

DECEMBER 01, 2022

# Remarks by President Biden and President Macron of France in Joint Press Conference

East Room

1:18 P.M. EST

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Well, it's great to see you all today. President Macron and I have had a chance to spend some time together. We went to a private dinner last night with our wives, and we're — just came to tell you that, and we're leaving. (Laughter.) No.

But we're — we've — it's wonderful to have him here. We've had a great conversation and always appreciate the opportunity to share ideas with you, Mr. President.

And I especially enjoyed our time that Jill and I and Brigitte had last night and our visit. First time I've gone to dinner — a private dinner in Washington in a long, long time. And — but I had the protection of the French government with me. But — (laughter).

But all kidding aside, France is one of our strongest partners and historically — but one of our strongest partners and our most capable allies and — and Emmanuel has also become a friend in addition to being President of that great country.

And we — we share the same values and will remain the core, common agenda that we — address all challenges together. And occasionally, we have some slight differences, but never in a fundamental way, thus far — at least as long as I've been in Washington, and that's been more than a couple years.

Today, we're reaffirmed that France and the United States, together with all our Alli- — all our NATO Allies and European Union and the G7 stand as strong as ever against Russia's brutal war against Ukraine. We talked a lot about that in our bilateral meeting.

And we'll continue the strong support for the people of Ukraine as they defend their homes and their families and their sovereignty and territorial integrity against Russian aggression, which has been incredibly brutal.

I knew Russia was, but I didn't anticipate them being as brutal as they have been in what they've been doing. Many of the reporters in this room have been there themselves and covered from there, and they know what it's like.

Today, we reaffirm that, as I said, we're going to stand together against this brutality.

And we'll continue the strong support for the Ukrainian people as they defend their homes and their families and their nurseries, their hospitals, their sovereignty, their integrity, and — against Russia aggression.

And I want to thank you, Mr. President, for welcoming — that the people of France have given to over 100,000 Ukrainian refugees — it's a mark of who you are as a people, and — who have flee- — or are fleeing Putin's, just, barbarism.

Putin thinks that he can crush the will of all those who oppose his imperial ambitions. But attacking civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, choking off energy to Europe to drive up prices, exacerbating food — a food crisis, that's hurting very vulnerable people not just in Ukraine but around the world. And he's not going to succeed.

President Macron and I have resolved that we're going to continue working together to hold Russia accountable for their actions and to mitigate the global — global impacts of Putin's war on the rest of the world.

The United States is helping Europe diversify away from Russian natural gas in the immediate term while accelerating our clean-energy transitions, and we're going to continue working in close partnership with Europe as we move forward. I welcome the progress we've already made on many of these issues through the U.S.-EU Task Force on Energy Security.

And today, we also committed to deepening cooperation between France and the United States on civil nuclear energy through our bilateral Clean Energy Partnership.

Around the world, France and the United States are working to strengthen stability and security. We share the vision — the same vision in the Indo-Pacific. We're looking, for one, an Indo-Pacific that's free and open, prosperous and secure.

And we're going to continue to strengthen our cooperation to defend core international principles in the Indo-Pacific, including freedom of navigation and freedom of overflight.

We're working together to support the Middle East that is more integrated, peaceful, and prosperous. And we want to particularly thank President Macron for his efforts to help bring

about the historic maritime boundaries agreement between Israel and Lebanon.

We also stand with the people of Iran. And the French and the United States are working together to hold accountable those responsible for the human rights abuses, to counter Iran's support for Russia's war, and to ensure that Iran does not — does not — emphasize "does not" — ever acquire a nuclear weapon.

And, as we in the United States are looking forward to hosting the upcoming U.S.-African Leaders Summit, President Macron and I understand Africa's influence and importance. And he has much to add — France has much to add.

We also are going to deepen our engagement, listening to and working with our African partners, to help strengthen the governance and security and economic opportunities across the continent and to tackle the global challenges of our time.

Our partnership also extends to cooperating in outer space, from coordinating defenses and our — excuse me — from coordinating defense of our space activities to strengthening scientific efforts to monitor Earth's changing climate.

And we're — we are — we had a detailed discussion of the Inflation Reduction Act. I know none of you are curious about that, but we did talk about that a good deal.

The United States and Europe share the goal of making bold investments in clean energy to meet the challenges of the climate crisis and to build — and to build the industries of the future, including batteries and green hydrogen.

