

Obama, you're the man!



NOTHING GRABS the political imagination of the world with more emotion than the US presidential elections. Everyone has an opinion on the candidates, but only the Americans get to vote.

On November 4th a fresh wind blew across the globe. The unthinkable happened. Barack Hussein Obama, the son of a white Midwesterner and a black Kenyan, was elected the 44th president of the United States of America.

The Democratic headquarters in Washington, DC, was not the only place of celebration. Everywhere, from small Kenyan villages to urban centres such as Brussels, there was a sense that something new was about to start. And everyone, even some Republicans, seemed elated.

With elation comes expectation. The expectations on Obama are probably higher than on any other incumbent US president. Yet his journey will not be easy.

Obama will have a mountain to climb. He inherits two wars (Iraq and Afghanistan) and the most severe financial crisis since the 1930s. But he has a Democratic majority in both houses. This will help him to push through key policy change. His focus is likely to be foreign policy, healthcare, the economy and energy issues. He will probably close Guantanamo Bay sooner rather than later.

In Europe we're especially interested in the foreign policy of the US. Last summer I had the chance to meet a few of Obama's foreign policy advisers. The message was clear: the new president-elect believes

in a multipolar world, or "the emergence of the others" as Fareed Zakaria, *Newsweek* editor-in-chief, would say.

The European Union is also looking forward to cooperating with the new administration. The past two years have been good for EU-US relations. The memories of a divisive war in Iraq are fading.

With a new administration comes a new start. The EU and the US should focus on four key areas of cooperation:

multilateral institutions, the Middle East, Afghanistan and Russia. All of these areas are of vital interest on both sides of the Atlantic.

For example, it's crucial that the EU and the US cooperate on climate change.

It's equally important that we're able to promote peace and stability in the Middle East and Afghanistan. Relations with Russia should get back on track after the war in Georgia.

The American Constitution speaks of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The legendary federalist papers outlined that all men are created equal. The land of opportunity has shown that "a guy with a funny name," as Obama himself put it, can become the president of the USA.

In 1831 a young French nobleman and astute political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville, travelled the United States for nine months. He published his observations in *Democracy in America*. It's still one of the best analyses of American democracy.

I am sure that de Tocqueville is smiling in his grave. Democracy in America is alive and well. ■■

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