

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

A STRONGER EUROPE: OUR COMMON INTEREST
A DISCUSSION WITH FINNISH PRESIDENT SAULI NIINISTÖ

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GAYER: Good morning everyone. Welcome to Brookings. My name is Ted Gayer, I'm the executive vice president here at Brookings and I'm delighted that you're joining us today for the Alan and Jane Batkin International Leaders Forum featuring his Excellency Sauli Niinistö, president of the Republic of Finland. Good morning also, we have people watching on our webcast so thank you for joining us as well.

President Niinistö is the 12th president of Finland. He was inaugurated in March 2012 and reelected just this past January. He has had a distinguished career in public service including as minister of justice, minister of finance, deputy prime minister and speaker of the Parliament. In a few short moments, he will share remarks on the challenges facing Europe today and on the role of transatlantic relations and meeting those challenges.

Following his remarks, he will be joined by my friend and colleague, Strobe Talbott. Among his many accomplishments, one of the big ones he dealt with me as he was my boss as the president of Brookings, so kudos to him. It is very nice to see you again, Strobe. Strobe will lead a discussion with President Niinistö including fielding questions from the audience. So, as he talks you might want to start thinking about which questions you want to ask.

One quick reminder today as the cameras would suggest, the event is on the record. With that, let me again thank everybody for coming. Special thanks again for being here, President Niinistö and for coming to Brookings. It has probably been a pretty busy week this week in New York so we really appreciate you making the stop at Brookings. I'll turn it over to you now, thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Good morning ambassadors, ladies, gentlemen and dear friends. I want to thank you for your kindest introduction. It is a great pleasure to join you here this morning. Like many of my colleagues, I spent the past few days at

the UN General Assembly. The sentiment I took away from the speeches and discussants there is not new but it became much clearer. We are experiencing a fundamental transformation in international relations. The balance of (inaudible) is changing. The credibility of the institution is being tested and completely new challenges pile up on top of the existing ones.

While there are reasons for hope and optimism, fear and pessimism often seem to outweigh them. We are leaving many familiar things behind us and the visibility ahead of us is very limited. That leads to uncertainty and uncertainty and insecurity go hand in hand. This combination can be corrosive to the very fabric of our societies. We are rapidly losing our sense of community, a spirit of belonging both domestically and internationally. Turning inward, we risk forgetting the value of working together.

Let me be very clear. This is a dangerous development. We need to boldly intervene and start shaping the future we want. In order to have a role in it, Europe has to become stronger. Ladies and gentlemen, the European Union was born in a previous era of insecurity, much more severe than one today. Out of the ashes of the Second World War, the six founding members starting pulling their coal and steel resources and began the project of a single market. It was a community of nation states who decided to join forces and share sovereignty at their own free will.

This principle has not changed over the decades. The member states are still in charge. People decide what the EU does. The European Union does not exist to serve its own institutions. The EU and its institutions are there to serve the interests of the member states and their citizens. Let's not forget that the European Union has succeeded remarkably well.

Over several enlargement rounds, we have seen the internal market, the freedom of movement and a growing number of common policies develop. They have created welfare and stability previous generations so now our continent could never have

imagined. That internal strength of Europe has also made the transatlantic partnership stronger. Building on solid foundations at home, the Europeans and Americans have jointly defended and promoted our common values in the world democracy, freedom and rule of law.

For Finland, joining the EU in 1995 anchored us firmly into the community of nations and values we consider our own. I remember very well, the powerful European spirit of that time, a sense of belonging. Unfortunately, that spirit has faded over time. It is a secret that the EU is now in a difficult phase. Discord is overshadowing unity. Brexit is a loss for both the United Kingdom and the remaining 27 members of the union. In some neighbor states, national elections have brought in governments that are questioning the very values Europe is based on. In order to put our house in order, I believe rebuilding the European spirit is essential.

When I talk about that spirit, it's not just a soft and idealistic goal it is also hard realism. The spirit of belonging together increases our security and resilience. Without it, we are much more vulnerable to external threats and it goes both ways. I believe that doing more together on security is the best way to strengthen that spirit.

