

IT IS EUROPE THAT IS STANDING BY OUR SIDE ON EVERY ISSUE

- *Lecture of Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis at Central European University* -

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Her Excellency, *Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis* Ambassador of the United States to Hungary delivered a lecture at the Central European University (CEU) on the 11th of March 2011. The lecture was introduced by Professor *John Shattuck*¹, President and Rector of CEU. The lecture mainly focused on issues of US foreign policy, covering a broad range of topics such as the Arab Spring, the Hungarian EU and the Transatlantic partnership.

First of all the ambassador talked about the special relationship between Europe and the USA. She quoted President Obama when stating: "Europe is the cornerstone for our engagement with the rest of the world." It has to be admitted however, that this relationship has changed very much according to the historical background. With the fall of the Iron Curtain NATO's role has developed into something else too: from being an important part of the doctrine of mutually assured destruction, it has changed into an organization which has to help solving regional conflicts.

In the past 20 years, with the integration of Eastern European countries, Europe has become different also: becoming more unified is a trend welcomed very much by the USA. The US supports initiatives, which lead towards a stronger Europe, initiatives such as the Lisbon Treaty, the office of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU, the strengthening of energy security and the addressing of the issue of the Roma in Europe.

And only a strong Europe can help the US in addressing global problems. The ambassador emphasised that Europe is a natural ally of the US and this alliance is vital now, when the US has to face the new challenges of the 21st century.

Some of these challenges include the recent events in the Middle East, the continued nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran, the transition of India and China into leading economic actors, the lasting instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and international crime and drug trade. All of these are problems which have to be addressed accordingly.

The no. 1 priority for Washington right now is the Middle Eastern-Northern African region. The US is deeply committed to promote human rights and democracy and as such, would like to see a peaceful, democratic transition in the wake of the Arab Spring. The ambassador underscored the gravity of the situation, especially in connection with the refugees. Humanitarian aid and enforcement of international political decisions is much needed in the region, in these matters Europe and the US must act responsibly. The ambassador also talked about NATO's planned actions which involve humanitarian aid and the enforcement of the arms embargo.²

An important part of providing aid to the refugees is helping third country nationals reach their home countries. Hungarian State Secretary for European Affairs, Győri Enikő was in Tunisia to help coordinate the assistance for refugees.³ The USA donated \$47 million to reach this goal, \$13 million was given to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), so that thousands of third country nationals could be transported home. The cooperation was extended to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Red Cross.

¹ He has been the Rector and President of the CEU since 2009. Prior to that he was US Ambassador to the Czech Republic from 1998 to 2000, Assistant Secretary of State of the Clinton administration from 1993 to 1998, Vice President of Harvard University from 1984 to 1993, and took part in the establishment of the International Crime Tribunals prosecuting war criminals from Rwanda and former Yugoslavia.

² NATO has later expanded its range of activities. On the 23rd of March the enforcement of the arms embargo started in reality, on the 24th the no-fly zone was established over Libya, on the 27th of March NATO took over the military control of the allied forces in Libya from the USA, and later on they tried protecting the civilians with bombing of government military buildings too.

³ Also the Hungarian embassy in Tripoli was open during the entire time of the crisis in Libya and helped to coordinate the rescue of 3rd country nationals.

As far as Lybian internal politics are concerned, the ambassador emphasized that Colonel Gaddhafi has to leave immediately because he has lost legitimacy. She voiced concern over potential instability in other countries of the region, because despite the changes the economical and political security is not yet ensured.⁴

A crucial point in a democracy is an independent judiciary system which guarantees the protection of human rights. The US will support the region in reaching transparency, but it has to be admitted that neither the US nor Europe can decide what will happen in the region, they can only provide assistance.

The ambassador talked about the complex relationship of the USA and China, which can be best described with the contradictions of growing economic interdependency and a widening gap in values.

The topic that the ambassador covered in more depth was that of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is still one of the highest priorities of American foreign politics. Although serious achievements have been reached, extremists and members of the al-Quaida still carry out brutal and violent attacks against the central government in Kabul. As one of the main goals of President Obama was to stop the al-Quaida, he identified three main tracks for engagement: military offensive, diplomatic pressure and the building of civilian confidence in the government in Kabul. In addition to this, a recent meeting of NATO in Lisbon declared that the future of the country lies mainly within the Afghan people.

According to this, the withdrawal of American troops will start in July and will be completed by 2014. For the transition to be successful of not only the various ethnic groups of the country have to cooperate, but the neighboring countries also, first and foremost the state of Pakistan.

Although there have been differences between the US and Pakistan, the strategic advantage of the alliance is still invaluable. For this reason US aid to Pakistan will be significant in the future also.⁵

For the development of Afghanistan civilian education programs are the most important. In the development and reconstruction Hungary shows leadership with the Provincial Reconstruction and Mentoring Teams in Baghlan Province.

Although the final goal is reaching transparency in Afghan-led institutions, corruption and fraud are still serious problems in the country.

Because of the reasons mentioned above, the withdrawal of the troops will not mean that the US will abandon Afghanistan: together with NATO it will provide military and financial aid as long as it is needed.

Coming back to Europe the ambassador talked about the initiatives and achievements of the Hungarian rotating EU presidency.

It was unfortunate that the beginning of the presidency was clouded by the debate surrounding the new Hungarian media law, because the presidency identified priorities, which are advocated by the US too, first of all, the further integration of the Western Balkans into the EU⁶.

Supporting the Eastern Partnership Initiative is also a common goal of the US and Hungary, so it is to be regretted that the EPI conference will be held during the course of the Polish presidency, but as a co-host Hungary will still be able to shape the agenda.

The common European energy security and energy policy is also outstandingly important for the USA⁷.

In order to reach this, new sources of gas have to be secured and the partnership with Ukraine has to be stabilized. Developing new technologies can also help increase the energy security.

Last but not least the ambassador emphasised the importance of Hungary's contribution to the common European Roma Strategy.⁸

As International Women's Day had only been a couple of days earlier, the ambassador touched upon the subject of women's empowerment in society.

The ambassador ultimately talked about the special relationship between Europe and America, coming to the conclusion: „While China and India may attract headlines, it is Europe that is standing by our side on every issue.”

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⁴ She mentioned Iran as a negative example. The revolution of 1979 raised great hope in the West, but now Iran is one of the biggest concerns of American foreign policy.

⁵ The bill presented by Senators Kerry, Lugar and Berman will aid Pakistan with \$ 7,5 billion during a course of 5 years, starting in 2010.

⁶ The accession talks of Croatia were symbolically closed on the 30th of June 2011, the last day of Hungarian presidency.

⁷ The joint American-European Energy Council was founded in 2009 with the main goals of maintaining energy security, sustainability and the development of new technologies.

⁸ Livia Járóka, Hungarian member of the European Parliament prepared a comprehensive report about the situation of the Roma in the EU, which report was approved by the EP in March 2011.