

Joint press conference held by Leszek Miller and Tony Blair (Warsaw, 30 May 2003)

Caption: On 30 May 2003, at a joint press conference held by Leszek Miller and Tony Blair, the Polish Prime Minister expresses his support for an intergovernmental Europe and declares his opposition to the federalist approach to European integration.

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Joint press conference in Poland: PM Tony Blair and Polish PM Leszek Miller (30 May 2003)

Good Morning Ladies and gentlemen. Today we are hosting the Prime Minister of the Government of the United Kingdom, Mr Tony Blair, and I would like to welcome him very cordially. This is already the third bilateral meeting we are having for the period of the previous six months. Today we had an opportunity to reconfirm that the relations between Poland and the United Kingdom are excellent. There are no conflicting issues and the political and economic cooperation is going very well. Today we talked about the events of Iraq, and also the situation in the environment of Iraq. Prime Minister Blair is just coming back from Iraq and he shared with me his impressions from that stay. We were also talking about the cooperation in the Polish and British zones. We also talked about the preparations for the referendum, about the foreseen results, and also about the experiences of the United Kingdom in connection with integration. We were also talking about economic cooperation, indicating the areas which still can be worked on in this cooperation. And we also referred to the upcoming important events for our cooperation, about the upcoming visits and meetings. Prime Minister, I am very happy that you are in Warsaw.

Prime Minister

First of all, can I express my pleasure at being back here in Warsaw. Can I also say that I think the state of Polish and British bilateral relations are absolutely excellent. Our countries are working closer and closer together and that is of enormous importance to both of us.

We have also been immensely grateful for Polish help and support in the very difficult situation over Iraq, and I can say emphatically, having returned from Iraq yesterday, that whatever the difficulties, there is no doubt at all that people in Iraq have been liberated from a brutal and bloody dictatorship, and here in Poland people know the value of freedom. Secondly, we are working extremely closely together on the issue of Europe and the progress of the European Convention and intergovernmental conference. For Poland there is a very big decision coming up in the referendum. This is a referendum on whether Poland should join the European Union. I very much hope both that people will go out and vote in that referendum because of its importance, and that they will vote yes in it. And I can say from the experience of Britain, who took such a decision almost 30 years ago, that whatever the difficulties, there is no doubt at all in terms of prosperity, living standards, trade, business, it is better to be in than out.

So I wish you good luck in that referendum and it is obviously of vital importance to people in Poland that I hope very much, for the sake not just of Poland, but also for the sake of the whole of Europe, that Poland votes yes.

Question and Answer Session

Question

Mr Blair, you say you want an open debate on Europe, you say it is time for the country to take a settled view of its position in Europe. In that case, why not rise to the challenge of the Eurosceptics and hold a referendum on the coming constitution and achieve that?

Prime Minister

Poland is having a referendum on whether to join Europe. We had a referendum on whether to join Europe. There is no case whatever for having a referendum on the convention, unless it altered fundamentally the way that Britain is governed. Since I believe that the outcome of this convention will be the reaffirmation of Europe as a union of nations, not a federal superstate where foreign, and defence, and tax policy remain with the British people, there is no fundamental constitutional change that would warrant a referendum.

Question

If I could just pursue the thought on Europe with both of you please. Do you now believe that Poland and Britain are in the frontline of stopping the creation of a European federal superstate which some nations in Europe see as a good thing, and not a bad. And if I can ask you about Iraq too, as both countries participated in that war. Weapons of mass destruction, the imminent threat of them, were the reason given for fighting that war. Haven't the peoples of Britain and Poland, and all the countries that fought, every reason for feeling deeply anxious that almost 2 months since the war, there is no evidence that that threat was imminent and existed. And Prime Minister, can you explain to people why you went to Iraq and didn't mention weapons of mass destruction once?

Prime Minister

First of all let me deal with the issue of weapons of mass destruction. As I have just caught up overnight with some of the allegations that have been made, let me just say this. The evidence that we had of weapons of mass destruction, was evidence drawn up and accepted by the Joint Intelligence Committee. That evidence of weapons of mass destruction is evidence, the truth of which I have absolutely no doubt about at all. What is more, the idea that we authorised, or made, our intelligence agencies invent some piece of evidence is completely absurd, and what is happening here is that people who have opposed this action throughout are now trying to find a fresh reason for saying why it wasn't the right thing to do.

And I tell you when you go to Iraq and you speak to people there, and you see the freedom that they have, and you see the liberation they have, you realise why it was emphatically the right thing to do. And when you say there is no evidence that weapons of mass destruction exist in Iraq, there are 12 years of United Nations resolutions about the weapons of mass destruction found in Iraq. There is no doubt about the chemical programme, the biological programme, indeed the nuclear weapons programme. All that is well documented by the United Nations. Now, our priority, having got rid of Saddam, is to rebuild the country. So the focus at the moment is on the humanitarian and the political reconstruction of the country. The threat from weapons of mass destruction, obviously with Saddam out, is not immediate any more.

We have only just begun the process now of investigating all the various sites. We have already found two trailers, both of which we believe were used for the production of biological weapons, but this is a process that is going to go on over the coming weeks and months. It is not the most urgent priority now for us since Saddam has gone. So you are just going to have to have a little bit of patience. I have absolutely no doubt at all, when we present the full evidence after we have investigated all the sites, after we have interviewed all the experts and scientists, and this will take place as I say over the coming weeks and months, that evidence will be found. And I have absolutely no doubt it exists, because Saddam's history in relation to weapons of mass destruction is not some invention of the British security services, it has been well documented over 12 years of lies and deception from Saddam. As for Europe, well I am making a speech on it later this morning.

Prime Minister Miller

I share the view and the estimation of the situation of Prime Minister Tony Blair. As far as the concept of the future enlarged Europe is concerned, I wish to say that we are supporting and strengthening the value of the nation state and we are against the federal state. In Polish tradition, taking into consideration the Polish history, it will be extremely tough for us to accept the concept of some United States of Europe that would be role modelled on America, and we fully share the British views in this area and we will co-operate.

Question

I have a question to both of you. Just talk about what would happen if the referendum really is not successful, if it fails because of low turnout or they vote no. Did you talk about it, or maybe Prime Minister Blair had some secret advice on how to speed up the process or how to get some miraculous formula to have a very good result.

Prime Minister Miller

No, we didn't talk about such a grim scenario. Although not really Mr Blair, but myself and the Polish authorities, we have to have such a grim scenario in the back of our minds however. But in our conversation we focused much more on the efforts that will have to be made in the remaining days in order to make sure that the majority of Poles will go and vote and that they will vote yes.

Prime Minister

I agree.

Question

And advice to the Polish Prime Minister?

Prime Minister

I didn't have to give advice, it is not my role. But obviously, because of what I have said to you earlier, this is a vital decision for the Polish people. And Poland is a big and strong nation in Europe today. We want it to play its full part in Europe, and that is good for the Polish people, for their jobs and their prosperity, for Polish influence, but it is also good for the whole of Europe, including countries like Britain. So we want you with us.