Ladies and gentlemen, the EU has plenty of tools to provide its members with soft security, hard security and defense is where the union has been slower to deliver. Ever since the failed attempt to create a European defense community in the 1950's, NATO has been the uncontested foundation for the collective defense of its members. This continues to be the case.

Also, to non-members like Finland and Sweden, NATO is fundamentally important for European security and stability. We highly value our close partnership with NATO. For 70 years already NATO has, to a large degree, meant the United States. The Americans have shoulder the largest share of the burden for European security. It has been highly valuable for Europe and we fully understand why the U.S. expects Europe to do more for its own security. This is precisely what we aim to do now. I have

been calling a stronger European difference for over a decade already. I am delighted to see that there is finally movement in this field in Europe.

The European Union has started its first so-called BESCO projects. From the UN's perspective, this permanent structured cooperation may sound technocratic and the sums of money may seem tiny but it is an important step in developing the EU's defense investment capabilities and readiness. There is now also a first discussion about the article 42.7 of the Union's Lisbon Treaty. For those who are not familiar with the treaty, this article declares that EU member states have an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power if another member is under attack. I'm glad that we are finally beginning to address what that would mean in a crisis situation. A core task of any union is to protect its own citizens.

I know that European strategic autonomy is almost a dirty word for many here in Washington. Let me assure you, the growing European activity is not an attempt to undermine NATO, on the contrary. It aims at developing stronger European capabilities. Those capabilities can equally be deployed through NATO, through the EU, through multinational coalitions or nationally. This is not some game. A stronger Europe means stronger NATO and a stronger Europe is a more useful partner for the United States.

Finland takes its own defense very seriously. After the end of the Cold War, we never let our guard down. Our citizens will defend their country and the will is strongest in Europe. Maintaining a strong national defense sends two powerful messages. It is a threshold against potential aggressors and it makes us a more interesting partner. This is evident in our close bilateral cooperation with many NATO countries, including the United States. Ladies and gentlemen, in these turbulent times, a stronger Europe is in the interest of us Europeans. But my argument is that a stronger Europe is also shared transatlantic interests.

Let us just take a look at geopolitics and the two other major actors in the world.

China and Russia are both seeking to increase their influence in our neighborhood, in European's neighborhood. Russia has been doing it aggressively, flexing its military muscles and also using them as we have seen in Ukraine and Syria. Chinese means have been more subtle. Towards Europe, both of them are currently showing a friendly face. Lately we have not witnessed quite the same level of interest in Europe from Washington.

When China extends its (inaudible) to Europe and attempts to buy its way into our infrastructure, it prefers to work with individual European countries and ad hoc groups rather than with a strong European Union. When Russia tries to rebuild its economic relationship with Europe, disbar its sanctions, it declares it prefers to work with a strong EU. But also, with Russia the truth may be more fragmented than that. Beijing and Moscow certainly have paid attention to the signs of rift in the transatlantic relation. It cannot be in the U.S. interest to have your major adversaries gain a bigger foothold in our European continent. A strong and united Europe is better equipped to resist them.

Common competitors unite us and so should common interests. I say this fully aware of the fact that the U.S. and Europe now have open disagreements in many areas from foreign policy to trade. But where can the U.S. find a more reliable partner than Europe. The same question applies even if we think of the transatlantic relationship as transactional relationship. Our economies are deeply intertwined. There may be trade deficits on one side but services and foreign direct investments balance the picture. An open and free trade benefits us both. The transatlantic value chains force a competitiveness in European and American companies alike.

Climate change and other environmental challenges will require completely new technological innovations. Our companies, universities and research labs have a lot to offer to each other in these fields. Together, we can ensure that standards continue to be set by (inaudible) not by others. Technology cooperation across the Atlantic will also help us face even more complex hybrid and cyber threats.

And finally, beyond geopolitics and transnationalism, we should not forget how invaluable the transatlantic link is in its own right. I mean, invaluable in both senses of the word. Extremely important but also valuable beyond estimation. Something in material value that is impossible to measure in dollars or Euros. Let's call the transatlantic spirit a sense of belonging together. We can't afford to lose it on either side of the Atlantic. Thank you.

