

Sarkozy, Merkel Revive Atlanticism

By Ira Straus



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A new President of France and Chancellor of Germany have brought new initiatives for the revival of Atlanticism.

It is an unearned opportunity for America. Both leaders think in terms of Atlanticism, a word that is often used in Europe although not in the US.

Sarkozy has not merely delivered a friendly speech to the US Congress; he has offered a renewal of full French participation in NATO. He has stated his terms: it should be Euro-Atlanticism, with a serious EU defense capability, not Atlanticism alone. His terms are a starting point for negotiation of new deal for France-in-NATO.

Opportunities for Atlantic integration keep coming back. This is not to say there are no costs for neglecting them. But the trans-Atlantic relation itself keeps renewing its opportunities. This is due to the deep objective conditions of commonalities of society and interest among the Atlantic countries. The commonalities of interest continually give cause for proceeding with further integration; the commonalities of society enable Atlanticist initiatives to proceed with relative ease once attempted.

Angela Merkel picked up earlier this year on the idea of forming a common Atlantic economic space, by harmonizing the regulatory regimes on the two sides of the ocean – an idea Atlanticists had been working on for years – and gave it political legs. By the end of her period as President of the EU and Chair of the G8, she had an agreement in place for a 15-year project of forming a barrier-free Atlantic economy. A Transatlantic Economic Council has been established to oversee the work necessary for it.

Atlanticists in parliaments and NGOs had been quietly working on such a plan for years. For a long time, little attention was paid to the idea. Then their work bore fruit: Angela Merkel gained her multiple leadership posts and set as her task the renewal of transatlantic relations. She cast about for ways to proceed; one was waiting in the wings. Where no Atlanticist plan was ready – on environment, a new sphere for trans-Atlantic cooperation – she was not able to get as specific a result.

Current proponents of trans-Atlantic market integration have rediscovered a key point of Atlanticism, long ago noticed by Clarence Streit as *New York Times* correspondent at the League of Nations: 1) the Atlantic countries are the core of the world economy, with over half its GDP, and the hub of its finance and trade, 2) their economic unity or disunity determines the stability or chaos of world trade and finance, and 3) their economic union would have the effect of a union of a nucleus of the world economy, securing stability for world trade and finance and establishing common standards.

Sen. Bob Bennett, who chairs the Transatlantic Policy Network, has revived Streit's point seven decades later. He has in effect said that the newly-established Transatlantic Economic Council will carry the point into practice, when it harmonizes regulations on the two sides of the Atlantic: this, he says, will establish the same regulatory standard for 60% of the world economy, creating a de facto regulatory standard for the entire world.

The impetus from this would flow throughout the world economy. Other countries could, by adapting to com-

mon Atlantic standards, gain the benefits of closer intercourse with the entire Atlantic market instead of having to choose one or another Atlantic power to adapt to as in the past. A bandwagon effect would occur. The creation of the Transatlantic Economic Council this year thus has global implications.

Streit's classic reasoning had many implications. Given the deep commonality of the Atlantic societies, he concluded that they would have nothing to lose from a full political and economic union; given their role as hub of the world economic and security system, he concluded that theirs was the union most needed for world order. He added that more modest steps of alliance and economic integration would also work much better among them than among less cohesive global or regional groupings. This remark, made almost in passing, proved prescient. A decade later, State Department officials William Clayton and Theodore Achilles, inspired by Streit's goal of Atlantic Union, initiated the Marshall Plan and NATO, laying the grounds for the subsequent growth of the EU, OECD and G8. Ever since, integration has been proceeding, even if often invisibly. This year Chancellor Merkel, standing on the shoulders of the EU and G8, has taken the relation a new step forward; President Sarkozy has created an opening to move it further still. □

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