

BRUSSELS FORUM 2009

BBC World Debate

Press Conference

From the floor

So I want to ask a question. Mr Obama will make one of his first visits to Turkey. What's the meaning of it in global terms, and what do you see for Turkey as a potential role in the global environment?

Ms Anne-Marie Slaughter – Director of Policy Planning, US Dept of State

I think the Secretary's visit to Turkey, and the President's upcoming visit to Turkey, underline the importance that the United States puts on our partnership with Turkey, and on Turkey's role, both with respect to Europe and to the Middle East, and also Central Asia. So it is an emphasis on the importance of our partnership.

From the floor

Just a quick follow-up. Do you think, or could you call this a strategic partnership, in real terms?

Ms Anne-Marie Slaughter

I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

From the floor

Would you call the Turkish/United States relations based in Brussels – so everything is here – can you call it a real strategic partnership? Because that word is used too much, but it's not fulfilled most of the time.

Ms Anne-Marie Slaughter

Well, I think the United States and Turkey, they've worked very closely together as NATO allies and bilaterally for 50 years, and the issues now in the Middle East, in Central Asia, are critical to both our security, and we are working together on them.

[Jensen Jan – PBC]

Thank you. Jensen Jan from PBC. I have a question about the financial crisis. Everyone's talking about that, and you mentioned that it's maybe a cooperation between the US and EU on that. I have a question maybe for both Mr Carl Bildt and Ms Slaughter. How do you think the financial crisis means for European or for American? Everyone's talking about the difficulties. Maybe we also could talk about the challenges or opportunities. Or what does it really mean? It's maybe calling for the integrations, things like that? Thank you.

The Hon. Carl Bildt - Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sweden

It very clearly illustrates that we are in the same boat. If we didn't know it before, now we know it. And we are in the same boat, and there's a storm blowing, and waters are extremely choppy, and there are several others in the boat, it has to be said, as well. It's only by dealing with it together. There's no national solution, be that Swedish or American or British or whatever. It is the first truly global financial and economic crisis.

So I think what will happen, irrespective of how successful we are with G10, 20 or managing the different issues that are there, I think there is a recognition that we must work far more together on management of the global issues. And few things are more important than the global economy.

David [Brunstrom] – Reuters

Yes, it's David Brunstrom from Reuters. I wonder if I could ask Lord Malloch Brown and Anne Slaughter about how deep they think the divisions are on the issue of stimulus at G20? And how important will it be to have a free trade element coming out of that?

Lord Mark Malloch Brown – Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN, United Kingdom

Well, look, let me just say that I think the differences are in part definitional, but at times like this, inevitably as the press moves towards 2 April, they are blown up as more than that. The fact is, every country stimulating its economy, but they're all starting from different places, and I think the Finance Minister's made it clear in the G20 preparation meeting last weekend that everybody would do what it takes, and the IMF has set a broad global benchmark of 2% this year, 2% next year.

When you count in the stabilisers, which in Europe are so much part of this, the welfare payments we make as unemployment roles grow, we're on track. So in a sense, it's a false dichotomy which is being set up. It reflects the fact that there are concerns that we not build up so much debt that we crowd out other people's access to financial markets. So there is a debate, but it's not this sort of either/or debate that people have.

The second issue on trade, let me say as someone who has, for our Prime Minister been travelling the world on doing the G20, I have never seen an issue race up the agenda as rapidly as trade is, because in the last couple of months you've seen a collapse of global exports and trade at a much faster rate than the decline in the global economy as a whole.

In some Asian countries you've seen as much as a 30% contraction over just a couple of months. In some African countries – Botswana, for example, which is mainly a diamond exporter, and a very successful one – didn't sell a single diamond in November.

So in the light of this, the call for free trade to be protected, for monitoring mechanisms to make sure people don't back-track on their trade commitments, to add in trade finance, to make sure we can get the wheels of trade going again, that issue is racing up there to join the stimulus and regulation, if you like, as the big issue of this forthcoming summit.

Ms Anne-Marie Slaughter

I can't add to it. I would agree with that.

From the floor

I have a question for Dr Slaughter and possibly if Robert Kagan also wants to get in. There was this interesting exchange during the debate on the role of the German troops in Afghanistan when [inaudible] made the point that the Germans pacifies the north. So Dr Slaughter, what is your take on that? In the light of the upcoming NATO summit, how would you comment on that, and the German role in Afghanistan? Maybe Robert Kagan also wants to comment briefly because he has a slightly different position on that, I think.

Ms Anne-Marie Slaughter

I won't comment on the German role on pacifying the north. I don't think it was intended to be taken that way. What I would say is that the American review of our strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan certainly recognises the importance of policing, of a wide range of activities that are needed to strengthen the institutions in Afghanistan, institutions of effective governance, and that is part of the German contribution.

From the floor

Last night at the EU summit press conference, the European Commission President Barroso, he said about the WTO, the [Haroun] negotiations, that the EU is ready to quote him, but I don't know honestly if our partners are ready as we are. He was referring to the United States and India. And would you like to comment on that? The second question is that he mentioned that the reforms for these international

financial institutions like IMF should be ready by June this year. So how do you see that also coming? Thank you.

The Hon. Carl Bildt

Well, on the [do around] I think that President Barroso was just stating the facts. There have been a lot of tricky issues that we've sorted out, primarily also between Europeans and Americans in the do around. But at the end of the day, that wasn't the problem. The problem was from our point of view, what we consider fairly minor issues, primarily between India and the US.

So what President Barroso said was if they sort them out, we are certainly ready for that particular deal. Indeed, we are eager for that particular deal. On the other issues, yes, he stated the ambition that I think was also expressed in the final conclusions that we issued a couple of hours ago.

GMF Moderator

So thank you very much. This was the first of several press availabilities. You'll all get the chance to ask questions. Thank you.

[End]