

Off to a Fast and Exciting Start

I arrived in Brussels to assume my duties just in time: I presented my credentials to Council President Van Rompuy and European Commission President Barroso one week before President Barack Obama came to town. The excitement in the Mission and among our EU partners and contacts in Brussels was palpable. The President was paying his first visit to Belgium. I had attended three prior U.S.-EU Summits, but this one was special, as there's so much the U.S. and EU are working on together and there are so many vital issues we wanted to discuss.

Chatting to the President in the motorcade as we sped from the airport to the EU's Justus Lipsius building, it was clear what many of the day's main themes would be: the need for the U.S. and EU to remain united in dealing with the crisis in Ukraine; the ongoing negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; and energy security. These topics were addressed in a substantive and very friendly fashion during an elegant working lunch with Presidents Van Rompuy and Barroso, High Representative Ashton, Trade Commissioner De Gucht, my counterpart EU Ambassador to the U.S. Vale de Almeida, and other members of the EU team. These topics were also the focus of the questions at the packed-to-overflowing post-summit press conference.

Later that afternoon at the BOZAR, President Obama eloquently expounded on the need to uphold common transatlantic values as the central theme of the only speech he made during this trip to Europe. "Casual indifference" to the plight of Ukraine or any countries bullied by their bigger or stronger neighbors "would ignore the lessons that are written in the cemeteries" of Europe, he said, having visited one in Flanders that morning to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I and the shared sacrifice by Americans and Europeans. "We must never forget that we are heirs to a struggle for freedom.

"The message I took home after the day's events was that it is up to us – the leaders, the people, and the youth of Europe and America – to meet the challenges to our ideals and to the international order the U.S. and EU have long supported. The President's remarks got a standing ovation from the 1800-strong audience, which included some 600 young professionals, College of Europe students, and interns from EU institutions who are among my Mission's most valued contacts. I hope that was the message they heard too. My tenure as U.S. Ambassador to the EU is off to the fast start I had been looking forward to. Now I hope to maintain this momentum and enthusiasm in the months ahead to promote the U.S.-EU partnership, which is vital to address a long and growing list of global challenges.