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Building a transatlantic alliance for the 21st century

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Boston University
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Professor Michalski,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me thank the Institute for Human Sciences at Boston University and Professor Michalski for this invitation to address you tonight. I have known Professor Michalski for many years through his work at the Institute für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen in Vienna, and it was a pleasure to accept his kind invitation.

My central thesis tonight is that our world is changing irrevocably, and if the US and EU want to protect our fundamental values we must work together. The transatlantic alliance must be strong enough to enable us to achieve that. I will structure my remarks around 4 points, first, the current state of EU-US relations; second the EU’s ability to act as a major international power; third which powers will dominate the 21st century; and fourth the value and necessity of multilateral organisations, particularly a reformed UN.

1) EU-US relations today

Watching the footage of Hurricane Katrina and the almost apocalyptic scenes from a flooded and virtually-abandoned New Orleans we Europeans were once again reminded of the depth of the ties that unite us to Americans. Beyond the natural shock and intense sympathy for any natural disaster on this scale, we felt an additional almost instinctive desire to help.

So in response to the disaster, for the first time ever in the history of European civil protection coordination, all participating countries have offered assistance. Under the European Commission’s supervision, help has been mobilised from across Europe a crisis intervention team from Austria; tents and first aid kits from France; blankets, meals and pumps from the UK.

It seems painfully inadequate given the enormous need, but the underlying message is clear we feel your suffering and we are here for you – just as Americans have been there for Europeans at difficult moments of our history.

Yesterday was the fourth anniversary of 9/11. That tragedy also produced a moment of great solidarity across the Atlantic, embodied in Le Monde’s headline, “Nous sommes tous Américains” – we are all Americans. For me, that epitomizes EU-US relations – it is a special relationship, we feel for each other as citizens united by the same fundamental values.

Our relations have had their ups and downs since 9/11, but I can confidently say we are now on an upward path. And this is what both EU and US citizens want a survey of transatlantic trends
released last week by the German Marshall Fund found that 80% favour greater cooperation between the EU and the US.

EU leaders share President Bush’s emphasis on combating terrorism, bolstering homeland security, and promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The declarations of the last EU-US Summit demonstrate how much we’re working together on our common priorities, including the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts, and the threat posed by non-state actors.

Neither one of us can go it alone – we both recognise that the challenges are too great for either of us to deal with individually. As President Bush said at his inauguration, “All that we seek to achieve in the world requires that America and Europe remain close partners”.

I agree. And as the international capabilities of the EU have grown, it is only natural that the EU-US agenda increasingly focuses on the world beyond our borders.

Our approach may sometimes differ, but we are working together successfully around the world, in some countries turning those very differences to our mutual advantage. We are talking to each other more and more – sometimes formally, like our strategic dialogue on East Asia, sometimes informally, like our daily contacts over Ukraine, Lebanon, and Gaza disengagement.

Our views on many of today’s most pressing issues are the same for example the need to encourage China to take its place in the established international rules-based order. We have discovered the benefits of complementarity, in the Broader Middle East, in Iran, in Afghanistan, Georgia, Belarus and elsewhere. Perhaps most importantly, we agree on the need to discuss issues with one another upfront, at the stage of policy formation – before taking action.

The EU is a key partner for the US in achieving its triple goals of combating terrorism, promoting democracy and bolstering homeland security. Some people in Europe think the US is an unreformed unilateralist, only grudgingly reaching out to its partners. I strongly disagree that is certainly not my experience in working with Secretary Rice and other members of the Bush Administration, and it does not reflect the close relationship between President Bush and President Barroso. We would not be cooperating so effectively if the US were not fully committed to working with us.

That brings me to my second point.

2) The EU as a major international power

There are also those on this side of the Atlantic who are sceptical that Europe can be a useful partner for the US who believe the EU will never be anything other than an economic giant but a political dwarf. This school of thought, which I hope is dwindling in both influence and numbers, seems to view the EU’s development beyond a Common Market as an unwelcome development, as if the EU should have stopped its political clock in the 1970s. And, unfortunately, the confusion over what the “no” votes on the European constitution in the Netherlands and France
meant will only confirm their opinion. So let me take this opportunity to address the reality of EU foreign policy.