MR. TALBOTT: Good morning everybody. This day is, at least on this premise, is off to a very good start. Mr. President, your speech is, I think, one of the clearest, most candid and most constructive on these issues that we've heard for a long time. What I would like to do before we open it up to the audience is pick up on a couple of issues that you struck on in your speech. Both at the beginning and at the end, you made a point that there is a kind of a contagion, particularly in the community of democracies. And the contagion is that the nations involved are turning inward and also segments within those nations are turning inward. That could be tragic and dangerous.

We are dealing with this in our country. The number of Brookings scholars around the room who are trying to go back and do a diagnosis on what's behind that. What is your own diagnosis of the problem in Europe?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: I'm not a doctor. Nevertheless yes, you said that somehow nations are turning in, we have to ask why. One element, not total explanation for this, we heard this week in New York in the United Nations, the word patriotism very many times. Now we should think what each of us means by patriotism. We would like to define, in Finland, in a way at least I have, that you love your country. You're ready to defend your country but you do not have a feeling that loving your own country means something bad to other nations. No, on the contrary. You should feel that the more I love my country, I try to work with similar people as well.

But this would be, I guess, too easy of an explanation. Behind that, that people tend to understand patriotism in a different way that it is that we just we are

important, nobody else and we keep our interests and don't like anybody to come nearby. Something is behind. So, many people in Europe here have started to think in this way. I would say that the traditional political systems, even in democracies, have to look at a mirror. Something has not been made in the best possible way if so many people think otherwise. What is it that the mirror might tell, that is a bit difficult to say. Studying your own footprint, you maybe learn to walk more straightforward.

MR. TALBOTT: A good doctor would have probably underscored that. Is there another part of the problem and that is, a growing resentment in European countries as there is in the United States with what they consider to be elitists who do not have their interests in mind so there is a backlash. Certainly, in the United States we can see a low public opinion of our Congress and the federal government. Is there something like that going on in Europe as well?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes, but maybe it hasn't changed that much, it has always been a great place for voters to always say that well, they don't know members of parliament, sometimes even the president. But as the sentiment behind that changed somehow, I've heard quite often used the word elite nowadays pointing out that elite is something that one must resist. It is again, time to look at the mirror whether we have created both in business in politics, a group of people who are rather discussed with themselves and our very wise. And not maybe trying to understand, not accept but to try to understand that other people may be taking a different way.

Very many of those people I have met who have been very critical on different issues seem to be most satisfied after discussing with them if you tell them, well I understand your point of view but I don't accept it because my point of view is different and then explain that. But many people are very clearly satisfied, I have been heard, is the message. Many now behind the social media have forgotten a straight contact and let's say a polite way of discussing even if you disagree.

MR. TALBOTT: Understood. Let's go to the point that you raised after

you did give us a sense of the wobbliness of the European Union. We understand and we sympathize with our European friends for the problems and the weaknesses that they have inside the EU. But you also have another challenge which is that if you look to the east, there are two very, very large countries and that is Russia and China which are basically both resurgent great powers. And you look to the west and you see us, the United States that for the first time in 70 years is seriously pulling back.

I can imagine if I were a pessimist that that vice between the east and the west would make it all the harder for Europe to get back on track. But I like to be, as my boss, Madeleine Albright says, I'm an optimist who worries. As an optimist, I would like to think that these challenges on either side will actually wake up the European spirit.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes, you're absolutely right. Europe is not and it should never be a kind of unimportant continent moving from west to east back to west, no. Europe must be strong enough to be Europe one of the major players and actors in the world. This is now the problem. If we look at whatever conflict in the world, North Korea, Syria, Iran, we see three countries in different combinations solving these problems. That is U.S., China, Russia. Where is European Union, European Union should also be there too and that would also balance.

So, Europe must be stronger, that is my message. How Europe could be stronger, I don't believe in new directives or new institutions or constructions if you don't have the spirit. We Europeans, all of us, should understand that we all need the European Union. Why I have kept up discussing on European security and European defense, it is because in history I do not recall any union which wouldn't have seen that its most important task is to guarantee security for families and individuals. The European Union hasn't don't that. That is now time to do. That would also increase, I believe, the European spirit. That would also help Europe to become great again.

