

TRANSCRIPT

Closing Keynote Address

Remarks: The Hon. Karel De Gucht, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Belgium

Good Morning Excellencies, colleagues, distinguished ladies and gentlemen. Allow me first of all, and I think I that I can speak for all of you, to thank and to congratulate the German Marshall Fund for the organization of this second edition of Brussels' Forum, which draws to a close today.

These have been interesting and fruitful days. The high standing of the participants and the quality and the totality of the debates again prove that is useful and necessary to bring together, representatives from government, business, the media and academia from both sides of the Atlantic ocean to exchange views and ideas about the transatlantic relationship and the ways in which we can better work together in trying to meet the challenges that we all are faced.

Our gathering and discussions have been yet another clear indication of the strength and intensity of the transatlantic relations and of our friendship across the Atlantic. I am proud and happy that they have been taking place here in Brussels, the capital of Europe and the seat, the headquarters of the transatlantic alliance.

Our discussions of the last two days have confirmed that developing a good transatlantic cooperation and partnership is the key for successes in all (INAUDIBLE). In the almost three years ago I took office as Minister of Foreign Affairs, transatlantic relations and relations between Belgium and the United States were in very dire straits. We seemed to be on diametrically opposite sides on many issues.

From Iraq to Kyoto, to and from the role of multilateralism, to the European ambitions in the area of security and defense, the debate was at time very fierce, too much focused on our differences and disagreements. We seem to have forgotten how much we have in common and how much we can achieve when we work together instead of acting separately or even in opposition to each other.

Thanks to efforts on both sides of the Atlantic, we have been able to turn this page. Our relationship is again on a good track. We have reengaged the Euro American dialogue. We have entered a new area of transatlantic cooperation. We have given a new impetus to our partnership.

Our bond is based on shared values and interests, democracy, human rights, peace and development, free enterprise and market economy. We stood shoulder-to-shoulder in



combating tyranny and bringing back peace during what has been the biggest war the world has ever known. We will continue to do so now and in the future.

In this regard it is important that we have structured our transatlantic dialogue in the manner that better fits the strategic character of our relationship. We talk now to each other more often, more thoroughly, more politically, also using the so-called of (INAUDIBLE) of transatlantic dinners or lunches, bringing together NATO and EU foreign affairs ministers, Javier Solana, (INAUDIBLE) and Benita Ferreri Valnor (ph).

These kinds of meetings we hold regularly since September 2005 prove to be very useful in creating more understanding of each other's positions in detecting and diffusing possible tension on difficult issues and in enhancing cooperation.

In a world still too riddled with tensions, failed states and weapons proliferation, the transatlantic bond more than ever remains and should remain the mainstay of global stability. When we act together we succeed. When we act alone we lose force and focus.

Our partnership is indispensable. The challenges that (INAUDIBLE) had made it even more necessary. For example, in Afghanistan, where it becomes clear by today that bringing security, stability and development will require a sustained and comprehensive effort, also from the Afghan government.

With regard to the threat of Iran developing a military nuclear capacity or in the Middle East where the prospects of peace seem always to slip out of our hands and the continuing tension and growing radicalism. Here I would like to pay tribute to Javier Solana, who in these two critical issues, systematically tries to bring the EU and the U.S. to a common position.

His conversation on Friday evening, was from what I hear was excellent, constructive and inviting. In our own European neighborhood, the peaceful settlement of the Kosovo question is our most urgent priority.

The issues are now clearly on the table. In his final report to the Security Council, Mr. Ahtisaari has recommended that Kosovo's future status should be independence supervised by the international community. His settlement proposal is a balance solution. It offers guarantees to the Serb community in Kosovo, but also fulfills the wishes of the majority population in Kosovo.

It is equally important that overall the proposal will strengthen the implementation of the standards. The resolution that the Security Council now has to adopt should offer a clear framework for the international, civilian and military presence. This will be key for the EU enlargement to which Belgium will contribute significantly.



Concerted action between the EU and the U.S. will be critical for a successful implementation of the settlement. In this regard it is important that the international community holds a common line with regard to the final stages of the status process.

Unilateral moves should be discouraged. This means that everything has been done to avoid a declaration of independence before the adoption of the Security Council Resolution. It also means common recognition of Kosovo's independence once the resolution is adopted and the resolution is declared.

The issue will be most difficult to swallow for Serbia. The international community must seek to ensure that it does not strengthen the hands of the ultra nationalists there which could lead to de-stabilization. We need to explore what inducements can be offered. However, this should not imply a softening of the positions with regard to cooperations with (INAUDIBLE).

It is also clear that we should be careful not to alienate and corner Russia. In the coming months we will need to keep them on board on a number of key international issues, Kosovo, Iran, and the Middle East.

We have to keep them engaged even if its new assertiveness also in the field of energy makes our eyebrows rise. But Russia should be prepared to show a constructive attitude and cooperate in those areas where we have common interests.

We should also increase our transatlantic cooperation on the African continent in the Sudan, in Somalia, and also in Central Africa, not in the least because the people of the Congo in the regions of the Great Lakes are in as much need of freedom and democracy than those in Iraq, Afghanistan or the (INAUDIBLE) Middle East.

