

Transcript of the press conference following the meeting of European Union Heads of State and Government and the President of the USA, George W. Bush.

Brussels, 22 February 2005

PRESIDENT JUNCKER: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. As heads of state and government of the European Union, we've been very happy to welcome the U.S. President, Mr. George Bush, to the heart of the European institutions. And once again, I would like to thank him for this visit, and for the fact that he has taken the initiative of coming to Europe so soon after his inauguration for his second term as President of the United States.

In the course of our discussions, we have touched on a whole range of issues, which it is clearly impossible for me [to] summarize here. What I would say is that what we have established is that, as so often in our past, if we work together, if we pull our strengths, we as Europeans and Americans, can make the difference -- we have the strength, we have the legitimacy, and we have the means -- because we have the same ambitions for the world, ambition of democracy, of freedom, of fighting together against terrorism, ambition to end the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

On our flags, we have the words, "freedom" and "democracy." And we recognize the obligations that result from this -- the fight against poverty, the fight against under-development. And so, in a very studious, constructive and friendly atmosphere, we addressed a number of issues.

Middle East: We both do consider that peace prospects are better than they have been for a long time, and we are looking forward to cooperate in close partnership with the U.S. and with other Quartet members. It is of crucial importance, we do think, to go back to the implementation of the road map. In Gaza we do all hope and prospect for a negotiated, two-state solution, as defined in this road map. That means that we have to make sure for Israel that peace, security and recognition by all countries in the region are guaranteed. And that means for the Palestinians that they have the right to have a viable, democratic, independent and totally contiguous state.

As regards Iraq, we applauded the courage of the Iraqi people and the results of recent Iraqi elections, as far as the out-turn was concerned. We are pursuing our common engagement in Iraq. The United States and the [EU] stand together in support of the Iraqi people and the new Iraqi government, which will soon come into action. To that end, should the new Iraqi government request it, the United States and European Union are prepared to co-host an international conference to provide a forum to encourage and coordinate international support for Iraq.

We spoke at length about the Middle East, and in particular, about Lebanon -- Lebanon, this country which is lurching from misfortune to misfortune, from tragedy to tragedy. And we condemned vigorously the assassination of the former Prime Minister. We insisted on full compliance and immediate compliance with the Security Council resolution, and we, the U.S. and the European Union, have called for a joint committee of investigation.

I leave this to the President of the U.S.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Mr. Prime Minister, thanks. Jose, it's good to see you, sir, thank you. I'm looking forward to having dinner with you and Javier Solana and Jean-Claude tonight.

Listen, it's an honor to be here. I appreciate the invitation. You called an extraordinary meeting, and I'm honored you did so. My first trip after my inauguration was to Europe, and that's the way it should be, because Europe and the United States are close friends.

In my talk to the leaders in the room, I started by saying this: There should be no doubt in your mind that my government and the United States wants the European project to succeed. It's in our interests that Europe be strong. It's in our interests that the European Union work out whatever differences there are and become a continued, viable, strong partner. It's in our interests for commercial reasons; we trade a lot. And I talked about the need to continue trade and to work out our disputes in a sensible way.

It's in our interests because the values that caused the European Union to exist in the first place -- the values of human rights and human dignity and freedom -- are the same values we share. And we have

an opportunity to work together to spread those values. We talked about Iraq, and I appreciate the contributions and the new suggestion. I appreciate your contributions in Afghanistan.

We talked about how hopeful the Middle Eastern peace situation looks. And I told the leaders that my government will be very much involved in the process. We believe peace is within reach. Therefore, I want to work with the European Union to achieve that objective.

We talked about aid, the need to work together to fight disease, like HIV/AIDS, which we are doing and will continue to do. I brought up global warming. I said that the Kyoto debate is beyond us, as far as I'm concerned; now is the time to focus on our abilities and research and capacity to develop technologies to make the air cleaner, so that our people can have the standard of living they expect, at the same time that we're good stewards of the Earth.

