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**The Importance of European Public
Opinion for U.S. Foreign Policy**
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'An Enduring Partnership'

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RA Germany Press Director Eric Staal defends U.S. policy on German Television

The European Region Country Chapters of the Republicans Abroad meet each year at a regional conference to discuss strategy and issues related to their responsibilities as the overseas representatives of the U.S. Republican Party.

Presented to Conference Attendees

I am delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you about U.S.–European Relations and to share with you my personal views about what Republicans Abroad could do to improve European perceptions of American and Republican principles. I know that beyond the election many of us are interested in how we can be good ambassadors of our country in Europe. That’s what I am here to talk to you about today.

Let me begin by sharing with you excerpts from the introduction of the Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Survey:*

"A year after the war in Iraq, discontent with America and its policies has intensified rather than diminished. Opinion of the United States in France and Germany is at least as negative now as at the war’s conclusion, and British views are decidedly more critical. Perceptions of American unilateralism remain widespread in European and Muslim nations, and the war in Iraq has undermined America’s credibility abroad. Doubts about the



motives behind the U.S.-led war on terrorism abound, and a growing percentage of Europeans, want foreign policy and security arrangements independent from the United States. Across Europe, there is considerable support for the European Union to become as powerful as the United States."

In Muslim countries the study found that "anger toward the United States remains pervasive" while Osama bin Laden is viewed positively by majorities or near majorities in Pakistan, Jordan, and Morocco. "Even in Turkey . . . as many as 31% say that suicide attacks against Americans and other Westerners in Iraq are justifiable." Finally, "solid majorities in France and Germany believe the U.S. is conducting the war on terrorism in order to control Mideast oil and dominate the world." Eighty-five percent of French and Germans polled view President Bush unfavorably.

It would be an understatement to say that these trends are not encouraging, especially given that they have been getting worse over the past 3 years. However, this is not simply a problem of what the man on the street thinks. We saw over the past two years how opportunistic leaders in Europe rode the wave of anti-American sentiment to political victory and lobbied world opinion against U.S. policies. Spain is the most recent example.

At various times over the past 40 years, European leaders from Jean Monnet to Charles de Gaulle to Jacques Delors to Jacques Chirac have been allured by the prospect of a united Europe that could act as a counterbalance to the United States. Perhaps it is just a historical coincidence that all these leaders have been French, but I will leave you to draw your own conclusions. Nowadays, however, such thinking has become popular throughout Europe. And those who pursue this vision of a European counterweight tend to view American power as illegitimate in and of itself.

This is not meant to sound alarmist. We can and do cooperate with European nations across a range of regulatory, law enforcement, trade and other matters. Let us also not overlook that even France and Germany are contributing to Iraqi reconstruction by forgiving Iraqi debt. However, it is important to understand that



anti-Americanism in Europe is a serious problem.

It will not go away with the bonhomie of Schröder's visit to the White House last March, or by selective cooperation, or, unfortunately for Kerry, even with a change in leadership. Nor does it have much to do with the war on terrorism. The roots of European anti-Americanism run deep, European misperceptions of the United States are great, and irresponsible politicians are in plentiful supply to turn Europe into an obstacle for American foreign policy from Brussels to Beijing. Without a sustained effort to rally European hearts and minds to the American cause of freedom, Europe will be a thorn in our side.

Therefore, let me try to address 3 questions in the time we have today:

- ***First, what is the depth and seriousness of anti-Americanism in Europe?***
- ***Second, what are the roots of this anti-Americanism?***
- ***And third, what can we as Republicans Abroad do to counter the trend and support U.S. foreign policy?***

Before addressing each of these questions, let me say that, like many of you, I have followed European affairs with more than a passing interest for quite some time. In fact, I can remember living up in Hamburg as a high-school student back in 1988. At the time I hitchhiked with a friend of mine to Berlin. I recall the Wall, which divided this city and how the notion of freedom in Eastern Europe was little more than a courageous vision for Ronald Reagan and a band of Republicans.

