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## speech Verhofstadt - Brussels Forum

SPEECH BY PRIME MINISTER GUY VERHOFSTADT AT THE OPENING OF THE SECOND BRUSSELS FORUM.

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Dear colleagues from Europe and the United States, Ladies and gentlemen, It is my pleasure to open this Brussels Forum, just like last year. And just like last year, the agenda and list of participants are. The forum also comes at a good time. Right before the EU-US summit. So, in addition to this formal summit, this forum makes it possible to discuss global events in a more informal way. After all, it is mainly during informal meetings that people say what they really think. That is why, three years ago, I launched my proposal for the Trans-Atlantic Gymnich. And I am very pleased that it is working well. As became clear once again this week. That is also why I, right from the very start, supported the Brussels Forum - an idea developed by the German Marshall Fund. This is an ideal place to meet and think outside the box. Ladies and Gentlemen, I have been prime minister since 1999. Much has happened over the last eight years that. The 9/11, Madrid, London and Istanbul attacks. The war in Iraq. The Laeken Declaration. The failure of the European Constitution. But also democracy in Georgia, Ukraine and Congo. The enlargement of the European Union by 12 new Member States. The Kyoto agreements. Our country has always adopted a clear position on all of these events. I want to do that today as well. I want to examine a number of key issues that concern us all. I want to provide food for the debates that will take place in the days ahead. Let me start close to home, with Europe. You know how passionate I am about Europe. And how concerned I am too. I truly wish for the EU to become a global player. A player which takes necessary measures and which can play a positive role in global events. That is why, in the weeks and months ahead, much attention will once again be paid to the European Constitution. For foreigners, it may be surprising or even a bit irritating to see us Europeans once again returning to their internal debates about institutions, powers, responsibilities, future policy objectives and working methods. I can understand that. But it is necessary. Without a new treaty that makes the Union more efficient and more democratic, there is a risk of Europe becoming a geopolitical and economic lame duck. That is not what we want. Nor is it what the Americans want. That is why we need a federal Europe, a United States of Europe - as I call it, like the American did with the Convention of Philadelphia in 1789. A Europe that integrates further while continuing to expand. After all, the deepening and expansion of peace, democracy and prosperity were the vocation of the founding fathers fifty years ago. It must and shall remain the vocation of Europe today. Whether we use the term "constitution" to describe the treaty we need for this purpose, is of secondary importance. But in my view, it would not be prudent to deviate sharply from the current Constitutional Treaty. We had a compromise, a good compromise that would make Europe into a tool that could meet the hopes and expectations of our citizens. And of the international community. For instance, the Constitution calls for the establishment of a real minister of foreign affairs and the development of an external support service. There Constitution makes new initiatives possible on defence. This marks a major step forward in European foreign policy. It would be most unfortunate and even irresponsible to simply throw out such important things along with the constitution. Europe needs a joint foreign policy and defence. Such a European defence means a stronger NATO, not a weaker one. After all, the stronger the European pillar, the more efficiently Trans-Atlantic objectives can be reached. For instance, in the Balkans. It was a disgrace for Europe that fifty years after the Second World War we were unable to resolve a war on our own continent. Once again, the United States risked the lives of its boys for us. We are thankful for