So it was a very optimistic, hopeful meeting. I appreciate so very much the hospitality of the leaders, and I'm anxious to continue our dialogue after this press conference.

PRESIDENT BARROSO: Thank you. I think that, on behalf of the European Commission, that the visit of President Bush is really a very, very important one. Europe and America have reconnected. This visit has highlighted all that unites Europe and America; it has focused the eyes of the world on all that we share. I believe that the relationship between the United States and Europe is the world's strongest, most comprehensive and strategically important partnership. The United States, a united Europe, this is really the indispensable partnership.

If you look at the scale of the challenges ahead -- like terrorism, poverty -- one thing is certain: These are not challenges that any nation can tackle alone. Europe knows that; the United States knows that. Even working together, it's not sure that we will solve these problems because of their magnitude. But we must try, and I believe that together we will prevail. The reality is that the world is safer and more prosperous when Europe and America work together as global partners.

Today, we have had opportunity to discuss many of the challenges on the transatlantic agenda: Middle East, on transatlantic trade. There is a common outlook on many fronts. I believe that European Union and America will be very strong partners in supporting the efforts of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to move towards a lasting peace in the Middle East. We know that President Bush and America are fully engaged. There is a unique opportunity for peace-making.

The European Union and the United States are committed to continue to bring prosperity and solidarity across the broader Middle East, building on the Europe Union's side on a decade of dialogue and assistance through the Barcelona process.

On Iraq, the Commission is, and will remain, committed to a stable and democratic country. We will continue to offer substantial political and financial support for the process of democratic transition. And we hope that if the new Iraqi government makes a concrete proposal for joint action, we'll be ready to assist.

We also have a shared commitment to development, and I would add that we must measure ourselves by results, helping countries to progress towards the Millennium goals. We must give urgent attention to Africa. We need a quantum leap in terms of resources and policy.

We'll talk later about how we can work together, also, to fight climate change. The United States and Europe, I think I can say this, agree that climate change constitutes a major challenge. Now we need to develop new methods of working together to get results that are effective over the long-term. President Bush mentioned, for instance, the prospects offered now by new technologies. We are very much wishing to work together with the United States in that field.

The United States and Europe are the two largest economies in the world. We are determined to deepen the transatlantic economic partnership. Trade and investment are the bedrock of transatlantic relations. We want to build on this. Our common objective must be to remove obstacles to transatlantic trade and investment, as well as making a success of Doha development round, which is a catalyst for global growth. Europe is committed to promote growth and jobs, through knowledge, innovation and opportunity. That is what the Lisbon agenda stands for.

This visit has given new life to the partnership between Europe and United States. I believe that transatlantic relations have turned a corner. A new listening partnership is emerging. The challenge now is to turn this new spirit into reality, and show the world we are able to translate it into concrete results. Thank you.

Q A question to U.S. President and to the Prime Minister of Luxembourg. This EU-U.S. summit fueled speculation that there will be now two transatlantic tracks on foreign and security policy. One is the good old NATO, and then the other one is the new one that's direct EU-U.S. strategic talk. So is this meeting between EU and U.S., this special summit, a kind of historic foundation of a new second track outside of NATO on EU-U.S. relations?

PRESIDENT JUNCKER: I always wanted to make history, but I don't think that this time is the moment for doing so. We have an ongoing transatlantic dialogue inside NATO. It can be improved, and we discussed this, this morning together with the President. And we have an ongoing transatlantic dialogue inside the framework between U.S. and European Union. We'll have another summit by the end of the summer, so in June in Washington, where we are trying to deliver as concrete results as possible, on the basis of the good atmosphere we laid down in the course of this meeting. We shouldn't make a distinction between NATO and between the European Union. These are two different things, but to us, one family relation and links between the two. This is not a question, or is a question and --

PRESIDENT BUSH: I agree. I mean, I don't view these two meetings as mutually exclusive meetings. I think they're both important, they're both a part of an important dialogue with Europe. NATO was set up for security matters. The EU is set up as a way to make Europe function better, to be able to achieve objectives for her people. And the United States looks forward to working with Europe both within NATO and as the European Union.

