

Brussels Forum

March 26, 2010

Opening Address

SPEAKER: Please take your seat. We are about to start the program. Please take your seats. Thank you. Please take your seats. We are about to start. Thank you.

I think we are ready to go for the official opening of this year's Brussels Forum. Welcome again to the 5th Annual Brussels Forum. It is an annual conference on Transatlantic relations but with people and topics from around the world. It reflects our view that the Transatlantic relationship is not just about each other, but also about the world. Five and a half years ago when several people in this room came up with the idea for the Brussels Forum we thought that if we made it through the first year we'd be lucky. We look back on the various additions of this Brussels Forum and I see a lot of familiar faces. How many of you have been for all five? I think there is actually quite a few that have been here for all of them. We are very, very appreciative.

There is a number of people, Peter MacKay who you'll

hear from later on who was at the very first one and it was a really important intervention. Carl Bildt and a number of other people who have really been instrumental in building this up. As with every year we have worked very hard to make this year fresh and exciting. We ask that you be active in your participation, be respectful in discussions, but don't be afraid to be challenging and that you enjoy this weekend of policy discussions.

If you have complaints share them with us. We take all of that feedback and try to make this event better each year. There are a few new things. You are going to see quite a few younger faces around Brussels Forum this year because we have added a young professional's summit. There will be 80 or 90 young people that are working in various institutions here in Brussels that will be in and out of the meetings. It is the next generation of Brussels Forum participants. We've decided that in part we need to grow our own. And there is also a number of Brussels Forum papers written by experts that dive deeper into the issues that are central to this conference. Please be sure to take a look at them. All of them are very, very good. Some of them are exceptionally good.

G M F is delighted to be joined by our major founding partners. There are two that are especially important. Dimeler which supported our very first big conference that we did years ago in Istanbul when, frankly, we didn't know what we were doing. They took a real risk on us. It was a very successful meeting. They have been with us here at the Brussels Forum ever since then. And the second I want to cite are the federal authorities of Belgium. Belgium has been our steadfast partner throughout the five years of building this forum. They provide not only financial support but a huge amount of advice and tactical support for us every year.

We are also very pleased to welcome as additional sponsors, the European Union delegation to the United States, Eli Lilly Company and BNP Paribas . All of them have been very strong supporters and we appreciate it. And finally we would like to recognize the support of the Union of Chambers and Stock Exchanges of Turkey, the Ministry of Defense and the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership.

Today we have the privilege to have as the kickoff of this first official session, beyond the BBC Global Debate,

Yves Leterne, the Prime Minister of Belgium. He is serving his second time in that role. He is the former Minister President of (Inaudible). He has a reputation for being an exceptionally hard worker so we're grateful that he took time away from his busy job to be here today especially after a very complicated but I think successful council meeting. Belgium is a founding partner since the inception of this forum. We want to take Prime Minister Leterme and his government for their support of the Brussels Forum. Prime Minister, the floor is yours.

H.E. Yves Leterme: Thank you, Mr. President, colleagues from governments all over Europe, colleagues from politics all over the world, excellencies. Ladies and gentlemen, let me first of all extend a warm welcome to you. Welcome in Brussels. Welcome in Belgium. Thank you for being here, for your participation in this event. As a Belgium government we really feel honored to be able to host you here.

Ladies and gentlemen, while preparing for this speech I was in two minds whether to call it the end of sovereignty or the return of sovereignty. And I think both would seem equally appropriate. Challenges and recent developments

do give the impression that the Earth has become flat. The collapse on American banks but often financial economic crisis but in a large part of the globe. Pollution, terrorism, organized crime or climate change do not stop at borders. Attacking them, it requires, as we know besides local action, also a worldwide approach. But, in fact, in this seemingly borderless world borders, in fact, matter more than ever, as the lengthy and intrusive security checks at Brussels Airport demonstrates.

I should say national governments matter more than ever and each citizen looks to their national governments for protection against terrorists, violence and crime, against poverty and hardship. The financial crisis very clearly illustrates what I will call the return of politics. In a dramatic reversal, bankers who in their hay day snubbed "simple local politicians" suddenly begged those same politicians for help to bail them out. I think it has been said that we live in a world of so-called gated globalism. It is not, indeed, a bad characterization. There are still gates in the globalized worlds and in democracies. Political leaders are, in fact, also elected to be the guardians of those gates. The world being what it is the

predominance of national political leadership is not going to fundamentally change, not even within the European Union. The European Union, this unprecedented structure in which sovereign states freely agree to exercise a substantial part of their sovereignty in common. The discussion we just had at the European Council on support package for a grievance for Greece was basically political.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to touch on three main areas where political leaders need to assume the responsibility nationally and collectively to maintain or to create the momentum for change. First of goals we still have to address the consequences of the financial crisis. After saving our banks we had to confront a lot of confidence which led to a real economic recession. I know we are all graveling with the third wave of the crisis, a lot of jobs and rising unemployment.

In fact, many of our EU countries are weathering this crisis without too much hardship for their subjects. In Belgium and Sweden and other EU member states governments manage this with policies which soften the blows of the crisis for their populations without mortgaging their future too heavily. Indeed, most of our citizens in the

European Union still enjoy what has been named "the modest miracle of a normal life". That may not sound heroic and it may not be the stuff from which ballads are written and epic movies are made, but it is the aspiration of the majority of the people on this Earth and only those who do not know what war is, or the prevention of tyranny or forced exile, only those would look down upon this modest miracle.

