
For a Union of the West

by Edouard Balladur

Edouard Balladur was Prime Minister of France, 1993-1995, and served as the mentor of the current French President, Nicolas Sarkozy. Balladur was earlier a Minister of Economy and introduced liberalizing reforms to free the market. Throughout his political career, he has been an active member of the Gaullist party, Rally for the Republic; as a leader within the Gaullist movement, he is credited with having drawn the mainstream of French Gaullists back into a pro-European Union stance and into abandoning anti-American attitudes. Sarkozy rose within Balladur's wing of the Gaullist movement and, in Balladur's government, served as his spokesman and his Budget Minister. The two have long enjoyed close personal and professional ties. From 2002-2007 Balladur presided over the National Assembly's foreign affairs committee; today he heads the Commission on Constitutional Reforms.

Do we still have the right to speak of the West? When we do, are we fanning the flames, rekindling the hatreds, unleashing violence among peoples of different cultures and religions? Some would have you think so. Nothing could be further from the truth. Could anything be more important than self-reflection, than knowing what you hold most dear and who you are, so that you can build relationships with others based on realities and the truth and not merely on rehashing prefabricated ideas? To define oneself is not to hate what is different.

For centuries, the West has dominated the world. Today the West is divided and at the same time facing competition. It is proving incapable of organizing itself to face this ordeal, while its power and influence are under attack in every area. History is beginning to be made without the West; perhaps one day it will be made against it. There is only one way to avoid this: Westerners must become aware of the risk and realize that a greater solidarity among them is the only way to ward it off. They would hardly

merit credit for doing so, as their interdependence leaps to the eyes of those who are willing to see things as they are; and they would still have to face up to the consequences, in the policies implemented on both sides of the Atlantic, by strengthening their ties, and joining together for common action in the world.

The world seems to be slipping away from the Western powers. Their material strength remains unparalleled, but their moral strength and self-confidence are continuing to weaken. Immersed in these troubles, Europe and America have yet to understand that, for the most part, the dangers that threaten them are the same. They must present a united front.

It is high time for Europe and America to awaken to all that unites them in their traditions, their cultures, their ideals, to that which draws them together, be it on the economic, moral, political or strategic level. They are the most threatened by the chaos in the world and the emergence of new powers that do

not adhere to the same principles as they do, whose conceptions of life, man, and society are different. A true union between Europe and the United States must be imagined.

Europe and America have strained relations.

There are many differences between them. America's view of its own power is such that it distorts its judgment; the European Union struggles to assert itself, behaving as if it were lacking confidence and plagued by self-doubt. The Alliance, which is intended to unite them, is out of balance, so great is the assurance of the Americans and the resignation of the Europeans.

Imagine this situation: Europe and the United States are threatened by identical risks. They have common interests far stronger than those that divide them, shared convictions, a single civilization that should bind them as one, a shared vision of man's role, his place in society and the world. Everything should draw them closer together. Yet they continue to cling to quarrels of another time, as if the world had not changed, as if they were still in a position to contend alone for world domination.

Let them finally open their eyes! Whatever they might wish, each is deeply dependent upon the other. Europe has no better possible ally than America. America has no better possible ally than Europe. True, many doubt this on both sides of the Atlantic. But let them consider history, and the dangers both are faced with. Let them reflect before it is too late and before their divisions, cultivated with persistent care, have done irreparable damage.

Europe and America are faced with hostility around the world

With the ongoing shift in energy and wealth, is it any surprise that a mentality of revenge should develop among emerging nations, giving rise to a clash of wills to power? This can be seen in the cultural sphere. The values of the West are being held up as an object for rejection; in all the media a discourse is developed that relativizes the principles of human

rights, casts doubt on the benefits of individualism, and contests the rules of democracy. The cultural backlash has been spreading, not only in the Muslim world, but also throughout Asia and Africa. For those in power in these areas, the struggle for human rights seems more like a tactic of those who contest their authority than a sincere conviction.

The same will to power – or should we call it a self-affirmation, a renaissance? – is apparent in the strategic and military arena. This will to assert one-

self, to count, to be respected, is also taking hold in those countries of the South that are attempting to put the West on the defensive by organizing coalitions against it, so as to marginalize it in

international negotiations. It is in this way that Brazil, India and South Africa, putting themselves forth as the three great developing democracies, recently decided to defend their common interests together on the international stage.

