areas of cooperation and controversy.

Afghanistan

In the wake of the September 11 attacks, the United Kingdom emerged as the United States' most important military ally. On October 7, 2001, the United States and Britain launched joint air strikes in Afghanistan, where Osama bin Laden, the mastermind behind the attacks, had gained the protection of the Taliban regime. Other European countries joined the US-led coalition and supported the operation, though some voiced concerns.

The Taliban were quickly removed from power. In December 2001, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was created by the UN to provide security around Kabul, help the new Afghan government expand its authority throughout Afghanistan, and assist in the country's reconstruction. NATO took over the leadership of ISAF in 2003. NATO-ISAF's control over parts of Afghanistan outside of Kabul increased in stages, with U.S.-led coalition forces remaining engaged in other areas of the troubled country. Then, in 2006, the Alliance took command throughout Afghanistan. In 2008, forty countries continue to contribute troops to ISAF. The largest European contingents are from the United Kingdom (7,750), Germany (3,490), Italy (2,360), the Netherlands (1,730), France (1,430), and Poland (1,020). Canada contributes 2,500 troops.¹ The United States has 16,000 troops under NATO-ISAF command, as well as 18,000 troops that continue to operate under independent U.S. command.²

Iraq

The U.S.-led offensive to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in 2003 significantly strained relations between Washington and many of its European allies. France, Germany, and others sharply criticized the war, which helped to block official endorsement from the UN. On the other hand, the United States has received support from more than twenty European countries, most

notably the United Kingdom. Yet, between 2005 and 2008, key European allies either pulled their troops out of Iraq, such as Italy, or significantly reduced their troop strength there, such as the United Kingdom and Poland.³

The lack of evidence that Iraq was producing weapons of mass destruction or had ties to al Qaeda continues to stir consternation in Europe, since the Bush and Blair administrations used these issues as major justifications for the war. Incidents such as the abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison contribute to the war's unpopularity. More broadly, many Europeans have become increasingly concerned over what they see as Washington's unilateralist approach to combating terrorism and pursuing other foreign policy goals. According to surveys by the German Marshall Fund, the proportion of Europeans favoring a strong U.S. presence in the world fell from 64 percent in 2002 to 45 percent in 2003, and to 36 percent in 2007.⁴ Despite important steps leading to the establishment of a democratically elected Iraqi government, the divisions and violence in the country remain significant. U.S.-European relations remain strained over the conflict, which has now entered its sixth year.

Defense

(insert before "The Environment" on page 256)

Through NATO, U.S.-European military ties remain strong. Areas of focus include the United States' desire to build a missile defense shield in central Europe and the EU's plans to create a "European Army."

Missile Defense. The missile defense program seeks to protect the United States and its allies with a shield capable of detecting and intercepting long-range missiles by placing a radar station in the Czech Republic and missile interceptors in Poland. The project has sparked controversy around the world because it undercuts the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty signed by the United States and the Soviet Union in 1972. The treaty limited the development and deployment of a countrywide defense against ballistic missile attack. It prevented either side from initiating a first strike, since a first strike carried the promise of retaliation.

In order to proceed with its plans for a missile shield, in December 2001, the United States gave the required six-month notice of its intention to unilaterally withdraw from the ABM treaty. This decision was primarily a matter of U.S.-Russian relations. Nevertheless, many European leaders asserted that the United States' withdrawal from the treaty could lead to a global arms race. They claimed countries would try to strengthen their capabilities to counter a U.S. missile defense shield. Moreover, European officials worried that the United States' decision revealed a general disregard for international treaties and obligations.

Fears of proliferation were somewhat calmed in May 2002, when President Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a new treaty. In this treaty, both sides promised to significantly reduce the number of nuclear warheads pointed at each other. However, in a 2007 speech, Putin argued that an antimissile shield would upset the balance that had kept nuclear peace, adding that, despite the 2002 treaty and other treaties, he was concerned that the United States was "hiding extra warheads under the pillow."⁵

The U.S. missile defense project also remains controversial in Poland and the Czech Republic. While both Central European governments have been involved in negotiations with the United

States on using their territories to deploy the system, many people have expressed their opposition to the project by staging peaceful protests.