We agreed to discuss practical steps to coordinate and align our approaches so that we can strengthen and secure the supply chains, manufacturing, and innovation on both sides of the Atlantic.

We asked our teams to follow up on this part as ongoing U.S.-EU consultation continues to — because we can work out some of the differences that exist, I'm confident.

France and the United States are also leading efforts to strengthen the global health and global health security.

President Macron's visits — visit falls on the World AIDS Day. And I want to particularly highlight our joint effort to reach our goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. That is a goal we set, and it's a goal we're going to accomplish and the goal we're sticking with.

And to do it, we have to — all the tools we need. We just have to make finishing this fight a top priority for not just the two of us, but for other nations as well.

And that's why I'm proud to take the baton from you, President Macron, and host the Global Fund's Seventh Replenishment Conference this year, building on France's strong record of leadership.

We've raised \$15.7 billion with the United States and France as the two largest contributors to the Global Fund. And it's going to save millions — literally millions of lives.

If I listed all the areas where cooperation between France and the United States was delivering — were delivering meaningful progress, we'd be here until dinnertime.

But so, let me just close by highlighting our long-term investment to deepen the ties between our people, particularly the Fre- — the U.S.-French Fulbright Program, which celebrates its 75th anniversary and has facilitated thousands of exchanges between our students, our educators over the last decades.

It's been critical to our relationship. It's a key part of ensuring that the future of this vital alliance remain strong and vibrant for generations to come.

So, Emmanuel, I want to thank you again for all that our nations are doing together and the cooperation. My administration has built our foreign policy around the strength of our alliances, and France is the very heart of that commitment.

So, *merci*, my friend. And I look forward to continuing to work with you. And as I used to say in the body I worked in a long time, in the United States Senate, "The floor is yours."

PRESIDENT MACRON: (As interpreted.) Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. President, dear Joe, thank you ever so much for these words that very much reflect the discussions we just had.

But most importantly, thank you very much for your warm welcome. And indeed, together with my wife, Brigitte, we were very pleased to share this moment together with you and your spouse last night.

And let me tell you how honored and moved we are, both my delegation and myself, to be here, invited by you, on the occasion of this first state visit by your administration.

And regarding this relationship, we said it this morning and you just said it again: This heritage is based on — on life sacrifice, on so much. And I would like to say that, over centuries, every time there was something vital at stake, we were there one for the other without any doubt, without any hesitation. And this is very much what should structure the rest of it.

It is this spirit that is prevailing in the current circumstances since last February. And I do not repeat what President Biden perfectly described. And, dear Joe, indeed, you very much described what we're doing together in Ukraine.

We clearly condemned this war immediately. We led all the diplomatic actions to condemn this war, the war crimes committed by Russia on the Ukrainian soil. And we support both the Ukrainian army that is resisting, the Ukrainian population resisting as well. And please allow me here to very much thank the United States of America for all the support it has provided, because this war is impacting the European soil even more directly, and you've chosen to invest so much to contribute to this joint effort.

In this context, our discussion this morning was an opportunity to confirm the initiatives we will be taking, once again, in the coming weeks and months to keep supporting — to strengthen our support to the Ukrainian troops and to enable them to resist.

We also agreed to continue to work together to support the Ukrainian people to help them resist, because we can very well see today that the Russian war effort is very much targeting the civilian infrastructure, bringing even more violence to try and make the Ukrainian people desperate and make it impossible for them to survive this winter.

This is the reason why we decided to organize, on the 13th of December, a conference to support Ukraine, and very much would like to thank you for the close cooperation in preparing for that event.

And we are working in close cooperation with President Zelenskyy based on his 10-point plan that he proposed. And I also would like to take this opportunity to commend the efforts of President Zelenskyy to try and find a way, a path to peace while leading the heroic resistance they've been organizing for 10 months.

We always agreed: Help Ukraine resist. Never give up on anything in the U.N. Charter. Prevent any risk of escalation in this conflict. And make sure that, when the time comes, on

basis of conditions to be set by Ukrainians themselves, help build peace.

And I believe your positions being so clear, it is something important to us, because we're both working for sustainable peace.

We also talked about the direct and indirect consequences of this war, including on food security and energy security for the entire planet. And our joint initiatives within the G20, the G7 very much go in that direction.

And we also recalled this morning all of that — all we're doing to try and help all countries to weather the consequences of the conflict on their economies.

This morning, we also had an excellent discussion on the IRA and the recent pieces of legislation adopted by the American administration.