After the Cold War, nineties and the beginning of this millennium, we learned to live in a beautiful world. For example, in Europe very many countries reduced

their defense forces because war, that's so far away, such things doesn't happen. But now, we still should think in Europe beautifully, good things. But we have to understand that there is also bad existing in the world. And you have to be strong if you want to deliver your good message because if you're weak, nobody believes you.

MR. TALBOTT: That goes directly to another thought that came to me as I was listening to you. That is, the idea of mutual security guarantees is obviously what you're referring to, at least in part. What are the ideas and the plans for backing the guarantees with hard power?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: First, the Lisbon Agreement was agreed, if I remember correctly, in 2008. There is Article 42.7 which is actually a stronger expression of mutual responsibility if we meet aggressive behavior. Stronger than Article 5 in NATO's papers.

MR. TALBOTT: As strong?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: At least as strong. It is written strong. I now talk about written, not concrete life. After all the members signed the agreement, nothing happened. So, we have a very strong expression in our agreement but nothing behind that. That kind of discussion has now started. I have tried to keep it on for at least ten years and agreed, with pleasure, that the discussion has now begun.

Because I come back to union, which kind of a union is such that well, if some parts of the union are under aggression so we just now face and say, well maybe we are less next week. I very often try to think about the United States and why people in Montana to Texas in a way when they see the flack or they read the constitution they have respect on that. Their spirit, even though those people, according to my understanding, are quite different from each other but they have the spirit. They belong to somewhere. And why Europe is not capable of creating this kind of spirit, that's a huge question. I understand that the European Union is quite younger compared to the United States. But if we go 100 years back in time, so you had that spirit here already and then

you were not forward after the Civil War.

MR. TALBOTT: You also referenced what you think is a controversial phrase here in Washington and the U.S. and that is strategic autonomy. It doesn't frighten me at all but I'm not sure I understand it and I'm not sure how it will mesh with NATO.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes. Actually, I learned the expression from a French discussion. They had been talking from the nineties of two principles. One is strategic autonomy and the other is solidarity with NATO. And these two elements, in their opinion, can fit together. I would define now, strategic autonomy, in a way that, like I said, that Europe must take care more of its security and its defense. And that is not at all against NATO. That is the solidarity, in my opinion.

I just repeat once again to take care more of your own security, it means that you are stronger and you will be seen stronger elsewhere also. If you are seen strong, you get your voice heard better. So, it is two-folded not only that your capabilities in protecting yourself are increasing but your capabilities in getting your good message through are improving.

MR. TALBOTT: A single person comes to mind, somebody who puts a lot of weight into his reputation for being strong and that's President Putin. You have really a quite remarkable experience sitting down with him, talking to him on the phone. Could you give us a little sense of the man himself and his strategy and what does he really want at the end of the day.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Well, I want to repeat something which has been already in public because I don't like to estimate people who are not present. Nevertheless, as a person, I was amazed to notice that he still keeps contacts to Finland, to people he learned to know in the early nineties when he was not even number in St. Petersburg. But he met in his office, some Finnish city leaders or equal people that he was at the time. He never forgets it because he was dealt respectfully. He calls those

people who are now retired, calls them to Moscow after 20 to 30 years. So one element, he doesn't forget, he doesn't forget his friends but unfortunately this works also the other way around. He doesn't forget if he has not been dealt respectfully.

MR. TALBOTT: So, how does he define respect?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: You should know the Russian mindset and Russian soul, maybe. Hardly in his personal life and confides very easily with very many Russians. My pride is similar to Russian, the state of Russian pride. If it's hurt, the state, I'm personally hurt too. I guess that if Putin is hurt somehow, he feels that it is against Russia too. It is the same thing with respect of the state and the state leader. I believe that respect means well, it means what we mean but maybe a bit more that respect is also a sentiment where it might be a bit of not necessarily fear but let's say that others are careful when handling you, not maybe fear but careful.

MR. TALBOTT: We're hearing a lot about fear in this country too. I'm going to just ask one more question because we have a terrific audience here and I want them to have back and forth with you. Among your passions, if I can put it that way, is doing something about climate change. Kristy has sent me a number of your speeches. You never ignore that issue and towards the end of your speech today, did so as well.