The European Rapid Reaction Force. In 1999, as part of their efforts to develop a European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP), the EU's member states pledged to develop a European Rapid Reaction Force (ERRF) of up to 60,000 troops. This force would be deployable within sixty days, capable of staying in theater for about a year, and capable of undertaking such tasks as humanitarian assistance, search and rescue, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement. However, it would not be a standing "European army." Instead, when needed, the EU would call up previously identified troops and military resources from existing national forces.

Because of the limited capabilities of the ERRF, in 2004 EU leaders launched the concept of EU Battlegroups--standing, rapid reaction forces of about 1,500 troops each, which may be formed by one or more member states. As of 2007, the battlegroups reached operational capacity, which means that at any given time the EU is capable of launching two such groups simultaneously. The battlegroups are able to deploy more rapidly than ERRF, but can stay in the theater for only 120 days.

In addition to these rapid response forces, the EU also has military planners inside NATO's command center. These planners direct EU peacekeeping missions in which NATO does not want to participate. For example, using NATO assets and capabilities, the EU launched a mission in Macedonia in 2003 and Bosnia-Herzegovina in 2004.

The Pentagon initially expressed concern that the creation of EU rapid response forces could be a first step in "decoupling" European military forces from NATO. In 2002, U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld proposed that NATO create its own rapid deployment force of roughly 20,000 troops. The European response was lukewarm, as Europeans were suspicious that Rumsfeld's underlying motive was to undermine the EU's effort to build a force. Nevertheless, in November 2002 the NATO Response Force (NRF) was approved, and, in November 2006, was declared to be fully operational with 25,000 troops.⁶

However, there remains a significant "capability gap" between the United States and the EU. The U.S. military budget is more than twice the size of the budgets of the twenty-seven EU countries combined.⁷ In fact, nearly 50 percent of total world military spending is by the United States.⁸ The United States continues to pay 27 percent of NATO's shared budget and provides 60 percent of its military expenditures on personnel and equipment.⁹

The future direction of NATO remains a key item on the U.S.-European agenda. Although NATO's primary goal remains "to safeguard the freedom and security of its member countries," it is also playing a greater role in peacekeeping around the world. Its current missions include taking the lead in troubled Afghanistan and helping train Iraqi security forces.

Economic Issues

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The United States and the European Union are the world's two largest economies, and the close U.S.-European economic ties encouraged by the Marshall Plan remain strong.¹⁰ For example, the United States and the EU have the largest bilateral trade and investment relationship in the world

totaling over \$1.5 trillion.¹¹ Up to 14 million people, roughly 7 million on each side of the Atlantic, owe their job to the U.S.-EU economic relationship.¹² Through this connection, the EU and the United States are and closely linking their economic futures. To oversee and accelerate the bilateral economic cooperation as well as advance economic integration, the European Union and the United States created the Transatlantic Economic Council in April 2007. This new political body will work to harmonize the EU and the U.S. regulations, such as accounting standards or regulations for road safety. Still, there are sources of friction, especially over trade. Here, we look at steel, U.S. tax law, and genetically modified (GM) foods.

Steel. In March 2002, President Bush announced that the United States would place tariffs of up to 30 percent on a variety of steel products. He asserted that these tariffs constituted a temporary effort to protect the country's ailing steel sector. The European Union responded immediately by filing a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO), a multinational trade group designed to facilitate trade and settle international trade disputes. The EU filed the complaint because the United States is an important market for EU steel products.

In July 2003, the WTO ruled against the United States on the grounds that its tariffs were unjustified. The WTO gave the EU authorization to retaliate. The EU developed a list of U.S. goods that would be hit with \$2.2 billion a year in retaliatory tariffs.¹³ Importantly, the EU targeted its tariffs on products made in pivotal U.S. battleground states in the upcoming U.S. presidential and congressional elections. However, before the sanctions were imposed, President Bush revoked the U.S. tariffs.

