

EPP LEADERS' SUMMIT IN KORTRIJK

Kortrijk, October 19, 2001

EPP President Wilfried MARTENS said in a statement after today's EPP Summit ahead of the European Council in Gent:

"The EPP today reaffirms that, together with our member parties, we stand four-square behind the position elaborated by the Extraordinary European Council Meeting on September 21. The fight against terrorism will be long and difficult. But it is also just and necessary.

"From the beginning of this crisis we have rejected any mystification about a 'clash of civilisations.' This is evil propaganda. What can be civilised about murdering thousands of innocent people? About sending anthrax powder through the post? About declaring a so-called holy war against anyone not sharing your heretical version of Islam?

"No. This clash is between freedom and unfreedom. Tolerance and intolerance. Eventually between life and death.

"We confront a terrible new threat to global security, indeed to the peace of everyday life.

"Bin Laden has inspired thousands, perhaps millions of people, with an ideology which is as cynical as it is empty of anything except delusions of grandeur and hatred.

"It is time to remember our values, what we stand for, why we are meeting today. After the defeat of Nazism, here in Europe peaceful, democratic, nations were inspired to forget their quarrels, and to form a community, and then a Union.

"That solidarity is now our best hope of defeating a new and terrible danger.

"It was given practical expression by the European Council on September 21. On the basis of Security Council Resolution 1368 it called for "the broadest possible coalition against terrorism under United Nations aegis", endorsed the US riposte as legitimate, and said that "actions must be targeted and may also be directed against states abetting, supporting, or harbouring terrorists."

"We wholeheartedly support that.

"The EU plans includes such measures as a common EU definition of terrorism, action on money-laundering, and serious common engagement in regional conflicts. These are to the point, but they are also overdue. Sometimes it takes a crisis for us to see clearly what must be done. In particular, the Union's reluctance to take responsibility in the Middle East has disturbed all of us for a long time. The decision to send a ministerial

troika is a good start.

"But let us not pretend: it is only that. Everything - I mean real political will - must be exercised to ensure that the peace process is resumed and succeeds. In practice that means a Palestinian state. The same political will must be invested in the resolution of conflicts in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

"How else can these reservoirs of misery be removed? The reservoirs in which fanaticism breeds.

"But these are problems which will not be resolved today or tomorrow. Meanwhile, things are as they are.

"I do not wish to add to the current atmosphere of paranoia, but terrible dangers really do confront us. One of the greatest is the risk of destabilisation in Pakistan - a nuclear power - and a takeover by extremists committed to outright war with India.

"So it is essential that this crisis is handled with rigour and determination, but also with delicacy and intelligence, and a commitment to a long-term perspective. The EPP believes that the new administration in Washington has shown those qualities, and deserves the unwavering support it has been shown in Europe since the disaster of September 11.

Holding together the global coalition is and will remain very difficult, especially where the coalition allies are not democracies. And where, as in Pakistan, there is popular discontent which has already shown itself susceptible to the siren voices of extremists.

"These are sombre times, and economically they threaten to be turbulent too. If we are to win, then solidarity will have to go further than declarations, or even sending troops. We will need legal, judicial, police, financial, diplomatic, and political, as well as military means, if we are to defeat the cancer of terrorism and confront entirely new challenges to our whole way of life.

"Internationally, Kofi Annan has played a very positive part. The UN is becoming what it is supposed to be. We solidly support the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 of September 28, which contains very useful tools for international action against terrorism.

"Nationally, every country needs to look at, and if necessary review and broaden, its terrorism laws.

"On a military level - as the EPP has long argued - the Union must make a reality as soon as possible of the Common Defence and Security Policy, and of a Rapid Reaction Force capable of engaging in quite new circumstances and areas.

"The European members of NATO must stop repeating the usual excuses about budget pressures, and meet the goals of the 1999 Defence Capabilities Initiative (DCI) to modernise their forces and capabilities. Our defence spending in Europe is simply not enough to meet commitments. And there are now new ones: we also need urgently to assess the potential threat from terrorist use of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons.

"What are the implications for the EPP's commitment to EU enlargement? The burden on candidate EU Member States is already considerable, and will become more so if we now enter an economic recession.

"Our message is the same as before: the EPP will do everything it can to ensure the enlargement goes ahead according to plan. But we also urge you to confront the urgent priority of fighting terrorism and its accomplices - organised crime and money-laundering. That would be of the greatest help to all of us in Europe at this time.

"This crisis is a great test for all democratic countries, perhaps the greatest since the Cuban Missile Crisis 40 years ago. Our intentions to our neighbours, Christian, Muslim, people of all religions and none, is peaceful and generous. Our cause is just. And if we maintain our solidarity we will win."