

**Edouard Balladur, *For a Union of the West*, Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2009 (originally published as *Pour une Union occidentale entre l'Europe et les Etats-Unis*, Paris: Fayard, 2007).**

Reviewed by David G. Wagner<sup>1</sup>

The Impossible Dream of the United States' relations with the European Union (EU) has been to conclude a Transatlantic Free-Trade Agreement (TAFTA) with the EU. Besides removing the remaining nuisance tariffs on our trade, the two sides could expect to gain some agreement on standards, mutual recognition, and other long-standing impediments to trade. Every time the prospect of a TAFTA arises, however, one EU member vetoes it: France.

It is therefore noteworthy when a Frenchman proposes a "Union of the West". When the French author is a former Gaullist Premier of his country, the book becomes more interesting. When one realizes that the author is close to President Nicolas Sarkozy, and is even Sarkozy's mentor, the book becomes a nearly irresistible read.

Balladur advocates the creation of a Union of the West composed of the EU and the United States. The core of the Union would be an Executive Council in which the Presidents of the United States and the European Union would meet four times a year. American cabinet secretaries and the appropriate EU and member-state officials would back up their leaders. In addition, a "European coordinator of transatlantic relations" would work directly for the President of the EU, and a "permanent joint secretariat" of American and European officials would prepare the meetings between ministers or heads of state, and of the international financial institutions.

Under Balladur's proposal, the Union of the West would coordinate US and EU positions in other international fora and examine ways of deepening transatlantic economic integration. In economics and commerce, Balladur would gradually create a common market and a customs union with similar regulations for fiscal and juridical matters and competition law. In this, the Union of the West goes far beyond a TAFTA. A TAFTA would remove barriers to transatlantic trade, but the US and EU would maintain their own tariff regimes. Balladur, on the other hand, proposes to establish a common external tariff, such as the EU currently possesses.

Balladur proposals on competition law are especially noteworthy. The EU's recent anti-trust activity has stimulated a desire on both sides of the Atlantic to avoid conflicting, competitive regulatory regimes. An impetus to this common effort would benefit both sides.

The Union of the West would not include a common European and American currency. Far from it. Balladur gives full vent against the current system of floating exchange rates, which he sees as a threat to "the prosperity and progress of the world and that will eventually destroy the very idea of economic liberalism." Instead, he offers something like the European Monetary System (EMS), in which some non-euro EU currencies fluctuate within bands of  $\pm 2.5\%$  or  $\pm 15\%$  while they prepare to enter the euro-zone.

On political issues, the Union of the West would "harmonize" American and European views on issues such as nuclear proliferation. Balladur calls for a more equitable division of military spending so that Europe would take on "a more equitable share", music to the US NATO community.

Exactly what Balladur's proposals to double the number of meetings between the United States and the EU would contribute to US-EU relations is not clear from his book. A lot of the work is already being done. After a special US-EU summit meeting in Prague, the Czech Republic, in April, in June, President Obama will meet European leaders for their semiannual summit in Brussels. In the fall, he will receive the Swedish Presidency and other European leaders in the United States. Preparation of these events is difficult. There are many issues on which the United States and the EU have not agreed for many years and at many summit meetings. On the other hand, meetings at the level of Assistant Secretary of State coordinate US and European policies on a number of issues that never make it to the Presidential level. Preparing all these meetings occupies the efforts of several dozen American and European officials of all ranks. In fact, identifying issues amenable to final agreement to justify a summit meeting and the Presidential and Cabinet Secretaries' time that goes into them is often frankly hard.

The basis for Balladur's proposals can jar on American ears. He defines the West as "a civilization inspired ... by classical thought and Christian faith. He then veers into a Spenglerian depiction of the West "under attack in every area" and "incapable of organizing itself to face this ordeal". Against a mentality of revenge among the emerging non-Western states and in order to protect its civilization, the West must unite, Balladur believes.

Such a closed, exclusive, conservatively rigid world view affronts America's more open philosophy. Both Democratic and Republican administrations recognize the challenges posed by rapidly developing countries such as China, India, and Brazil. However, the United States has sought to give these countries solid stakes in the prevailing world order in the hope of minimizing the disruption of a world order which, for all its faults, has delivered strong growth for mankind.

France is the book's target audience. This French orientation also leads to the book's greatest value, for it is a call to arms for France to lead the EU to a higher stage of unity. Balladur argues that, to play its full role, the EU must "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". Today, however, it lacks the means to do so. He identifies many problems in the EU: the unwieldy number of member states, languages, historical memories, attachments to cultures and independence, the over-representation of smaller states in all EU organs, the excessive unanimity requirement, the unclear division of powers between the EU and the member states, and the complicated, inadequate nature of the EU's rules.

The solutions are not clear to Balladur. He writes, "Europe must choose and agree to undertake profound reforms if it simply wants to exist". Balladur himself seems to be of two minds regarding the direction in which the EU must move. On one hand, he writes almost like a wistful, starry-eyed federalist, advocating "a surrender of sovereignty." On the other hand, however, he asserts the traditional French view of "Europe of the states". "It's useless to feed the fantasy of a federal Europe." In the end he gives only a weak endorsement to the Lisbon Reform Treaty and concludes that his plan must be "the task of the next generation."

For the United States, Balladur prescribes a large dose of humility and a renunciation of American messianism. Bearing in mind that Balladur's book was first published in 2007, one might argue that the intervening change of Administrations in this country has ameliorated this problem. Certainly, Balladur assigns the vastly larger task to the EU.

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