And like President Biden just said, we agreed to resynchronize our approaches, our agendas in order to invest in critical emerging industries — semiconductors, batteries, hydrogen, everything that is absolutely decisive — because, as a matter of fact, we share the same vision and the same willingness.

President Biden wishes to create more industrial jobs in the long run for his country and to build a strong industry and secure your supplies, and this is very much our approach as well.

And this is the reason why we tasked our teams to continue this work in close cooperation — coordination to find solutions on the topics we identified.

And, of course, we will coordinate with all of the Europeans and with you to have an agenda that will only bring more jobs — industry jobs in the United States as well as in Europe, and guarantee the strength and the resilience of our supply chains, and to do that with a strong integration.

This European work is also the one we want to deliver on all of the issues on our agenda.

And, President, you just said it, what we would like to do as well is to work on a number of topics of the future. And yesterday, we had some sessions — working sessions — and our ministers and teams have been working as well — so that we could approve an agenda of hope and — for the future, like I said this morning, in the space industry, research, exploration, but as well the industries of the future — civil nuclear industry.

Here again, with some common research projects, in particular, on the most advanced technique, because I believe I can say on behalf of both of us that the civil nuclear industry is very much part of the energy mix in which we believe in that will not only bring jobs, but enable us as well to have a secure supply and to meet our climate objectives.

We also talked about the quantum issues with a number of stakeholders — innovation, and here as well our delegations are here to illustrate the work that is taking place so that we can deliver on that common agenda.

Lastly, we also have all of our commitments on the major international challenges which are very much, I would say, feeding our relationship as well. And I can only tell you, once again, how pleased we were with your choices that very much match your history and your campaign commitments.

The fact that you're back on major international challenges, such as health and climate — it is really a new deal. And we've been resisting for a number of years, and now we're being able to engage with you.

And on this day of World AIDS Day as well, we are very much continuing to work to deliver by 2030. And I would like to say how much has been achieved by both our countries, which are major contributors to the Global Fund to deal with, of course — eradicate AIDS, but also malaria and a number of other diseases for the benefit of the most fragile populations.

And the same goes in our relationship when we're doing everything we can to deal with climate change and biodiversity.

Of course, we want more innovation. We want to promote solutions on climate change. But we also very concretely acknowledge a number of initiatives in this respect on the occasion of this state visit.

It is about finding a new financing means for the most fragile countries, emerging countries to support them on both development and climate change.

And in this respect, you will be playing a key role in the summit we intend to organize next summer to build a new partnership between the North and the South. And this is very much along the lines of providing more resources to the southern countries, and as well reforming our ma- — our main international financial institutions with the reform of the

World Bank and a number of international existing tools.

And regarding the biodiversity, we had this lunch yesterday with the relevant caucus. And here again, our willingness is to have an agenda which is extremely ambitious. In particular, we will be working together to prepare for the One Forest Summit in Gaborone, in Africa at the end of the next semester.

And this topic, of course, is very much at the heart of the — the ones you will be covering with them, the African countries coming to Washington in a few days. So here, again, a strong convergence of views between us.

And lastly, we will continue to work together to fight terrorism and to act for peace.

And of course, my thoughts go to our soldiers who fell in Afghanistan, in the Middle East, in Africa over the past few years to fight for the security of these regions of the world and of all countries.

And here, again, please allow me to say once again that we're committed within our international coalition in the Middle East through our military action, and we will continue to do so because this fight is not over yet.

And it is important to remind all of our allies and partners that we need to continue to work to fight terrorism in the Middle East and in the Near East.

And I would like to thank you for all your very valuable support over the past few years for the fight against terror, including in the Sahel in Africa. And that enabled us to have some very concrete results, including a bit over the past few weeks. And we'll continue to work together.

I could carry on during the entire afternoon. We could talk about the Indo-Pacific — the way, in particular, we're organizing our presence in the Indian Ocean.

To put things right, dear Joe, you elegantly thanked France for the role we played in the historical agreement between Israel and Lebanon. We did our utmost to finalize the accord, but, let me be honest, I think most of the work was yours.

So, I think it was the work of the utmost importance. And Lebanon is so dear to us, and they needed this accord in the context of everything that is still on the agenda for Lebanon in the coming weeks and month.

Ladies and gentlemen, I very much meant to thank President Biden because what he said — I can say it as well — you're not just a leader with whom we share many values, many battles; you're someone with whom we are having some very frank and respectful discussions on any



topic. And you also became a friend.