First, the EU is not in crisis. It is true that the “no” votes were a disappointment the Constitutional Treaty includes many useful innovations to make the enlarged EU work better and bring policy closer to our citizens. But our institutions continue to function without it – although we also have not gone further forward. However, coupled with June’s lack of agreement on the EU’s future budget, it was right to decide on a “period of reflection” to address the unease felt by some of our citizens about the EU’s future.

There is still overwhelming support for the EU, but our citizens now take for granted the most impressive achievements most importantly, 60 years of peace on our continent. So we politicians must ensure that today’s EU also tackles the current concerns of our citizens – the economy, jobs, quality of life and security.

To maintain our position as an economic giant we must increase our competitiveness – through better, more efficient regulation including deregulation and more focus on education, research and innovation. At the same time we must maintain the core of the European way of life – our member states will be meeting next month to discuss the sustainability of our social model. This is the right answer to globalisation, not cutting ourselves off from the world. We need to be moulding global trends, and influencing the shape of the 21st century world order.

We are already a global actor I know from my daily experience that when we talk, people listen. We are the world’s largest economic bloc, and the biggest donor of development assistance. We use our foreign policy tools aid, trade, and economic agreements – to promote human rights and good governance in every corner of the globe. And for those who say we are no military power more than 50,000 European soldiers are currently keeping the peace and promoting stability across the world.

But we need to do more to match our political clout to our economic power. And we know that both the EU’s citizens and our partners throughout the world demand we play a greater role internationally. So a large part of our reflection on the EU’s future will focus on how we can do more and do it better.

In the meantime, the EU remains a committed international player. Take our involvement in the peace process in Aceh. We are spear-heading a 230-strong monitoring mission which will be on the ground just 3 days from now. We brokered the August peace deal putting an end to 30 years of bloody conflict, and together with 5 members of ASEAN we are now staffing and funding a mission to monitor the decommissioning of arms and relocation of police and military.

We are also engaged in Afghanistan, where we are providing significant financial assistance to next weekend’s elections and have sent the largest international election observation mission. And we are playing an active role in Darfur, Iran, and Gaza. I could go on.
My point is that whatever our internal difficulties we are still in business. And we will remain a committed and engaged partner for the US and others as we work through our internal challenges.

Public diplomacy is vitally important.

Within the EU it is clear that we have to do more to capture the public imagination in an age where the EU’s original purpose – peace – has lost its immediacy. We must convince the public economic reform is necessary to maintain our standard of living; enlargement brings us enormous economic and security benefits; and innovation in our social model is essential to avoid being outpaced by global competition.

Public diplomacy is also important for the transatlantic relationship. The transatlantic trends survey showed that EU and US publics view each other in the same way as a year ago. In other words, the significant improvement in EU-US relations at official level is not reflected in public opinion. Both the US and EU governments must do more to present our citizens with the new reality of our relationship. Because public opinion matters ours cannot just be a relationship of elites or we seriously undermine its very basis.

Let’s publicise the success stories which reveal the true strength of our relations, like having two of the most integrated economies on earth. Our bilateral trade relationship is the largest in the world – every day we trade more than 1 billion worth of immensely diverse goods and services. As many as 14 million workers in the EU and the US owe their job to our commercial ties, including more than 100,000 here in Massachusetts. Yes, there’s the occasional trade dispute, but they only account for 2% of our $2.5 trillion economic and trade relationship. An unsung success of last June’s EU-US Summit was the EU-US Economic Initiative, designed to remove further obstacles to efficient operation of the transatlantic marketplace.

But there is more to this debate than simply feeling good about our relationship.

3) Who will dominate the 21st Century?

Recently a number of analysts – including at least two Americans (Rifkin, Reid) – have suggested that the future belongs to Europe. They believe the EU is best placed to meet the challenges of globalization in the 21st Century. My analysis is different not only because I realise it might be risky for a European to stand here in Boston, not far from the beginnings of the American Revolution, and suggest that the “American Century” is drawing to a close!

