

Address by Javier Solana to the external action working group of the European Convention (Brussels, 15 October 2002)

Caption: Address by Javier Solana, High Representative for the EU common foreign and security policy, delivered before the External Action Working Group of the European Convention on 15 October 2002. In his speech, Mr Solana explains the nature of his role, shares lessons learned from his own experience and puts forward proposals for a more efficient foreign policy.

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Address of Javier Solana, High Representative for the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, to the external action working group of the Convention on 15 October 2002

Introduction

I am very pleased to be with you today. Allow me to begin by apologising for the rescheduling of this hearing, owing to an unforeseen trip to the Middle East. I feel at home with so many friends around the table. As I am among friends I wish to speak frankly, and plainly.

Three years ago when I was appointed as High Representative it was in response to a perceived weakness in the EU's foreign policy. The EU had a good track record on many economic aspects of external relations: on trade, on aid and so on. The weakness that our heads of State and Government had identified was a political one. My task was not to take anything away from the efforts that others were already making, but to bring something new and additional. I was asked to provide coherence, visibility and a distinctly political element to our foreign policy efforts. That is how I have approached my work, and it is with that in mind that I want to talk to you today.

Let me say at the outset that I have worked closely and in excellent harmony with Chris Patten throughout this period and I agree very much with the themes of his presentation to this Convention.

I will structure my opening statement around 3 main elements:

1. I will try to **give a sense of what my work consists of**, taking as examples some of the issues that have dominated my term to date;
2. I will share with you the **lessons learned from this experience**, identifying the shortcomings which in my view need redressing (not necessarily at Treaty level);
3. I will offer some **suggestions on the way ahead**, with a view to improving the EU's overall external performance.

I. About the High Representative's work and function

(a) The Balkans:

I have devoted much time and effort to the Balkans and for good reason. This is "our backyard", our neighbourhood. The replacement of war and disorder with peace and stability in the Balkans has a very direct and immediate impact on the lives of the Union's citizens. Much remains to be done, but an enormous amount has been achieved in recent years. Our American friends and allies continue to make an important contribution, but there has been an unmistakable trend towards a "Europeanisation" of diplomacy in the Balkans. Where once Dayton was the venue and model, today it is Ohrid. The presence of a European political personality, invested with the authority of the Union and its Member States, and freed from a six-month horizon has been a considerable asset in this regard.

Let me explain in a little more detail how such progress has been possible:

- I have worked in close co-operation with Chris Patten to strengthen stability and promote reforms throughout the Balkans. I have made 37 visits to the region. Much work is still required, but the region is undoubtedly in better shape than 3 years ago.
- Collectively, we have helped the Yugoslav people to bring to an end the Milosevic era through mobilising massive international support of civil society and Media in Serbia
- Together with George Robertson we have stabilised Southern Serbia at a time of considerable tension
- Last year we helped steer Macedonia away from what threatened to be a disastrous civil war. The Ohrid

Agreement now serves as the basis for new relations between Slavs and Albanians.

– As an example of conflict prevention, an agreement between Serbia and Montenegro on new constitutional arrangements was brokered.

– In Bosnia-Herzegovina, which remains fragile, the EU is about to take over from the United Nations a vital police mission. The EU Police Mission mobilises policemen from Member States (and from third countries) and is a very tangible illustration of the EU taking on important new responsibilities.

– We have set up in the region, in addition to Member State Embassies and Commission delegations, a network of remarkable EU Envoys/Special Representatives: Alexis Brouhns in FYROM (with the tall order of taking up the excellent work carried out by François Léotard and Alain Le Roy); Lord Ashdown in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Erhard Busek with the Stability Pact; without forgetting Michael Steiner in Kosovo, who remains a prominent European official, while fulfilling his UN mandate.

Their presence on the spot - and their close relations with my Office - allow for a constant monitoring of local situation; for early warning in real time with regard to impending crises; for political problem - solving on a daily basis.

(b) The Middle-East

In the Middle East achievements have been more modest for obvious reasons, but highly significant in terms of presence, visibility and participation. Developments on the ground and the dynamics of the peace process may be disheartening at times - as is the case now. But not so long ago the EU did not even have a seat at the main political table despite the very important contribution we made in terms of economic and financial assistance. Now we are an important player, even if it remains the case that lasting solutions require the wholehearted engagement of the United States.

There has been a substantial political upgrade of the EU's role in the region:

– As High Representative I was nominated by the European Council as a full participant in the Sharm-el-Sheik Summit.

– The EU had a strong and continuing presence through my membership of the subsequent Mitchell Committee.

– We have consistently argued for the creation of "Quartet" co-ordination with the US, UN and Russia (and this is now the most important vehicle for the peace process);

– I visit the region practically every month. I enjoy close personal relations with all the leaders in the region. The EU's role is not just appreciated: it is in demand.

