

Remarks

**by US Secretary of State Condoleeza RICE,
with current President of the EU Council Jean ASSELBORN,
EU High Representative Javier SOLANA and
EU External Relations Commissioner Benita FERRERO-WALDNER**

EU-USA Ministerial Troika meeting - Washington 2 June 2005

SECRETARY RICE: Good afternoon. I am happy to welcome the EU Presidency Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, the EU External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner and the EU High Representative Javier Solana here to Washington. We have been working actively together over the last months and I appreciate the excellent leadership of Luxembourg during its EU presidency. So, Jean, thank you very much for that. It's been a great pleasure to meet with my colleagues again.

Today, Europe faces important questions about its future course and this is, of course, a matter for Europeans to decide. But I do want to say that the United States of America is very glad that we have a strong partner in Europe to work on vital issues of peace, of hunger, of poverty, of opportunity and of freedom. We are confident that this partnership will continue to grow and to be put to use in the service of great goals.

Today, we have talked about the spread of freedom and democracy, particularly in the Middle East. We have discussed the situation in Lebanon and the need to support the Lebanese people as they move forward from Sunday's elections. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the Quartet process to implement the roadmap in order to achieve a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We also had good discussions on our ongoing efforts to get Iran to meet its international obligations under the Paris agreement.

We've talked about our support for the Iraqi people as they work to build a free society. At the request of the new Iraqi Transitional Government, the United States and the European Union have agreed to co-host with the Iraqis an international conference in Brussels on June 22nd and we've talked about the opportunities that we will have there to gather international support for this government as it manages the important transition for the Iraqi people.

Freedom and fresh hope are advancing in Ukraine and Georgia and the Kyrgyz Republic. We are supporting these countries as they face many challenges in building free societies.

We have also had an opportunity to talk about our joint efforts to help the suffering people of Darfur.

Today's discussions prepare us for an upcoming summit of heads of state on June the 20th in Washington. We have an ambitious agenda before us. We have a lot of work to do. This partnership is growing and developing and I'm very glad to have hosted my colleagues in yet another effort to move our work forward.

Thank you very much.

Jean.

MINISTER ASSELBORN: Thank you, Condi. I am very happy to be here in Washington with my colleagues, Javier Solana and Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner. It's the second time in this year that we have a troika together. The first time was in Luxembourg the 10th of February and there we prepared the conference, the meeting with President Bush on the 22nd of February, and I thank you, Dr. Condi Rice, for your hospitality and for the very fruitful discussions here.

Now, our meeting today, we concentrated, as you said, on the summit, the preparation of the summit, and we want to establish a global agenda for this summit that would be very, very important to show that the transatlantic relations are very important and very comprehensive, too.

Middle East was in the center of our discussions. In particular, we exchanged also views on the recent developments in Lebanon; that is, on the ongoing legislative elections and on the state of implementation of Security Council Resolution 1559, which must be full and complete. We explored ways in which the EU and the U.S. can support the Lebanese Government after the elections.

And then the 22nd of June in Brussels is an important day. We will have this conference with Iraq not only to speak about Iraq, but above all, to speak with Iraq. The conference will be a prime opportunity for the Iraqi Transitional Authority to present its strategy and the priorities to the international community and for all of us to reiterate our continuing commitment to a safe, to a stable, to a unified, prosperous and democratic Iraq that upholds human rights, fully exercises its sovereignty and cooperates constructively with its neighbors and with the international community.

But let me tell also — and it was not on the agenda but a word about what happens in these days in Europe. We can say that Europe is a little bit hesitating. People in France and yesterday in the Netherlands, they gave us a message. But Europe is not denied, not rejected, by these two countries but it seems to be misunderstood. We have a mixture of national influence and European aims. We will make these results, these negative results, possible.

Now, in Europe, we have to work very hard. Problems in the world are not changed. They remain. The EU is still able also, on the other side, to play its role inside of Europe but also on the international side. The presidency, as you know perhaps, said, and I will repeat it here in the States, that we will continue the procedures of ratification.

The next referendum now will be in Luxembourg the 10th of July. This day will be very important because a lot of people will look to Luxembourg in Europe and even in other countries in the world. In Luxembourg, we know that more of Europe gave always more influence to our country and we hope that we can reverse this dynamic, this negative dynamic, in our mind and make it possible that with a new constitution we will have a better Europe in the world who is better organized.

