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**Towards a common European foreign
policy : how are we doing ?**

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Winston Churchill Memorial Lecture

Luxembourg, 10 October 2000

It is now nearly sixty years since Winston Churchill dictated - from the vantage point of his bed in a railway carriage at Adana in Turkey, in the 'margins', as diplomats say, of a meeting with the Turks - a memorandum to the Foreign Office entitled 'Morning Thoughts'.

That memorandum set out his early views on the need for a regional structure for Europe after the war. In a BBC broadcast in March 1943, much of it devoted to his ideas on the re-organisation and reconstitution of Europe, Churchill declared of his scheme:

'...It must eventually embrace all of Europe and all the main branches of the European family must one day be partners in it...We must achieve the largest measure of common integrated life of Europe that is possible, without destroying the individual characteristics and traditions of its many ancient and historic races'.

I wonder what Sir Winston would make of today's European Union.

Both sides in the European debate in the country I know best are fond of enlisting Churchill in their cause.

But it seems to me that there is a good chance that while Churchill – like the rest of us – would find a good deal that needs improving about the European Union, he would strongly approve of at least two important aspects of our efforts today.

First, I think he would share our determination to broaden the membership of the Union. The man who coined the term 'Iron Curtain', but loathed all it stood for would surely be the first to say that such a policy was not just morally right, but vital to fulfilling one of the fundamental aims of any European foreign policy – namely the projection of stability, above all within Europe. He, perhaps the greatest European of his day, would have endorsed the view of one of the greatest Europeans of our day, Vaclav Havel, who told the European Parliament earlier this year:

'Enlargement is a vital interest of the European Union....The idea of two Europes living cheek by jowl, the idea of a democratic, stable, prosperous Europe on the road to integration and a less democratic, less stable and less prosperous Europe is, in my view, completely illusory. It sounds like the idea of sustainable coexistence in a room which is half flooded and half dry. Despite its differences, Europe is indivisible, and anything serious which happens to it will have repercussions on and consequences for the rest of the continent.'

Second, Churchill would, I believe, have supported efforts to strengthen our collective influence in the world by fashioning a common foreign and security policy. Not a strait-jacket policy; not a policy blind to individual national interests or seeking to snuff them out. But a policy designed to make sure that where it is in Europe's interests to speak – and above all act – as one, it is capable of doing so; a common foreign policy, not a uniform one. Churchill would have applauded that: but he would, I suspect, have reserved final judgement until he could see if it was delivering 'actions this day', as well as fine words.

It is now just over a year since I became Commissioner for External Relations. I have spent that time trying to help close the gap between rhetoric and reality in our efforts to implement CFSP.

The position I hold is a new one. Previously there were four – and at one stage six – Commissioners dealing with foreign affairs issues, which were divided up geographically.

Romano Prodi wisely changed that, and now there is one Commissioner for External Relations, as well as a Commissioner for Trade, a Commissioner for Enlargement, a Commissioner for Development and a Commissioner for Monetary Affairs – all of whom form a team of External Relations Commissioners. As Commissioner for External Relations, I oversee a €5 billion budget for external assistance and the parts of the Commission responsible for implementing them.

My appointment to the Commission coincided with Javier Solana's appointment as the first High Representative for CFSP and Secretary General of the Council.

Javier and I share a determination to speed up the way the EU does business in foreign policy, and to adapt our procedures to the age of the internet, 24 hour news and instant communication. The modern world will not wait for management committee sub-group 34 to meet three weeks hence before a decision can be taken. And public opinion will not accept it either.

So improving our ability to deliver – our ability to bring Europe's considerable financial, trade and political clout to bear – has been my number one goal in the last 12 months and will remain so for the next four years. It is necessary worldwide, but most urgent in those areas where Europe's interests are most directly at stake, such as in the Balkans.

I will return to the Balkans in a moment; Europe's efforts there embody in microcosm much of the debate about CFSP. Since 1991, South East Europe has become a tragic and costly proving ground for Europe's pretensions to a common foreign policy. Balkan grave-yards testify to our failures; the faces of the people in the streets of Belgrade last week offer hope, perhaps, that we are starting, just starting to get things right.

But let us return for a moment to first principles: why have a common foreign policy at all? What are we trying to achieve together?

After all, history is littered with failed attempts to fashion a CFSP that could be more than the sum of its parts. There was the Pleven Plan. There was the de Gasperi Plan, the Fouchet plan...With European Political Co-operation, the baby at least survived. But it was always a rather sickly creature. By the late 1980s, EPC boasted an impressive jungle of committees; it issued ringing declarations, usually several days after the event in question had passed; but it failed to make much impact.

During the 1990s, events steadily forced Member States to improve this hitherto rather feeble performance.