And so, thank you ever so much for this warm welcome and for the importance of being able to spend some time together now — so important for our joint future. Thank you.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Well, thank you, Emmanuel. I began to refer to him privately as my “closer.” That — that deal with Lebanon and Israel — we did negotiate, but we needed a closer to get the job done. And you did it. And thank you very much.

All right. We’re going to take — we’re each going to call on two people — a total of two people — a total of four, all — all told.

And the first questioner is going to be from AFP, Ms. End.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I will have a question for you and one for the French President, if I may.

For you, first, you now are saying that you are going to better coordinate, especially your green economic policies. But yesterday, Emmanuel Macron said that the Inflation Reduction Act is, in fact, “super aggressive,” I quote, toward European companies. Does that mean that you are ready to grant exception — exemptions of (inaudible) to European industries?

And now my question to you, Mr. President: (Speaks French.) (As interpreted.) Mr. President, will you leave Washington with the assurance that you will be able to deal with these (inaudible)? Do you think there is risk of generating divisions?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: I’ll answer the last question, since I didn’t hear any of it. I didn’t understand a word of it, so I’ll answer it. (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT MACRON: Can we take care of it?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: No, look, the United States makes no apology — and I make no apologies, since I wrote it — for — the — the legislation you’re talking about.

But there are occasions when you write a massive piece of legislation — and that has almost \$368 billion dollars for the largest investment in climate change on all he- — of all of history. And so, there’s obviously going to be glitches in it and need to reconcile changes in it.

For example, there’s a provision in it that says that there is the exception for anyone has a free trade agreement with us. Well, that was added by a member of the United States Congress who

acknowledges that he just meant allies; he didn't mean, literally, free trade agreement. So, there's a lot we can work out.

But the essence of it is: We're going to make sure that the United States continues — and just as I hope Europe will be able to continue — not to have to rely on anybody else's supply chain.

We're — we are our own supply chain, and we share that with Europe and all of our allies. And they will, in fact, have the opportunity to do the same thing.

So, there's tweaks that we can make that can fundamentally make it easier for European countries to participate and/or be on their own. But that is something that is a matter to be worked out.

There is no fundamental — it was never intended, when I wrote the legislation — I never intended to exclude folks who were cooperating with us. That was not the intention.

The intention was to make sure we were no longer in a position — when there was a pandemic in Asia, and China decided they're going to no longer sell us computer chips. We invented the damn things, you know? (Laughs.)

So, anyway — but my point is: We're back in business, Europe is back in business, and we're going to continue to create manufacturing jobs in America, but not at the expense of Europe.

PRESIDENT MACRON: (As interpreted.) What we've been discussing with President Biden and what, as a matter of fact, he just said — and that's what I talked about with the caucus yesterday — that simple: The United States of America adopted a piece of legislation for their country, for their industry with a common objective, goal that we share: creating jobs, creating opportunities for the middle class, and succeeding in implementing the energy transition.

The reality is that the consequences, as we've seen in our discussions — it is certainly not the intention of the United States, but, as a matter of fact, project that were growing — being developed in Europe, there's such a difference in subsidies that these projects might come to an end.

And a number of senators, yesterday, said it was certainly not their intention. So, France simply did not come to ask for an exemption or another for — for our economy but simply to discuss the consequences of this legislation.

And the news — the circumstances mean that we have no alternative but to work together. So, therefore, I believe we need to resynchronize, as I say, find a new policy to clarify our goals and

continue together. And the discussion we had this morning was extremely clear. And I could feel the very same intent on behalf of the members of the Congress yesterday.

And the wish of President Biden is to rebuild a strong industry here and to have somehow to secure some technology solutions for the future. France wishes exactly the same thing for itself. And we've been fighting, day in, day out, to do the very same thing in our country. And this will enable us to put an end to some 15 years of industry loss in our country and to have new manufacturing jobs.

And so, we'll be working on that. And we decided to do that together with the other members of the European Union and the European Commission. So, we will work on the technical elements to make sure that there is no domino effect on ongoing projects in Europe. We want to succeed together, not one against the other.

It's been clear. This is the outcome of our discussions this morning. And this is exactly the philosophy that I share, and it is the one that we need.

Q (As interpreted.) Presidents — William Galibert, on behalf of RTL Radio.

In French, President Biden, we say, "There is no love, there is only proof of love." Do you feel that your French friend will go home very much reassured? Do you feel you were able to reassure your European friends?

