

“Will the United States and Europe Get Along after Bush?”

Lecture
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Lecturer:
Thomas Carothers (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
Comments:
István Gyarmati (International Centre for Democratic Transition)

On October 18, 2007 CEU's Center for EU Enlargement Studies and the Humanities Center hosted a public lecture delivered by Thomas Carothers of the Carnegie Endowment. Carothers in his talk entitled “Will the United States and Europe Get Along after Bush?” addressed the issue of the future of transatlantic relations. Carothers first outlined unique features of Americans springing from their geographical situation and history that account for some of their fundamental characteristics and the way they look at the world. He described Americans as ‘islanders’ largely isolated by the rest of the world, preferring to be left alone and unwilling to understand foreign realities. According to Carothers this unwillingness has led to some of the worst mistakes of American foreign policy.

Carothers pointed out that when the benign elements of the global context ceased to exist, that is, when from the world without a threat we moved to a world in which America was threatened on its own soil, this was the time that led to the complete estrangement of the US from the rest of the world. This estrangement can only be reduced if in the future the framework of the war on terror is changed, Carothers claimed. The moral standing of the US can thus also be recovered by for instance closing down Guantanamo Bay, not attacking Iran and moving ahead on commitments on environmental issues.

Europe, Carothers emphasized, also has its share in making transatlantic relations better – most importantly, it should work towards a more unified European foreign policy, and be more assertive when it comes to voicing its position on global issues. The US on the other hand needs to learn to cope with the new realities of the world they find themselves living in. Only if the US can readjust to the realities of its declining power can transatlantic relations be as fruitful as before.

István Gyarmati delivered his comments following Carothers' lecture. He underlined that due to globalization and the restructuring of the international system the world is now fundamentally different from what it was during the Cold War. Therefore, he claimed, relations between the US and Europe will continue to see disagreements and will be much more complicated and sophisticated than during the Cold War. Transatlantic relations, he believes, will be led by coalitions of the willing that will be formed on an ad hoc basis and will be much shorter lasting. What both sides should have learned from the recent past, Gyarmati claimed, is not to oppose each other publicly but to tolerate the differences in opinion.