

BRUSSELS FORUM 2009

Closing Remarks

The Hon. Pieter De Crem

Minister of Defence, Belgium

Ladies and gentlemen, first I would like to thank the organisers of the Brussels Forum for the impeccable hosting of this high-level meeting. And can I make a special mention of Craig Kennedy, the President of the German Marshall Fund, and of his team. A job very well done, sir. Congratulations.

I think, ladies and gentlemen, that the 2009 edition is more than ever a great success, and the Brussels Forum remains an exceptional gathering of a broad range of speakers and guests from both sides of the Atlantic, and also beyond the Atlantic, and they enjoy world-wide fame for their expertise.

I would like to mention, in particular, the contribution of Robert Casey and Bob Bennett, the co-chairmen of the United States Congressional Delegation. They brought with them not only members, but also the attention of the American Congress. And for the next edition, you will see me pleading for your counterparts of the European Parliament to give even bigger attention to this event than it was this weekend.

Ladies and gentlemen, the added value of an informal meeting like this, where everybody can openly share opinions about the major changes that the transatlantic community is now facing, is rather unique. Brussels, the capital of Europe, is the place for such a happening. This year's edition is quite special, as it is the first Forum since the beginning of the financial crisis and which evolved in the economic crisis that we are now facing. Many ideas put forward during this Forum deserve our special attention, and I would like to share some with you.

One of the common features throughout the different interventions is that the key question is not to estimate how long the crisis will last but actually how the world will look once the crisis is over. And once the world economy [breezes] again, it will not pick up the thread where it broke off. It won't be business as usual. Within a changing context, we need to decide on a new direction, even though it is difficult to have a clear view on the finishing point.

This awareness of profound change has clearly prevailed here in the last few days. It gives us an idea of the magnitude of the challenges we will face in the upcoming years. Three years ago, in 2006, former Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed a similar feeling in his farewell speech. He said the scale of the challenges now dwarf what we faced only ten years ago. They are different, they are deeper, they are bigger, hammered out on the anvil of forces, global in nature, sweeping the world. In 1997, he said, the challenges we faced were essentially British. Today they are essentially global. In 1997, he said, we barely mentioned China. Not any more. Ten years ago, energy was not on the agenda. Immigration hardly raised. Terrorism meant the IRA. Not any more.

Ladies and gentlemen, this weekend, here at the Brussels Forum, many of you said the scale of the challenges now dwarf what we faced only six months ago. Banks were the most trusted institutions on our planet. Not any more. The long boom of global economy seemed unstoppable. Not any more. The desired scale for a corporation was a global scale. Not any more. Everything will be changed and look different. However, the current deep crisis leaves the challenges presented by Prime Minister Blair three years ago unaltered. Reconciling openness and the huge potential of globalisation with security is our main challenge now.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us turn to the first question. How to be open? From the various discussions this weekend, I remember that the transatlantic approach can have a meaningful future only within a framework that is receptive to the global context we are living in. We all realise that transatlantic stability and prosperity can only be guaranteed when there are no armed conflicts elsewhere. We do not have the possibility any more to close our borders for the fallout of events occurring in the other parts of the world, be it in Africa, be it in the Middle East, be it in Afghanistan, or even in Mexico. Closing our borders is just not an option. Not in an economic, not in a political, nor in a security point of view. We definitely bear the consequences of what is happening in Globalistan, and that is something when I use the words of a former Prime Minister of Belgium and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mark Eyskens.

The changes we are facing are global. In addition, they are happening simultaneously. Tackling these global challenges will not be an easy task. Globalisation touches daily life, and it has become very tangible for each and every one of us on this globe. Take, for example, the African families struggling against the food crisis, or so many paterfamilias throughout the world faced with financial losses, or with the hardship of being evicted from their homes. Should we be surprised that some of these people are blaming globalisation for their hardship? Also, and it was mentioned this morning, an obvious decline of public support for international institutions. All of us are confronted with the uphill task of curbing this negative trend back into a positive one.

To achieve this goal, we are looking for a new balance between global and local. Half a century ago, or even more, Gandhi said that it is possible for one to be an

internationalist without being a nationalist. Our nationalism can be no peril to other nations inasmuch as we will exploit none, just as we will allow none to exploit us.

The search for a new balance between global and local often appears to be very vague. In the coming months this search will become very tangible. Within a fortnight, NATO will present a first draft of the Declaration on Alliance Security. Within a few months, the European Union hopes to complete the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty, so that the main institutions, European Parliament, Commission and Council, could start with new tools, more adapted to the new world context and more able to cope with the present crisis. And in the coming years, besides concluding the WTO negotiations, global negotiations might be launched on drafting a Bretton Woods 2 agreement.