Europe and the United States are no longer the only ones making decisions and taking action. Other powers are emerging, creating new centers of prosperity and new trade flows. The equilibrium of the world is being shaken up; it is changing.

The West is hesitating, because it has still not become fully aware of its profound unity. Is the West ready to form a common front against common threats or will it continue to act in an uncoordinated manner, when it acts at all? Will it finally admit that the shifting of the center of gravity of global power requires it to let go of its reflexive traditional thinking and ready-made ideas?

Defining “the West”. Does it exist? Who is in it?

Does the West have an underlying unity? Many have their doubts. The differences between America and Europe are profound and rooted in history. And yet the West exists, hard as it is to define it.

The transatlantic community constitutes the best definition of the West. It is a material reality, grounded in facts. The economic integration between the two sides of the Atlantic is progressing

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continuously. Europe and America are each other's best clients and largest investors. Trade in goods has been growing at a rate of 10% a year, to the point that people now speak of a "transatlantic economy" embracing fifteen million jobs on the two sides of the ocean. Together, the European Union and the United States still produce more than 55% of world GDP. The North Atlantic will remain the commercial and financial center of the world for a long time to come.

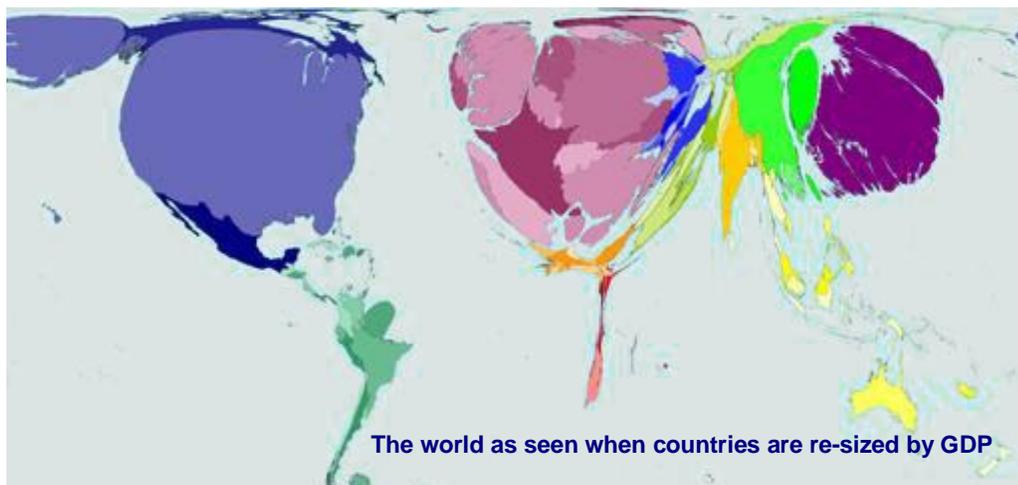
The security of Europe and of America are closely linked, less by the risks left over from the Cold War than by those arising from terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and poorly managed globalization. The threat that weighs on them is largely the same: they are both targets of choice for fundamentalist and terrorist movements that are horrified by their reverence for freedom. This imposes on them a need for common strategic choices, and the reinforcement of an alliance, formed after the World War to fend off the danger of Soviet domination in Europe, that retains its value in an unstable, militarily fragmented and uncertain world.

Europe and America harbor the same collective ideals, their history is largely shared, their principles likewise, and most of the American population is still of European origin. They both believe in democracy, and, while they put it into practice to varying degrees in different areas, they do so far more than the other parts of the world. They are deeply attached to fundamental human rights and individual liberty. They believe in the market economy, in competition, and in progress as the fruit of individual initiative. Above all, they are proud of having invented

the concept of the rights of man, even if they don't always put these rights into practice in an exemplary fashion. This Euro-Atlantic space comprises nearly a billion people, divided among a multitude of nations with an eventful history; and despite ever-present rivalries, they are ultimately devoted to the same spiritual values.

Thus, not only are Europe and the United States bound together by the same fundamental interests, but, in addition, their societies rest on very similar ethical principles and face the same dangers. To unite the West, there is not only a powerful and active transatlantic economy, but also a deep community -- a community of civilization and of the concept of freedom and collective life. What remains to be done is to breathe new life into this western unity, which already is inscribed in history and in facts, and, no matter what some might claim, in our minds and mores. Whatever may be the differences between Europe and America -- and various international occasions provide the theater for them -- the prosperity and peace of the world still depends largely on their cohesion. A political existence must be given to this Euro-American community.

