

TRANSCRIPT
BRUSSELS FORUM 2008 OPENING SESSION
Friday March 14, 2008

Welcome: **Mr. Craig Kennedy**, President, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

Introduction: **Amb. Lodewijk Willems**, Director External Affairs, Fortis

Keynote Address: **H.E. Guy Verhofstadt**, Prime Minister, Belgium

CRAIG KENNEDY: ...GMF is delighted to welcome again as key partners in this initiative the Federal Authorities of Belgium and the Egmont Institute, Daimler, and the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

We are also grateful to Fortis, the Republic of Latvia- and especially the Ministry of Defence, and the Tipping Point Foundation of Bulgaria. And finally, we have been helped greatly this year by the Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (WAZ) and the European Commission. Every year we do this we promise you knew thing, some of them work some of them don't, but every year we are going to give you new things. And this year we have a number of them.

First, for those who were here early enough, we started off with the BBC Debate with Nik Gowling. We have a session tonight with Bob Zoellick on Africa and Development and International Economics. This is a topic that really hasn't been on our agenda before.

Tomorrow there is a session on climate change, again, something which we have often had on the periphery but this year we brought to the center. And there is a greatly expanded number of sessions on economic issues.

Now, I've got some slightly bad news. Europeans don't understand what it is to deal with tight budgets, American politicians do. In fact, the American United States House of Representatives is still voting on budget issues as we speak, which means tomorrow morning, we are going to have a Senate Delegation here, and but we don't think, unless I am wrong, we will have one House Member.

We had a terrific Delegation set up, and they started scheduling votes for today and it got really complicated.



But we do have Secretary Chertoff, the first time we have a Cabinet Member here. We've got Robert Kimmitt, the Deputy Secretary of the Treasury. We've got Paul Atkins, SEC Commissioner, and we have CEOs of two major corporate entities in the United States, as well as three Prime Ministers, five or six Foreign Ministers, three Commissioners and a host of other people.

I think it's a really terrific schedule that we have set up for the next forty eight hours.

To introduce really the host of the Brussels Forum, I am going to turn to one of our very good partners, Ambassador Lodewijk Willems of Fortis. He is the Director of External Affairs there, and he has really been one of our most important partners in developing the Brussels Forum over the last two years.

LODEWIJK WILLEMS: Ladies and Gentleman, Craig, thank you very much for your kind words. Fortis is indeed proud to join forces with the German Marshall Fund, the Belgian government and other sponsors to make the Brussels Forum the foremost transatlantic forum in the world. Your presence here, ladies and gentleman, tonight, is a case in point that we are well on our way to achieving this goal.

Introducing Mr. Verhofstadt who has been Prime Minister for almost nine years and who has just attended his 39th EU summit, a Belgian record, is not really necessary and that's why the German Marshall Fund gave me three minutes.

The very odd way in which we set out in this country in forming a federal government has for months fascinated the world and driven most Belgians including our politicians to exasperation. We are, Prime Minister, extremely grateful for one last stroke of genius by creating and heading an interim government that is pregnant. A pregnancy of three months, with a new government that will be born at the end of next week, I hope.

Problem solving and moving things forward is what Guy Verhofstadt has done at EU level. Let me give you just two examples of many. With the Declaration of Laeken in 2001, his contribution to the Constitutional Treaty and therefore to the Lisbon Treaty has been crucial.

Secondly, by calling and presiding a Summit with France, Germany and Luxembourg in April 2003, a bold move that did not wreck NATO. He has started and then nurtured a process which has significantly reinforced both the European Security and Defence Policy and the EU action capabilities with NATO and its allies.

Prime Minister, you are now leaving the political stage for a well-deserved sabbatical, which will allow you to write another book about the European Union, which we are all looking forward to reading. We wish you all the best. We hope your successor will



With additional sponsorship by:





continue to support Brussels Forum as strongly as you did. And it is now my privilege to give you the floor.

(APPLAUSE)

GUY VERHOFSTADT: Thank you, Mr. Willems.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, colleagues, and ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure for me to be here, I should say, again, for the third time in a row, and to see also a number of friends here.