I've been meeting with the European Union a lot since I've been the President. This isn't the first meeting -- your question kind of made it sound like, he finally showed up and met. This isn't the first time we've met with the European Union in my presidency. As a matter of fact, we do so on an annual basis. And I look forward to the meetings and they're constructive and they're important.

Plante.

Q Mr. President, the Russians seem to be pushing back against some of the things that you've said, Mr. President. Their ambassador to the U.S. wrote today that "there cannot be a sole standard for democracy." So what I'm asking is just how flexible you think the standards for democracy can be?

PRESIDENT BUSH: First, we've got a constructive relationship with Russia, and that's important. I've got a very good personal relationship with President Putin, and that's important. And it's important because it enables me and our country to remind President Putin that democracies are based upon rule of law and the respect for human rights and human dignity and a free press -- you'll be happy to hear -- and that a constructive relationship allows me to remind him that I believe Russia is a European country, and European countries embrace those very same values that America embraces. And I'm looking forward to continuing my dialogue with him.

Q A question for President Bush. President, you came to Europe with a very constructive speech. And, indeed, you said very few things the Europeans couldn't agree with. But actions speak louder, so do you actually commit to taking more into account the European position on international matters? And do you actually commit to, for instance, prevent from launching action, strikes against a sovereign member state, state like Iran, without a mandate from the United Nations Security Council?

PRESIDENT BUSH: You know, look, let me talk about Iran; that's a place where I'm getting good advice from European partners. After all, Great Britain, Germany and France are negotiating with the Ayatollahs to achieve a common objective, something that we all want, and that is for them not to have a nuclear weapon. It's in our interests for them not to have a nuclear weapon.

It's also in our interests for them not to continue funding terrorist organizations like Hezbollah, which has the desire to stop the Middle East peace process from going forward. And so these are great interlocutors on behalf of the position we share. So there's an example of concrete action.

I'm also looking forward to working with our European partners on the Middle Eastern peace process. Tony Blair is hosting a very important meeting in London, and that is a meeting at which President Abbas will hear that the United States and the EU is desirous of helping this good man set up a democracy in the Palestinian territories, so that Israel will have a democratic partner in peace.

I laid out a vision, the first U.S. President to do so, which said that our vision is two states, Israel and Palestine, living side-by-side in peace. That is the goal. And I look forward to working concretely with our European friends and allies to achieve that goal.

And finally, this notion that the United States is getting ready to attack Iran is simply ridiculous. And having said that, all options are on the table.

Bob.

Q Mr. President, I wanted to follow up on Plante's question, if I could. I wanted to follow up on --

PRESIDENT BUSH: Is this a question on Russia?

Q Sir?

PRESIDENT BUSH: This is a question on Russia?

Q Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT BUSH: Okay.

Q Do you believe, sir, that Russia is backsliding in its march toward democracy? What troubles you the most about that, and how is that going to shape your conversation with President Putin two days from now?

PRESIDENT BUSH: I like a country with a free press -- an independent, free press. And there has been some moves where the Russian government, I guess for better use of the word, didn't license certain members of the press. I think it's very important that President Putin hear not only from me in a private way, which he will, but also hear some of the concerns I heard around the table today. There were some concerns from the Baltic nations. And I look forward to carrying their message that it's very important for President Putin to make very clear why he's made some of the decisions he's made, and as well as respect his neighbors.

And I'm confident that can be done in a cordial way. It's important for us to keep a constructive relationship with Russia. We've got a lot to do together. We've got a lot of common projects that will make people more secure around the world, one of which is to make sure that nuclear stockpiles are safeguarded. I look forward to talking to him about that. But I also will remind him that the United States believes strongly in democratic values.

Thank you.

PRESIDENT JUNCKER: That was it. Thank you.