It is our duty to assist that region to climb out of its protracted conflicts onto the path of peace, stability and development. Belgium has a special bond with Central Africa and the DRC in particular. Together with the international community we have invested a lot of efforts to stop the conflict, establish a new constitutional framework, hold democratic elections and put the country on the development track.

Much progress has been achieved but much more still needs to be done as recent events have shown. We will continue to need a strong and unified voice and a coordinated approach of the international community determines not to let our efforts fall apart.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, European integration has become ever more important in the evolution of transatlantic relations. The integration process has made the European Union stronger in the economic and political fields.



Once started as a mere customs union of six members and despite the many hiccups in the integration process, the EU has grown into a political entity of 27 members, an economic power house and a remarkable success story.

By working together and sharing national interests and resources we have created an area of peace and stability which is a unique example in the world, inspiring others across the globe. But along the process we may have forgotten our economic, security and social accomplishments cannot be taken for granted.

Threats will exist more than ever and we should be better prepared to confront them. We have to admit that when Europe failed to manage the crisis in Kosovo in the past, it is thanks to the American military capability and power that we were able to enforce the will of the international community.

In this context the creation of a common European security and defense policy is among Europe's main challenges for the future. The further development of such a policy is not at all contradictory to NATO. On the contrary, by re-enforcing the European pillar we are strengthening NATO.

The more efficient the European defense will grow, the more powerful the alliance will be. It supports a strong European entity able to operate as a responsible partner and to bear its part of the burden. As NATO and the EU act in unison, based on the wide support, they reinforce each other and have a stronger capacity to confront the challenges facing all of us.

Moreover, with the renewal of the transatlantic bond and dialogue at both sides of the Atlantic, we came to realize that we have to transcend the apparent contradictions of hard and soft power, between Mars and Venus. We have learned that we need a combination of both.

Military means alone do not create sustainable peace, stability, and security. Equally important are respect for human rights and democracy and not in the least good governance. Also there can be no sustainable peace and stability without economic development and this presupposes a comprehensive approach.

It also requires the deployment of several crisis management instruments in order to contribute to stabilization and reconstruction, for example in Kosovo and in Afghanistan. Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I don't have to remind you of the importance of the economic ties between the U.S. and Europe.

As for most European countries, the United States is Belgium's non-European market. Many Belgium companies have branches in the U.S. and more than 1,000 U.S. companies operate in Belgium providing more than 100,000 jobs.



Over the past year, total U.S. investments in China, while growing fast, still amounted to only 23 percent of the resources that the American companies invested in Belgium. Despite the rise of China and India as the new economic powers, the scope and the depth of the transatlantic economic partnership remain unparalleled.

... Investment flows between Europe and American account for more than half of the world's economic activity. The United States and the European Union are each others most important economic partners. We are at the forefront of globalization.

The transatlantic markets continue to be predominant in terms of creation of growth, jobs and wealth, of production of good and services, of international trade, of scientific research and of technological innovation of foreign investments and of degree of openness.

We should use the transatlantic space to gain economic growth by increasing more and better (INAUDIBLE) convergence and by reducing the (INAUDIBLE) burden for businesses. This is an important subject for the EU-U.S. dialogue at the governmental, at the business and at the academic level. It deserves our fullest attention and support.

Progress has been made these days in the field of health technology and in the automotive sector. However, still much more needs to be done, for example in regards to accountancy and energy standards. Proposals by the German EU presidency to increase the transparency and efficiency of our economic cooperation and to accelerate the reduction of barriers to international trade and investments are on the table.

They include the creation of a Transatlantic Economic Council which should guide the process with a focus on achieving results. Specific areas of cooperation are the reduction of regulatory burdens, intellectual property rights, secure trade, financial markets, innovation and technology, and investments.

These items will be on the agenda when the American and European leaders meet in Washington tomorrow for the yearly U.S.-EU Summit and I hope they will get the necessary political impetus to lead to concrete results.

In the same line, we should join our efforts of the swift conclusion of the WTO negotiations (INAUDIBLE). This should contribute to the further opening of our economies for each other's companies to a stronger transatlantic financial market and to greater market access in the growth markets.

A special emphasis should be put on the reduction on non-tariff barriers both in the goods and services markets. For what would be the point of reducing tariff barriers if the gains in market access would be neutralized by new, smart and disproportionate and this (INAUDIBLE) regulation.



Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, our meetings of the past two days have shown that transatlantic bonds are alive and kicking. Your presence and participation in the debate have contributed to that effect and I want to thank you for it, and I want to thank again the German Marshall Fund for so perfectly organizing this event.

We look forward to the third edition next year with even more American friends present. Our partnership over the Atlantic is indispensable. We need each other and we can only gain by working together even if we do not and will not always agree on everything. We have learned it is better to accept differences of opinion than to focus on what binds us.

It is in doing so that we can make progress and make the difference in building a world that is a better and a safer place for all of us. With this in mind, I wish you all a good and safe journey back home and I look forward to seeing you next year.

Thank you very much.

END



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