



UK Presidency of the European Union

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REMARKS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR TONY BLAIR,

ON THE LAUNCH OF BRITAIN'S EU PRESIDENCY IN THE US

Britain's Presidency of the European Union in 1998 is a tremendously important opportunity for Britain, and indeed for Europe.

The new British government has taken a constructive attitude to Europe. We've put behind us some of the more anti-European attitudes of the past because we believe that it is essential if Britain is to have influence in the world that it must be a key and leading player in Europe.

In the Presidency we aim to focus on launching Monetary Union successfully, making sure that it works, and works in the interests of countries whether they are in or out of it. We need to make sure that the process of enlargement, getting the countries from Eastern Europe into the European Union, is put under way, and put under way successfully. We will focus particularly on areas like crime and environment, where those issues cross national boundaries, and are of direct interest to people in Europe. And of course the key question for the ordinary person in the street in Europe is jobs, and we have got to make sure that in Europe we are concentrating on how we make our work force more employable, on education, skills, technology in the new global market rather than on some of the old style European interventionism and state aids.

We also want a Europe that's open. Open to markets, open to competition, able to compete, not a fortress Europe that tries to shut itself off from the rest of the world.

I believe, too, that a Britain that is stronger in Europe is a Britain that is strong with the United States of America too. Britain enjoys a good, very strong relationship with the United States today. I believe in that. The United States is a key ally for Britain, always has been and always will be, but I think it is important that Britain acts as a bridge between Europe and the United States of America. We could bring the two closer together, and make sure that some of the common issues that we face are tackled in a more cohesive and concerted way.

So I hope very much that the European Union Presidency for Britain will be an opportunity for us not just to demonstrate new leadership in Europe, but also an opportunity for us to bring Europe and America closer together, with a closer and better understanding of the challenges we both face.