- First, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union changed the political landscape of Europe completely. Until that point we knew what was required of us: to stand up to Soviet expansionism, and to preserve our own liberty and values. Now we had to look beyond our immediate neighbourhood, to shore up fragile democracies on our borders, to try to fashion a strategy to nurture democracy and the market economy in Russia and throughout the former Soviet Union. It was and is a costly venture, in which we all have a formidable stake. Small wonder that it occurred to many that it would make sense to try and tackle it together.
- Second, as the EU matured in other respects – with enlargement, and the creation of the single market and the launch of the single currency – the extent to which external and security policy was lagging behind became steadily more apparent, and the gap between the rhetoric and the reality more obvious.

- Third, and most dramatically, with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, we suddenly found ourselves tackling real instability on our borders, instability that was propelling waves of refugees into Western European cities. Europe's weakness was exposed in brutal fashion in Bosnia, where we were unable to stop the fighting until the United States intervened. It was little better in Kosovo, where Europe once again had to lean heavily on US military capacity to halt the ethnic cleansing.

There was a growing realisation that Europe could not continue like this. It was neither fair nor politically very smart to continue to rely on the United States to such an extent, given Europe's relative prosperity; and such an approach was more rather than less likely to drive a disenchanted US Congress into unilateralism or isolationism or a mixture of the two. Europe needed to become a stronger partner for the United States, and to be able to do more for itself.

We already know in trade negotiations how much stronger Europe is if it speaks together. And the same logic applies in foreign and security policy. As Tony Blair said in his excellent speech in Warsaw last week – as good a speech by a British Prime Minister on Europe as I can recall – ‘...though nations will jealously guard their own national interests, there are times when it will be of clear benefit to all, that Europe acts and speaks together....The individual nations, even the larger ones, gain through the collective strength of the EU. That is one very clear reason, quite apart from the economic ones, why the eastern European nations want to join’.

It is one thing to state a self-evident truth; it is quite another, believe me, to move from laudable aspiration to the practical reality of getting 15 very different nations to work together effectively and coherently on the world stage.

First the EU institutions need to know what the direction is, and all pull towards it. That requires a sensible and sensitive partnership between them, to draw on all our considerable strengths as a Union, and to resist temptations to compartmentalise our assets between different institutions. That harnessing of effort is what the structures of CFSP are designed to achieve. And that is why the Commission has such an important role to play – not, let me stress, carving out new responsibilities for itself, but exercising those it has already, in the service of CFSP. That is why the Treaty fully associates the Commission with CFSP. We participate fully in the Council and we enjoy, in Community jargon, a ‘shared right of initiative’. Rightly so. The Commission, after all, bears responsibility for some of the most valuable tools for implementing any European foreign policy. Those include external trade questions, including sanctions, for example; responsibility for European external assistance (worth some 12 billion euros last year); or for many of the external aspects of Justice and Home Affairs.

But what do we actually want to achieve as a European Union?

I suggest two key goals:

First, to manage more effectively our relationships with our nearest neighbours. The Member States' ability to do that effectively is plainly less than that of the EU acting as a whole, deploying to the full extent the full range of policies over which the Community has competence, from trade to external assistance, from environmental co-operation to competition policy, as well as some aspects of justice and home affairs. Our aim: the projection of stability, as I mentioned earlier.

Second, we should try to bring our experience of multilateral co-operation to a wider stage. The EU has been a tremendous force for stability and prosperity on this continent. It has reconciled long-standing enemies and helped make further wars between them unthinkable.

Europe had a mixed record in the last century; our continent spawned two world wars and the Holocaust. But we also showed a happier face to the world, becoming a powerful example of how intractable problems can be overcome by nation states working together, given the political will and the right framework.

Our first priority must be to help to ensure that Europe has a strong economy capable of upholding a strong foreign policy. As Ernie Bevin, the first postwar British Foreign Secretary said: 'Give me the coal, and I'll give you the policy'.

So we must promote a competitive European economy. The Commission's external trade policy is a central component of European foreign policy. The EU must contribute to open, rule-based international trade. We should champion globalisation, which I strongly believe to be a force for good, not only because of the economic benefits of trade that it can bring to the poorest countries, but because it promotes open societies and liberal ideas. But we must also address the risk of polarisation between the connected and the isolated. Liberal trade and advanced technology are making people better off – but not everywhere and not in every country.

This brings me immediately to external assistance – where, as many of you will be painfully aware, the reality of our efforts falls well below the potential.

The EU is the biggest aid provider in the world – much bigger than the United States. The EC and its Member States account for 55% of all official international development assistance; and for two thirds of all grant aid. But the money is not well managed, and as a result the EU has a very poor reputation as an aid provider worldwide, despite the generosity of Europe's taxpayers. I do not want to cast aspersions on our many excellent staff; they have been saddled with procedures that Kafka would have found challenging, and there are too few staff to cope.

