

Audience Questions

McCain's League of Democracies proposal

Q. What do you think of the proposal of Senator McCain for a worldwide League of Democracies?

Balladur: To respond directly and frankly, I really don't think that this league of democracies is a good idea. Personally, I don't approve of this idea. And I wouldn't want to be the one to decide who is and is not a democracy. Japan is a democracy, Australia is a democracy; but when you get into the African continent things become more complicated. It's a different matter for us to discuss advanced countries only.

Is it realistic to hold more U.S.-EU summits?

Q. You are proposing four summits a year. Some time ago, U.S.-EU summits were reduced from two to one a year; apparently they did not seem useful enough. Instead of a new institution, would it be better to make the existing US-EU summits work better and put more meat on them?

Balladur: What would the Council add to the U.S.-EU summits? Quite simply, that it would be systematic and regular.

Would it not be better to use something that already exists? This does, in fact, already exist. I'm simply proposing that the meetings take place more frequently. And that we establish a permanent European-American secretariat for them, which would be similar to the G8 system. If the number of summits has been reduced because they're not useful, we need to look at the fact that even on a national level politicians and government authorities take time to meet and they don't always come to a conclusion. It's not something that's specific to the international level. I'm not claiming that this type of a system would be a substitute for political will. If countries don't want to do anything, they're not going to.

One additional factor: I'm proposing that these meetings proceed, especially on the European side, with officials who are capable of making decisions. This underlines the importance of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty. The problem on the European side is to create a political authority that can speak

for Europe. In our current system, with the six-month presidency in the EU, the president has no decision-making powers. If we adopt the Lisbon treaty we will have a presidency that has a term of two and a half years, renewable one time, so a total of five years. This will be a more serious partner.

Is there support for a Union of the West?

Q. It is almost flattering to be hearing this from a Frenchman. I wonder what responses you have had to your proposal in other parts of Europe—whether other parts of Europe would be as eager for a union with the United States.

Balladur: I was in Germany months ago and had the opportunity to meet with German leaders and ministers. Some of them were very enthusiastic about this idea. But that's all I can say at this point. Their enthusiasm has not yet been translated into public support.

In my meetings here in Washington, what I have perceived is significant interest, but I haven't really perceived a will, if you please. I'm sure this situation will change. Again, this is a long term endeavor. And let me say this, I think this initiative will have to be put forward by the European Union.

I would like in the end to say that I am happy with the interest you have expressed regarding these proposals, and I am impressed by the force of the various comments that you made. I have not submitted to you a finalized plan with all of the rules and all of the details nicely fine-tuned, after taking everything into account; that is not how things work. When we started Europe, sixty years ago, we did not talk about the common market, we started talking about steel and coal. Then we started talking about trade unification, little by little we started talking about legislative harmonization. Now we have a common currency and still more things. This was all a gradual process. What is important is that we get the momentum going. I think once we have this momentum, gradually we will solve the issues that are put before us.