– Thanks to the relentless work of Miguel Moratinos on the ground, we have been involved in some of the most sensitive processes and crises that have unfolded in the last few months: from the Nativity crisis, to reform of the PA security apparatus; from the recent Fatah declaration signalling an end to military Intifada, to the Hasbani water dispute. We do so discreetly, away from the spotlight, through political advice and input from real specialists.

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The creation of the role of High Representative has allowed for added value beyond these two vital regional theatres. Visibility, profile and a permanent political channel have been given to the EU's work with the United Nations through my appearances before the Security Council (a radical innovation that I am pleased to report has now become an annual event) and through my contacts with the Secretary General. I have maintained close contact with subsequent chairs of the G8 countries and have helped to raise the EU's

stature in that body. Finally, I spare no efforts in trying to raise the EU's profile and influence in other regions of the world. I have enjoyed an excellent working relationship with my interlocutors in the United States based on trust, frequent contacts and a shared desire to forge a closer EU-US relationship. Equally, I have worked hard to develop a political dialogue - in the truest sense of the phrase - with our partners in Russia, China, India, Africa, Asia and Latin America.

As you know, I have also devoted much time and energy to building up the necessary **infrastructure for effective foreign policy** at EU level. We now have most of the elements in place: a Policy Unit, a Situation Centre, the embryo of an EU intelligence capability, a Military Staff, a Military Committee and a Political and Security Committee. Together these elements have helped create a new culture of **real-time foreign policy formulation**.

All of these examples clearly illustrate **that the creation of the High Representative has actually filled a vacuum in terms of political action and presence, and added value to the EU's external action**.

II. Lessons learned

What lessons do I draw from the experience of the last 3 years?

1. The pre-requisite of **political will**. Efficient structures, access to suitable resources, institutional clarity count for little in the absence of real political will on the part of our Member States. The added value of the post of High Representative is maximised where the political will of our Member States is focussed and clearly expressed. Progress has been made in this respect, but more can be achieved. That means working even harder to achieve common EU positions, even where starting points may be divergent, and it means a greater readiness to mobilise national resources in the pursuit of EU aims.
2. The importance of **continuity**. Foreign policy, in particular crisis management, is still based on personal relations and trust. This has to be built up through personal contacts; (those cannot be switched every six months). This is particularly true also for relations with our transatlantic friends. I have always had excellent working relations with the successive Presidencies - not least the current one. But our system of external representation with constantly changing faces, an inflation of actors, and sometimes changing priorities is simply no longer adapted to the modern world and to our ambition to be a serious actor on the international scene.
3. **The need to be able to react quickly**. In the past the rhythm of CFSP work has been determined by monthly Foreign Ministers' meetings. However, crisis management in the 21st century requires real time reaction, high speed of contacts and co-ordination, and the capacity to deploy resources flexibly and rapidly.
4. Need for a **clear division of labour** in decision shaping and implementation. The EU external policy structure is inevitably complex. We are only successful if the Council delegates responsibility clearly, and if effective internal co-ordination is assured. The Commission and High Representative have distinct responsibilities: merging these functions would, in my view, create more confusion than synergy. Chris and I have shown that close co-operation and partnership can, and do, produce results.
5. **Coherence and solidarity among member states**. Both on the Balkans and on the Middle East, positions have converged greatly in recent years. (Compare the situation to the one prevailing at the beginning of the 90s!) This is not however the case everywhere. Ultimately our effectiveness as a global actor will depend on the willingness of member States to share analysis and set joint priorities. It also depends on their commitment to act together, and above all to share the burden fairly. Burden-sharing can take different forms: member States that may not be able to contribute much in terms of military capabilities, can still bring a lot in terms of finance, refugees, development aid)
6. **Willingness to tackle sensitive issues in the EU framework**. For understandable historical reasons, certain issues linked to security and defence or finance are hardly touched upon in our discussions with third countries. A way must be found to overcome that problem; it is simply not possible to engage in a serious

political partnership with the US (as EU) without talking about these matters.

7. Well functioning co-ordination with international partners and actors is another key to success. A large part of my work in past years has been devoted to harmonising approaches with the US, Russia, NATO, OSCE etc. Coherent International Community policies can overcome local obstructionism in crisis situations. Reluctant parties on the ground, instead, ruthlessly exploit divisions within the International Community. More generally, we must seek a more productive format for our contacts with third countries. At present too much of our external policy is locked into a rigid structure of ritualistic meetings, some of them lacking in substance.

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III. The way ahead: suggestions for a more efficient foreign policy

I have, over the last 3 years, avoided getting involved in the debate on institutional engineering. I have focussed instead on getting the job done, within the institutional framework that we have. It is up to you (the Convention) and eventually to the representatives of Governments in the upcoming IGC, to design the future shape of Treaties and Institutions.