I'm going to make a very large point that goes off into the future. But all of us, no matter how old we are, have stake in the far, far future, especially if we have progeny. You've had a lot of tough things to work on this year but you've had one glorious event, you and your first lady brought a little boy into the world, nine months now, something like that?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Eight.

MR. TALBOTT: His name is Aaro and Aaro is likely to see in the 22nd century and we're not going to see that but our generation and the one coming up behind us is probably the last generation that can do something about climate change. That resonates with our hope for our own children and grandchildren and great grandchildren

because we want them to be able to live in a livable world.

Let me go to this year issue which is the Arctic Council. Finland, as I think most of you know, has the chair. How does that look and are you getting some help and cooperation from our government.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes, if you allow me I'll go a bit to climate change. What happened to me was quite exciting. We have to remember that in Finland, and I do not believe that the situation is very different here. 70 percent of all emissions comes from household's behavior. What happened with me during these years was that when I go shopping, the early days I compared prices, how many Euros is that, can I afford it, have I money enough to buy that and do I find a cheaper one or do I get more with my 100 Euros than in this shop.

Now more and more often when I go to a shop, I don't count it in Euros but I count it on how much impact it has on the environment. That pricing is totally different. It might be in Euros, more expensive but you pick it up because it is cheaper for the future. And you might think not anymore that can I afford that but you ask whether I need it absolutely. This is something that I think we should all start thinking. If it's in our mind, deep in our minds, it has a huge impact on climate change.

Now I answer you on the Arctic. We are chairing the Arctic Council now and what happens in the Arctic is very crucial. It is not a question of Arctic anymore, it's question of globe. If we lose the Arctic ice, we lose the globe. And one element of what we have now discussed a lot, I have put it forward with Putin and with Trump also. Both of them have understood the problem and are, at least according to their sayings, ready to do something. That is the black hole, emission black hole comes from the sky and drops down to the Arctic. We all know what happens when white ice and snow is covered by black. When the sun meets it, the melting will accelerate a lot.

This is one of the points that we would like to clear up during our chairmanship. We have proposed to arrange a summit that is for heads of state. So, far

we have got positive answers, let's say from most of the eight-member countries. Sometimes the President has to be diplomatic so most of the member countries. There are other elements, for example, flaring. That is, they burn the extra gas in fields. We have all seen beaches of huge flames and that is silly, actually. Well, you could use maybe that gas instead of burning it and creating a lot of emissions and black carbon. But it is expensive and it is a difficult issue. These kinds of elements we would like to take up when or if we have the summit where heads of state will say that we save the Arctic.

MR. TALBOTT: So Aaro, this was going to be the happy part of the conversation.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Well, this is a very personal part. Sometimes when I look at his blue eyes, I ask myself that what kind of a world those eyes will be looking in the future. That, dear friends, puts you thinking.

MR. TALBOTT: Well, in his long life on a livable planet, he will know that his father made it a livable planet.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: I hope so.

MR. TALBOTT: Let's open it up. Just a couple of things. I'll try to be as democratic as possible. Please wait until you get a mic. Please ask a question that has a sentence with a question mark after it so that we can use the time that we still have to listen to the President. This gentleman here in the third row, that gentleman and then the lady behind him.

MR. POMERANCE: Thank you very much, Strobe. Thank you, Mr. President, for just the terrific speech and dialogue. My name is Rafe Pomerance, I chair a group called Arctic 21. As chair of the Arctic Council, there is this continuing opportunity to bring the attention of the world as you explained it. We call it the unraveling of the Arctic. The many components, Greenland, sea ice, permafrost which threatens a massive feedback. There is great urgency to this and required ambition in

both the Arctic and globally.

My question is, would you consider using your platform as chair to convene some kind of global meeting that improves the spirit. I mean, there has to be a blending of the European spirit and the global spirit to save the Arctic and our planet. Your platform offers a major opportunity in the remaining months. There will be a foreign ministers meeting to close in May, you have an environment ministers meeting next month, if you have the summit meeting terrific. But you have this platform and the question is are you willing to consider using it in a bigger way than you already have which you have done. Thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes, actually even though there are only these eight members, permanent members, the Arctic countries which have a part of them in the Arctic area, I have been talking about this for well, for example, with representatives (inaudible) because it is also their interest even more than ours. So, getting more people supporting and maybe putting a pressure, that's one of the ideas. But I want to be very clear with stopping black carbon. You haven't done so very much to stop the climate change but it is a very easy way of having an impact. That's why it should be used. Yes, we use that platform as strongly as possible.