No, my thesis is that the world is changing to such an extent that we will need to draw on the strengths of both the EU and the US if we want to define the international order of the 21st century. We will only wield sufficient influence if we act together, and we must build a transatlantic alliance strong enough to do that.

Today, the EU and US have unrivalled influence in terms of relative wealth and power. Power relationships in the 21st century may be very different.
I don’t only mean the emerging economic powers, like China, India, and possibly others. There are other threats: energy security look at the current price of oil; global health risks HIV/AIDS, malaria and new pandemics like SARS or Avian flu; entrenched poverty sub-Saharan Africa has been getting poorer not richer; and environmental problems climate change, major natural disasters like the tsunamis and Hurricane Katrina, and the mix of fire and floods in Europe this summer. The world’s demographics are changing and there are generational challenges to us all. Plus the “hard” security threats of violent extremists, international terrorism and international crime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and trafficking in people, drugs and arms.

Another major issue which will dominate the 21st Century, or at least this part of it, is relations between different cultures or civilisations. This encompasses not only the Islamic world and the West, but many other cultures and religions. I do not subscribe to the Huntington belief in an inevitable “clash of civilisations”, but nevertheless we must improve understanding between different cultures. Last week at the EU-India summit this topic drew a lot of attention, as it will at the UN summit this week. I want to explore innovative ways of pursuing this discussion – in the Middle East, India and Indonesia, and through cooperation with the media.

To summarize – the 21st Century will confront us with an even more complex world than today’s. I come back to the title of tonight’s speech, “Building a Transatlantic Alliance for the 21st Century”. The US and EU need to work together to create an international order that will protect our interests and principles of democracy and freedom. And to do that, we need to encourage other powers to work with us, and sign up to that international order.

4) The value of multilateralism and a reformed UN

For that we need what we in the EU refer to as effective multilateralism, a rules-based, inclusive international order. The EU works through many multilateral organisations, including the WTO, whose Doha round will make a major contribution to development, and regional multilateral bodies like the OSCE.

But the only truly universal multilateral institution is the United Nations. With its inclusive membership and worldwide legitimacy, it remains the most important arena for advancing common solutions to our common problems.

So it is the perfect starting point for building and consolidating the kind of international order we will need to protect our way of life and values. All the more so as the UN’s values are our own let’s remember the US is the home of modern multilateralism, as the sixtieth anniversary of the UN Charter’s signature in San Francisco reminds us.

I believe that both the EU and the US, perhaps especially in the wake of recent events, recognise the value of international solidarity and compromise, in return for the international legitimacy that confers. And there is increasing recognition that multilateral action, involving large parts of the international community, is the only way forward if our goal is to find solutions that work.

And make no mistake as the balance of power changes in the coming decades, we will need the support of others.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are on the eve of a major UN Summit, one of the biggest gatherings of world leaders ever. I cannot overstate the significance of this occasion at which we will agree the first serious reform of the UN’s 60-year history.

It embodies just the sort of grand bargain between north and south, rich and poor, that is necessary to establish a solid framework for international relations in the decades to come. Choosing development, security and human rights as the focus of the debate reflected a new recognition of their interdependence – without peace there is no development, without development no peace, and without human rights, neither.

The other major issue is management reform, which for obvious reasons has dominated the news headlines recently. Given our desire to see the system function effectively, the EU would be the first to say that the UN needs an organisational re-fit to equip it for the challenges ahead. But above all we are clear that the organisation’s original promise – anchoring international peace and security, promoting sustainable development and defending human rights and human security – remains as valid today as 60 years ago.

The lengthy and difficult negotiations over the Summit statement are drawing to a close. I hope the result will be ambitious and concrete. It must live up to expectations we need a UN better equipped to deal with the complex challenges to development, peace and security and human rights.

But the real work begins after the Summit as we translate the commitments into action. This is where the EU and US can really make a difference. Together we have a proud history as the driving force behind multilateralism. As the world’s two richest, most democratic, and most powerful entities, it is our duty to continue this leadership role. By pooling our diplomatic power and resources, we can lead the world in building a new international architecture.

