

## Prime Minister of Australia

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Interview

### **Joint Press Conference with Josse Barroso, President of the European Commission, Brussels, Belgium**

02 April 2008

Subject(s): Doha, Afghanistan, Prime Minister Bertie Ahern

E&OE

PM: Thank you very much Jose, the President of the European Commission and thank you for receiving me today in Brussels.

My central purpose in being Brussels today is to symbolise the importance of establishing a new broad based relationship with the European Commission and the European Union.

Europe, across the world and across the global agenda, has much to offer. And we in Australia wish to partner with our friends in Europe in so many areas of common endeavour: whether it is in global trade liberalisation, the great challenges of development for the impoverished nations of the world through implementing the millennium development goals, or beyond that, the great global challenge of climate change.

Today as the President has indicated, we spent a lot of time talking about the Doha Round. Our view in Australia is this, and I share the view expressed by the President, that this Doha Round is do-able.

There is an urgent need, in my view, to conclude this Round and to conclude it urgently, as a shot in the arm for the global economy. Which as we know has been going through a period of considerable stress through the unfolding crisis in global financial markets.

Negotiators right around the world and in Australia's case the Cairns Group, are hard at work. Time is short, urgency is great, and our requirement to achieve an outcome is significant for all those people around the world who depend on the forces of free trade to prevail, rather than be marginalised.

We also spoke at length about our cooperation on climate change and since the Australian Government's decision to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, we have been in close consultation with our friends in Europe and also partners around the world on the Bali Road Map. And time again, is ticking away.

We have Copenhagen at the end of next year. This will be very difficult to achieve. But following my discussions in the United States and these discussions today here in Brussels and others that I will have soon in China, it will be very important for us all to cooperate closely to achieve outcomes in the benefit of the planet.

This is the overarching moral and economic challenge of our generation and we must act together, in partnership to meet it.

On security questions, we also discussed earlier, the challenges that we face, including in Afghanistan. This formed a part of my discussions also with Mr Solana. We have Australian troops on the ground in Afghanistan. We have troops who are in harms way and we owe them everything in our upcoming meetings in Bucharest and all those other troops on the ground in Afghanistan to ensure that they have an effective strategy, both military and civilian, to ensure that we can prevail. And assist the government in Kabul to establish proper control in over the country.

Finally on the question of our development assistance cooperation, we have spoken at length about the need to work more closely together in the South Pacific. The European Union, I would thank them for this, the Commission are significant supporters of development assistance programs in the South Pacific.

When I was recently in the Solomon Islands, I opened an aid project concerning health services to people suffering from

various categories of diseases in the Solomons. And that was co-funded between the Commission and ourselves as the Australian Government. And I would thank those in Brussels who were responsible for that project.

But it indicates where we can go to further, in the future in harmonising more effectively, our significant development assistance efforts with the Pacific Island countries.

To conclude, I look forward to a close relationship with Jose and a new broad based relationship with our friends and partners in Europe. We will always have things that we disagree on. There will be difficult negotiations over trade, and as there always have been in the past on questions of agriculture and defending the interests of Australian farmers.

But we have a broad based relationship and we intend to prosecute that broad based relationship through this new key partnership framework which our two parties will negotiate, we hope by mid year. Thank you.

JOURNALIST: Mr Rudd on Afghanistan, you have said that you don't intend sending more troops. Is that a permanent commitment or are there circumstances in which that could change and secondly, you want the elimination of that Afghan opium crop, how would you do that and what would you say to those who argue that that could remove the livelihood of some are turn them towards the Taliban?

PM: When I go to Bucharest, first and foremost in mind I have the wellbeing of 1000 troops on the ground in harms' way in Oruzgan province in Afghanistan. Our responsibility is to make sure that there is an effective civilian military strategy across the country, to ensure that their mission prevails.

On the question of opium and the opium crop, again I discussed this with Mr Solana today. There are differing views across the international community about how to deal with this challenge. When I visited Afghanistan for the first time in 2004, this was a challenge staring us in the face then. It hasn't got better since then.

One of our aspirations for Bucharest is to begin to achieve a resolution of how this is to be done. My own view, and you asked for it directly, is this. Crops should be eliminated. Crop substitution should occur and where necessary, financial subsidies to the farmers concerned, so that there is a continued economic incentive to remain in viable agriculture or other forms of viable economic activity. And if we don't act in this department, what happens is, through the illicit sale of opium, not only is it bad worldwide in terms of narcotics, it is bad in providing illicit sources of finance for terrorist organisations.

JOURNALIST: Question to the Prime Minister on the WTO – you are saying it was urgent to get a deal, what is required exactly, concessions. And more specifically, there were discussions about agreeing on this scheme to allow countries to shield politically sensitive agricultural products with the full force of the tariff cuts. Has there been any new agreement on this, will there be an agreement?