U.S. Tax Law. Another trade conflict of the early 2000s involved the U.S.'s Foreign Sales Corporations Act. In essence, this law provided a tax break to U.S. firms that sold products overseas, allowing them to cut prices to win foreign markets. The Europeans (and others) had long complained about this act, saying it broke WTO rules because it was in effect a subsidy to exporters. In 1998, the Europeans took their case to the WTO.

In 2002, after the WTO had ruled against the U.S. subsidies, it gave the EU the right to impose sanctions of up to \$4 billion. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick cautioned that issuing sanctions of such magnitude would be equivalent to exploding a "nuclear bomb" within the global trading system.¹⁴ On March 1, 2004, the EU imposed sanctions, but not at the full level permitted by the WTO. Instead, the EU introduced mild tariffs set to increase over time. However, the EU again targeted its tariffs on products made in pivotal U.S. battleground states in the upcoming U.S. presidential and congressional elections. In October 2004, new U.S. legislation repealed the tax exemptions and replaced them with a 3 percent corporate tax cut to be phased in through 2010. Despite some concern over parts of the legislation, the EU lifted its tariffs in January 2005.

GM Foods. Controversy is also highlighted by the debate over genetically modified foods. Although commonplace in the United States, GM foods are not widely accepted in Europe. EU officials have fought to protect their markets from the introduction of American GM products because they have fears over the safety of these products.

After much dispute and an EU moratorium on the importation of GM foods, at the end of 2002 the EU passed a set of rules for labeling genetically modified food. The U.S. ambassador to the EU, however, called the new labeling proposals “unworkable, costly, and subject to fraud.”¹⁵ The United States filed a complaint with the WTO. In 2004, the EU adopted more regulations on labeling and traceability of the genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and resumed GM approvals, hoping this step would convince the United States to withdraw its complaint. But this did not satisfy the Bush administration, which argued that the EU continues to judge many GM products on political rather than scientific grounds. The United States proceeded with its case in the WTO. While in 2006 the WTO ruled that the earlier European moratorium on GM imports was illegal, this ruling has not altered the EU policies adopted in 2004. GM foods remain unpopular across most of Europe. So far, only one GM product has been approved in the EU – insect-resistant maize grown in Spain.

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA AND THE OTHER FORMER SOVIET REPUBLICS

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When the republics of the former Soviet Union became independent states at the end of the Cold War, Western and Central European countries faced a complex set of new foreign relationships. Some of the fifteen new countries, such as Belarus, the Baltic states, and Ukraine, are in Central and Eastern Europe. Others, such as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, are farther away in Central Asia. Russia, by far the largest of the former republics, straddles Europe and Asia.

Relations between European countries and Russia have been centered around a long list of important political, economic, social, and strategic questions. What is the status of Russia’s aging nuclear arsenal? Does the entrance of Central European countries and former Soviet republics into NATO and the EU threaten Russia? Will Russia ever be a member of NATO or the EU? Will natural gas and oil shipments from Russia into Europe be interrupted? Can Russia become an attractive place for trade and investment? What is the state of democracy in Russia? What types of human rights abuses are being committed in Chechnya? What is the best way to address issues surrounding Kaliningrad, the Russian enclave now encircled by the EU? Each of these questions has significant importance to the future of European-Russian relations, as well as to the future of Europe in general.

For its part, the European Union has sought to engage Russia in a number of ways, but progress has been erratic. For example, trade has increased significantly and the EU is now Russia’s main trading partner. However, 67 percent of Russia’s exports to the EU are oil and gas, on which many EU states have grown dependent.¹⁶ Foreign direct investment (FDI) into Russia increased from \$3 billion in 1998 to nearly \$29 billion in 2006, with EU investment in Russia accounting for more than \$13 billion of that total.¹⁷ However, Russia still attracts two percent of the world’s FDI, and investment is somewhat concentrated in the natural resource sectors.¹⁸ Corruption and weak political and economic institutions hamper the investment climate in Russia; for example, Russia’s regulatory agencies and judiciary must be improved.