I'm very delighted after noticing that this message is understood. It was understood in the White House, it was understood in (inaudible). Sometimes, it is good to start with something concrete, even if it's not that big step. Because if you take a first step, maybe you are prepared to take another and plenty more. That's why I'm selling this first step to those who haven't taken it yet.

MR. TALBOTT: Just one other thought came to mind and that is, there is a lot of quite ominous activity at the Antarctic. Is there any set of ways to get at that problem as well?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes, it is many times bigger problem if we are losing the Antarctic, even bigger a lot bigger than the Arctic area. I guess it is different, it

is more depending on the fact that climate is warming up. Surely that has an impact or so on the Arctic but this kind of extra element like the black hole, I do not believe that that is a big issue in the Antarctic but climate change is dangerous.

MR. TALBOTT: Do nations in the southern hemisphere, are they getting together in the way the northern hemisphere has?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: We have to push them, yes. Also, in this respect, the aspect if we can do something to wake up people understanding the Arctic, maybe that leads to think more about the Antarctic surroundings too.

MR. TALBOTT: This gentleman here I think is next.

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible) press. Could you little bit elaborate your thinking about European defense about this 27. Some people have said that it's very open, you must come to the aid of the country in distress but it can mean like sending only oil if you want to. So, should that be defined more security wise kind of pinpointing in the military measures or are you talking more about common European army or how far are you ready and willing to go?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Like I said, it's written text but even though it is ten years it was written, actually nobody is very prepared to answer what it means. That's why I have been asking for years from other European state leaders that how do you see this? Do you understand and your country understand this because it applies to every country with all possible means to help, what are they? And nobody actually has so far answered to me and I haven't answered.

So, now ongoing discussions, for example, with President Macron, well I think that we little by little start to get to the discussion both what each of us means by that. I do not believe it means a European army. For example, NATO hasn't got an army of its own. NATO's troops are national troops and they only put the (inaudible) of NATO is they are serving NATO. So, it's not a relevant issue to create armies because in Europe we have 28 armies, actually. I can't actually answer you more exact because

there is not an exact answer which we are looking after now.

MR. TALBOTT: Will there be progress during the course of this year, do you think?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Not that fast.

MR. TALBOTT: The lady here.

MS. CHOI: Good morning, President. My name is Sunjin Choi, Langum Partners. Finland will take over EU presence next year. Would you perhaps share with us what are the priorities since you are President of Finland and also think about previous President of Finland, President Ahtisaari who is the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Also, he never forgot he was (inaudible) a displaced person. He never forgot experience. For me, he's one of the best, finest example of global public good. Also, he spent some time and restored (inaudible) library which is built by one of my favorite architects, Alva Arto. So, I would be interested in your views about Finnish government effort how to integrate some of the immigrants and refugees in your country especially education and professional career. Thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Thank you. What comes to Finnish program during the presidency of (inaudible), I would like to see progress in getting more understanding to European spirit. If we can wake up European spirit in whatever form and connecting with whatever concrete issue, that would be a real victory. I haven't heard so very many people even talking about European spirit just to talk about that might also raise it. Otherwise, I have difficulties to say how our government because I have no responsibility on EU policy in Finland. I'm badly blamed if I take any comment on that.

You maybe know that Finland received quite a lot of migrants a couple of years ago and now the discussion is that whether we should increase the fixed amount of refugees we take every year. I have said, this is just my opinion because I'm not deciding that but I think we could increase that with one condition. That European Union

takes more responsibility of its borders and creates more unified criteria's, how the processes are being done, the context of processes is in the international agreements. But how the processes are dealt and then also how member countries show solidarity because everybody must be prepared to take migrants. But the best possible situation would be that there are big migrant camps all over the Middle East, Turkey wherever, that people would stay there and Europe should pick up people from there. In that case, I think Finland could well increase a lot its yearly fixed amount of refugees.

