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Speech Verhofstadt - 11 september

11 September 2001. Everybody knows exactly where they were when they heard the news. This is the kind of news that arrives only once in a lifetime, news that leaves you feeling aghast, news you cannot immediately situate, news that is engraved upon your memory for ever. Because the world was changed for ever. The world was changed first and foremost for so many families who lost a father, a mother, a son or a daughter. Our thoughts go out to them first of all. The images CNN broadcast were burnt onto the retinas of billions of people around the globe. America under attack. I think we all felt under attack. The feeling of impotence that the world we had known until then was collapsing before our eyes. The hopes of a better world to come that emerged after 1989 were instantly swept away. 11 September signalled the start of a new and gloomy epoch, a new period of anxiety, terrorism and insecurity. 11 September 2001. I, too, remember exactly where I was, in Yalta. The symbol of the outbreak of the Cold War. Thirteen years after the end of the conflict between East and West, between dictatorship and democracy, between slavery and freedom. I was in Yalta as President of the European Council, together with the High Representative, Javier Solana, and the European Commission President, Romano Prodi. Our visit was called off immediately and we travelled back to Brussels post-haste. It was on the way back that the news came through about the second plane, about the plane that crashed into the Pentagon and about the failed attack. Sitting in a plane for a few hours at such a moment filled us with an overwhelming feeling of impotence. The flight seemed to last for ever. However, the fact that the members of the European Union Troika were sitting together in one place did offer one advantage. We were able to put our heads together to work out a European programme in response to the events. A European anti-terrorist programme, a programme to facilitate information-sharing and promote cooperation between the police forces and between the courts, which led to the introduction of the European Warrant of Arrest. On our return from Yalta, every one of us was also convinced that such a European programme could be developed solely if we cooperated more than ever with the United States. The attack on the Twin Towers was not only an attack on the United States, it was an attack on democracy, an attack on freedom, an attack on Western civilisation. In my capacity as President of the European Union, I paid a visit shortly afterwards to the President of the United States. Our transatlantic bond is after all a bond of solidarity. On 11 September all Europeans were Americans, as in the case of the attacks in London, Madrid and Istanbul, when all Americans were Europeans. Neither the United States nor Europe can ever accept such barbarous attacks. Neither Europe nor the United States can allow terrorism, fundamentalism or extremism to dominate our global society. We cannot allow Al Qaida and its affiliates to plunge the world into a state of anxiety, uncertainty and chaos in the name of whatever belief or conviction. Consequently, we have no other choice but to cooperate. We have no other choice but to concentrate all the democratic forces into this complex battle. Because complexity is the operative word in this combat. This is 'a complex battle for hearts and minds'. In order to extinguish the fire of terrorism and hate we first of all have to remove the fuel of terrorism. This by no means easy task calls for long-term, relentless efforts. This is why it is more important than ever for us to put the transatlantic tensions, controversies and irritations behind us and consign them to history. Now, more than ever before, we need to pull on the same rope. Now, more than ever before we have to work together for a solution in the Middle East. Our country, too, has made numerous efforts in support of this freedom. Our soldiers, too, are contributing to the security situation Afghanistan. Our people, too, are present in Lebanon, helping to prevent a further outbreak of violence. Our country, too, is lending its full support to the negotiations with Iran. We also have to join forces to do our utmost to eradicate the sources that are fuelling the hate, misery and bitterness in the Middle East. Only if we continue to work together can we look forwards to the prospect of lasting peace in this complex region. Ladies and Gentlemen, I revisited Ground Zero a few months ago. As I looked at this emptiness, the feelings I had during the flight from Yalta to Brussels unrolled in my head again like a film. Painful feelings.

But never feelings of despondency. The sight of the new plans for Ground Zero strengthens my conviction that there is nothing as resilient as freedom, nothing as strong as democracy, nothing as important as our free and open society. These are the values we stand for, these are the values no-one can take away from us. Thank you for your attention.