The Ambassador of the U.S. here in Belgium and our Ambassador in Washington, Professor Geremek, thank you for your presence.

And I would like to begin by wishing you all welcome here to Brussels and this Brussels Forum. Like I said, this was already the third edition of the forum.

And I must say, Chairman, both the agenda and the list of participants become more impressive with every new forum held. And that is thanks to the organizers and especially the German Marshall Fund of the United States, which has successfully combined German *gruendlichkeit* with American ambition, I should say.

In my view, however, in my view, the success of this forum also has something to do with its location here in Brussels. I recall that, four years ago, when the forum was still at the planning stage, there were doubts about Brussels. Would the city turn out to be attractive enough? Would Americans want to come to Brussels?

And this year, there was maybe another question: Would Belgium still exist in 2008?

(LAUGHTER)

So let me put you at your ease. Belgium does still exist, and I'm sure it will continue to be so for a long time.

So I have now been Belgium's Prime Minister for almost nine years. And somewhat to my astonishment, I might add that, but six days from now, I will be standing down. I have just come back from my final European Summit. And some people find that the time is ripe for me to start writing my memoirs, but I am far too young for that, I think.

Anyway, I prefer to look to the future than think about the past. Which major challenges do we face today? And I think this is the ideal moment to do that, to do that



because we are about to witness a changing of the guard with new leaders in Europe and in the United States.

The election campaigns are already in full swing in America on the streets and in Europe in the corridors of the Schumann Square. In January 2009, two new presidents will be elected, one in the United States of America and, for the very first time, also, one in the European Council of the European Union.

And whoever wins, whoever is elected, it will mark, I think, the start of a new era. What are the challenges of this new era?

I think, first of all, climate change. It is thanks to an American that the issue has risen to the top of the political agenda today, thanks to solid and alarming statistics. And let me repeat just a few of them.

Global warming has doubled the number of severe storms over the last 30 years. Over the past decade, twice as much glacial ice has melted. And unless we cut off CO2 emissions, dramatic effects will become apparent very soon because, over the next 25 years, the death totals by a hotter climate will go up to 300,000 people a year. Melting ice will make sea levels rise by six meters, and the planet will see more dry periods, heat waves, and forest fires.

And a few weeks ago, Mr. Chairman, the European Commission sent out a clear message when it unveiled a radical climate plan that will, I think, substantially alter our patterns of energy use over the next 12 years. I mean, of course, Europeans' ambitious 20/20/20 vision. By 2020, the European Union intends to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent, obtain 20 percent of its energy from renewable sources, and lower overall energy use by 20 percent.

And today I can announce that the European Council a few hours ago has given its full backing to this package and to these ambitions.

And the big question remaining is this, for this first challenge of climate change, what about our American friends? In that way, I think it's very positive that each of the three presidential candidates wants the United States to sign up to the international agreements on global warming.

And perhaps 2009 could turn out to be a key year, a key year in reaching a new version of the Kyoto agreement. And why not? Why not make use of this crucial year of change to bring forward the negotiations on that Kyoto II agreement?

Why, indeed? Because global warming doesn't just affect I think the climate. It also has strategic geopolitical consequences. The fact is underscored once again in the recent

report by our High Representative of the European Union, Javier Solana, and Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

In fact, even one is about a full-blown energy conflict between Russia and the West. Because if the North Pole continues melting, new trade routes will open up and untold mineral wealth, which is, in effect, today beneath the pack ice, will become accessible.

And as the world knows, since Russian planted a flag on the bottom of the Northern part of the Arctic Ocean, the fight for these resources has already begun. In short, I think waiting to see what happens is in any way not an option.

A second obvious transatlantic challenge, Mr. Chairman, we face is naturally the war on terror. Will we prove capable -- and I'm talking about Afghanistan -- of turning the driving force of international terrorism into a secure democracy? Because that's the key question.

And yet, at the same time, we know the answer to that question, because failure is, in fact, not an option. Naturally, that applies to the entire Middle East, as well, not least in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Because if Afghanistan is, I should say, the driving force behind Islamic terrorism, that conflict is what fuels it.