We are doing our best to integrate those people. Although I have to admit that the phenomenon is a bit new and we have a lot of people who came at the same time so there are difficulties with that.

MR. TALBOTT: That gentleman there, the lady and then that gentleman there.

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible) Finnish Media. President Trump had a press conference yesterday where he said that during his speech at the UN, people were not laughing at him but they were having a good time. Had did you personally see it? Did you feel like laughing, did you have a good time or did you hear a speech that gave you reason to be worried about the future of the United Nations and the international cooperation in general. Thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: That is very difficult to define. Maybe the most important thing is that people were laughing, not showing another kind of face and to whom they were laughing that's all the same. I have seldom heard people laughing in the UN and it was kind of a first experience. It's better than shouting. In regards to his speech, it was very similar to the one from last year, the context, no differences. The way he put it this time was a lot more polite. I don't know whether we can read anything out of that but nevertheless, he said in a different way, the same things he said a year ago. For example, he's demanding how to fix the UN, what kind of reforms should be done or at least demanding reforms. I think that most of us can agree with that.

Institutions will live for a longer period, every one of them needs reformed every now and then so that is one example. In my speech, I had a different view.

MR. TALBOTT: The lady right there and then the gentleman there and then we'll go to the lady on the other side of the aisle.

MS. ASBORA: Kristen Asbora. I'm the Helmut Schmitt professor at the Kissinger Center. I would like to ask about the global order and how you, from a Finnish perspective, see the challenge of the opening Arctic if you think about the Chinese term, polar Silk Road. And how will the alliance between Russia and China be when it comes to shipping in the far north and oil and gas mining thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes. One of the elements we have taken up in our Arctic problem is maritime security, how to develop more security to the traffic in the Arctic area. One element is also, and I think every member might be ready to accept it is to forbid using heavy fuel in maritime traffic there.

Well that is a very interesting issue because we have heard that China is building the Silk Road and the Arctic belt, whatever they mean by that. China is not a member in the Arctic Council and China has not any territorial rights in the Arctic area. There has been a dispute, according to my understanding, between Russia and China with what are free waters and what are not free waters there. That might be an easier issue that would be interesting to take up in the Arctic Council but that needs a summit.

MR. TALBOTT: Before we go to the next gentleman, I wanted to come back to one other issue about the Arctic. And that is the geopolitical and military and security issues. If the polar ice cap becomes the polar sea, that has huge implications, some of them quite worrisome.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Yes. So far, there has been an agreement that the Arctic Council doesn't take any opinion on military issues. I think that we keep that but you're quite right, geopolitically the Arctic is very interesting. If like you said, polar sea, the ice would change to polar sea, I think the major would be environmental,

however, because we have lost so much that it is almost all the same if there are military boats closing.

But nevertheless, are already now there is a lot of room for geopolitical activities and somehow, I have a feeling that all, at least the bigger ones, they avoid talking about that saying that well, that's not a problem there. And then we have to think that is it a problem that the big ones say that it is not a problem. Sometimes it might be.

MR. TALBOTT: Indeed. Thank you for your patience. This gentleman here.

MR. CARTER: Thank you, Mr. President, for your comments earlier. I really appreciate your visit here. My name is Lopez Carter. I am a strategic planning analyst with the Army National Guard, retired Colonel whose last duty assignment was with the U.S. military delegation to NATO Military Committee in Brussels, Belgium for five years. In 2002, at a Russian NATO summit in Rome, Italy, they created the NATO Russia Council. It is my contention, and I'm speaking on behalf of Lopez Carter, not the U.S. Army or anyone else, that the Russian's used what we call in the U.S. Army, an intelligence preparation of the battlefield. By that, I mean they studied the nuances of NATO collectively and the individual member nations to understand how NATO might respond to any aggressive actions on their part.