And to be more precise, President Macron, do you have some specific deadlines or specific industries in relation to which you're hoping to have some adaptation of the economic policies of the United States?

PRESIDENT MACRON: (As interpreted.) Well, first of all, to be very clear, we have some work to do with the Europeans on semiconductors, hydrogen batteries, on industry. We will continue to move forward as Europeans. And we're not here simply, really, to ask for "proof of love." We were here — we came to agree on a strategy and to clarify what was necessary to clarify, and we did.

Now we are conducting our own work, and we can't ask the United States of America to adopt whatever rules would be necessary to deal with our issues in Europe. But we need to have the same ambition and very much synchronize.

And in addition, we clarified things today. There are already a number of discussions, frameworks. And it is in the coming weeks and months that we will — can deal with that. And fairly quickly, because these projects are ongoing.

So, for me, there is some very clear strategy. We've had some very frank discussions. And I believe, accordingly, that in the coming days, the discussions we will be having with the European Commission, the close — we will — the discussions we will have in close cooperation with our German partners and others will enable us to very much clarify all of this without any difficulty.

So, I'm — I'm going home confident but, as well, (inaudible) as to what remains to be done on the European side, which is a good thing.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: I'm confident. (Laughter.) That's my answer. (Laughter.)

Okay, who's the next question? I got my list here.

PRESIDENT MACRON: On this side.

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Is it my turn to call on someone? Right?

Okay, how about NPR, Tamara Keith.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I have a domestic question for you. And then, Mr. Macron, I have a president — a question for you about Ukraine.

But first, President Biden, do the freight rail workers deserve more than one day of paid sick leave, like millions of Americans have?

And if so, why didn't you negotiate for that when you were helping to negotiate that contract that you now want Congress to impose?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: I love you guys. I negotiated a contract no one else could negotiate. The only thing that was left out was whether or not it was paid leave.

You know I've been trying to get paid leave not just for rail workers, for everybody. But that other team — they're called the Republicans — they voted against it. They said we couldn't do it. We're one of the few nations in the world that don't have paid leave for our workers.

And so, what we're doing is — we can't afford to have — and, by the way, in the meantime, they got a 43 — 45 percent increase in salary, et cetera. There's a lot of good things that happened in that.

And if, in fact, this shuts down over the question of one to five paid — or seven or nine or whatever the number is that've been negotiating — of paid leave days, it's going to immediately

cost 750,000 jobs and cause a recession.

And so, what I made really clear is that — what was negotiated was so much better than anything they ever had that it's worth — and they all signed on to it, by the way. There are only four unions that — out of the 13 or 14 — that didn't agree. So, the majority at the time it was — that I presented it, they asked me to do it. I presented it; they all signed on.

But here's the story: It doesn't mean because we are going to pass this, God willing, on — by Friday, by the time the — by the weekend that we're — that I'm going to back off of paid leave.

I made it really clear: I'm going to continue to fight for paid leave for not only rail workers, but for all American workers. I sup- — I imagine it may surprise some of our European friends that there's no paid leave in the United States of America. We're one of the few major countries in the world that don't have it. It's about time.

And so, that's the context in which this all took place. And — and — you know, and labor signed on to it as well, as you recall, initially. There were 4 unions out of the, I think, 13 or 14 that didn't like it.

And — but I think we're going to get it done but not within this agreement — not within this agreement. We're going to avoid the rail strike, keep the rails running, keep things moving, and I'm going to go back and we're going to get paid leave not just for rail workers but for all workers.

Q President Macron, (inaudible) President Biden is asking Congress for \$38 billion of additional funding for support for Ukraine. There's been some pushback from Republicans in Congress, saying that they cannot continue to write a blank check.

So do you have confidence that the United States will be able to continue supporting Ukraine's defense in the way it has over the past year, in the months going forward? And did you talk to President Biden about trying to urge Ukraine to negotiate to end this war, you know, especially with winter bearing down and the effects on energy prices?

PRESIDENT MACRON: Look, I do thank President Biden and his administration for the great commitment they had vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

And let me just say that our two nations are made of values and history. And what is at stake in Ukraine is not just

very far from here in a small country somewhere in Europe, but it's about our va- — our values, and it's about our principles. And it's about what we agreed together in the U.N. Charter: protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity.

