



DEBATE

Carl Bildt, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden

That was a very eloquent exposé of the world from the French point of view. I was sitting there asking myself if I would have phrased it differently or if the perspectives would have been different. I was surprised to find that the differences were not that large, which shows the commonalities between the European countries, although we come from different geographies and different histories. There is one word that would have figured if I had spoken. I would not have taken anything away, but I would have added one country, and that would have been the Ukraine. There is a major crisis in a European country of nearly 50 million people; it is a big place, a country that is in deep, fundamental difficulties, where we Europeans have made an offer, as we do in order to be generous, but where we suddenly find opposing forces coming from another concept of how you build Europe. There I think we are faced with a challenge to our concept of how we build a Europe that is open to each and everyone, how we build it on a win-win, where what is good for one country is essentially good for every country. We are suddenly confronted with another vision. That is the only word I would have added, but since you covered most of the rest of the world, I can understand that you did not have room for that one as well.

Titus Corlătean, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania

Thank you. It is always wonderful to listen to Laurent talking about small universal things. But it is extremely useful. I am briefly going to bring up what Laurent said about the US abandoning Europe. The discussion about but also point out Europe's central/eastern perspective. Is France also abandoning Eastern Europe? Thank you.

Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and European Affairs of Belgium

So, I would first like to reassure Laurent. Despite what Valéry believes, I don't think anything that was said tonight was untrue. Much to the contrary. I think that we have already had an opportunity to work on many of those points. We will do so again in Brussels on Monday. For me, the question is quite simple. It is not about revealing what we may be talking about a few weeks from now. But since the German Chancellor and the French President will be meeting on Wednesday, what topics would you like to see on the table in this resurgence of the European initiative that perhaps the Franco-German pair could offer us? Is there a specific priority you would really like to see them focus on before we talk about it in the months to come?

Laurent Fabius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France

Many thanks to my three friends. I will address their comments in order.

First, Carl Bildt rightly brought up the Ukraine issue, which could also come up abruptly this weekend because President Yanukovich has announced the arrival of protesters from Ukraine's pro-Russian party. All of us, not just the Europeans but in this body itself, would agree that some things are unacceptable. Anything having to do with violence or any sort of coercion. The ministers here tonight have all stepped in to tell the current Ukrainian authorities that these threats and acts of violence are not acceptable.

Here is the problem. We are proposing – and this speaks to what Titus was saying – an association agreement in the form of a partnership that we believe is aligned with the interests of Europe and the Ukrainians as well as Russia's interests. But while this association agreement is good for Ukraine, but it does not include any immediate sweeping economic or financial measures. At the same time, President Putin is either directly or indirectly putting some crushing pressure on Ukraine by promising a number of benefits if it moves toward Russia and, conversely, is threatening retributions if it signs the association agreement.



We are offering an association agreement, but we are not saying that Ukraine will enter the European Union in the short term. This presents a problem because many Ukrainians are saying, "Yes, we want Europe because Europe means freedom, because that is our natural inclination. But at the same time, are you Europeans prepared to give us what the others are offering us?"

We should add that the whole population of Ukraine is not quite on the same page as us and our friends in the Ukrainian opposition. And let's also add what we are telling the Ukrainians – and I think we are right to say this. "Listen, of course we agreed to talk about the material, economic and financial aspects – it is only natural. But if you align yourselves with Europe, it means taking on a certain mindset, not just a sort of bargaining exercise." That is where we are now.

The last comment, and I know Carl and I agree on this point, is it should not be presented to the Ukrainian people or the Europeans as a radical choice between the European Union and Russia. Just because the Ukrainians decide to agree with what we want, the association, does not mean they are pitting themselves against Russia. This backward analysis is often what the public hears. But it is inaccurate. We would like Ukraine to ally itself with the European Union. We would like an association agreement. We want to support this, but it is not an act of hostility toward Russia.

That said, I have already sort of answered my friend Titus. I have had the pleasure of many heartfelt discussions with him. Yes, we want an eastern partnership for Europe as well as a southern partnership. Both of them are crucial. When you look at the geography – foreign policy entails a lot of geography and quite a bit of history – you see that on one side we have the Americas and on the other Asia. And in the middle there is a large area that is both Europe and Africa. While Europe has to keep one foot in the future, it has to turn its head to both sides, to the east and to the south. Titus and I wholeheartedly agree on that.

Lastly, Didier Reynders asked me how I see this Franco-German partnership, subsequently extended to other countries, to be a European initiative. Didier, all I can do here is give you a few chapter headings.

There is the simplification factor. The procedures are too complex and some who are currently pulling away from Europe cite this much-needed simplification. We will need to have a talk with our British friends, and that will not be an easy conversation. Are the British in or are they out? Let's simplify things. That is a fair topic. Just because it is sometimes used for demagogic ends does not mean it is wrong. So, we have some simplifying to do and our fellow citizens are keenly aware of this.

Second, the citizens want Europe to protect them. Hence, it should not do the opposite and leave them exposed. What do I mean by "protection"? Not in the sense of protectionism, but rather economic protection so that on a range of issues Europeans see Europe as the solution and not the problem. Protection in terms of other continents and trade negotiations, social protection. There has been a lot of talk in France recently about seconded workers. If the French – and the same is true for the Belgians and other Europeans – have the impression that Europe had to be a war machine to reduce our social safety net, how do you expect them to be invested? So there is this aspect of simplification, an aspect of protection, etc.

There are critical advances to make. That was Didier Reynders' question. We should be capable of making a major push toward a European defence force, and the heads of state and government will be talking about this in December. For reasons we can understand, the United States is saying, "Europe is a continent, it is not our job to protect this continent. Make an effort." Defence is one of Europe's biggest industries, so it does not make sense that Europe is not capable of having, for example, its own drones, that when there are problems in Africa or elsewhere it cannot rally the Community into action. So, a European defence force. European energy, too. There are people in this room who are much more competent than me when it comes to energy. But suggesting that we can join forces to avoid being too dependent on another country, suggesting that we combine our skills to achieve a more effective energy mix, suggesting that we develop new energies together – those are self-evident. In the same vein, when it comes to new technologies we have incredible research and innovation capacities, but we know that now is the time to join these creative forces. In short, it means starting with the banking union, the economy, social welfare and taxes, building a genuine program of progress.



The last point, Didier, is democratic control. In the best case scenario, the citizens in our midst have the impression that they are voting for European Parliament members but have no control over what they do. The European Parliament, national parliaments and other organisations – not just the political society, but the civil society as well – need tighter control over what is being done.

Didier, if we manage to simplify, to demonstrate that Europe is capable of providing protection, to put together a concrete realistic program for progress and control things better, I do not think 2014 will be useless.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you. Thank you to my colleagues, to you and to everyone. Thank you very much.

Thierry de Montbrial, President and founder of the WPC

Good. Thank you, Laurent. If I may be so bold, my only regret is you did not travel twice as far this week because you are in splendid shape. I imagine that if you had travelled 10,000 or 15,000 more kilometres, you would look even better. In any event, thank you sincerely. Now, as a reminder, the next item on the agenda is the main course. Followed by a little show. I will tell you this now because I will not be repeating it here, the show is courtesy of the Total Group.