The time I have spent in Germany and Europe on and off over the past 15 years - both in academia and in business - has afforded me plenty of opportunities to engage in political discourse with my counterparts, including many a late-night tête-à-tête over a nicely-poured German Pilsner. And I am sure that, as a Republican, I am not alone in arriving at some frustration with how some Europeans view the United States. The view one often encounters is simple really. There are two major parties in America: a good party and an evil party. The good party wants to feed the poor, guarantee the rights of women and minorities, meet the needs of the elderly, abolish pollution, and create global peace and harmony.



The evil party, meanwhile, wants to destroy sundry species, contaminate the drinking water, create poverty and indiscriminately bomb third world countries. I will leave you to guess which is the good party from the European point of view. Well, the point of this mockery of is that there is a strong tendency in Europe to oversimplify American politics and a tendency to consider Republican views on domestic and foreign policy to be illegitimate. Worse yet, European prejudices about the United States even undermine our foreign policy at times – both in Europe and beyond.

What is the depth and seriousness of Anti-Americanism in Europe?

The first thing to bear in mind about anti-Americanism in Europe is how the election plays into it. Unfortunately, Kerry's attempt to deconstruct Bush's record in Iraq is lending credibility to anti-American views in the war on terrorism. Kerry's 1st line of attack is to blame the administration for the tragedy of September 11, in the 9/11 Commission and he is letting Richard Ben-Veniste do his handiwork. Short of blaming Bush for 9/11 outright, a second line of attack is coming from Kerry's henchmen Dick Clark and Bob Woodward, who are undermining the legitimacy of the war in Iraq by arguing that Bush planned to overthrow Saddam Hussein prior to 9/11.

Never mind the fact that members of the Administration made their concerns about Iraq public throughout the 1990s. Kerry's third line of attack is most problematic for our purposes: Kerry wants to hold the administration responsible for the abysmal diplomacy between the Franco-German axis and the United States. Of course, this severely obscures Franco-German culpability in the souring of relations over Iraq. In particular, it diverts attention from how Chancellor Schröder jettisoned the Atlanticist pillar of German foreign policy for his reelection; and it diverts attention from Dominique de Villepin's odyssey through Africa to sabotage the UN resolution and rescue French contracts from the fate of "Bush's war".

Kerry is making a short-term gamble that he can build his future diplomacy on the



very legitimacy he now undermines. It would seem he anticipates that a reparation of relations with European countries is a mere matter of him being a new man for a new season! But it shows a facile understanding of real European views, and it is a high-stakes game that it is unlikely to succeed.

A Kerry presidency would also inherit Iraqi reconstruction. And it is hard to imagine Kerry would be able to abandon U.S. efforts in Iraq very easily; or that Europeans will suddenly become more enthusiastic about supporting U.S. initiatives in Iraq with him as President. As a case in point, in the current German Presidential election, candidates on both right and left are more or less competing to be more critical of American efforts in Iraq. The Schadenfreude about the deteriorating situation in Iraq is almost overwhelming. How will Kerry respond when terrorists attempt to cower him the way they recently pulled the strings of Spanish foreign policy? Stepping back from the voltage of the current situation and from the election, we should take a sobering look at the depth of the anti-American wellspring from which Kerry is drinking. For, as we know, the war on terror is not the cause of European resentment of the United States, but just the long-awaited catalyst for it.

Looking back we can easily trace European anti-American and anti-Republican sentiments throughout the 1990s. The Iran-Lybia sanctions Act, various trade disputes, and the Helms-Burton Act were only some of the substantive irritations for which Republicans were blamed in Europe. European mockery of our constitutional crisis over Clinton's Lewinsky scandal was even more illustrative of how different European and Republican views are. Indeed, European distaste for Republicanism can be traced even further to at least Reagan's presidency. Reagan's Presidency confounded Europeans: it placed ideals above pragmatism, freedom and capitalism above the Cold War status-quo, imports of goods and capital above exchange rates, and small government above the misguided social-engineering of the New Deal and Great Society.