In February 2004, the European Commission issued a report that questioned Russia’s democratic credentials and human rights practices. It complained about a lack of press freedoms and pointed to Russia’s “assertive” behavior toward its neighbors. Partly in response, Russia threatened to not extend the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), the foundation of EU-Russian relations, to the ten new states entering the EU. Russia also had concerns about trade

losses resulting from the extension of EU quotas and tariffs to the ten new members entering the EU, and was worried about Kaliningrad, a piece of Russian territory separated from the Russian homeland by Poland and the Baltic states. The entrance of Poland and the Baltic states into the EU made Kaliningrad an island within the EU and required Kaliningrad citizens to obtain visas to travel to other parts of Russia. The EU opposed visa-free travel into its territory, and had concerns about the free flow of goods into the EU from Russia.

After intense negotiations, Russia and the EU signed a joint statement in which Russia agreed to extend the PCA's provisions to the new EU members, and, in a separate move, agreed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The European Union, in turn, agreed to lower tariffs and raise some quotas on Russian imports. The EU also agreed to exempt goods in transit between Russia and Kaliningrad from customs and to allow Russian citizens to travel to and from Kaliningrad on special transit documents, similar to visas but easier to obtain and free of charge. Finally, the EU promised to support Russia's petition to enter the WTO. At subsequent EU-Russia summits in 2005, 2006, and 2007, the two sides worked to renew the PCA. However, trade disputes, energy issues, human rights concerns, and other areas of tension have forestalled a final agreement.

The other former Soviet republics have also figured prominently in European foreign relations since the end of the Cold War. The three Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania—have joined the EU and NATO. Countries and people across the continent have worked to assist democracy movements in Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and elsewhere. Efforts have been made to bring stability and economic growth to the troubled Caucasus and Central Asia, which are dominated by authoritarian states. Because Russia and the other former Soviet republics are in the European neighborhood, many complex and critical interactions will continue to take place.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER WORLD REGIONS

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From the fifteenth to the twentieth century, European soldiers, explorers, adventurers, traders, and missionaries visited every continent. They extended European influence and control, and from the late eighteenth century through the 1940s European empires, especially those of France and Great Britain, spanned much of the globe. But in the face of a rising tide of anticolonialism after World War II, these empires receded dramatically. Today, European states maintain only a few overseas territories. Most of these territories are small islands. While their empires are all but lost, Europe's colonizers still often maintain close bonds with former territories.

Europe and Africa

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In the 1950s and '60s, a wave of independence movements began to sweep across Africa. Nevertheless, some cultural and economic connections between European colonial powers and African states remain. For example, seventeen former British colonies in Africa belong to the Commonwealth of Nations, a voluntary association of fifty-three countries linked to Britain's imperial past. France maintains its influence through the International Organization of La Francophonie and through the backing of the CFA franc. The CFA franc is a common currency shared by fourteen countries in West and Central Africa.

Each year, thousands of African immigrants and refugees come to Europe. Africans are drawn to Europe because of its high level of development and proximity. Europe and Africa also share

historic and cultural links. Belgium, France, Germany, Great Britain, Portugal, and Spain have the largest African minority populations.¹⁹ At times this immigration causes friction.

Africa continues to face daunting political, economic, and social challenges. These challenges have been high on the European-African agenda. Over the past several decades, a number of initiatives in the areas of debt relief, aid, trade, environmental protection, disease alleviation, and peacekeeping have been taken. For example, in 2005, G-8 leaders agreed to cancel the debt of the world's most heavily indebted countries (most of which are in Africa), double aid flows to Africa, and promote fairer trade policies. In 2007, G-8 countries pledged \$60 billion to fight disease in Africa (especially AIDS, TB, and malaria).²⁰ Unfortunately, while there has been some progress with debt relief, the overall increase in development aid to African countries has been insufficient. Despite the pledges, efforts to create trade policies that address Africa's needs and issues have not been very successful.