You know that in the chapter four of this constitution is mentioned that if 20 of the 25 countries ratify, the European Council can take a decision what to do with the other five countries in this case if 20 countries will ratify. So we will continue to make our work but we have also (inaudible) what people told us and the next European Council, the 16th and the 17th in Brussels, will be a very important council, not only to speak about money, not only to speak about financial (inaudible), but also to speak about a deeper understanding of Europe. We will have a meeting, general affair meeting, the 12th and the 13th of June in Brussels and there we can start this work. I hope, I hope, that in June we can give the message to the Europeans that we have found a solution about the financial (inaudible) that would be very, very important sign to reverse this misunderstanding of Europe in a lot of — in the two countries and maybe also in other countries. But I stay very optimistic that we can reverse this negative dynamic.

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE SOLANA: I don't have much to add. The agenda that we have been dealing today, as you will note, has been well explained by Dr. Rice and by the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Luxembourg. The only thing I would like to emphasize in the same line that has been done by the Minister of Foreign Affairs for Luxembourg, that the problems that we are facing together in trying to resolve together with the United States in a very profound cooperation are the same today that they were a month ago, and the determination of the European Union countries and the European Union institution is the same: to continue trying to work to solve these problems, to do it with our friends, to do it in cooperation with the United States and to try to get this world a better place. This will continue to be our aim.

Thank you.

COMMISSIONER FERRERO-WALDNER: Thank you very much. This meeting was a very good point to prepare the summit of the 20th of June which I think would give us the chance to have an even more strategic perspective as global partners in the world on our common agenda that so well has been outlined by Dr. Condoleezza Rice.

I would like to say that the Iraq conference that is coming up on the 22nd of June is, I would say, an example of our new dynamic between the European Union and the U.S., and you can check out today's joint announcement on the international conference on Iraq. There you will see that the atmosphere is very good and also the objectives that we want to achieve. We want Iraq to be in the center. We want to have inclusiveness. We want to have more cohesion also with the neighboring states and I think this will be very, very important.

Another word on the economic side. I think we have a huge trade relationship but we have an even stronger potential, and in order to make this potential even improve, there was a communication of the Commission working on the question of how do we give regulators, how do we give businessmen an even better chance for investment. And this should also be looked at the next time this is working on the borders because there, on the one hand, you have security; on the other hand you have to have a facilitation of trade; on the other hand, I think it's the question of avoiding obstacles and I think for the future there are many chances to still do better. Maybe we can prepare this agenda for the next summit, which will be the summit in Vienna.

Finally, let me also say a word on the constitution. Of course, the vote in France and now especially in Netherlands, these are real, important, serious setbacks. But at the same time, of course, we continue to work and nothing does prevent us from carrying all the important work in cooperation with the U.S. and I think this meeting shows it. We are able to work with you as well today as we did yesterday. And some people have suggested we will now be too absorbed in our own crisis to pursue our external policies. I promise you, this will not be the case. All the agenda items that have been mentioned show it clearly.

Thank you.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.

MR. BOUCHER: We'll start with Associated Press.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, could you discuss the impact on the United States of the two referenda held this week? And also, do the outcomes represent a setback for the U.S. goal of EU membership of Turkey?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, first of all, there has been, of course, a longstanding interest in the United States in European integration, in the European project. The President reaffirmed this and I think even strengthened our belief and commitment in a strong Europe as a global partner when he was in Brussels.

It is our view that a strong and united Europe that is able to act as a global partner with the United States, given its democratic values and our long history together, will only serve to multiply the forces that are fighting for democracy and freedom and for prosperity across the globe.

And our view of that has not changed. I think that the agenda that we have outlined here demonstrates that we intend to continue on precisely that course. We have a big agenda ahead of us, whether it's in the Middle East or in Iraq or in trying to deal with a potential nuclear breakout in Iran. We have a lot ahead of us and we're going to continue that agenda.

I can't speak to precisely what the referendum — referenda mean for the way that Europe will approach these issues in the future. That is something that Europeans will have to decide. But we have also believed and have said so, that a Europe that is outward-looking, not inward-looking, that is offering a European perspective and a European future to all of the democracies of Europe is extremely important to completing Europe's integration and Europe's unity. And that, of course, includes Turkey.

