

Speech re September 11
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Ladies and Gentlemen, Bonjour, Good Morning,

Greetings from Qualifier Group. Swissair and Sabena have collapsed and so have the Twin Towers on September 11 inflicting unspeakable tragedy on so many innocent victims and families. Meanwhile I have had to cut my fingernails, lost my scissors, lost my pocket knife and can't peel an apple anymore. So what to think about what happened in Big Apple and elsewhere in America on that infamous day?

Americans clearly have been shaken very badly. How could that happen in our country where we feel free and safe? America's heart and pride have been hit. Thanksgiving is under attack. Interestingly, especially the young people feel devastated. What have we done to deserve this? A European reaction would be slightly different. Hey, now you Americans are learning how we have felt for ever. We never felt safe and secure and always under a threat. First from each other and then from the Russians. Reference to IRA London bombing experience.

Now down to the point: if 6,000 dead people is not a declaration of war, tell me what is? So America had to respond and they did wisely not subject to a UN or NATO resolution or whether Belgium or anyone would agree or not. America has virtually universal support but we hope and pray they respond in a measured manner. If they go wild, I fear support might dwindle rapidly. I believe our American friends understand this.

The question really is: who is the enemy ? The enemy seems like Mephistopheles the Cat: now he is here, now he is not. The enemy is among us. We appear to train them, to equip them, to shelter them, to feed them so that they can hit us really hard as terrorists. And even more sinister, large amounts of money seem to find their way to those terrorist activities from everywhere. From the Middle East, from Europe, from Asia and even from the USA. We are not really helping ourselves, are we?

Who are those guys wanting to benefit from terrorism and from turmoil in our world ? We do not really know because we never paid attention. We want to be tolerant, we are democratic, equal opportunity for everyone. Terrorists have their own idea about that ! This has lead us to learn that democracy at its limits can be self-destructive. Terrorism is criminal and cannot be tolerated. President Bush rightly has said: this is going to be a long war and fought on many fronts. We as citizens have to heighten our awareness of what is going on around us and respond accordingly. Personal rights and freedom may have to be restrained for the benefit of security.

Since September 11, the world has changed. The map is being redrawn and relationships are redefined giving a new life to international dynamics. This may be good. Our best friend nowadays is Mr. Putin and remember, economies in China and Russia are booming. Realpolitik of course sets in: support is negotiated against trade and political concessions and the US are ready to oblige, for the better of a lot of countries: India, Pakistan, Former Soviet Republics, Middle East etc.

If only our American friends could remember how they sometimes can behave like real bullies: arrogant, inflexible, imperialist. Like the old ugly American. For that they are also hated in many places and that breeds resistance as well.

A more fundamental problem however is poverty. In our world, the rich get richer and the poor gets poorer leading to instability not to mention terrorism. For the creation of wealth the WTO (World Trade Organisation) is an important forum. Also China and Russia are keen to become a member. Yet the impression exists among developing nations that WTO is rather used as an excuse for the rich to expand their own business at the expense of the poor who cannot follow. Trade negotiations are fraught with politics and people do not listen to each other. As a consequence there is a lot of distrust. America actually is among the worst perpetrators of protecting their own business whilst promoting free trade. This is all politics. Politicians have local constituencies and short-term programs until the next election.

So we cannot wait for politicians. It is again up to responsible citizens to stand up and guide those politicians. NGO is not necessarily a dirty term. If we cannot get a handle on poverty the world will remain unstable.

Conclusion

September 11 should serve as a monumental wake-up call for us all:

1. Individual citizens need to take responsibility for implementing and achieving a safer and better world not just at the ballot box but in the reality of every day. Where did we hear this message before ? Right here at Normandy but it also applies to society at large.
2. Wealth has to be brought to the poor. Markets should open up for developing countries which have to grow sustainable economies for the benefit of many, not just a few.

Thank you, merci et au revoir.