

A grumpy old couple

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

and Europe have a long, mutual history and a set of shared values. We have successfully fought for democracy, liberty and market economy.

EU-US relations have rarely been this good. Our cooperation has astounding depth and scope. The atmosphere has improved significantly from what it was a few years ago. Yet, there is a feeling of unease on both sides of the Atlantic.

ALARMING CHANGES

The United States is flirting with the world outside of Europe and assessing its global network of partnerships. At the same time, Americans are frustrated with the weak and politically divided European Union. And who could blame them? Europe is punching beneath its weight class in foreign policy.

Europeans, in turn, fear that their relative role in world affairs may face a rapid decline on account of the growing importance of the emerging economies. We are afraid of a G2 world dominated by the US and China.

We failed to join forces at Copenhagen's climate change summit. We have failed to push through a new free trade agreement in the WTO. And now President Obama has decided to skip the traditional EU-US summit meeting.

A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

In many ways this trans-Atlantic partnership reminds me of a grumpy old couple that has lived, loved and fought together. They are capable of the cruelest of arguments and the noblest expressions of solidarity. They cannot escape their shared history, but aren't quite sure how the relationship will play out in a changing environment.

Something needs to be done, but what? Let me make three concrete proposals.

First, we need a solidarity pledge. The Lisbon Treaty declares that the Union

and its Member States should act jointly and in spirit of solidarity in case of terrorist attacks or either natural or man-made disasters. The trans-Atlantic partnership could be strengthened by adopting a similar joint pledge that underscores solidarity in civilian crises. This would signal a qualitative change in our relationship that would be based on solidarity.

Second, we should focus on a new trans-Atlantic green economy. The EU and the US must show joint leadership in the global transition towards a low-carbon economy. We must remove barriers that stand in the way of green growth.

Third, we should establish a fully-fledged free trade area. We need to put our money where our mouth is. It's time to stop beating around

the bush: we should create a free trade zone between the EU and the US.

RELATIONSHIP THERAPY

Perhaps we should set up a "marriage council," i.e. group of experts led by two prominent personalities from both sides. Their task would be to outline a set of proposals on how to reinvigorate this trans-Atlantic relationship.

If we make the right choices now, in a hundred years we could be looking back on not just an Atlantic decade – but another Atlantic century. ■■

It's time to renew the wedding vows between Europe and the US.

Alexander Stubb is Finland's minister of foreign affairs who gets a kick out of dismantling EU myths.



Pekka Mustonen