Ladies and gentlemen, this brings us to our second question. The highly important one of security. How can we feel sufficiently secure in an open world? None of the global challenges is an isolated phenomenon. Allow me to give an example. One of the answers to the shortage of oil reserves was biofuel. Biofuel is not just a renewable energy source, it is only a much cleaner energy source. Within a few years, rapeseed and other crops were cultivated on a massive scale. Last year, it turned out that these crops put such a strain on the available agricultural area that it contributed to the skyrocketing of world food prices. Some of these countries are now referred to as flashpoints - regions in which armed conflicts look imminent. Moreover, the pressure on the available agricultural area prompted some people to cut down and burn more rainforest.

This example makes one thing very clear. We should not tackle any global challenge in an isolated way. Each and every global challenge requires a global and a comprehensive approach. Not just NATO needs that comprehensive approach. Every global challenge does. Such a comprehensive approach consists of more than the combination of diplomacy, defence and development co-operation. Such a comprehensive approach also includes the simultaneous tackling of economic, financial and ecological factors.

When a reporter asked President John Kennedy how he would tackle Communism, he answered, "We will need more than air power, financial power or manpower. What we need is the power of our spirits." Kennedy expressed at that moment a very true essence of any comprehensive approach. We will need to mobilise the power of our spirits, and in order to mobilise the power of our spirits we need trust.

In the end, it was a lack of trust that almost broke the backbone of our global financial system. It was a lack of trust that has stopped us from moving ahead in tackling climate change much sooner and much faster. Trust is today's most valuable good. If you want to feel secure, first we will need to rebuild our trust in our open society. In strengthening the bonds within NATO, trust between all member states is key. Let us therefore move forward in the field of intelligence sharing. The same is true for the

relations between NATO and the European Union, and their relations with other international institutions. And in recreating relations between lenders and borrowers, trust is absolutely key.

Ladies and gentlemen, let's face the paradox. The institutions which, until last year, were at the top of the trust meter in opinion polls - the banks - are today bailed out with a considerable injection of trust by institutions which are usually at the bottom of the trusted list, namely governments. Since the private sector is facing hard times, many look towards governments and politics for aid and for solution. Governments are searching a new balance today. The scope of the national economic recovery plans has again fed the public debate on the scope of government's role in economy. In the years to come, politics will go in search of the right and new balance between states so big that they crush citizens' sense for initiative, and states so light that citizens might perish, as the French poet Paul Valery expressed it so aptly.

The political decisions that will be made today, and the fundamental choices in the next five to ten years, will determine the future of the coming generations. To every politician, it is an honour and a privilege to assume such assignment in these demanding times. However, the path to a better future is paved with many unpopular cobblestones. Quoting President Roosevelt, he once said, "Assuming leadership is a terrifying experience. When you dare to look behind you, you realise that nobody is following."

Populism, ladies and gentlemen, is not a policy. Politicians who keep tuned to the voters of Main Street know that they too often do not agree. In the forthcoming years, politicians will, more than ever, need the courage to tell to the people what they need to know and not what they want to hear. In the forthcoming years, politicians will have to agree on what is best for the people and have to have the courage to act upon it. The real mean of expression for a politician is through action and result orientation, much more than through popularity.

Ladies and gentlemen, leadership is important, yet politics is the right of many. I was therefore very pleased to see a sharp rise in political interest among young people in the United States, participating actively in the vote. I am convinced that this wave of political enthusiasm will soon cross the Atlantic and also spread among our youth here in Europe.

Some politicians promise paradise with a regularity that rivals with a Swiss clock. I can tell you that these are not to be trusted. Politics is in everything, but not everything is in politics. Politics, consequently, needs a comprehensive approach.

That is also the strength of the Brussels Forum. Indeed, every topic, every statement, is commented upon by experts from diverse social circles. The participants of the Brussels Forum all realise that nobody has a silver bullet for any of the global challenges that we face.

Ladies and gentlemen, this weekend we have heard a tremendous amount of clear-cut analysis and innovative proposals. I would like to add to these statements an African saying - when you pray, move your feet. When you really believe in an idea, when you are really convinced of its value, then you should never forget to act.

Let this be the final remark at this year's Brussels Forum. Let us now act upon our ideals. Thank you very much.

Craig Kennedy

President, The German Marshall Fund of the United States

Thank you so much for those very thoughtful remarks. Very thoughtful and inspiring remarks.

In closing - I will take the last closing remark! I won't start to dance, but I think we should act.

I first want to thank all of the participants here. There's several ingredients that make the Brussels Forum great, but the best is the people that actually sit in the audience, ask the questions, argue in the bars at night, go to the breakfast sessions and ask sometimes surprising questions. It really doesn't work in this format without great participants, and we're very very grateful for all of you.

We're also -- I -- There's lots of people at GMF, and at Bruegel and elsewhere, that help us put together the various sessions here, but I do want to single out four people that are really - maybe not indispensable, but absolutely essential. And that's Ron Asmus, John Richardson, Mark Fischer and Karen Donfried. These are the four people that really work -- These are the people that will meet next week to start putting together the agenda for the next Brussels Forum. That's how long it takes to pull all these pieces together.

I think lunch is served. We look forward to seeing all of you next year, at the Brussels Forum.

[End]