We work hand in hand with the European Union and NATO to provide stable pillars of a transatlantic relationship that I think has demonstrably been an incentive for democratizing states coming out of crisis or coming out of revolutionary situations, as in the case of East Central Europe, to have a kind of lodestar to which they are attaching. And I would hope that that remains an important goal of the European Union because everybody has a stake in a Europe — which, of course, includes Turkey — a Europe that is united around common values. But, you know, we understand that this has been a difficult period and that there will be some period of reflection going forward, but we continue to hope for an outward looking Europe, not an inward looking one.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary, can you tell us if Iran is invited to the conference on Iraq? If it is not, why not? And if it is, do you plan to meet with the Iranians there?

SECRETARY RICE: Well, the Iranians are a neighbor of the Iraqis. I would just note that the Iranians have been at other meetings in which the Iraqi situation has been discussed. We don't have relations with Iran. Everybody understands that. And we have our differences with Iran. We believe very strongly that Iran is a state that is out of step with what is going on in the region. And whether it is support for the rejectionists in the Palestinian territories or the support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iran or the concerns that the world has about Iran's nuclear weapons program and the concerns of that the world has about Iran's own internal developments. I mean, it's a very — not a very pretty picture of this "election," that is going to take place in a couple of weeks when candidates have been summarily dismissed by an unelected Guardian Council. So those things have not changed with Iran.

But we understand, as I talked with Foreign Minister Zebari yesterday, that Iran is Iraq's neighbor. We would like nothing better than for Iran to be devoted to a stable Iraq in which Iran is not trying to interfere in Iraq's internal affairs, but rather, trying to support the development of a stable and democratic Iraq.

And I'll just make one other point about that, which is that I have never believed that the Iraqi people, having thrown off the yoke of Saddam Hussein, now wish to subject themselves to the rule of the Guardian Council of Iran. And so I really do believe that the Iraqis, left to their own devices, will find their own path.

QUESTION: (Off-mike.)

MINISTER ASSELBORN: Can I just answer?

SECRETARY RICE: Yes.

MINISTER ASSELBORN: That was my purpose.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. I think they have. Yes.

MINISTER ASSELBORN: It's — Luxembourg has the Presidency. Luxembourg has relations with Iran. Iran are invited.

SECRETARY RICE: Yeah. And it's not a problem. My point is it's not a problem from our point of view that they are invited to this conference. We do not have relations with Iran. And we have said, and I think I said when I was in Iraq, we want Iran and Iraq to have good neighborly transparent relations. And to this degree that this serves that cause, we're all for it.

QUESTION: Madame Secretary and Mr. Solana, what's your comment on the assassination of a Lebanese journalist today in Beirut?

SECRETARY RICE: Do you want to start, Javier?

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE SOLANA: Well, we have talked about that. We learned this morning about it. And I would like, on behalf of everybody here, to condemn this tragedy. He was a very honest man. He — some of us had a relative knowledge person — knowledge with him. And we don't know who is responsible, but whichever is responsible should be found and responsibly condemned.

SECRETARY RICE: Yes. And let me just add it's a heinous act that, obviously, is someone who's trying to intimidate the Lebanese people as they move through this electoral cycle that, I think, will not happen because the Lebanese people want to build a new democracy. He was clearly someone who spoke out against foreign influences in his country. And we don't know who is responsible for it, but I really do hope that Mr. Mikati carries through on his pledge earlier that there will be a full investigation to get to the bottom of it because this — the international community needs to watch very carefully. The Lebanese people are going through a difficult period. They're going through an important period. And we have to speak out against efforts like this to intimidate them.

QUESTION: Mr. President, since there's been opposition from both the left and right to the constitution, what is the way forward?

MINISTER ASSELBORN: The middle. No. I think, as I explained to you, the way forward is to say what we said now that Europe can function. I don't say now without a constitution that it functions better, but it continues to function. The constitution was to increase the internal and also the external functioning of Europe. So now we are in a state that two countries of 25 said to the referendum no. I remember that nine countries said already yes and Spain had a very clear referendum in favor of the European constitution.

We have to stay very quiet to listen to the people, to think about the credibility of our policies in Europe, as I told you, and in Luxembourg we will reverse the situation, then we will have the next referendums in autumn and you will see that the cause is not yet lost. We have to believe in a better Europe and we have to persuade people, continue to persuade people, that they have to answer what is written in the text and not answer about the context. I am not now a professor of democracy, but in some countries this was the case, for instance, in Spain. And we hope that we can find other countries to show the way in a positive direction.

SECRETARY RICE: Thank you very much.