EC aid volumes have increased two to three times as fast as our ability to manage the funds. We have to work with absurdly heavy procedures imposed by Member States wanting to micro-manage projects, and to secure contracts. As a result, in the last five years the average delay in disbursement of committed funds has increased from – wait for it - three years to four and a half years. Four and a half years! For some programmes, the backlog of commitments is equivalent to 8.5 years. No wonder some beneficiaries are reluctant to accept EU funds.

We cannot credibly continue like this. In May, I announced plans to clean up the mess. We are proposing to the budgetary authority that a proportion of each assistance programme should be committed to its management. With these additional resources:

- We can do a better job of multiannual programming and seek to involve Member States at that stage, so that they do not delay projects later by excessive oversight procedures.
- We can create a single office of the Commission, called Europe Aid, which will identify projects and oversee their implementation from start to finish.
- We can devolve more work to our delegations in country, bringing management nearer to the projects themselves, and involving beneficiary countries more closely in decision-making.

We want to beef up the number of staff dealing with our programmes to something approaching the figures for Member States. The World Bank and Member States have between 4 and 9 staff for every 10 million euro they manage. The UK's DFID has 6.5, for example. The Commission has just 2.9. We want to devolve decision making from Brussels to people in the field, and make sure they are adequately trained for the task. And we want to lighten excessive procedures.

These proposals are now under active consideration in the European Parliament and Council of Ministers. They received a generally favourable reception at the informal Foreign Ministers' meeting at Evian in September; and the French Presidency has given priority to improving the effectiveness of our external activities.

The need for our reforms becomes no less urgent; there is a pressing need for us to be able to deliver assistance rapidly and effectively pretty much whenever we intervene. Rare is the case where things can be done at a leisurely pace.

I could now hop from continent to continent showing how we try to apply some of the principles and approaches that I have covered. It would be the traditional 'tour d'horizon', all take-offs and landings without much time for even getting out of the airport terminal, let alone doing any sight-seeing.

We have global responsibilities and challenges. We have to establish a strategic partnership with Russia, helping the Federation to develop the infrastructure of sound economic management, assisting with improvements in the safety of nuclear power, working to deal with some of the shared problems around the Baltic. We have burgeoning, complex trade and political relations with China and India. We are supporting political initiatives to bring greater security to the Korean peninsula. We have concluded a Free Trade and Political Agreement with Mexico and seek similar agreements elsewhere in Latin America. We are funding peace efforts right across Africa. We devote much attention to our developed country partners in the OECD like the USA, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

All that and much more makes this Commissioner ubiquitously peripatetic. But let me come back to Earth with one dramatically up to date example.

I return, as I said I would, to the Balkans, where one can see all aspects of our policy in action.

We have learned many, many lessons as Europeans in the Balkans over the last decade.

Much of what Javier Solana and I are trying to achieve in the respective areas for which we are responsible is born out of the Union's experience in the Balkans.

On the military side, we learned in Bosnia and then in Kosovo that Europe needed to be capable of mounting large-scale peace enforcement operations and sustaining them. We learned the need for a policing capacity, pitched somewhere between conventional soldiers and on street policemen, to tackle mob violence. We learned the need for Europe to be able to respond fast and coherently in emergency humanitarian crises, and to be able to call quickly and efficiently on the resources that Europe possesses – from emergency medical facilities to human rights or election monitors – at short notice.

Now the EU is taking action to make that possible. The Union is determined to be able to deploy 60,000 troops capable of the full range of so called Petersberg tasks – humanitarian and rescue work, crisis management, peace-keeping and even peace-making. This is the Council's rather than the Commission's domain – Javier Solana is busy establishing the necessary command and control arrangements and, on the institutional side, working to resolve the complexities of the relationship with Nato – including the involvement of non-Nato members of the EU and non-EU members of Nato. It is obviously essential that the whole enterprise should be tightly co-ordinated with Nato, serving to reinforce Europe's contribution to its own security.

The military dimension is not a matter for the Commission. But another thing we have learned in the Balkans is that you cannot simply divorce the military from the non-military side of crisis management. You have to have close co-ordination between institutions if you are to deliver an effective European foreign policy on the ground; you have to co-ordinate your assets in the service of a single strategy. The Commission might, for example, be providing customs support and training in one or more countries, or police training, or media support, or implementing trade concessions; or helping to nurture institutions, upon the success of which depend the prospects for withdrawing expensive peace-keeping troops and building a lasting peace.

It is precisely such a strategy that we are implementing and have been implementing in South East Europe.

Like others, I give the lion's share of the credit for what happened in Belgrade last week to the brave people of Yugoslavia. They reclaimed their country, they refused to see their election stolen from them. They wanted, after all these years, to live in a normal country again; to be part of Europe once more. And they rose up to make that happen.

