

Statement by President Coelho

Our mission to Washington was very useful and productive.

We arrived in the United States in a week when security issues filled the main headlines of the press -- the replacement of the CIA Director and the scandal of protection of data violated by some telephone companies. Despite this climate of unrest they were many organisations and officials who accepted our invitation to meet us.

I would like to underline the availability of the American Government and US Congressmen, as well as their willingness to speak to us. Overcoming some initial scepticism, we could finally talk to government representatives --Assistant secretary of State Dan Fried and the Legal Advisor of the Department of State John Bellinger, as well as to members of Congress from both political parties and both chambers --the Senate and the House of Representatives--.

I have to admit that US officials are very well informed about our work on the TDIP committee and our concerns and that Europe and European officials - such as the TDIP delegation - are taken very serious. Based on my personal experience, I can add that the availability of the US Administration and of Congress has been far better than what we experienced 5 years ago during the visit of the temporary committee on Echelon.

Besides the activities initially scheduled we managed to have other interesting meetings with people like ABC News director Brian Ross or former CIA agent Vincent Cannistraro, among others who prefer to remain confidential. From all those meetings we obtained valuable information and names of people, new sources whom we will try to contact in the near future.

As a first assessment of our visit to Washington, I would like to draw the following conclusions:

1. There are clear differences of opinion between the United States and the European Union on security issues, specially those related to legal concepts like the definition of torture or the fact they believe to be at 'state of war'. As representative Wexler said during our meeting, "*we are now two groups sharing the same values but living on different planets*". However it is important for us both to reduce such differences in the name of our common fight against terrorism, and to bring together both sides of the Atlantic around the common values we share.
2. There are not only clear differences between the United States and the European Union, these differences also exist inside the United States, as we could confirm by talking to various NGOs and members of Congress. American civil society is alive and active, and we can only applaud and look with favour on their constant fight to defend human rights.

3. Many people we met encouraged us to continue with our works and our efforts. It is an absolute priority for the European Parliament to continue being the people's voice; we have a key role to play in the defence of democratic and human rights values.

4. All our guests suggested or confirmed that the extraordinary rendition programme carried out in Europe could only be achieved with the knowledge and support of European national governments. State Department officials said, in a diplomatic manner, that the United States never violated the sovereignty of European Member States; others admitted the involvement of European governments in a more straightforward way. These allegations should be taken serious and we should examine if that really happened, if other prisoners were effected and if European or domestic law was broken.

In all the meetings we had I took the opportunity to reaffirm our attachment as Europeans to the fundamental principles of the state of law, to the protection of human rights in whatever circumstances and to the democratic values, all of them are in our view a precondition for a successful fight against terrorism, which remains one of the main priorities at the global stage.

Close cooperation between Europe and America is indeed of the utmost importance to defeat the scourge of terrorism and extremism, and we are also sensible to this message constantly underlined by our American partners.