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Obama's European tour

By Péter Tálas and Gergely Varga

Barack Obama's first European tour with the G20 and the NATO Strasbourg-Kehl Summit and the EU-US Summit, plus a visit to Turkey gathered huge international attention. The week long tour and the meetings was filled with friendly gestures and declarations, but it also signaled the huge international financial and security challenges the new administration has to face. The main question regarding Obama's foreign policy is whether unilateralism could be replaced by effective multilateralism. The new administration intends to have a realist and "a multilaterally if we can, unilaterally if we must" approach, but it is uncertain, how much the other powers will be willing to work together with the US.

With the US as the leader of the global economy and financial system, and with a promise to reinvent the redefine American leadership, it was a necessity for Obama to reach some kind of a compromise at the G20 summit. So in the end it was the US who made bigger concessions to the German and the French partners by not sticking to another economic stimulus package which the Europeans rejected, and by accepting stricter financial regulations in the final declaration. The US argued the Europeans want to free-ride on the domestic US stimulus packages which could generate European exports, but the Europeans pointed at their growing social welfare expenditures as automatic stimulus packages built in the system.

The question of transatlantic burden-sharing was raised again at the NATO Summit, where the new US "Af-Pak- Strategy" was warmly welcome, but no considerable new European commitments were made to the ISAF mission, especially not from the most criticized German government. Obama named Afghanistan as the top security priority of the US, presenting a new strategy containing more Afghan and regional ownership, more

American resources, and a strengthened civil-economic contribution, but realities on the ground and the devastations of the war cannot be changed overnight. The most noticeable achievement of the Summit was accepting Anders Fogh Rasmussen as the next NATO secretary general by making some concessions to the Turkish government, which previously opposed the nomination.

Obama's bilateral meeting with Russian president Medvedev was in accordance with the "reset button" set forth by the administration. Obama wants Russian help concerning the regional security challenges in the wider Middle East, but Russia is more willing to cooperate in fields closer to its interest, such as strategic arms reductions. The US-Russian regional rivalry in Russia's neighborhood is not likely to disappear.

With huge challenges and the interdependence of the two economic powerhouses, the main topic was the economy at the Obama - Hu Jintao meeting. Amid growing US dependency on Chinese capital and China's growing confidence, the US has to accommodate to the new global economic realities.

After years of cold relations between Washington and Ankara, the Obama administration realized that Turkey could be a strategic asset for its strategic objectives in the Middle East and vis-à-vis Russia. With Turkey having the potential to become a major energy transport route from Central-Asia to Europe, the Obama administration is seeking to bring Ankara and Brussels closer together. This way Russian energy blackmail against Europe would not be as effective, and Washington could get more European support for its geopolitical aspirations in Russia's neighborhood.