

Report Annual gathering Netherlands Atlantic Youth

On February 5, Netherlands Atlantic Youth held their annual gathering for members and relations in The Hague. In light of the newly elected American President Barack Obama, Mr. Denny Meredith (Political-Military Officer at the U.S. Embassy in The Hague) was invited to speak about the role he expects the United States to play in the transatlantic community in 2009.

Looking ahead to what the Obama administration might bring about in transatlantic affairs, Mr. Meredith stated that now is the time to renew the transatlantic relationship. At this point, Europe and the United States have the opportunity to regenerate their bond. They should use the election of President Obama to re-engage. Answering a question from the audience, Mr. Meredith claimed that the EU-U.S. relationship will grow stronger under Obama. On important issues, such as the situation in Afghanistan, the new American President is open for discussion on how to handle this problem together. Obama is reaching out and will try to strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Already, the new administration has shown its willingness to discuss current difficulties and restore the natural bridge that originates from a common European ancestry.

One of the most important bonds today is common defence. The question is how to deal with new threats, such as terrorism. NATO (and its future) is still an important factor in the transatlantic relationship. How will a common European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) affect NATO? And how to deal with Russia and Afghanistan? Mr. Meredith argued that, in the case of Russia, it is important to understand Russia's issues (for instance gas problems and Ukraine) and to engage in mutual dialogue. Fighting is not a solution. Furthermore, Mr. Meredith stated that NATO will still be important for the EU, especially because a common European defence system is a long-term project. In response to a question from the audience Mr. Meredith stated that NATO and ESDP can not merge, but they can reach a certain level of cooperation and might be able to complement each other.

Following an interesting last question from the audience on a possible short-term breakthrough in the U.S.-EU relationship, Mr. Meredith replied that the high expectations may not all be met, but the intentions are clear: the new U.S. administration is ready to work together with the EU and improve transatlantic relations.

Following the interesting introduction about the new American administration by Mr. Meredith, the speaker and his audience had an opportunity to mingle and discuss the transatlantic relations over drinks and refreshments.

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