And this is why I do believe that having the U.S. strongly supporting the Ukrainians in that time is very important not just for the Ukrainians, for the Europeans we are — this is why we do thank you for the solidarity — but for the stability of our world today. Because if we consider that we can abandon the country and abandon the full respect of these principles, it means that there is no possible stability in this world.

So, I think it's extremely important to have you so much committed. So, I'm confident because I think your people and — and your representatives do endorse and understand this objective. We will follow up our own support. We increased our military support. We increased our economic support. We — we — we are increasing our humanitarian support.

And for the second question you raise, let me tell you that we will never urge the Ukrainians to make a compromise which will not be acceptable for them because they are so brave and they defend precisely their lives, their nation, and our principles, and because it will never build a sustainable peace.

If we want a sustainable peace, we have to respect the Ukrainians to decide the moment and the conditions in which they will negotiate about their territory and their future.

MS. JEAN-PIERRE: This will be the last question.

Q (As interpreted.) We hear that you will be talking to President Putin anytime soon. What is your approach?

And as the Ukrainian war seems to be at a turning point, do you feel realistic that President Zelenskyy is putting a condition to open negotiations and that is the return of Crimea to Ukraine?

PRESIDENT BIDEN: Look, there is one way for this war to end the rational way: Putin to pull out of Ukraine. Number one. But it appears he's not going to do that.

He's paying a very heavy price for failing to do it, but he's inflicting incredible, incredible carnage on the civilian population of Ukraine — bombing nurseries, hospitals, children's homes. It's sick what he's doing.

But the fact of the matter is, I have no immediate plans to contact Mr. Putin. Mr. Putin is — let me choose my words very carefully — I'm prepared to speak with Mr. Putin if in fact there is an interest in him deciding he's looking for a way to end the war. He hasn't done that yet. If that's the case, in consultation with my French and my NATO friends, I'll be happy to sit down with Putin to see what he wants — has in mind. He hasn't done that yet.

In the meantime, I think it's absolutely critical what Emmanuel said: We must support the Ukrainian people. The idea that Putin is ever going to defeat Ukraine is beyond comprehension. Imagine them trying to occupy that country through the next 2, 5, 10, 20 years if they could — if they could.

He's miscalculated every single thing he initially calculated. He thought he'd be greeted with open arms by the Russian-speaking portions of the Ukrainian population.

Go back and read his speech when he invaded — when I said they were going to invade, and they did when we said they were. Go back and read the speech he made. He talked about him — with needing to be another Peter the Great. He talked about the need for the people — that Kyiv is the motherload of Russian identity in the beginning, et cetera, et cetera. He's just miscalculated across the board.

And so, the question is: What is his decision — how does he get himself out of the circumstance he's in?

I'm prepared, if he's willing to talk, to find out what he's willing to do, but I'll only do it in consultation with my NATO Allies. I'm not going to do it on my own.

Thank you.

**PRESIDENT MACRON:** (As interpreted.) Regarding your question and the preconditions or the conditions set by the Ukrainian President, I believe that what is important for all of us to look at is that as Ukraine is resisting, suffering from war crimes, attacks on their civilian infrastructure, leading counteroffensive, President Zelenskyy presented a 10-point peace plan.

So we, I believe, very much need to continue to engage with him because there is a genuine willingness, on behalf of Ukraine, to discuss these matters. And we acknowledge it, and we commend it.

And for a number of years, I was in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. And the latest — at the last meeting between President Zelenskyy and President

Putin, the only one — December 2019 — at the time, I was with Chancellor Merkel. And I can tell you that I saw a President who was sincere in his willingness to talk and to negotiate.

And since he was elected, until May, President Zelenskyy was very much willing to talk and negotiate. The one who wanted to go to war, to wage war was President Putin. And I could see it by myself, including when I visited Russia and Ukraine at the beginning of February.

So, it's only legitimate that President Zelenskyy sets some conditions to talk. We need to work on what could lead to a peace agreement, but it is for him to tell us when the time comes and what the choices of the Ukrainians are.

So once this has been said, indeed, I will continue to talk to President Putin. And as a matter of fact, we talked about it this morning with President Biden, because we constantly as well tried to prevent escalation and to get some very concrete results.

So, I will talk to him about security and safety of nuclear plants in the areas that are being claimed, including Zaporizhzhia, in particular. And over the past few months, we did some work on the Chernobyl Nuclear Plant, and there is some outstanding work ongoing, which is very important, by Mr. Grossi and his agency, the IAEA. So we will continue.

Thank you so much.

END

1:50 P.M. EST