PM: Negotiators have been hard at work in Geneva on recent days and we have been both briefed on the outcome of those negotiations. There is a lot of work to do yet. In terms of the, including the areas you just spoke of in your question. The urgency of the timetable is this, let's be realistic, we are now in April. There are Presidential elections due at the end of this year. Time is short and if you know anything about the trade negotiations, achieving agreement on what is called modalities, has to be achieved well before what is called the final undertaking.

That means I think we are really looking at a few months at best and the few weeks ahead, are critical to getting an outcome in those few months. World trade, world free trade, is a critical priority of the Australian Government. It is a critical priority in terms of our partners here in Europe as well. We may have different approaches from time to time.

We are determined to work creatively and constructively together to get a good outcome for the world economy.

JOURNALIST: Question for President Barroso. Mr President as you know the Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern has announced his resignation today. He will be stepping down one month before the Lisbon treaty referendum, can we have your reaction to that please?

PRESIDENT BARROSO: First of all his (inaudible) But let me tell personally, that I am very sorry that Bertie Ahern has to leave and decided to leave. He is a good friend. He has been a great partner. We have been working very closely together. Let me praise everything he has been doing for Europe in Ireland, also for Northern Ireland. I was in Belfast some time ago. It was one of the great moments of my experience as President of the Commission, was to see those parties working together in the real spirit of reconciliation that would not have been possible without the commitment of people like Bertie Ahern. So I really want to express my friendship to him and my gratitude for everything he has been doing also to the European Union. It was during his presidency that we made a lot of progress. I remember many, many hours of negotiation and I think he is a politician that has given and is giving a lot to the European project.

PM: Bertie Ahern, his contribution together with Tony Blair's to Northern Ireland in recent times has been extraordinary. Were it not for their respective contributions, then I agree entirely with what the President has said, what we have seen most recently in Belfast, would not have been possible.

So his contribution in terms of the settlement of a dispute which goes back centuries, many centuries, as an Australian of partial Irish extraction, I know something of it, this has been a great contribution to the world.

JOURNALIST: If I could firstly press Mr Rudd to just respond to the earlier part of the question with regard to what are the circumstances in which you might consider sending extra Afghanistan troops. But my question is to both leaders, you've spoken on the need for a more substantial relationship. That implies there has been something missing in recent times. Can I ask Mr Rudd, what has impeded Australia's relations with Europe in recent times and to Mr Barroso, do you believe that Australia has been too much of a critic and not enough of a partner with Europe?

PM: Look the key challenge here is to look to the future and not to reflect too much on the past. Let's look at Europe, you put the economies together, this is a massive economy and on top of that if you look for example at the impact for this economy, and for the global economy if we got a decent outcome on trade.

If we get a decent outcome on trade, a recent analyst suggests that global incomes would be boosted by \$120 billion per annum. For Australia that would be \$2.5 billion per annum. So for economies of size, and Europe's collective economy is one of size, getting good outcomes on trade is very important.

Directly to answer your question, I think in the past we have not pursued a sufficiently broad based relationship. We need to emphasise what we can achieve together on trade. Recognise and prosecute our differences in order to achieve a good outcome for all of our constituencies. But also recognise the common ground which we can forge in climate change, the common ground which we can now forge in development assistance cooperation. And the fact that we are now partnering so many European countries together in Afghanistan, for example, common security endeavour is important. Which comes back to your first question.

Our commitment in terms of the 1000 troops is rock solid. As I have said to President Bush in Washington, it is for the long haul. We believe that that commitment is sufficient. We believe that what is appropriate for the future is an effective military and civilian strategy for all participating and proper burden sharing across all participating states.

PRESIDENT BARROSO: It will be a very important global challenge. It is obvious that all working together we can have global answers to those global challenges, such as climate change.

But also democracy and respect for human rights. But also the Millennium Development Goals. And I could go on and on. And so it is quite obvious that if Australia and the European Union work together, since we basically share the same values, regarding open economies, open societies, the rule of law, human rights. I think we can achieve a lot. I think we can give a contribution not only for the well being of the Australian people and the European Union citizens but also a contribution to make the world a more decent place.

And this was I think the most important conclusion of our meeting today. We made a real, a real commitment on both sides to give more density, to give more substance.

Dual relations, that is good. Relations between the European Union and Australia is good. But of course we can do more. An example where we can do more is precisely climate change. That was why I really congratulated, very sincerely, the Prime Minister Rudd and the Australians. So it is for this courageous move. This is a very important move, because of specific Australian reasons, in terms of their own sources of energy, in terms of their location. It is a very important move.

It is an argument we are losing, honestly, with other very important partners. So, why do we need to make progress. This is a concrete example. So now we are preparing this partnership, this key partnership agreement, framework agreement.

And I hope that our officials will prepare a very good document that will translate now in very concrete terms this determination to go forward. It is not that we will agree on all issues, as Prime Minister Rudd just said. Of course we have some times of difference consistencies, we have to.

But I believe that more than ever, in this unpredictable and sometimes very dangerous world, it is important that partners that are like minded like Australian and the European Union and the European Union member states, work hand in hand to give a positive contribution to this globally, in the 21st century.