As for peacekeeping, in 2006 the EU deployed a temporary mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in support of the UN mission during the country's general election. To deal with the crisis in Darfur, the EU launched a peacekeeping operation in Chad and the northeastern Central African Republic in January 2008. The European soldiers will protect civilians, assist with humanitarian aid, and ensure safety of UN staff.

Europe and the Middle East

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The Middle East is also linked to Europe by colonial legacy. Both France and Britain had significant holdings in the region. While these historical ties remain important, today much of Europe's interest in the Middle East relates to the region's turmoil. Pressing issues include the Arab-Israeli conflict, the U.S.-led war in Iraq, and Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons. Europe also has important economic interests in the Middle East, particularly in the region's vast oil reserves.

As discussed above with respect to the war in Iraq, European countries often take a different position on Middle Eastern issues than that of the United States. The Palestinian-Israeli dispute is another example. Europeans tend to show greater sympathy for the Palestinian position, largely because of historical connections and experiences, a bigger Arab population in Europe, and, for some European countries, a dependence on Middle Eastern oil.

The European Union and the United States have also disagreed on how to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions. The Europeans have tended to favor negotiations, while the United States has favored sanctions and confrontation. However, the June 2005 election of hard-line candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in Iran helped lead to the collapse of negotiations in 2006. The United States and the EU then supported a referral by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to the UN Security Council that paved the way for imposing sanctions on Iran in December 2006. These sanctions were strengthened in March 2007, and extended a year later, in March 2008.

Europe and Asia

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Europe's colonial footprint in Asia was extensive. Several of the colonized territories were under European rule for more than one hundred years. The British Empire in India lasted almost two

hundred years. Today, economics is a primary focus of relations between Europe and Asia. Since the early 1990s, the EU's trade with Asia has increased dramatically and Asia has also become a major investment destination for European countries. In 2007, one-third of Europe's total trade and one-third of its foreign investment was with Asia.²¹ The EU also provides significant development assistance to Asian countries, allocating \$7.6 billion for the period 2007-2013.²²

As Europeans seek to promote their economic interests, they also work to strengthen their political ties with Asia. The European Union deepens its ties with the region through formal relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Also, in 1996, both sides initiated the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), a forum designed to strengthen political, economic, and cultural ties between the two regions. ASEM meets every second year and has forty-five members.

The EU and individual European states often focus on ties with individual Asian states. China and India draw particular attention because of their huge and complex societies, and their booming economies. But there are many other examples. For instance, Norway has made efforts to end the civil war in Sri Lanka, and the EU has tried to help broker an agreement on North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

Social ties between Europe and Asia are also important. Many Asians live and travel in Europe. Many Europeans live and travel in Asia. Health and environmental issues also come into play. One example is the spread of "bird flu," which emerged in Asia in 2003 and has since spread into various European countries.

Europe and Latin America

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The Spanish and Portuguese dominated much of Latin America for more than three hundred years. However, most of the region gained its independence early in the nineteenth century. In the twenty-first century, the EU cultivates close ties to Latin America by negotiating free trade agreements, encouraging investment, and promoting democracy and human rights. Indeed, the EU is the largest investor in the region and its second largest trading partner.²³ Spain remains closely tied to Latin America, not just because of cultural and linguistic heritage, but also because of significant Spanish trade and investment in the region. Finally, the drug trade has become an increasingly important factor in relations between Europe and Latin America. Europe is the second most important destination of cocaine produced in Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. Traffickers have exploited Spain and Portugal's historic and linguistic ties with Latin America, turning these two countries into main entry points of cocaine into Europe.²⁴

For more recent information, please visit the timelines at www.southerncenter.org.

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