During the 2000 election few European capitals contained their preference for Gore over George W. Bush. Along with the American left, European predictions



were common that an intellectual lightweight such as George W. Bush would be a destabilizing influence on world politics. If Bush was incompetent, then his advisors were too bright. Leftists from Berlin to Berkeley, California warned that Bush would not keep up with his own team intellectually. Needless to say, few Europeans who are convinced Bush 'stole' the election can articulate a basic understanding of our electoral college, let alone its philosophical and constitutional underpinnings.

It may sound jarring, but the depth of anti-Americanism in Europe is illustrated not by the war in Iraq, but by the war in Afghanistan. After 9/11 the United States received universal proclamations of solidarity from European leaders, and NATO's Article V provision for mutual defense was invoked for the first time. Yet, even then the depth of anti-Americanism in Europe was palpable: the language between the lines and behind the scenes was that the United States had finally received payback for decades of unequivocally supporting Israel, and for pursuing its naked self-interest in securing oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. Europeans wondered why they should be drawn into a U.S. conflict of its own making.

Thus, even before Iraq was on the agenda, there was broad cynicism about the war in Afghanistan in Europe. Many were the expert predictions that U.S. ignorance of the foreign geography and politics would lead to military disaster in the Vietnam of the 21st century. Two things prevented European anti-Americanism from boiling over during the Afghanistan war: One was the fact that the war took place in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the link between Osama bin Laden and the Taliban was undeniable; the other was that the war culminated swiftly in the images of men shaving their beards and women dropping the burka to bask in the glow of freedom for the first time in more than a decade. Washington received European approval for its measured and successful execution of the war. The underestimation of U.S. capability and planning was quickly forgotten - until the same cynicism reared its ugly head in mid-2002.



Let me just say that we should not place blame on the Bush administration for the transatlantic acrimony over the Iraq war. Unfortunately, even now neither the Franco-German leadership nor the broader European public seems to grasp the geopolitical stakes in Iraq. The fact that almost all of the September 11 hijackers were Saudi Arabian led to the conclusion that our biggest ally in the Middle East, without which a containment of Iraq or Iran would be impossible, had spawned a menace.

Against the backdrop of 9/11, there was an imperative to establish a foothold of democracy in the region, to send a beacon to reformers in the Middle East, and to send a signal to local rogues and terrorists that their days were numbered. The United States could no longer wait for better days in Saddam Hussein's Iraq; nor could it rely on Saudi Arabia for regional security. The U.S. strategic vision, the long-term U.S. commitment to democracy, the U.S. agenda for a more secure and prosperous Middle East – all have been almost completely overlooked in the European debate about Iraq.

What does this depth of anti-Americanism mean for U.S. foreign policy? There was no leadership in France or Germany to mitigate the radical anti-Americanism. There was no statesman like Helmut Kohl to put the Atlantic Alliance above domestic politics, or to ignore French schemes to build European unity at the expense of American legitimacy. We have learned a hard lesson about the reality of opportunistic leadership in Europe. Unless we engage in the battle for hearts and minds, it will be a matter of time before we find ourselves standing without our key allies in the struggles ahead. The Kerry campaign will not help the cause.

What are some of the roots of anti-Americanism in Europe?

As mentioned, misperceptions of the United States run historically deep. There is a vast philosophical divide between European elites and U.S. Republican leaders when it comes to international and American domestic politics. We must recognize the differences in both spheres, in order to engage in meaningful



political discourse with our European counterparts and to avoid debating the Straw Man they use to undermine our credibility. By way of example, let me address each sphere.

On the international level, the United States is obviously a global power with global responsibilities versus Europe, which is a conglomeration of players limited to regional influence. Whereas the United States determines existential questions of peace and security from North Korea to North Africa, Europe clearly does not play this role. Indeed, for the better part of the last 60 years, Europe has been preoccupied with its own national-security on the doorstep of Stalin's empire, with its own economic reconstruction and welfare state, and with its own political integration. In the past decade Europe has been fixated on making sure its regional integration outlives the Cold War, and on filling the void left by the implosion of the Soviet Union.