that. But Europe's discord and impotence was shameful. That is why we must - now more than ever - work together to ensure that peace in the Balkans is permanent. We must bring the Balkan states into the European Union. And the support of the United States is important to that end. We do not want a vacuum in the Balkans. We cannot allow Serbia, Bosnia or Kosovo to be black holes. That is not good for us, and even worse for them. Consequently, I am calling on the international community to assume its full responsibilities. The US and Russia naturally have an important role to play here. But first the EU must be united. In my view, we must follow four principles for Kosovo. One, Ahtisaari's proposal must be used as the basis for a solution. Two, the decision on status will always be based on compliance with standards. Three, the matter must be resolved in the short term. But the Security Council may not do anything rash. We must not make Kosovo into a new bone of contention. And four, Kosovo is Kosovo. A solution for Kosovo is a one-of-a-kind solution, a unique solution for one of the most complex regions in the world. If we succeed, we will have finally turned a black page in the history of our continent. Then, in that part of Europe, we will have successfully established peace, democracy and prosperity. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the Middle East. Two years ago, after the death of Arafat, we thought that there was a window of opportunity. But little progress has been made since then. The misery in that part of the world has not decreased. The region has not become more secure. The tension between Sunnis and Shiites has not diminished. In the Middle East entire generations are growing up without hope, without any prospect of improvement. New generations are raised on hatred. Everyone realises that we cannot buy any more time. The longer we wait, the more serious it gets. The Trans-Atlantic partners have a great deal of responsibility. The roadmap was noble. But without the beginnings of implementation that can lead to mutual trust, the roadmap is virtually meaningless. Moreover, we are once again seeing discord. A great deal of discord also in our countries themselves. That is not abnormal. That is the way things are in a democracy. But it is high time we set our discord aside for a while. That we shake hands. Genuine political will must be able to inspire the Quartet to resume talks with local and regional stakeholders. Let us quickly schedule another meeting where the international community can actually give fresh impetus to the Middle East peace process. Brussels is certainly prepared to make the facilities available. Trans-Atlantic cooperation holds the key to many solutions. The Doha Development Round, for instance. Now and then, there is a spark of hope. Fresh momentum. But then it fades away. Ideas emerge for bilateral trade talks. Protectionist reflexes regain the upper hand. The globalisation of our economy is moving ahead at full speed. With positive as well as negative results. The centre of gravity of the international economy is gradually moving to the East, where - and let us be quite clear about this - they do not always play by international rules. The development aspect of the Doha Round therefore must not be underestimated. Good arrangements will ensure better market operation, less conflict and greater security. And I therefore hope that the EU-US summit this weekend will take another step forward in this direction. I must admit that my expectations for the summit are somewhat lower in terms of the climate and energy. Nevertheless, we have reached a turning point. Following the various alarming reports by experts from around the world, we can no longer keep our heads in the sand. We have to face facts. We have to take decisions in the interest of future generations. The European Council in March sent powerful signals and made far-reaching decisions. I am calling on our American friends to do the same. The inconvenient truth may well be that we have no other choice than to reach international agreements. New agreements based on new facts. New agreements that this time have everyone's support. The last point for which I would advocate greater Trans-Atlantic effort today is Africa. In past decades, Africa has been a continent of tragedy. The continent where hopes for improvement were remote. Devastating diseases, wars, human rights violations and genocide. We, the international community, cannot let this happen. We have the resources. We must simply have the courage to use them. Take child soldiers, maybe the most tragic example. Today, in the 21st century, thousands and thousands of children are being forced to fight and commit cruelties. Each and every one of these is a blot on the soul of human civilisation. Unbearable blots that we cannot ignore. We must assume our responsibility, on behalf of humanity. Hence the need to take three major measures. I talked about this earlier this week with the special representative of the UN Secretary-General. First and foremost, there should be a new international treaty on the arms trade with a legal prohibition on

exporting arms to countries with child soldiers. Second, it must be agreed internationally to stop providing development aid to those countries that include child soldiers in their army. The framework for this already exists. UN resolution 1612. This resolution encourages those groups that use child soldiers to develop an action plan, with deadlines, for putting an end to such violations. Those groups are also on a "name and shame" list. So the instrument exists. But naming and shaming will not solve the problem. We must impose sanctions on these criminal countries. But we have to go even further and that brings me to my third point. Criminals must be brought to justice. That is the essence of the rule of law, one of our basic principles. That is why those who abuse children in such a criminal way must be brought before the International Criminal Court. But I would like to come back to development aid. Europe has not forgotten how the US helped us get back on our feet with the Marshall Plan. We are still thankful for that. The German Marshall Fund bears witness to that. The US realised very clearly that democratic development must always go hand in hand with economic development. The same holds true for Africa. Urgent action is needed for Africa. Sixty billion euros. According to a UN study, that is what is needed to deal with all of the core problems in Africa. To provide each and every African with clean water, plumbing, basic health care and education. And to do that in the very short term. Sixty billion euro. I think, that is peanuts for the rich West. That is peanuts for the Trans-Atlantic community. So let us get started today. Ladies and gentlemen, After eight years as prime minister, I have seen a great deal on the international scene. And I've learned a lot too. I have learned a few lessons. Lessons I will take with me into the years ahead. So, what are they? We need more Europe. A deeper, broader Europe. Closing off the road to integration means giving up an international political role for Europe. The European Union is a model for other regions in the world. We must continue proving that our model works. But not only do we need more Europe. We also need more multilateralism, more international agreements, because they are the way forward towards greater civilisation. We also need stronger Trans-Atlantic ties, since the US and the EU are and remain the driving force for greater democracy and prosperity. But what we really need are passion and courage. Passion to make the world a better place. Passion to make progress. And courage to make it happen. Courage not to abandon our principles. I wish you all a passionate and courageous Brussels Forum. Thank you.