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**The European Union and the United States,
before the election:
a much deeper mutual understanding**

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**The European Union and the United States:
a much deeper mutual understanding ***

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Governor Romney's statement that President Obama was trying to convert the United States into a European state actually served to point out the need for a much deeper understanding of both entities to make considerable progress in the future. The need for a close alliance is taken for granted. However, the link is riddled with confusion and stereotypes. This relationship is considered a normal fact forged by mutual historical legacies. Hence the frequent signs of awkward behaviour and misunderstandings under the cover of the notion that potential damage will be corrected by the force of the special relationship. If conflicts are detected, both parties are said to be condemned to agree. If a lack of knowledge is detected, it will be modified by accessible means. Mechanisms for an understanding and cooperation are within reach. Therefore, an effective relationship is not utopian. However, there are areas in which much work is needed to strengthen the alliance and correct its shortcomings. There is a need, not only for agreements in economic and political issues, but also for a deeper understanding of the essence of both entities.

The Twentieth Century has been dominated by a series of events, ideologies and historical milestones in inter-state relations. Among the most important are two World Wars, the rise and fall of extreme ideologies that left a tragic mark, and a trans-continental relationship that was intimately fused with the war contests (and a Cold War). An ongoing relationship has been maintained in spite of some politically incongruent views between both continents. However, what seems to be "normal" presents profiles and angles with variable dimensions that require an adjustment in the analysis, even more in the current times, in the fading away of what was called the "American century".

Both partners in this apparent marriage of convenience propelled by professed love are different in their essential DNA. They contrast in their structure, and they have been in similar fashion but not always as a solid block free from all sorts of difficulties. In spite of all this, the alleged solid relationship between Europe and the United States is

* For an expanded version of this comment in Spanish, see: "La Unión Europea, desde Estados Unidos: percepción, investigación, acción." Consejo Uruguayo de Relaciones Internacionales (CURI) 6/2012 <http://curi.org.uy/archivos/Estudiodelcuri07roy.pdf>. For a short analysis, see: Joaquín Roy, "Europa y EEUU: antes y después de las elecciones presidenciales" Fundación Alternativas (Madrid), 18/2012. <http://www.falternativas.org/opex/documentos/notas-prospectivas/europa-y-eeuu-antes-y-despues-de-las-elecciones-presidenciales>

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considered exempted of serious discrepancies. Both partners seem to respond to similar values, interests and objectives. However, they have a different personality.

There is a need to distinguish two expressions that are wrongly considered as synonymous. "Europe" responds to a geographical or cultural identification, while the "European Union" is, at the moment, a juridical entity, which enjoys full personality as international subject since the Treaty of Lisbon. Before that, according to the orthodoxy of international law, the "EU" did not exist. Only the European Community, more exactly the European Economic Community (EEC) was able to operate in the world scene through the Commission in the areas assigned to its structure. But the EU could not be a "nation" of cultural or ethnic fashion without the requirement of will to belong, according to the profiles of nationalism forged by lineage and blood of individuals ("nationals"). The EU (and its predecessors) is an entity composed of sovereign States that band together by will. They were not forced by conquest, war or political pressure. The EU would then be more similar to a "civic" or "liberal" nation.

At the other side of the pond, an entity with an ambiguous name (the United States of America) has a defined profile and precise international personality, an active subject of international law. This explains why the American mind believes that the United States is actually an idea, based in a sentiment of exceptionality, the most successful "civic" nation in history. But the ambiguity of the label "United States" reveals ambivalence and confusion to speakers of other languages. For example, in Spanish it is a widespread custom to refer to "los Estados Unidos", in plural, taking a verb in plural. However, in recent years, the style books of major newspapers have recommended the use of the singular "Estados Unidos", an apparently plural grammatical subject used with verbs in singular ("Estados Unidos es un gran país"). The firm conviction of the solidity of this political entity is proven by the simple fact that in English, grammatically the country name that is plural, in plural, is accompanied systematically by verbs in singular, such as "the United States is a rich country". This peculiarity, according to traditional sources, was not always this way. Before the Civil War, American English said "the United States are very powerful".

