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# Barroso: U.S., EU should avoid protectionism

~ *Belgian PM Van Rompuy encourages U.S.-EU cooperation on financial crisis* ~

BRUSSELS (March 20, 2009) – On the opening night of Brussels Forum, European Commission President José Manuel Barroso told participants today that the United States and the European Union must steer clear of protectionist policies going into the G20 Summit in London next month.

“We must avoid protectionism, it is one of the main dangers,” Barroso said. “I see many whirling signals of economic nationalism and protectionism. One of the worst storms now is that for the first time we have this recession, a sharp drop in demand, but also a contraction of global trade, not a cool down but a contraction, at the same time that we have a crisis in the financial system.”

Barroso spoke today at the fourth annual Brussels Forum, a high-level meeting of influential worldwide leaders to discuss pressing transatlantic issues. Brussels Forum is organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) with the Federal Authorities of Belgium & the Egmont Institute, Daimler, and the government of the Czech Republic.

Barroso explained that many financial institutions have already cut back on lending and that as a result, global trade has decreased, dramatically in some cases. Barroso and other participating U.S. and European officials also warned that developing nations could experience especially severe economic downturns as a result of the crisis. They implored world leaders not to forget these nations during the summit, scheduled to begin April 2.

“In Botswana, for example, which is mainly a diamond exporter, and a very successful one, didn’t sell a single diamond in November,” said Lord Mark Malloch Brown, Minister for Africa, Asia, and the UN for the United Kingdom. “So in the light of this, the call for free trade to be protected, for monitoring mechanisms to make sure people don’t backtrack on their trade commitments, to add in trade finance, to make sure we can get the wheels of trade going again, that issue is racing up there ... as the big issue of this forthcoming summit.”

In an opening address, Belgium Prime Minister Herman Van Rompuy encouraged U.S. and European officials to find common solutions to the financial crisis and other global concerns, including securing



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lasting peace in Afghanistan. For his part, Van Rompuy said he would consider providing “an additional contribution of a civilian military nature” to stabilize Afghanistan. Van Rompuy strongly urged both sides to seize “the new opportunity of the day” to draft policies that could affect real change in finance, climate change, and global security.

Van Rompuy’s commitment to weighing the deployment of more Belgian forces to Afghanistan was welcomed by U.S. Sen. Robert Casey, co-chairman of the U.S. Congressional delegation to the Brussels Forum. “We need more than just boots on the ground,” Casey said. “We need a common strategy.”

Czech Republic Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek told forum participants that Europe must take advantage of a new U.S. administration. “Let us try to transform this change in feelings and emotions into real and genuine improvements in transatlantic cooperation,” he said. “It will not be easy at all, first and foremost it will call for a much greater engagement from Europe than we have seen in past years.... It will require Europe to speak less and to participate more.”

Czech Republic Deputy Prime Minister Alexandr Vondra addressed the recent gas crisis in a late-night conversation about energy security. “We have to be prepared materially, legally, operationally,” Vondra said. “We will build new interconnections. We will build new facilities to be able to reverse the flow [of gas].”

Before the conference officially opened, the Brussels Forum hosted a BBC World Debate entitled “Shared Destiny: How Relevant is Europe to the United States under Obama?” The debate will air March 28 and 29 on BBC World.

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*Brussels Forum is an annual high-level meeting of the most influential political, corporate, and intellectual leaders worldwide to address pressing challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic. Participants include heads of state, senior officials from the European Union institutions and member states, U.S. officials, Congressional representatives, Parliamentarians, think tank leaders, academics, corporate executives, and media.*

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