The logic of regional politics in Europe dictates working through multilateral cooperation and institution building. But Europeans are quick to transpose this approach to the global level, where the context may not be appropriate. Republicans understand that no amount of institutional cooperation, consensus building, and dialogue at the UN could have reformed the Taliban regime, or would forestall ad infinitum that a Saddam Hussein or Osama Bin Laden will get weapons of mass destruction. Back in Washington, American decision makers are keenly aware that inaction means regional tyrants and networks of terrorists will flourish. On 9/11 Washington saw how a decade of complacency resulted in catastrophe.

Even as these differences in how to approach world politics persist, Europeans aspire to overcome the disparity of influence between Europe and the United States. As mentioned earlier, more and more, the goal is not merely to play a greater international role, but to 'counterbalance' American primacy, which is looked upon as illegitimate in and of itself. Observers in Germany even note that anti-American sentiment is strong enough to make pacifists support defense spending in the name of a stronger Europe.



We must be careful not to underestimate the Gaullist ambitions of those who wish to use Europe to rein in American power. However, we must also apply Rumsfeld's diplomatic masterstroke of dividing Europe between 'Old' and 'New' carefully. Only a united Europe will be in a position to contribute significantly to joint transatlantic initiatives, while a weak and divided Europe will make the world a lonely place for American democracy. This tension is why the battle for hearts and minds in Europe is important to us over the long-term. The battle for hearts and minds is what hangs in the balance to determine whether Europe is with or against us in the future.

On the domestic level, the philosophical differences between Europeans and Americans are even greater. Europeans look to the United States and see what Europe is not – 45 million people without health insurance, crumbling public education, appalling levels of violent crime and numbers of young men in prison, a disproportionate use of energy resources coupled with an assumed disinterest in conservation, and lest we forget, budget deficits that Chancellor Schröder can only dream about.

For Europeans of the left and the right, the solution to American social problems is to be more like Europe; and, in European eyes, the party that wants to use government to solve social problems is the Democratic Party. However, in this respect important differences are overlooked. The United States is vastly more geographically, economically and ethnically diverse than any European country. It does not lend itself to one-sized fits all solutions and government, just as Europe taken as a whole would not. Most Europeans would admit that it is erroneous to compare the United States to individual countries in Europe. Yet, few Europeans understand the importance of devolution for the Republican movement, allowing states to regain prominence in the political lives of our citizens, and making government more accountable.

Republicans are ahead of their time in Europe, just as they were ahead of their time in the United States in 1964. With proper explanation, one can find sympathy for a Republican agenda among Europeans. For example, many



educated Europeans do not really understand the differences between our presidential system of democracy and their parliamentary systems.

Therefore they are surprised to learn how limited the President's control over policy and legislation formally is. By explaining the unique autonomy of Congress and Courts and the historical development of these branches of government, you can make a cogent argument that Republican intellectuals and leaders have been in the driver's seat of reform in the United States for 25 years. We have a record to stand on anywhere in the world!

For all of European exposure to American pop culture and infotainment, very little is really understood about the unique international responsibility history has thrust upon American shoulders or the unique constitutional framework of our domestic politics. Yet these things can be communicated and, in so doing, the legitimacy of our leadership can be given its due recognition.

Given the depth and sources of anti-American sentiment, what can we as Republicans Abroad do to serve as ambassadors in Europe?

First, let us recognize that we want a Europe with which we can cooperate, not just on trade and regulatory issues, but on broader geopolitical matters such as the war on terror. Over the long-run, if European decision makers and elites continue to feed the cancer of anti-Americanism, our struggle for peace and prosperity worldwide will only face more violent resistance -- egged on by European opinion shapers and ignorant mobs. U.S. credibility will constantly be under fire, our voice drowned out of the debate, and our goals that much harder to realize.

