

Brussels Forum

March 20, 2015

Remarks and Presentation of BF Young Writers Award / A Conversation

The Hon. Didier

Dr. Karen Donfried: I have the great pleasure of introducing the deputy prime minister and foreign minister of Belgium, The Honorable Didier Reynders. And I'm very happy to do this, not only because of the role he's playing today, but also because it gives me a chance to reiterate the thanks I gave earlier to the federal authorities of Belgium.

And I want to give a special thanks to the foreign minister for his support of Brussels Forum over years, as well. And with that, let me welcome you to the stage.

The Hon. Didier Reynders: Thank you very much for your kind words, also for the Belgium government. It's not all the time so it's a pleasure to receive a lot of kind words. Certainly, because we will start in some minutes, the (inaudible) discussions in Belgium, so it's also a difficult moment.

Excellencies, distinguished guests, this third anniversary marks a long history of mutual friendship between the GMF and Belgium. And it's an honor for me to welcome you once more in the City of Brussels for this prominent diplomatic rendezvous.

We just heard very rich perspectives from Russia, the European Union, NATO and the U.S. I would like to add a few words from another point of view in my current capacity of Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Thanks to the Council of Europe, the same binding and detailed commitments to human rights, democracy and the rule of law have been taken from Lisbon to Vladivostok and in front of 20 million of citizens can bring their complaints to the European Court of Human Rights if they feel that their rights are violated. Tens of thousands of them actually do it. With great discretion, the Venice Commission has a deep influence on the legislative processes in all respective countries.

Parliamentarians from 47 countries interact in their personal capacities across all sorts of dividing lines in the most diverse parliamentary assembly of the world. That kind of soft power can sound a bit futile as guns resonate in the heart of Europe. However, considering Europe's history, we can fully appreciate the true value of having a common legal and institutional ground all over Europe. We may disagree about the way we implement human rights and blame each other for our failures, but we refer to the same standard to do so.

The Council of Europe has not done away with dividing lines, but it has helped blur some of them. When the European Union and a European country sign

an association agreement, including clauses on human rights, democracy and rule of law, these clauses refer to legal instruments of the Council of Europe.

A common legal and political language has been created in those decades of interaction. Council of Europe for (inaudible) are not zero-sum games, they are win-win operation. The crisis we are going through in Europe due to the conflict in Ukraine is a result of the years of hard power as opposed to soft power.

It is not even a zero-sum game, it's a negative-sum game. Everybody loses. Two million people or more are displaced. The Donbass is devastated. Crimea lost its autonomy and ended up isolated when it should be a hub in the Black Sea. Hatred between communities will last for decades.

Nobody is winning at this game. Whatever the parties will achieve, they will end worse off than before the beginning of the conflict and accomplish less than they could have through normal political means.

We have to assert the primacy of the political process. And the Council of Europe can help on (inaudible) advantage of the Minsk Agreement is that they provide the parameters of a comprehensive political settlement. I will circumvent that the Venice Commission, if request by the parties to do so, could do wonders in providing its impartial expertise to define legal frameworks that are based on the best standards of the Council of Europe and provide for a political solution that respects the rights of all concerned.

In any case, as chairman chief of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, we will continue to do what we can to let soft power prevail in Ukraine and allow the win-win scenario that can be beneficial for all.

Firstly, the Ukrainian population on both sides of the military lines. And I went to Ukraine and to Moscow in such a capacity in December and I will go back there next month and we'll try to make some progress with all those institutions from the Council of Europe.

Turning onto the next subject, if I may. After the end of the Cold War, it was my hope, like many others, that international trade could be regulated by fair and international trade rules. The creation of the World Trade Organization, by America's agreements, now 20 years ago, symbolized this hope. The picture in 2015 of international trade and investment has changed substantially. The WTO has certainly delivered results among the orders through a system of dispute settlement, but there is still room for progress to ensure completely that all producers and consumers do not suffer the consequences of unpredictable trade bans or infer to its practices.

We have all witnessed the fickle descriptions in Geneva on the (inaudible), the lack of (inaudible) in Geneva has given (inaudible) free trade agreements boost. The (inaudible) of free trade agreements, is a reality nowadays. On the positive

side, free trade agreements were present more than the sum of (inaudible) benefits as they reflected a more strategy alliance.

The Russian ban on certain AU products has reinforced the cooperation between the EU and third countries. TTIP will (inaudible) and reinforce the alliance between Europe and the U.S. at a time when both sides are conscious of the importance of the values we share. TTIP is often criticized as a deal for big companies. I believe, on the contrary, that it is a unique opportunity to put into place a substantial strategy for small and medium-sized enterprises.

One other subject that has dominated the debate on TTIP, particularly in European Union and also in Belgium, is the subject of investor (inaudible) dispute settlement. Commissioner Cecelia Malmstrom has presented to the European Parliament some of the ideas of the commission. I'm sure she will tell us more about this. TTIP acted as a trigger to modernize by lateral investment treaties and to come to an integrated AU investment policy.

But TTIP negotiations offers us an opportunity to promote high standards for labor, environment, and investment protection. TTIP should also provide European and American people with greater prosperity.

I want to express my support of this process. It is certainly not easy. If it was easy, it would have been done years ago. But the talks continue, and TTIP is already developed in my eyes, regulators from both sides of the Atlantic, are

meeting frequently and discussing their future projects. I expect TTIP to further anchor us and formalize these discussion.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, like every year, I would like to congratulate, for their exceptional performance, the laureates of the Young Writers award. Max Smeets, from U.K., and George Bogden, from USA, and invite you to join me if you are in the room. They are, both of them. Thanks again. And I said I really want--would like to congratulate you for your very well efforts and the quality of the reserves. It is good to see that our shared value are still strong enough to convince and inspire young people who will be the leaders of tomorrow. And they will be not only in the room in the next years, but maybe on the podium to discuss about different issues in different panels.

I'm sure that I need to give you some awards, if I have the support of the organization. I will find those--two is great. It's very organized. And so, George Bogden. And Max Smeets. Congratulations again. My pleasure.

Have a good panel now, I'm sure. And first of all about TTIP.

Dr. Karen Donfried: Well, I'm just going to add my thanks to the foreign ministers, first for presenting the awards to our two winners. And I'd like to congratulate you both, as well, and thank you for your contributions.

As many of you know, GMF is dedicated to leadership development. At this years' Brussels Forum, we're featuring the Young Professionals Summit, which

has 64 participants from 30 countries. And they are partaking in three days of policy discussions and leadership training. They have a full program today and most of tomorrow, but then they're going to join us as full participants starting tomorrow evening at the breakout dinner. So keep eye out for all of them joining us.

I also want to highlight two new features of this years' Brussels Forum. One will be tomorrow. It's the first year that we're having a Brussels Forum talk, and this year, it'll be with Simon and Holt and that's sure to be interesting. And then also, we have a mystery session on Sunday. Those of you who were here last year are thinking, oh, I know what that is, because there was a mystery session last year. But we're switching it up and it's a different mystery this year. So I hope you all come on Sunday to find out what that mystery is.