

“Transatlantic Security Issues from the Cold War to the 21st Century”

Geneva, 23-24 April 2009

PANEL 3: CULTURE, IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION IN TRANSATLANTIC
RELATIONS

**Venus Has Learned Geopolitics: the European Union’s Frontier and Transatlantic
Relations**

Dr. Basil Germond
(University of St Andrews)

The “power versus weakness” image has become a very common and popular way of depicting the divergences between the United States of America (US) and the European Union (EU) in the post-Cold War (and post-9/11) world. Beyond the dichotomy between *Mars* and *Venus* (Kagan, 2003), the recent literature on transatlantic relations has often discussed the reality and the myth of the so-called transatlantic gap. Issues such as the representation of the world, the perception of threats, the security values, and the use of force have been highly debated. Now, it is generally recognised that the US and the Europeans are facing similar risks and threats, and are responding by projecting security outside in order to obtain security inside. However, the literature has emphasised that the strategies envisaged by the US and the Europeans to cope with the current real or perceived risks and threats (and thus to project security outside) are rather divergent, if not opposite. Thus, while the US seems to favour the use of force (hard power) and support unilateralism, the Europeans in general and the EU in particular emphasize soft power, favour a comprehensive approach to security, and call for multilateralism. This has notably been illustrated by comparing the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) and the 2002 US National Security Strategy (USNSS).

In my paper, I show that this “distinctive” European approach to security issues has not prevented the EU to develop a geopolitical vision that transcends the somewhat candid depiction of EU’s security thought and policies by the literature. Indeed, a careful reading of the 2003 ESS and an analysis of the post-2003 EU practice in terms of projecting security (both at the Community and at the intergovernmental levels) reveal that the EU has assimilated the notion of European frontier and consolidated its practice of intervening “out-of-area” (to use a NATO concept), that is to say within its wider frontier zone. EU’s geopolitical ambitions and the exercise of its power beyond its external boundaries are, however, based on the EU’s specificities; they thus encompass both civilian and military elements, as well as Community and intergovernmental components. In other words, Venus has learned geopolitics, but she has nonetheless kept her distinctiveness.

To illustrate this, I firstly discuss the notion of EU frontier and the resulting practice of projecting security outside the EU’s boundary. Secondly, I analyse what it reveals in terms of geopolitical vision and ambitions. Finally, I conclude on the impacts of EU’s geopolitical vision on transatlantic relations.