

## BRIEFING NOTE

### One year after September 11<sup>th</sup>: Europe must show leadership

*By Steven Everts*

With the anniversary of the September 11<sup>th</sup> approaching, many politicians and commentators will be tempted to revert to the view which was so dominant immediately afterwards: that the attacks represented a sea change – not just in US history but also in the course of global politics. They will emphasise how much the world has changed. This tendency is understandable but runs the risk of obscuring some deeper trends. Because upon reflection it is clear that in many policy areas, September 11<sup>th</sup> did not change the world very much – rather it highlighted and reinforced pre-existing trends.

Overall European leaders and institutions have reacted adequately, but not brilliantly. Relative successes include the agreement on a common arrest warrant and significant contributions to the Afghanistan campaign – both in terms of troops and financial assistance. But on the diplomatic side Europe's performance has been poor. In the months ahead, European leaders will have to develop more agile and effective policies to tackle the underlying issues that September 11<sup>th</sup> has thrown up – such as weapons proliferation, failed states, political extremism and so-called 'Arab state failure'.

#### **There are five important aspects to the longer-term effects of September 11<sup>th</sup>:**

★ The initial hopes that September 11<sup>th</sup> would initiate not just a war on terror but also a new era of robust and innovative international co-operation – as Tony Blair suggested in his Brighton speech – have been unfulfilled. The world today is a more fractious place, beset by higher levels of political tensions while international structures and institutions to tackle these problems have weakened. Co-operation does occur but is too often based on fragile patterns of ever-shifting coalitions of the willing. And important issues that are not directly linked to the fight against terrorism are in danger of falling off the international agenda. All this could still change but only with decisive leadership from EU leaders in particular – and time is running out.

★ US-European relations are subject to serious strains, particularly over policy on the Middle East. But rising transatlantic tensions are mainly a product of an acceleration of pre-existing trends: US unilateral tendencies and profound European weaknesses existed well before September 11<sup>th</sup>. There is a sense of disappointment in Europe and elsewhere that the US could have waged a more inclusive, multi-faceted campaign against terrorism – but it chose not to. What could be done? The solution to stem the transatlantic drift is familiar but no less valid for that: the US needs to listen and persuade, not just coerce while Europe needs to be united and act, not just complain. Thankfully some aspects of transatlantic relations work well: co-operation among intelligence agencies, police and prosecuting authorities has led to a rounding up of numerous terrorist cells. And in terms of public opinion, Europeans and Americans are often closer than newspaper headlines suggest – it is President Bush and his posse that are out of touch.

★ The biggest international change involved Russia. President Putin has interpreted September 11<sup>th</sup> as a clear chance to recast Russian foreign policy and forge closer relations with the West, the US in particular. But Putin's gamble has little domestic support. Fleshing out the consequences of his strategic choice will be a key theme for the months ahead. The most urgent issues Russian policy-makers have to work on are: building closer relations with NATO, making as much progress on WTO entry as possible and giving greater substance to Russia's relationship with the EU.

★ The EU has accelerated its co-operation in Justice and Home Affairs, particularly on immigration and border control. But this has been more a reaction to the rise of the populist Right and the increase in people smuggling than a consequence of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. Contrary to expectations and despite widespread laments about Europe's underwhelming international performance, there has been only limited progress in EU foreign policy and even less on European defence. There is an active debate on the future of Europe taking place in the Convention. But it mainly follows an older, familiar agenda (what sort of Europe do we want and at what price?). Overall, the dominant impression is of a Europe that has been very introspective.

★ On the economy, weaknesses abound. But, again, this is mainly because September 11<sup>th</sup> has confirmed underlying problems – not created new ones. The European economy has proved sluggish, and there has been no step change on structural reform. Also, Europe has shown itself less immune from US developments than expected. A war on Iraq may tip the US and the rest of world including Europe into double dip recession – both through a direct effect on oil prices and through a worsening of economic sentiment. Regarding international economic policy the picture is equally mixed: launching a new round of global trade negotiations in Doha was good progress. But by common account trade policy is going nowhere fast. In similar ways, there has been limited progress only on broader development issues. At the UN Monterrey and Johannesburg summits European leaders have been unable to promote real breakthroughs on key issues, despite all the talk about need to undercut political extremism and combat 'root causes'.

Therefore, to ensure that the long term legacy of September 11<sup>th</sup> is a positive one EU leaders must meet five inter-related challenges: promote stronger structures of global governance; try to maintain a constructive transatlantic relationship; develop more robust policies in the field of foreign policy plus justice and home affairs; help President Putin sustain his pro-Western course; address Europe's own persistent economic weaknesses and push for reforms of the international economic system. To do all these things at the same time is surely a tall order. But if the EU fails to meet these challenges then its authority will deservedly decline. Managing the fall out of September 11<sup>th</sup> is a real test of Europe's leadership.

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