

Press conference held by Javier Solana and Fouad Siniora at the Council of the European Union (Brussels, 20 March 2006)

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[Javier Solana] Let me tell you that, for me, it is a great pleasure to receive, once again, the Prime Minister of Lebanon — a good friend of many years and somebody which is doing a lot for his country. He has been, today, with the Foreign Ministers of the European Union, in different configurations, if I may say. He has participated on the lunch today, he has had a bilateral meeting with several ministers, he has been to the Commission, he has been here, at the end of the day, to wrap up what has been a long day.

I would like to say three or four things which I would like to underline for you. First, the dialogue, the national dialogue in which Prime Minister Siniora is engaged is something that we support completely, wholeheartedly. We think that this is a good initiative, that it is an initiative that he is dealing with a tremendous amount of energy and we support completely. Second, I'd like to say that the relationship that he is constructing with the European Union, that we are constructing with Lebanon, is going very, very well, and we will be giving a push in a very short period of time, I hope, a very, very important push. And, thirdly, the process of reforms which on the economic field he has taken over are also something that we very much support and try to help.

I'd like to say that, with the Prime Minister Siniora, Lebanon is one of our most, our closest country in the Mediterranean region. He is a member of the Euro-Med process — a very important one, and a very advanced one. So I am very, very happy to receive a good friend, a very good Prime Minister and somebody which is a friend of Europe, today, here in all the institutions of the European Union. Prime Minister, a pleasure.

[Fouad Siniora] Thank you very much. I am really very much happy to have met our friend, Mr Solana. We had an excellent meeting and discussed several issues: what's going on in Lebanon pertaining to the national dialogue in which we made important progress, as well as with the meetings that I've had today regarding the partnership agreement, the association that we have with Europe and the preparation for the neighbourhood policy and the action plan, and the bilateral meetings that we had, I am going back to Beirut very much confident of the progress that we are having. We, you know, the association agreement will become effective on the beginning of April — next April — and other meetings will be held by some of my colleagues here in Brussels as well as in Luxembourg. So I am really very thankful for my friend, Mr Solana, for the meeting that we have had and for the support that he is showing and which I have heard from everybody that I have met regarding the support to Lebanon, whether politically or economically, and with the show of support that they have already expressed in the meeting that I have had with the 25 Ministers — the Foreign Ministers of Europe — in which they expressed their sincere support to Lebanon in its reform programme and for the convening of the meeting that will be held as the Beirut Conference for the support of Lebanon. So, this day was a very busy day, but a very fruitful day.