Hence, in 2008 the aggressive military actions against Georgia, a few years later, the aggressive military actions in Ukraine. The continued meddling in western elections, the somewhat aggressive action against our NATO allies in the Baltics, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania with the very muted response from the international community. Not a zero response but not a very aggressive response to these aggressive actions on the part of Russia. I'm just interested in your perspective on that if there should be a stronger response to these aggressive actions on the part of Russia or if you agree with the present course and the present responses that have been done. Thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Well if you allow me, I'll just keep myself on

Finnish experiences. That is that you have to be very straight and very decisive with Russia. That if you say something that is very straightforward going in a very straightforward going way and according to my understanding or experiences they do believe. But I also want to refer to you from an old Finnish wisdom which comes back from centuries when you know Russia and Finland had quite many wars going on. The wisdom is as follows: The Cossack takes everything which is loose, so fix everything. This is how we do, not leaving unfixed things loose.

MR. TALBOTT: Or ambiguity. Way across the aisle.

MS. MOMILL.: Thank you Mr. President. I am Wa Momill, I'm from China and I'm an undergraduate student at the George Washington University. My question is, how can education make Europe stronger and how can young students or young people, not only learning how to take care of themselves and their responsibilities but also be informed of the social consciousness and the wanting to really care for the world and other people in the world. Thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Education in Europe like education worldwide makes us stronger. It is seemingly a fundamental all over the world. It is an important factor for the future because the more you educate the more you learn and the more you hopefully understand our common future. With climate change and all the risks we are facing, Finland has always been very supportive on education. We have been number one in PISA studies very many times, I have been often asked how is it possible, is it you're using a lot of money or something like that, no.

My answer is respect. If people respect education and people respect teachers, the result is absolutely good. If a respected teacher gives to pupils and young people information and those youngsters respect having it so the result is very good. We have to respect education.

MR. TALBOTT: I might just add something from this side of the ocean and in this country. A lot of people are convinced that we can overcome our societal and

political problems if we put much more emphasis on civics and American history in our curriculum here in this country. Yes, this lady here and then the lady with the blue and then we'll come back to you.

MS. ANALLA: Hi, my name is Maria Analla. I'm a journalist at the Finnish News Agency so also a member of the Finnish press here. In the beginning of your speech, you talked about how many people in many countries seem to be losing their sense of community and sense of belonging. You said we need to do something about it and you also mentioned that we need a stronger Europe because of that. Could you tell us a little more about what, in your opinion, we could try to do about it. What can we do, what can countries do, what can a stronger Europe do, what can all of us do?

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: If we start from the European scale, I said also that Europe should secure people. Give security to families in ordinary lives so that people can trust that whatever I'm doing, it's in my hands because I can take do it in peace. But if we go deeper down to different countries or nations so to keep everybody as a part of society is, what we have seen in Europe and I guess here too, a bit difficult. More and more youngsters seem to be somehow outside the society. That is a very severe problem. Maybe to some extent what I said about listening to be heard, that is some help. But education is also here a very important factor that everybody has a possibility taking care of that.

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible). I am a teacher. I work for (inaudible) college which is located near Los Angeles. We have a Washington program here. I have a few students here with me. Several weeks ago, we talked about the Baltic Sea area and the security situation there. We also discussed about the Russian bases and the situation that has been rather tense there. Do you think that trading between Finland and Russia will increase in the near future? What is your opinion about the sanctions? Thank you.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: What first comes to the Baltic area is there are

tensions. I would say that the tensions haven't increased during the past few years. It seems to be stabilized tensions. That is better than unstabilized tensions. But nevertheless, NATO presence there in Baltic countries is most important.

With Finland and Russia, the economic relations are not as large as people would think. I guess Finland has been suffering more from the sanctions than any other European Union country. That is part of we are very firm on keeping on the sanctions as it is agreed in the European Union decisions. Well we suffer, but nevertheless, we keep them firm. What comes to the future, everything is depending on the how the Minsk Agreement is fulfilled. Nothing has happened so far so there is no way of opening up sanctions. Outside sanctions yes, there is trading. Every country also USA has trading with Russia but it is limited. I see no change in the near future.

MR. TALBOTT: Since that's not a hugely optimistic note to end on, I would like to end on one that is very much optimistic. It goes back to Aaro. I would bet, and I certainly hope and I know you do as well, that when Aaro goes into fifth grade he will be living in a European community with a European project that's getting its mojo back and his dad will have helped. After giving applause to our guest, stay in your seats so we can get him out to his next appointment. Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT NIINISTO: Thank you.

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