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The US and EU have 58% of global GDP, the OECD countries over 75% (World Bank figures, 2006), using actual exchange rates; in PPP conversion rates the numbers are 43% and 55% respectively. Image credit www.worldmapper.org

In a world that is so unified when one considers the material realities, yet so fragmented if one observes the movements of its hearts, the unity between Europe and America must win out over

their differences. This assumes that America will accept that it is neither alone nor all-powerful, and that

Europe will make the efforts needed to exist through something other than its grievances.

It should surprise no one if the peoples of Europe and the United States have doubts about their profound unity; nothing is being done to convince them of it, to create a feeling common to all. There is also the fact that the policies followed by their governments are neither discussed together, nor defined together, nor applied together. Yet the realities are there.

Europeans and Americans should, without renouncing any part of their respective independence of judgment and action, both avoid useless provocation and mistakes that affect them mutually. Europe gains nothing from systematic hostility toward American policy; America gains nothing from neglecting European wishes and interests. Indeed, their quarrels are raising doubts in people's minds about the solidity of the West and its faith in itself.

The path is laid out for them. Europe and America must awaken to the shared civilization that unites them and build common institutions that enable them to act together in a world where they are no longer the exclusive holders of power.

A more effective Europe is necessary for creating a Union of the West.

Will the European Union be capable one day of existing politically and pursuing independent policies, the indispensable condition for establishing more balanced and equal relations with the United States? If not, the West will remain a formula that serves as a front for the maintenance of American predominance. Despite the progress made since the war, this goal is still not in sight. It will only be attained if Europe manages to endow itself with the structure and powers that would enable it to be heard and have real weight. This will be no easy task.

For America to agree and treat the European Union as an equal, the Union must truly exist, it must be better organized and more mobilized, and its members must invest the necessary amount in defense. In sum, Europe must behave more responsibly.

How the Union of the West can be built

Europe and America must work out an ambitious partnership that deals with all of the problems they share, and must create enough solidarity to remedy the state of disarray that endangers the peoples of the West.

A common market, with customs union and currency coordination

Proposals for closer EU-U.S. cooperation, already made at my initiative a few years ago, include: the appointment of a European transatlantic relations coordinator working under the supervision of the European Union president;

and the creation by the European Union and the United States of a permanent joint secretariat, tasked with preparing meetings between ministers or heads of state and meetings of the multilateral institutions they take part in.

These are fine intentions, and they lay the ground for concrete measures, but they are still too timid. Europe and the United States should show greater ambition and conceive of the gradual creation of a large common market, with the institution of a customs union and the adoption of similar fiscal, juridical and competition law regulations. An immense arena, stretching across the Atlantic, would in this way be opened up for the formation of an economic and social community governed, to the extent possible, by the same principles and subject to the same rules.

It is time to seriously commit to putting an end to the disorderly floating of currencies that threatens the prosperity and progress of the world and that eventually will destroy the very idea of economic liberalism. In 1986, I was able to get our partners to sign the Louvre Accords, in which Europe, the United States and Japan pledged to maintain monetary stability through coordination of their economic policies and interventions by the central banks on the foreign exchange market. For a few years the Ac-

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cords yielded satisfactory results, before they were forgotten and monetary speculation resumed with renewed vigor.

We must not lose heart, but take up the task again. Thanks to the felicitous creation of the Euro, the Franc and the Mark no longer fluctuate in relation to one another and commercial transactions within the Union are safe from speculation. Today the ratios that matter are those between the Euro and the Dollar. We cannot suggest the creation of a currency common to Europe and America; considering the global role of the Dollar, it would be too unequal a marriage. On the other hand, a relationship akin to that instituted among European currencies by the European Monetary System could be imagined between the Dol-

lar and the Euro, with the fluctuation margins guided and controlled by the two central banks, the Fed and the European Central Bank, the economic and budgetary policies coordinated, and the monetary policies harmonized. Is this too great an ambition? I am convinced of the opposite: I strongly believe that liberalism is advantageous

only when accompanied by an order, that is, a set of rules that must be respected by all. The world will know neither balance nor lasting prosperity as long as monetary stability is not guaranteed.

