

BRUSSELS FORUM 2009

Opening Dinner

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[Audio starts in progress] This is exactly what Vice President John Biden understood in his speech in Munich: America will do more. There's the good news, but the bad news is that America will ask for more of its partners.

Third, I really think that we cannot expect that foreign policy issues will always be given the top priority by Obama's administration. Let's put ourselves in his shoes: we have the worst crisis since 1929, and the American President will have to spend far more time on the state of the US economy, so it is going to be a mainly domestic agenda.

Fourth, it is evident that Euro-centric days are over. The relative importance of Europe is declining, both economically and demographically. The global power, political and economic balance is being transformed. I agree with scholar, Richard Haass, who claims that the current arrangement of international relations is somewhat non-polar. This development is underlined by estimates showing that by the year 2050 the US and Europe will only make up 7% of the global population. This is certainly reflected in economic power and in the ability of the West to influence world affairs.

Fifth, I'd like to mention the challenges that NATO is currently facing. This Organisation has always been regarded a pillar of trans-Atlantic co-operation. And we could talk about this subject for hours. The Alliance must find answers to a new strategic situation of its new [asymmetrical fess] and shifts in economic power, as well as in the security balance.

At the same time, the deployment of military forces alone is not enough. Civilian operations are equally needed. Comprehensive approach is needed. Afghanistan and Iraq are an important test.

And here I come to the point: actions speak louder than words. There are a lot of words ahead of us in order to fill the Euro-Atlantic co-operation with real content. I do not believe that the right response to the American call for a more pro-active attitude [and] on the part of the European Union is excessive and, indeed, unrealistic ambition to build its own independent defensive system.

But don't get me wrong; I am very much aware of the strategic need of Europe assuming responsibility for its own security and defence. Perhaps over a period of time, effective structures will be built that will help Europe to overcome its current inabilities to find agreement and promote its common interests. The biggest mistake would be to miss the window of opportunity opened by the new administration, instead of choosing the down-to-earth approach we would fall victim to our over-ambitious objectives.

Throughout the twentieth century, the Euro-Atlantic relationship formed the backbone of both the European and the global security and prosperity, and even the new world order cannot do without it. At the same time, it is essential that America and Europe bring not only common values to this relationship, but also combine their specific abilities. Henry Kissinger once stated America needs to learn to discipline itself into a strategy of gradualism that seeks greatness in the accumulation of the attainable. And the same thing is equally valid for Europe. Let each of us do what we know the best in this common enterprise.

Thank you very much for your attention.

[End]