We all agree that we are at the age of a new abyss on the verge of a fresh, I think, Intifada. And although the dialogue in Annapolis may be fragile at the moment, we have to do all we can to keep the process on track so that, at the end of the year, let's hope an agreement can be reached as intended.

The third challenge we face, I think, is to continue to secure peace by reforming our defense structure. This is important, both for Europe and I think also from the transatlantic perspective. And my experience in 2003 shortly before the start of the War in Iraq was very painful, but I think instructive.

At the time, it seemed totally, totally impossible to change ideas about the Iraqi crisis in our European Council. But now we know that only when Europe has its own armed forces and defense capabilities and diplomatic capability, it will be able, I think, to play a proper role in international crisis.

And in the 21st century, I think that NATO may evolve from a regional defense alliance into what I call an international security network, consisting of allies and partners. And certainly as France is now planning its full, I should say, reintegration into NATO, I think that fresh opportunities will open up to the organization.

Within this new transatlantic global security network, Europe's defense must, I think, be developed and promoted as a European pillar of the North Atlantic Alliance. And in my

view, it must comprise a European military force capable of immediate deployment when necessary.

And some people, I know some people, continue to see a European defense force as an alternative to or even arrival of NATO, which is wrong. History has taught us of the dangers of not working together, Iraq being a prime example. And when we do work together, like in the Balkans, for example, we do attain results.

The final challenge I would like to highlight today is, Mr. Chairman, the rediscovery of Africa's geostrategic significance. I think at the dawn of the 21st century, the world is changing under the combined influence of economic globalization and multipolar power.

And Africa is changing more than many other regions in the world today. And, once again, Africa is being courted by all the major global powers. No longer seen, as I should say, as a burden, Africa is considered a continent of opportunity, a new frontier.

And we see the determination of economic powers, both traditional and emerging, to gain access to Africa's vast resources. And this has now made Africa the scene of what I call a kind of new great game. And the question is: Does Africa benefit from this great game?

I don't think so. In fact, out of an overall population of over 800 million, Africa still has 400 million people living in extreme poverty, subsisting on less than one euro a day. And human development, life expectancy, income, literacy, access to health care of most African countries are amongst the lowest in the world.

And the war on poverty in Africa has mobilized the international community as never before, and that's a good thing. However, the course of such extensive poverty remains the same: constant outbreaks of conflicts in different parts of Africa.

Take, for example, Congo. After a long and intensive process, last year saw the first elections held there, and with great success. People patiently stood in line for hours in the rain just to cast their vote. And why? To make their country a better place.

And yet today we find that the conflict in the eastern part of the country, in Eastern Congo, risks not only casting the surrounding region into turmoil, but also driving the entire country into the abyss.

Problems like this cannot be solved by, I think, elections and democracy alone. We also need to unite the forces at our disposal, such as the IMF, the World Bank, U.N., the African Union to build up the country and prove, prove, in fact, that democracy and freedom lead not to chaos, but rather to stability and also to prosperity.



So, ladies and gentlemen, when I took office as Prime Minister back in 1999, there were a lot of strategic papers, too. Debates were conducted about what the challenges in the future may be. And when we look back at those strategy papers, it immediately becomes clear that we were living, I think, in a different world back then.

The issues we are talking about today used to be footnotes at that time, terrorism, energy, climate change, new global players like Russia, India, China. And now we are talking about the European Union with 27 member states, with a single currency, a new treaty, a European defense capability, and in a short time a President.

And it's a completely different ballgame. But amidst all this change, one fact remains the same, I think, one fact remains the same: that is that only if Europe and the United States pull together can we arise to the challenges facing us and only, I think, if we strengthen our Atlantic ties and seek solutions together can we also gradually make the world a better place.

Thank you very much. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

KENNEDY: Prime Minister, I want to thank you, since this will be -- well, maybe not your last Brussels Forum or even the last one as Prime Minister, but probably not next year's Prime Minister.

But we really want to thank you, because the leadership that you've shown is extremely important in getting this conference off the ground. And we are very appreciative for everything that you have done for us. Thank you.

END