A foreign policy and military union

As regards military issues, the emergence of a Union of the West between Europe and the United States would make it possible to rebalance the func-

tioning of the Alliance for a better distribution of responsibilities, since American reticence would no longer be justified. The Alliance would no longer evade the need to update and clarify the strategic concept that underlies it: defining for today's world the defense mission that had once justified its creation, the conditions for it to intervene outside of its traditional geographical area, which is itself expanding, and the rules allowing its members to intervene in one or another region of the world without the consent of their allies while nonetheless using the instruments of the Alliance.

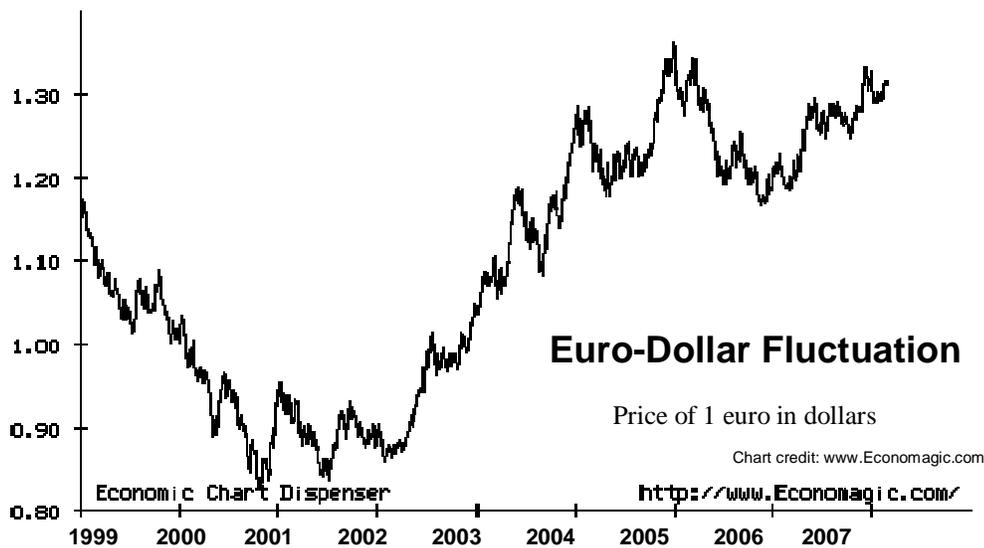
Such adjustments become all the more necessary as the United States and Europe must act in concert - - in Africa, for example, to keep the continent from

sinking into poverty, overpopulation, tribal wars and tyrannies; or in the Middle East, where much of the West's prosperity, security and even its fate are at stake. No matter what the issue -- be it energy supplies, the environment, or the fight against terrorism -- the solidarity of

Europe and the United States must be indivisible if they want to make the best use of the assets still at their disposal thanks to their current strength and the political influence they still possess. This would seem undeniable.

The most serious problem faced by Europe and America is the nuclear issue in all its facets. It is critical that these two powers harmonize their thinking and synchronize their policies in this area. Should consideration be given to the establishment

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of binding international rules that would aim to lock in the present situation against nuclear spread, with compliance enforced upon a simple report by the United Nations Security Council that they have been violated? Many states would be hostile to this basic innovation in international law and see it as legitimizing an unfair situation that favors a few, and instituting an international executive authority to consolidate it. Yet, without such a change, we will have more and more difficulty containing nuclear proliferation.

An executive-level political structure

To face up to such serious issues and try to find answers, an organized and improved cooperation between Europeans and Americans is not enough, nor a deepened military Alliance either. Things must be stated clearly and for all to hear. A vaster ambition requires a new organization. We must show ourselves to be bolder and build – these words have a meaning – a true Union of the West traversing the two shores of the ocean.

The Union of the West would have an Executive Council, convening its leaders every three months. Would this Executive Council have as its sole mission to organize the debate, harmonize the positions of its members and -- this would be the new factor -- to do so at regular intervals? Should it be endowed, like the European Council, with true decision-making authority? If so, in what form and with what majority and sanctions? It is too early to answer such questions without running the risk of daydreaming. It would already be enormous progress if a body were to be created on an initially limited basis and were to meet frequently, and if neither the Europeans nor the Americans could decide anything on matters of common interest without having discussed them together beforehand. If this endeavor had positive results, then the Union of the West could go farther. But to be frank, I do not see this as a possibility today.