However, managing the present day on behalf of our citizens is only part of our task. We can, indeed, not relax now that the worst of crisis seems over. We have to remember the lessons learned and keep the momentum going for better regulation of the international financial system, for keeping open free trades and opposing protectionism. All of this requires political will and leadership. We expect among other things a strong signal from the G20 in Toronto. We will see if membership of that group is a status symbol. It ought not to be. It is a responsibility to interstate global action.

That kind of leadership is needed to reconnect with healthy economic growth. But that is not enough. We also -- and this is, indeed, our second major challenge -- have to spread the resources and riches of the

world, to spread them in a fair and more balanced way within countries and amongst countries.

How is Europe doing in that field? Ladies and gentlemen, I am personally and with colleagues, also, we are familiar with the criticism that the European Union and many of its member states. We are, in a sense, overregulated, for example. Our systems are social protection and our bureaucracies eat up too large of parts of our gross national product. Our social protection tends to smuggle personal initiative and risk taking. Our economic growth is sluggish compared to other parts of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, I do not agree the severity of this analysis, but I acknowledge that there is some truth in it. We have a need to remain vigilant to find and keep the right balance between the protection of our social model to which we are attached and the free initiative that is needed for the creation of wealth. But let us have a look at the other side of the medal. We may not have known double digit economic growth but growth is not enough. One still has to see a fair distribution of the new wealth amongst the citizens so as not to endanger social harmony. In



western Europe we have grown more slowly but we saw this from a higher base and we did it in a complex of political stability and social harmony.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 we realized that the best way to save democratic systems and values was to export them. With the expansion of NATO and the European Union we have managed to spread credibility, peace, open governments, democratic institutions over practically the whole of the continent and that is no mean achievement. Apart from distributing wealth among our citizens, EU countries are also by individual and collective action the most important donors of development. That fits in our agenda of combining economic growth with social and ecological responsibility.

But we know that more is to be done to fill up the gap between the richer and poorer parts of the world and we know that we cannot do it on our own. Our first partners in this endeavor are, of course, the North American NATO allies with whom we share our values and an old history. Relations between European countries and the United States of America have from time to time been somewhat rocky. There is, in fact, totally normal between France who feel secure enough

in the friendship to speak their minds.

On the Transatlantic friendship I would like to quote George Washington. "True friendship is a plant of slow growth and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation." Ladies and gentlemen, transferring this word "appellation" to the language of the wine world, I would say that indeed the European, American friendship isn't of an excellent vintage.

Ladies and gentlemen, working together with like-minded friends and allies is, of course, not sufficient. Russia, for instance, is more than a European power but it certainly is a power in Europe. She has to be involved in creating and maintaining Europe's security architecture and is a major player in the international scene. In a larger framework, we have to work with the old and new economic giants in Asia and elsewhere. We have to work with them to ensure that economic growth is more evenly spread and does not mortgage the future of all planets because we do not own this Earth. We have it on loan for our children and grandchildren.

The September summits of the midterm review of

millennium development goals should give this undertaking a new momentum. It will, in fact, not only be the occasion to look at what rich countries can and should do more, the summits will also have to direct a critical look at what governments of poorer countries should and can do better. Indeed, some countries are not poor because of lack of resources but because of a lack of governance. There, again, what is needed is political will, is responsible behavior of governance.

Thirdly, last but not least I would say we have to work, all of us, with all parties involved to bring peace to war torn countries and regions. As I said last September in my speech to the U.N. General Assembly, the worst international disorder is not the current economic crisis. The worst international disorder is the fact that today still millions of people are killed or raped or driven from their homelands in violence between and within states. The worst international disorder is that still millions of people do not get the chance to at minimally a decent existence because of war, civil war, interethnic violence or repression. That is the most important challenge for without peace, without security, there is no development,

let alone sustainable development.

What we need to end violence in African and Asian countries and elsewhere is not new institutions but new mentalities. Since wars begin in the minds of man, it is in the minds of man that the defenses of these must be constructed. As you know, this beautiful sentence is in the preamble of the constitutions. It means that all of us to start with a governance have to put reason before passion as an old heraldic device also says. Drumming up emotions of nationalism are individualized against others. (Inaudible) and hate is all too easy. Opposing other powers simply for the sake of demonstrating one's own power or one's power may be flattening to the national or personal ego. Harboring and financing terrorist organizations may be seen by some fanatic leaders as a service to a noble cause. In fact, none of those attitudes, however, serve peace and development and progress, serve the people that governments are supposed to be serving.

There, again, a new momentum has to be created. It has to be created by those who wield political power. They have to show courage, for contrary to hate speech, the language of reason and tolerance takes courage and this courage is

what governments owe to their people. And what people all over the world long for is, indeed, again the modest miracle of a normal life which cannot exist without peace and basic personal security.

In fact, I cannot think of a better forum to discuss those challenges, to discuss them in open, intellectual and honest discourse than your Brussels Forum here which I am glad and honored to welcome on its first (Inaudible).

Ladies and gentlemen, before ending, one last word before I let you start with your busy and extremely interesting agenda. In fact, just before a former addition of this forum there was speculations in foreign media because of a political crisis in Belgium. The question was how long this country could stay lost. As you can see our answer as Belgiums is similar to the one by the man who read his own obituary in the newspaper and who replied that "any announcement of my demise is grossly exaggerated and dreadfully premature."

Given the unpredictability of political come fortunes I personally do not know where I will be when the next Brussels Forum comes around, but I am convinced that this forum will still be going strong thanks to the talent and

untiring energy of the organizers and I know that Belgium will still be here and very welcome happy to welcome all of you again. In the meantime, I wish this 5th edition of the Brussels Forum very fruitful and frank discussions. Thank you for having me.