One of the major successes of this Summit will be the creation of a **Peacebuilding Commission**. This will plug the gap between post-conflict assistance and longer-term stabilisation and development. Getting post-conflict states up and running is a complicated matter. Too often there is not enough continuity between the different post-conflict activities and international aid: peacekeepers funded by one party, demobilisation by another, reconstruction and institution-building by yet another. But given that half of all countries emerging from conflict relapse back into violence within five years, it is vital that we find a way of improving our performance.

That is why the EU and US have been fully engaged in the discussions for setting up this new body.

The EU has longstanding experience in providing support for a wide spectrum of peacebuilding activities around the world, ranging from de-mining and social rehabilitation initiatives in Ethiopia to promoting the constitutional dialogue in Nepal. And we are ready and fully committed to actively contribute to the Peacebuilding Commission’s work.
Together with the US we must work hard to ensure it can carry out its mandate effectively.

We also have to do more to protect human rights. Abuse of fundamental rights is one of the clear indicators for future conflict so improving our ability to act in this field is not only a moral obligation but also addresses our security concerns. The present Human Rights Commission is no longer fully up to the job, and reforming the UN’s human rights architecture is crucial.

Together the EU and US must push for a system which takes rights seriously, because this is about people the prisoner at risk of torture, the child forced into armed combat, the woman threatened by cruelty and abuse. We must also put human security to the fore—adopting a modern concept of sovereignty where states are responsible for protecting their people, not just their borders. We want the Summit to decide on a new principal Human Rights body, the Human Rights Council. The Summit must make clear the UN’s undivided commitment to human rights and human security empowering women; helping states meet their international obligations; assisting human rights defenders and children in armed conflict; and sounding the alarm when violations occur.

And we must also be more serious about development. Economic prosperity is not the preserve of the developed world. Eradicating poverty and promoting development are moral imperatives which the world’s richest nations are bound to address.

European Commission President Barroso recently compared the modern scourges of poverty, hunger and disease to slavery 200 years ago. “Slavery” he said, “was then considered an inevitability; a natural part of the order of things. But that was wrong.” Equally, it is wrong for us today to think of poverty as a fact of life. We can and must fight against it.

That is why reconfirming our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and setting target dates for their achievement is so vital. It is mainly a question of mustering the necessary political will. The EU is already the world’s biggest donor, providing 55% of worldwide official development assistance between the Commission and Member States, worth $43 billion in 2004. In May this year we committed ourselves to further and substantially increase this amount by 2010 we will provide nearly an extra $26 billion, and by 2015 we will reach the recommended 0.7% of gross national income (GNI).

There is a clear link between poverty and political instability. Failed states pose one of the biggest security risks of our day. So in addressing the causes of conflict and misgovernment in developing countries we are also acting to defeat terrorism.

In tackling poverty we also move a step closer to human security. But again this cannot just be rhetoric. It requires developing countries to tackle corruption, reform justice systems and build transparent, efficient institutions. Both developing and donor countries must make serious efforts to translate dollar and euro signs on paper into real and sustainable progress in our partner countries of the South.

If the US, the word’s second biggest donor, were to join us in this commitment and follow the EU’s lead on increasing ODA, the impact on poverty and security would be tremendous.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Only last week the UN Secretary General pointed out that the American people … have always been the most generous in responding to disasters in other parts of the world’. That generosity of spirit is quintessentially American, as is the exercise of moral authority and world leadership at critical moments in world affairs.

Even as the US is still reeling from the effects of Hurricane Katrina I am confident that it is capable of exerting that moral leadership again in the cause of a more just world order, one which also holds in trust the values that underpin both US and EU societies.

The EU will support the US in this quest. After all, as my 4 points have illustrated, we are natural partners in seeking to build a consensus around the values of democracy, human rights, prosperity and security for all. The EU will be an increasingly useful partner for the US as we strengthen our capacity to act internationally. The world is changing rapidly and we must unite together to shape international affairs in the 21st century. And to do so, we must be the driving force behind creating an effective United Nations.

None of this will be easy – we will have our work cut out to build the international order we wish to see prevail in the 21st Century. But acting together, drawing others in by working through the United Nations, we have the best chance to succeed. Which is why our task today and in the months and years to come must be to build the Transatlantic Alliance – stronger than ever!