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## Bush Is Expected to Express Support for a 'Strong Europe'

By **ELISABETH BUMILLER**

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**B**RUSSELS, Feb. 20 - President Bush will declare that America supports a "strong Europe" in a major speech here on Monday aimed at opening a new era in his relations across the Atlantic and at soothing the allies that opposed him on Iraq.

Mr. Bush's words are to make clear that the United States welcomes the drive toward European unity and views the 25-member European Union, with an economy roughly equal to that of the United States, as a partner, not a rival.

"The alliance of Europe and North America is the main pillar of our security in a new century," Mr. Bush is expected to say at Concert Noble, a 19th-century hall, according to advance excerpts from his text. "Our robust trade is one of the engines of the world economy. Our example of economic and political freedom gives hope to millions who are weary of poverty and oppression."

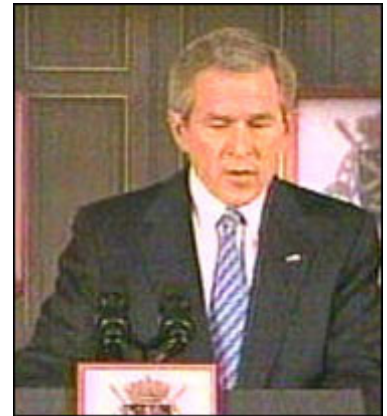
Mr. Bush is also expected to say that, "In all these ways, our strong friendship is essential to peace and prosperity across the globe - and no temporary debate, no passing disagreement of governments, no power on earth will ever divide us."

Mr. Bush arrived in Brussels on Sunday evening and immediately went by motorcade to the 18th-century home of Tom C. Korologos, the American ambassador to Belgium.

Earlier in the day, about 1,000 people protested the Iraq war and American environmental policies outside the Brussels Bourse, where a banner placed across the entrance proclaimed, "President Bush, the world holds you accountable."

An alliance of environmental, human rights and peace groups plan additional protests in Brussels on Monday and Tuesday.

In his speech, Mr. Bush is expected to call for a "new era of trans-Atlantic unity" and to say that together the United States and Europe can work toward "our greatest opportunity and our immediate goal" of peace in the Middle East.



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President Bush delivered a speech aimed at opening a new era in his relations across the Atlantic.

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"We seek peace between Israel and Palestine for its own sake," Mr. Bush is expected to say.

He is also expected say that Europe and the United States must work together in rebuilding Iraq. "Now is the time for established democracies to give tangible political, economic and security assistance to the world's newest democracy," the excerpts say.

Senior members of the Bush administration have recently spoken out in favor of a strong Europe. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice heartened Europeans when she said in a speech in Paris on Feb. 8 that "the United States, above all, welcomes the growing unity of Europe." Mr. Bush's speech will be the first time he has supported the idea with such force.

His words are likely to quell dissent from some American conservatives who say that a unified Europe is not necessarily in America's interests because the Continent will see itself as a counterforce to the United States.

Mr. Bush's speech underscores his decision to spend a full two days and three nights in the heart of the new Europe, Brussels, which is the headquarters of NATO, the European Union and the European Commission, the union's executive body. Significantly, Mr. Bush will spend much of Tuesday visiting all three.

He gave some insight into his own thinking behind a unified Europe in an interview with European newspapers at the White House on Friday, when he was asked what he thought of the European Constitution. Mr. Bush said he would not comment, but added that, "Every time I meet with the European leaders, I ask them how it's going because I'm fascinated by the political integration and, is it possible."

Mr. Bush had no public events scheduled in Brussels on Sunday evening. On Monday morning he is to pay a courtesy call on King Albert II and Queen Paola of Belgium and then meet with the Belgian prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt.

Mr. Bush will also meet with the NATO secretary general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. In the evening, he will give a dinner at the home of Mr. Korologos for President Jacques Chirac of France and is expected to try to mend relations after his anger over Mr. Chirac's opposition to the American-led invasion of Iraq.

"I don't feel bitter, personally," Mr. Bush told the European newspaper writers on Friday. "And so it's easy to have a conversation with somebody to overcome bitterness if you don't feel bitter."

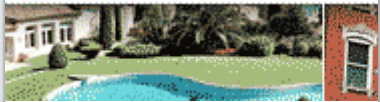


Luke Frazza/AFP/Getty Images

President Bush, with Belgium's Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, will make clear that the U.S. views the European Union as a partner, not a rival.

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