I leave with you, however, a few suggestions to think over. These are inspired by a desire to overcome unnecessary obstacles on the path to a more efficient external action. Some of the improvements could be made within the existing framework; others will require treaty changes.

1. Representation: External representation should be delegated by the Council to the High Representative, where appropriate in collaboration with the Commissioner responsible for RELEX.

2. Initiative: The High Representative should be empowered to present proposals in his own right: Any such proposals, especially in the framework of crisis management, should encompass the possibility and capability to mobilise the whole spectrum of instruments at the disposal of the Community and of the Member States: from humanitarian aid to police; from electoral observation to military assets. There is an argument to be made for greater use of joint proposals of the High Representative and the Commission.

3. Chairing the Council: A permanent Chair for the External Relations Council is necessary. Many of the aims of the suggestions in 1 and 2 above could be achieved if – as many have proposed - the High Representative were to be designated as this permanent chair. It would greatly simplify external representation practices, and it would inevitably imply a right of initiative or proposal, alongside the prerogative of organising and steering the Council's work. Furthermore, it would de facto (if not de jure) ensure better planning and more consistent preparation of policy initiatives, including mobilisation of member States' and Commission's assets and resources.

4. Voting: Unanimity at 25 (or more) on each and every CFSP issue will make decisionmaking very difficult. We need to seriously reflect on the possibility of enlarging the existing possibilities for majority voting while taking full account of the interests and specific situations of Member States. We should also reflect on the issue of constructive abstention and reinforced co-operation.

5. Diplomatic resources. Pragmatic pooling of resources would allow us to find better ways of using the vast resources available (national ministries of foreign affairs, Member State embassies, the Commission services and delegations) for the collective goals of European foreign policy. The Policy Unit has proved to be not only a useful tool in its own right, but also an essential link or bridge between the Member States, the Council and the High Representative. Bringing together high quality national diplomats on secondment from the capitals with permanent officials in the Council secretariat and the Commission allows for an invaluable exchange of ideas, information and trust. Such pragmatic pooling of resources offers the potential to develop a "European Foreign Ministry" at a pace and in a manner that the Member States feel comfortable with.

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My final point is that we ought to take a hard look at the whole complex of budget-related issues in this area. There must be ways to ensure that there is a closer connection between talk and action, between means and ambitions. You will deal with this aspect in more detail in the afternoon, when you meet with Pierre de Boissieu.

Let me outline, in the meantime, three distinct layers of problems that I see in this area:

– **financing of CFSP activities and possible military operations:**

The CFSP budget line for 2002 is not just negligible - it is laughable: 35 MEuro. To make but a few random comparisons with other budget lines, the Community disposes of 12 MEuro to finance twinning (jumelages) of European cities; whereas the EP will spend 29 MEuro for publications and information. No doubt these are useful and justified expenditures, but they highlight the paucity of resources available to the CFSP. Financing of military operations needs clear and sustainable mechanisms and legal basis, beyond the current imprecise treaty provisions. We cannot afford to start preparations for military operations with a big internal row over financing, as we have done in the case of EU Police Mission.

– **more direct synergy is undoubtedly needed between CFSP policy-making and Community instruments.** There must be ways and means to mobilise rapidly financial and technical resources, to back up and support established political goals or policy actions.

The current, strong cooperation between myself and Chris Patten is based on friendship and personal chemistry, rather than obvious institutional arrangements.

– worrisome (with few exceptions) **levels of defence spending at national level.** The success of our "Headline goal" process on military capabilities depends on them, and is far from assured. I just wished to flag up the issue, which goes beyond the scope of our debate here today.

Concluding remarks

I will stop here, hoping to have provided enough food for thought, and material for your debate.

I would only add two more general comments.

The first one relates to the notion of **solidarity**. This is in my view a crucial notion. Participating and having a voice entails sharing responsibility and burdens; it involves understanding the vital concerns of others, and respecting the terms and spirit of the treaty.

The second is inspired by a recurrent line of argument, in this group and elsewhere, on the virtues of the so-called "Community method". In reality, there is no such thing as the Community method. Powers and competences of the various institutional actors (the Commission, the EP, the Court, etc.) differ widely within the Treaties, and within each "pillar".

The time has come to understand that we need a more sophisticated approach to the alleged alternative between "Community versus Intergovernmental method". The question we have to answer is about the quality and depth of the integration and the value of the results achieved. This is more important than institutional uniformity.

If we all agree that the Euro is today a spectacular success, we must also acknowledge that many of the organs effectively managing Economic and Monetary Union (the Eurogroup; the European Central Bank; the Economic and Monetary committee, with an elected chairman) are rather unorthodox, compared to the traditional Community institutional triangle. Does this make the single currency a bad project?

We need **more flexibility, and innovation; less theory, and more practice.** That is true of the function of High Representative, whose conventional description as "intergovernmental" is, in my view, simplistic, and

simply wrong.