The goal of organizing a coherent and effective Atlantic community will remain a dream if Europeans and Americans, who have a common interest in

putting an end to their quarrels, do not give themselves the legal instruments to do so by creating a Union of the West. This Union would need sound institutions. That is the task of the next generation.

A revolution that creates a future

The aim proposed is immense. It will be no easy task for each to accept that an era of history has come to an end, and to renounce exercising alone the powers that it can no longer handle effectively, so as to benefit from a strength that will be greater though collective. If the creation of the Union of Europe is presented as an undertaking without precedent, then the Union of the West itself, spanning the Atlantic, will

be worthy of no less praise. It is the grand design of the half-century to come. The time has come to make it a reality. Its achievement will give rise to countless difficulties, the greatest from the western nations

themselves, where past rivalries, conformism and lack of imagination continue to inform their policies. But there is no alternative and nobody has proposed one, other than the *status quo* from which a slow and continuous weakening will result, then decadence, as new powers emerge around the world.

A revolution of mindset is needed, both in Europe and the United States. Each must stop harboring nostalgic and inconsistent ways of thinking.

Americans continue to believe that very little can be accomplished without their leadership, so their leadership is still indispensable. This is true today, but won't be for long. Within twenty years, many are the changes that will occur in the balance of power!

Time is of the essence for both. The United States must convince itself that it will be more successful in maintaining the world's equilibrium if it is more closely connected to a Europe that is at long last organized. It will have to make a break with its habit of deciding things alone, which is explained if

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not justified by the role it played in defending liberty throughout the twentieth century. The United States needs to recognize that isolation weakens it too, as the adventure in Iraq shows, and the time has passed for military solutions that no one approves. Asia's rise in power will force it to make compromises. America will be more powerful if it is no longer alone, but strongly linked to others, even at some expense to its freedom of movement. As for the European nations, they must, without forsaking any part of themselves, open their eyes and establish closer links with one another, as this is the only way to speak to the United States on an equal basis. Europeans have to make a two-fold effort: organize a true Union among themselves and forge close ties between this new Union and the United States.

The world truly needs to be taken as it is, in all its diversity and vitality, and the extraordinary will to progress that from now on animates the main part of humanity, too long consigned to the margins of history. In these new times, other civilizations are emerging, but the West continues to exist; it too is a reality, a constituent part of humanity, for a long time the most enlightened and dynamic. To declare that the West exists, to want it to survive in a world where it will represent less wealth and power in relation to others, implies that Europeans and Americans should not dissipate their energies in the many contradictions of the past, or indulge in rivalries that no longer make sense and that, instead of cultivating their mutual resentments, they should focus instead on what they have in common.

The closer association between Europe and the United States would not always lead them to identical policies in all regions of the world, but at the very least they would hold discussions beforehand and better understand one another, perhaps even reach agreement. Europe is not focused exclusively on the Atlantic, but also on Africa and Eastern Europe, and on Russia in particular. The United States is concerned not only with events in Europe, but also with those in Latin America and in the Pacific, an area that is looming ever larger in its fears and apprehen-

sions. This multiplicity of interests does not constitute an obstacle to bringing Europe and America together. Quite to the contrary: each, thanks to the other, would have a more sound view of the state of the world and the most appropriate actions to be undertaken. Many ambiguities would be dissipated, misunderstandings clarified, rivalries avoided.

For the West, organizing itself better would not mean closing itself off with a purely defensive attitude. The West's mission is not to reject the world but, on the contrary, to send it a message of solidarity and cooperation. It is to call upon the international community to awaken to the risks of violence and chaos flowing from terrorism, climate change, nuclear proliferation, and poverty -- risks that threaten all peoples, whatever their religion, culture, race and history -- and to act together to confront them.

For all involved, it would be the kind of revolution that creates a future. Is this too grand an ambition? No other can enable the West to escape the decline that threatens it. Given the new powers that are emerging, only Union will enable the West to assert itself in the century that is now beginning.

Most importantly, the West must set for itself the goal of proposing to the world a message that is above all moral and political, founded on universal endorsement of common values and universal respect for them.

Let us become aware that we are entering a new world! In this world, it is only by combining imagination, generosity and realism that we can safeguard our idea of man and of international society.

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