But I also believe that what happened in Belgrade was – indirectly - a success for the policy of the European Union, the United States and the rest of the international community.

We stood firm on the principle that what was happening in the Balkans was our business too. We rejected the view that this was a region in which people were almost genetically programmed to murder one another, and that its problems were too complicated and too distant to matter.

We made mistakes, to be sure. We prevaricated too long as Milosevic pursued his mad scheme to build a greater Serbia; as he fomented ethnic hatred by his criminal abuse of the media, especially television; as he attacked Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia.

But we did, together, stop the war in Bosnia; we did halt the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. We stayed the course, and in the last few years have worked tirelessly to keep faith with the region and rebuild its hopes.

Not only have we kept tens of thousands of soldiers deployed on the ground.

We have pursued a steady strategy in recent years to stabilise the region and associate it more closely with European structures. We have sought to build a ring of increasingly stable and secure democracies around Serbia, better able to withstand Milosevic's attempts to export trouble, and more capable of demonstrating to the Serbian people the extent to which Milosevic was holding them back from mainstream Europe.

So we have been negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Macedonia; working with BiH to build institutions and create a functioning state; working to support the reforms being implemented by Albania; and pouring enormous sums into rebuilding Kosovo.

We maintained a firm policy towards Croatia under the previous regime; but when Croatia chose democracy, the European Union made a radical change in its policy. We have been lending strong support to the Government of Croatia since its election in January – support we fully intend to maintain.

We have deployed the full range of tools in our policy arsenal in pursuit of this strategy. We have EU customs assistance missions operating in Kosovo, Bosnia and Albania. We are helping to train police across the region. We are providing budgetary support across the region.

Last month EU foreign ministers agreed a radical package of trade liberalisation measures, which will come into effect on 1 November. We have devoted enormous efforts to supporting the democratic government in Montenegro, to stabilise the situation there and to help it tackle the threat that then existed from Belgrade; an example of proactive crisis prevention in action.

In Serbia itself, we imposed sanctions against the Milosevic regime, while maintaining strong support for civil society and especially the independent media. Much of that support we had to do rather quietly; supporting people like Radio B2 92 and their superb web-site, and the ANEM television network. We launched – with Javier Solana and Bodo Hombach – a Campaign to support the Independent Media in Serbia following the crackdown by Milosevic in May this year. In June the European Commission funded an emergency assistance programme in collaboration with the Swedish Helsinki Committee. This helped support 16 local media outlets in the run-up to the election on 24 September.

Let me just say that we were glad to provide this limited help; I wish we could have done more. Because the independent media in Serbia are real heroes; they kept truth alive, and when the history comes to be written of this remarkable period, they will deserve a good deal of the credit for helping to bring democracy to Serbia. I welcome today's release from prison on the brave journalist Miroslav Filipovic. I hope that a new era of media freedom is coming at last in Serbia.

We also launched practical programmes like Energy for Democracy last winter, which delivered much needed heating oil to opposition controlled municipalities throughout the winter; and we launched Schools for Democracy this summer, which has been helping schools in opposition municipalities.

We have used a rolling programme of visits by EU Ministers, Javier Solana and myself in recent months to underscore Europe's commitment to the region.

I repeat: the overwhelming credit for the revolution in Belgrade belongs to the people on the streets and to the opposition who worked so hard for so long to this end.

But our strategy helped, I believe, to make their efforts possible.

Now we must stay the course.

Above all we must honour our promise to the people of Yugoslavia that democratic change would see them welcomed back into the European family; and honour our promise to help them rebuild their country – economically and institutionally.

I am delighted that the meeting of EU foreign ministers here in Luxembourg yesterday decided to lift sanctions against Yugoslavia, keeping only those that directly hit Milosevic and his cronies. And the EU made clear its determination to launch a full scale reconstruction programme for the FRY; to support its full involvement in the SAA process and in the Stability Pact.

But we will also need to maintain our commitment to the rest of the region – to Montenegro, to Kosovo, to Croatia, to Bosnia, to Macedonia and to Albania. If there is one thing we have learned in the last decade it is that the problems – and opportunities – in this region are intimately bound up with each other, and can only be resolved together.

In the last decade, history has come full circle in the Balkans; the war Milosevic started a decade ago has come, at last, to an end. As President Clinton put it at the weekend, 'democracy has retaken every piece of ground he took'.

But history has also come full circle in the wider Europe too. A democratic Europe that is both whole and free is now at last a real possibility.

Europe must be ready for it, and able to play the role that its friends expect of it on the world stage.

The final word goes to Havel again. In the speech to the European Parliament to which I referred, he called on Europe to 'get its act together.'

It was a justified call.

And on CFSP it is a call, I hope and believe, that is being acted on. We are not there yet; but we are starting to get there, in ways of which I hope both Vaclav Havel and Winston Churchill would approve.