Anyhow, on the spot comments and rigorous studies identify "the United States" as a defined territory, with a federal structure, composed of States (heirs of British colonies that won independence by will in 1776), a people that acquire citizenship of "the United States" directly (not as in a confederation as in the EU), with common institutions, elections by universal suffrage, and the trappings of international recognition. In contrast, doubts arise on the personality of "Europe". Its existence is questioned, its geographical limits are labelled as imprecise (especially in the East), and its shared values and interests are scrutinized. While the "Americans" apparently know who they are, Europeans seem content with knowing who they are not. Europe, at least, is not Africa or Asia, even though some citizens of these two continents may share sentiments for European values.

From the preceding arguments one can conclude, in contrast with the belief that both entities (the United States and the European Union) respond to a different personality, if that they have in common to have a similar origin: will to be. One is an "American" (meaning an individual of the United States), juridically and sentimentally, by an individual decision. Even though recently arrived persons may not internally adopt all and each one of the ingredients of the U.S. "faith", they cannot be denied the right to exercise it according to personal convenience, provided it is done within the law. The European Union, composed not by individuals but by States, has also similar

foundations born out from a will to join. The citizens of these countries acquire also this condition voluntarily, although in an indirect fashion by the decision taken by their corresponding States of which they are citizens. They cannot, juridically, accede to have the European (more accurately, European Union) citizenship in the same fashion as U.S. citizens received theirs. Citizens of Europe do not need to go through a previous filter of meeting the citizenship requirements, as necessary for any given state. European (read “EU”) citizenship is in reality a hybrid condition, best illustrated by the burgundy covers of EU member states issued passports.

But in both cases, American and European, a wish to join makes possible the recommitment to a political entity to which one believes to belong. In Europe this quality is taken for granted by the unstoppable force of history. In the European setting one finds the significant case that in France, in the aftermath of the Revolution, it was the State that made the Nation. In the case of the EU, this entity was formed to give legal sense and political personality to “Europe”, a cultural entity, whose destiny and survival were put in question by the quasi suicidal of World War II.

However, the EU plays some roles of a State (via its common policies). While “Europe” then can be considered as a “cultural” nation, that has a common sovereignty shared in diverse degrees, the EU would be the “State”, a structure formed by institutions and laws that provide economic consistency to the “nation”. In the future, these two lines (“Europe” and the “EU”) may merge, as in a standard “Nation-State”. In contrast, or as in a later stage, “the United States” enjoys both dimensions: nation and state, an example of classic “nation-state”.

For Europe and the EU, the United States is a unitary actor, equipped with sovereign decisions at the federal level; for the United States, the EU is equalized with “Europe”. At the same time, “Europe” is for Washington a badly connected series of States with which one has to deal in crucial issues. It may even be convenient to carry out this task individually with some States, avoiding the complicated maze of the EU, or even questioning it in a rather problematic fashion. Let’s remember that when Henry Kissinger allegedly asked for “the telephone of Europe”, he meant of the number to call the EU. Nonetheless, still today, after the establishment of the position of High Representative of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), when sensitive security topics are addressed, Washington prefers to set them in the context of NATO or in a bilateral deal with a given country. Regrettably, “Europe” and the “EU” hardly exist for that strategic and geopolitical mind of the United States. While this shortcoming in Trans-Atlantic relations is not solved, problems of understanding will remain. †

What then should be the priority of the president of the United States after the elections? First, Obama or Romney should decide what kind of European Union is for the best interest of the United States. A general gift list issued by numerous U.S. think-tanks and observers concur that what is urgently needed is an EU (and Europe) complete (an even closer union). It should be “free” of all the old evils that led to intolerance and racism. Finally, the EU/Europe should be not only in peace, domestically, but exerting its influence in its immediate vicinity and later in the rest of the world. ‡ For this second stage scenario Europe needs to play a model role along the

† For an expanded bi-regional set of recommendations, see “Shoulder to Shoulder: Forging a Strategic U.S.–EU Partnership”, a report coordinated by Center of Trans-Atlantic relations of Johns Hopkins-SAIS University. <http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/publications/books/shoulder-to-shoulder-book-finaltext.pdf>

United States. The U.S. leadership needs to be convinced that a policy of “divide and conquer” should be avoided at all cost. To believe that what is bad for Europe and the EU, in a zero sum game, is good for America is not practical, if not counter productive and suicidal. But Europe has to respond and decide to close the gap, beginning with rewiring the lines of the telephones, set the economic house in order and project an effective face to the rest of the world