

Europeans debate relations with U.S.

Role of EU: Competitor or partner?

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London—Who would have thought that serious and sober people would ever feel nostalgic for the Cold War?

But it is true, at least for some Europeans.

As the European Union prepares to grow larger and more unified, European leaders are heatedly debating what role the union should play in international affairs.

There are two schools of thought. One, espoused primarily by the French, is that the EU should act as a counterweight to the United States. The other, argued primarily by Britain, is that the EU should be America's partner.

The debate comes as the 15-nation European Union prepares to expand dramatically. When it adds 10 members next year, it will encompass 500 million citizens.

Multipolarity longed for

A *proposed new constitution* would deepen ties between members. Among the goals: a common foreign policy, and even a European Union foreign minister.

Alain Juppé, a former French Prime Minister said last month that the French envision *a world with several powers, of which the expanded EU would be one.* Others would be Russia, China and the United States. This multipolar world, he said, would be "much better than a single power ruling over the affairs of the planet."

This view contains more than a touch of Cold War nostalgia.

"I would prefer to have a situation with two or more more-or-less comparable nation-states, as in the best years, so to speak, of the Cold War," said Dick Leurdijk, an expert on European politics at the Clingendael Institute of International Relations Netherlands.

On the other hand, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has argued that this would be the wrong path for the EU to take.

"If we don't deal with the world on the basis of a *partnership between Europe and America*, then we will in a sense put back into the world the divisions that we wanted to get rid of when the Cold War finished," he said in April. "And I think that would be just a disaster for the world." He returned to the theme last month in his speech to Congress.

"There is no more dangerous theory in international politics today than that we need to balance the power of America with other competitor powers, different poles

around which nations gather," he told U.S. lawmakers. "Such a theory made sense in 19th-century Europe. ... Today it is an anachronism to be discarded like traditional theories of security."

Common military force

Amid the debate over the EU's place in the world, the union is taking tentative *steps to develop common defense and international policies.* It has a 500-member police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and is developing a rapid-reaction military force. There is even talk that an EU force could take over from NATO in Bosnia.

In terms of influence, there is *the strength of the euro*, the EU's new unit of currency, and the sheer size of the union.

"On the economic side of it, in some senses Europe is a counterbalance to the United States," said Michael Cox, a professor of international relations at the London School of Economics. "We've been so much focused since 9/11 on hard security ... that we've forgotten basically that the economic balance is actually shifting toward Europe.

"I don't think we'll see a return to a traditional balance of power," he said. "But I think we will see this economic weight translated into more political diplomatic power."

"Almost no one thinks the EU can come close to balancing the United States, but they don't like the idea of putting their money where their mouth is," said Chris Brown, another expert in international relations at the London School of Economics.

In fiscal 2002, the U.S. defense budget was \$350 billion. The defense budget of the 15 European Union added up to just \$131.7 billion.

Some international relations experts argue that what is *important to world stability* is not whether it has one power center or several; more important, they argue, is the nature of the government in the dominant country.

"Having the United States as the unipolar is a rather different proposition from having Soviet Russia as the unipolar, because they're different kinds of societies," Brown said.

"The thing that constrains U.S. foreign policy and prevents it from just doing whatever it likes is the U.S. Constitution — you know, U.S. voters. The American people don't, I think, have the spirit and stomach for empire."

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