



STATEMENTS MADE BY M. JACQUES CHIRAC, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, DURING HIS JOINT PRESS BRIEFING WITH M. BERTIE AHERN, PRIME MINISTER OF IRELAND, FOLLOWING THEIR MEETING - EXCERPTS

(Paris, 2 June 2004)

THE PRESIDENT (...) We're on the eve of two important events: first, the European elections; second, the intergovernmental conference.

EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

For each of our countries, the European elections will be extremely important insofar as Parliament has more and more power and so its decisions carry weight. They increasingly affect the everyday life of each of our nations and all Europeans. Which means, as far as France is concerned, that she needs to try a bit to develop her strike force, if you'll pardon the expression, in the European Parliament, because she's weak due to the fact that French MEPs are dispersed [among European groupings], which is a serious shortcoming for France, a weakness.

IGC/EUROPEAN COUNCIL

Then the European Council, which will aim to complete the institutional reform, initiated with a view to the enlargement, by an agreement we're hoping to get on the new Constitution on the basis of the work of the Convention, and as close as possible to its draft this is the Irish presidency's job and responsibility. It isn't easy, but the presidency is carrying it out, I repeat, with an exceptional sense of responsibility. An agreement on the treaty is today necessary and possible. We have every confidence in the Irish presidency to attain this objective.

DOUBLE MAJORITY VOTING SYSTEM/EUROPEAN COMMISSION/QMV

Among the issues we discussed, there was the so-called double majority voting system allowing the Council to take decisions more effectively and, I would say, more democratically that's the first point.

Secondly, a Commission which is able genuinely to represent not each State's interests, but the general interest of the European Union and whose membership is thus reduced to the number of commissioners needed to carry out the tasks genuinely within Europe's remit. For us, the principle of a more compact Commission, if I can call it thus, is wholly essential.

And finally, a Europe with the means to act and thus not paralysed by the unanimity rule and which, in the greatest possible number of cases, can take its decisions by majority, qualified majority, but in any case a majority.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

So of course, we are totally ready to be constructive, cooperative in this matter. But we also have a demanding and ambitious vision of Europe which must allow us to have a functioning Europe, i.e. one which can take decisions and move forward, in other words, which is less paralysed than it still is today.

EU ENLARGEMENT/FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE/JHA

We also discussed the enlargement process, particularly vis-à-vis Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia. We talked about the Financial Perspective, the fact that it must be the subject only of procedural decisions at the next European Council. We discussed the problems of Justice and Home Affairs with, inter alia, a first assessment of the implementation of the decisions taken in March to step up our battle against terrorism, particularly after the Madrid terrorist attacks.

(...)

IRAQ/US PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO EUROPE

Q. Two questions, if I may. What's the view of France and the European Union on the appointment of the new president in Iraq?

The second question concerns President Bush's visit to France. On the eve of this visit, President Bush has said that he had never been angry with the French: have the differences between Paris and Washington on Iraq and the Greater Middle East project diminished?

THE PRESIDENT (...) I'm not going to comment on the appointment of the new Iraqi government, except to say: I hope it's going to succeed. I don't know the men, but what I do know is that, to succeed, it's essential for it to inspire confidence in the Iraqis, i.e. for the Iraqis to feel convinced that they have regained their sovereignty, their independence and control of their destiny.

So things will perhaps be able to improve and my only wish with respect to this new government is for it to have the means and, in particular, for the UN resolution to give it the means to be really independent and sovereign and that it may succeed.

As for President Bush, you know, you mustn't always believe polemical reports and what's in the newspapers. I was never angry with the President of the United States and never had the feeling that he was angry with me. We have had a difference of view, that's fine, it's normal. Everyone asserts his own conviction, I have always done so, as you will have noticed, without any aggressiveness. I welcome the fact that on 6 June, there can be something essential, i.e. the tremendous gratitude of the French, and more generally the Europeans, to the Americans who came at a particularly black moment, for Europe and for France, giving us their help and shedding their blood.

(...)



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

EUROPEAN COMMISSION PRESIDENCY

Q. (...) Did you talk about the Commission presidency? Do you think that a decision can be taken at the Council. And is Mr Verhofstadt still your preferred candidate?

(...)

THE PRESIDENT I have a great deal of esteem and friendship for Mr Verhofstadt, but as far as I know he isn't a candidate. That said, I think he would make a very good Commission president.

IRAQ/DRAFT UNSCR

Q. My question is on Iraq. Does the new draft resolution satisfy France and do you think there are things in it which need improving?

THE PRESIDENT I think one can say that the resolution or current draft resolution is a good basis for discussion but that it needs improvements, particularly to affirm and confirm the Iraqi government's full sovereignty, particularly in the military sphere. (...). |