The Atlantic Community

The Ideological and Historic Foundations of European-US Relations

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ABSTRACT

Although the expression "Atlantic Community" is relatively common, it largely refers in both its academic and media usage to the Atlantic Alliance, created by the Treaty of Washington on April 4, 1949. However, the notion of an Atlantic Community broadly exceeds this framework, both in terms of chronology and institutions.

The official emblem of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

During the 1950s, Robert Palmer and Jacques Godechot popularized the theory of the "Atlantic Revolution", the period of revolutions during the eighteenth century aiming, on both sides of the Atlantic, to establish democracies and republics founded on the shared principles of liberty, equality, and national sovereignty: an ideological community that enabled the implementation of a democratic system on both sides of the Atlantic. Their theory was presented during the 10th International Congress of Historical Science in Rome in 1955, under the name "The Problem of the Atlantic". It is extremely important to situate this theory in its context, as this interpretation emerged in the middle of the Cold War, and created a link between the two shores of the Atlantic. A common history was also the bearer of common values. At the same time, other intellectuals were examining this "Atlantic Community". The definition of Atlantic values was the subject of a conference in December 1957 organized by the

Collège de l'Europe and the University of Pennsylvania. The participants agreed on a number of criteria: respect for the intrinsic value of a person as such, a value that transcends any idolatrous or absolute conception of the state; the affirmation that liberty is inseparable from moral responsibility, which presupposes reference to a higher law; the conviction that liberty is inseparable from human solidarity, and the duty to gradually give everyone access to material and spiritual assets. After this conference, the publication of a collective work under the direction of Henry Brugmans, Léo Moulin, Ernst Bieri, Hans Kohn, and Milorad Drachkovitch confirmed the conclusions of the debates (*The Conference on the Atlantic Community. Basic Values of the Atlantic Community*, 1961). In France, André Malraux also developed a theory for the Atlantic Community: as with the Mediterranean in ancient times, a common civilization was blossoming around the Atlantic. The same definition can be found with Raymond Aron: "If we define community as a nation or a group of countries whose cultures, in the ethnological sense of the word, belong to the same family, then Europeans and Americans today constitute a community."

Yet we may ask ourselves, despite or precisely because of these efforts, whether an Atlantic Community truly exists, or whether the transatlantic link is not instead a simple contingency of war (the two World Wars and especially the Cold War). Why go to such pains to justify the existence of an Atlantic Community if its existence is as obvious as these intellectuals suggest? For these reflections on the Atlantic Community corresponded at the time to a political need in the context of the Cold War. This was not done without difficulty. While insisting on democracy and liberty as fundamental values of this community, its political and geographical boundaries fluctuated (did Salazar's Portugal or Eastern Turkey, both members of NATO, belong to this community? And Franco's Spain?).

In particular, reflections on the notion of the Atlantic Community differ on both sides of the ocean. The Atlantic Community is frequently mentioned in religious and Christian terms in American discourse, with the Atlantic Alliance being for many an alliance of Western Christianity against communist atheism. During the debates surrounding Turkey's admittance in 1951, voices incidentally rose against a non-Christian country taking part in the coalition. For the French, this conception rubbed the concept of secularism the wrong way, but it is not so incongruous for a German or an Italian. In reality, Europeans themselves do not agree on the meaning of the notion, so how then could Americans agree with Europeans as a whole? In fact, even if a certain community of culture or values between Europe and the United States is rarely denied, points of view diverge according to the European definition in question, and subsequently on what the foundations should be for links between the two sides of the Atlantic. Is it a strategic community? This is probably the most obvious interpretation, with NATO as its concrete manifestation. Even France "returned to the fold" in 2007 by rejoining the integrated command of the Alliance, and permanent applications to join NATO are seen as a sign of success. Is it an economic community? This is less obvious. Capitalism of course serves as a link, but it precisely introduces competition. The Marshall Plan led to the creation of the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC) in 1948. Relations were thus established between one country, the United States, and a European organization: an unequal relation between a donor and beneficiaries. The EEC reinforced this economic dimension in 1957, through links established between the EEC and the United States, or between the EEC and Canada, for example. On the "American" side, NAFTA and UNASUR served as the "Western" counterparts for the EU in terms of economy, with UNASUR also doing so in terms of political ambition. But if economic partnerships were built on both sides of the Atlantic, how could they be guaranteed from one side to the other? Is it a political community? The political relationship is more confined to the level of relations between states. The absence of a common European foreign policy requires a dialogue between state actors, and American hegemony over the Western block makes any dialogue unequal. Participation in NATO of course fosters taking common positions. The military relation falls under the framework of NATO, between the United States and each of the partner countries. Attempts to implement a "European pillar" of the Alliance have struggled to become reality.

Above all, in the United States , this community generally appears as a view to the future rather than a present reality. In Europe, it is to the past that people look to justify collaboration in the present.

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