A simple change in leadership or a change in policy directions on either side of the Atlantic will not be enough. Radical Islamists fed on deep misperceptions about American leadership will not lay down their arms for a President Kerry, or because France and Germany suddenly forgive billions of dollars of Saddam Hussein's debt. Make no mistake about it, anti-Americanism is viewed favorably in today's Europe - not just among Greens, Social Democrats and parties of the



left.

Even on the mainstream right mistrust of U.S. foreign policy is prevalent and conservative parties fail to identify with U.S. Republicans. To give an example, just this past week the General Secretary of the CDU spoke out in favor of the U.S. overthrow of Saddam Hussein – he is the first member of the CDU to do so until now, a year after the war!

Let us not fail to communicate the importance of European attitudes to our leadership back home. Let us not neglect that European anti-Americanism is waiting to exploit the next story of torture from an Iraqi prison, or the next bomb that misses in a terrorist safe haven. Let us not wait until another populist impulse puts a united Europe on a collision course with American foreign policy and recklessly derails our legitimacy in other countries. But also let us not just simply raise awareness. Rather let us come forth with a concrete agenda for action on two levels.

First, we must shore up support among our own ranks. This can be done by perhaps hosting a Republican Conference on the topic of U.S.-European relations and inviting guest from the U.S. and Europe as speakers. We can inform our members by contributions to our website and links to important other websites. There is strength in numbers, so our efforts at recruitment would also help.

In similar fashion, we can also target our grassroots efforts at mainstream conservative groups in Europe. We can do this by more frequent dialogue to articulate the Republican vision of freedom and entrepreneurship. Official state visits can go a long way to building goodwill. But we must engage in the debate on a day-to-day basis here in Berlin and other capitals, just as leftists from the United States and Europe do on an ongoing basis. We can work with some of the think-tanks to present and debate our views at conferences and other events. We can invite conservative thinkers to Europe for a lecture series or roadshow. All in all, by making our message known, we can step by step restore the legitimacy of our purpose.



Secondly, we must also prevail upon those European leaders who have built their own political fortunes on anti-Americanism - firmly reminding them of the damage they have wrought. There should be no illusions. French and German contributions to Iraqi reconstruction are welcome, but unless public endorsements for U.S. policy take the place of earlier public denouncements, we cannot allow ourselves to be satisfied. When U.S. initiatives to offer NATO-Partnerships to countries in the Persian Gulf are met with cynicism about U.S. motives, we know where that cynicism has been feeding. When Turkey denies the U.S. military right of passage, we know whose club it wants to join. We as Republicans Abroad have a duty and special role to play in speaking out against anti-American demagoguery in Europe.

Demagogues must be called by their names and there is always room for more of a rhetorical offensive. When President Bush is called the greatest threat to world peace, we are not debating the war on terror or the virtues of American foreign policy. We are debating worldviews. And those who open that debate must be cornered into positions where their moral bankruptcy and vacuous principles become obvious. We must hold those who have spread the cancer of anti-Americanism in Europe to account in the public square, the same way they have abused the public square to distort and manipulate the motives of what we stand for as Americans. This goes for European commentators, as well as American ones who visit Europe to peddle their ignorance - Michael Moore comes to mind as an example.

Republicans Abroad should articulate their agenda for domestic and international reform. We can build stronger bridges to mainstream parties. And we can remind foreign leaders that allies do not feed anti-Americanism. We can remind a foreign public that allies defend the legitimacy of our cause, even when they differ about the means to achieving it.

We will not overcome the legacy of European anti-Americanism overnight and we will continue to struggle with its consequences in the war on terror. But we can build bridges and defend our convictions. Republicans have been on the right



side of history since the Civil War, and we can remind Europeans that we plan to stay there.

Eric Staal presented these remarks to participants at the conference in a volunteer capacity as Press Director of the U.S. Republicans Abroad in Germany. Send comments or inquiries to Eric R. Staal at erstaal@hotmail.com.

* All quotes from, The Pew Global Attitudes Project, A Year After Iraq War: Mistrust of American in Europe Ever Higher, Muslim Anger Persists (The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, Released March 16, 2004).

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