

## Speech by Chris Patten (Paris, 15 June 2000)

**Caption:** Speech by Chris Patten, European Commissioner responsible for External Relations, on European foreign policy and the role of the Commission within this policy area.

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## Chris Patten's speech, European Commissioner responsible for External Relations, on European Foreign Policy

More than 40 years ago the European Commission's first President, Walter Hallstein, wanted to formalise the Commission's relations with the representatives of third countries in Brussels. President de Gaulle slapped him down, pooh-poohing this 'artificial country springing from the brow of a technocrat'. I suppose that some — not least in what we would call, within the Commission, 'the country that I know best' — would regard this speech as a similarly reprehensible trespass into that artificial country. None of this is surprising. For foreign policy goes to the heart of what it means to be a nation. And the Commission's role is still disputed. When it comes to trade policy or agriculture, we know where we stand. The Commission acts, more or less, according to Jean Monnet's brilliant vision. But what exactly **is** the Common Foreign and Security Policy? Should the Member States be willing to curb their national instincts for the sake of it?

These questions have never been answered to anyone's satisfaction. History is littered with failed attempts to create a Common Foreign and Security Policy which could be more than the sum of its parts. The Pleven Plan; the De Gasperi Plan; the Fouchet Plan ... With European Political Co-operation, in 1970, the baby at least survived. Indeed it grew. But it was always rather a sickly creature. After twenty years, in 1989, it boasted an impressive jungle of committees; it issued ringing declarations (usually a week or two after they could influence events); but — as some academic commentators put it recently — "the structure resembled a diplomatic game, providing work for officials without engaging or informing Parliaments or press, let alone public opinion. It thus failed to promote any substantial convergence of national attitudes." <sup>(1)</sup>

Since then, the European Union has started to raise its game. The Maastricht Treaty of 1992 created the Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Amsterdam Treaty called into being the High Representative, "Monsieur PESC". And the Helsinki European Council last December took the first big step into defence policy.

What caused this new impetus? I would suggest three reasons in particular:

— First, the mismatch between the time and effort being put into Political Co-operation, and the feeble outcome, had become too glaring. As the European Union matured in other respects, with enlargement, the advent of the Single Market and the drive towards a single currency — it became ever clearer that foreign policy was lagging behind.

— Second, the fall of the Berlin Wall changed the whole landscape of Europe. We had always known what we were against. Now we had to work out what we were for. And we needed to be able to tackle instability on our borders. Europe's weakness was exposed, in particular, by our humiliating 'hour of Europe' in Bosnia, where we could neither stop the fighting, nor bring about any serious negotiation until the Americans chose to intervene. Europe's subsequent reliance on US military capacity in Kosovo had a similarly galvanising effect. The Member States recognised that they needed a genuine Common Foreign and Security Policy to reverse this tide.

— And third, perhaps, there has been a changing relationship with the US. American engagement in Europe since the Second World War has been a blessing in almost every respect. Yet America has divided us. Some Europeans — foolishly in my view — have measured their devotion to the cause of Europe by their anti-Americanism. Others have shied away from a muscular European foreign policy, and especially defence policy, for fear that this would sever the all-important transatlantic link. Both have been wrong. And both are coming to see it. Europe and America need one another. The danger is not of US isolationism, but of unilateralism — accompanied, sometimes, by disregard for the great abroad. Europe will encourage that tendency if it is not seen to be doing more for itself.

So we have our new CFSP. Javier Solana, as its High Representative, also presides over the Council Secretariat. As the Commissioner for External Relations, I combine responsibilities which used to be spread between several Commissioners. I do not want to turn this into a speech about institutions — but I should discuss very briefly one central issue, which is **the role of the Commission in the emerging structure of CFSP**.

In the important advances achieved in CFSP in the last decade, the Member States have **not** given the Commission a sole right of initiative; nor, in general, have they agreed to abide by majority votes; nor do they accept that Europe has ‘occupied the space’ reducing national freedom of action. It is important to understand this, and particularly important that the European Commission should understand it. Foreign policy remains primarily a matter for democratically elected Member State governments.

But it is equally necessary that all Member States should acknowledge what those actually doing the work of CFSP have long understood: that mere inter-Governmentalism is a recipe for weakness and mediocrity: for a European foreign policy of the lowest common denominator. That will become more and more obvious as the Union takes in new members. Individual Member States can blunt the deficiencies of inter-Governmentalism by playing a prominent role. As President Chirac said in his important foreign policy speech of 30 May: “some members can act as a driving force ...” to give Europe a coherent, high-profile foreign policy. But force of will and the appeal to shared values are not enough. That is why the Member States decided at Maastricht and at Amsterdam to combine the Community and the inter-Governmental methods. Only in this way would they be able to sing, if not in unison, at least in closer harmony.

What they came up with is far from perfect. Luckily Javier Solana and I work extremely well together — but we are not much helped in that by the new institutional machinery. CFSP is a work in progress which will be further streamlined in the years to come. The important point is that — however awkward they may be — the new structures, procedures and instruments of CFSP recognise the need to **harness** the strengths of the European Community in the service of European foreign policy. That is why the Treaty ‘fully associates’ the European Commission with CFSP. We participate fully in the decision-making process in the Council, with a shared right of initiative which we shall exercise. Our role cannot be reduced to one of ‘painting by numbers’ — simply filling in the blanks on a canvas drawn by others. Nor should it be. It would be absurd to divorce European foreign policy from the institutions which have been given responsibility for most of the instruments for its accomplishment: for external trade questions, including sanctions; for European external assistance; for many of the external aspects of Justice and Home Affairs.

What is needed is a sensible and sensitive partnership between the institutions of the Union and the Member States. We should be engaged not in trench warfare, but in a common enterprise to ensure that the world’s largest trading group also makes its presence felt politically.

[...]

Finally, I promised to say a few words about **security**, and the Commission’s role within the emerging structures. Heads of Government have stated their immediate goal very clearly. By the year 2003 they want to be able to deploy 50–60 000 troops capable of the full range of what are known as the Petersberg tasks: humanitarian and rescue work, crisis management, peace-keeping, and even peace-**making**. The French have made clear their determination to drive full throttle for that goal during their Presidency. Javier Solana is deeply involved both on the operational side, building command and control structures for European operations, and on the institutional side, too, tackling the complexities of the EU-NATO relationship including the involvement of non-NATO members of the EU and of non-EU members of NATO. It is essential that the whole project should be closely coordinated with NATO, serving to reinforce Europe’s contribution to its own security. It is work that I strongly support. Yet I do so in many respects as an interested observer rather than as a contributor.

Does this mean that the Commission should keep out of the whole field? Some — even in this hall — perhaps would answer yes: military questions are for the Member States, and the Community institutions should mind their own business.

That is wrong for two reasons at least:

— First, while the Commission has nothing to say — nor do we seek a role — in defence, it is impossible to separate purely military matters from related issues in which we **are** competent, and have a real contribution

to make. Military and the non-military actions cannot be placed neatly into separate boxes. Nor should they be, because they need to be closely co-ordinated in the service of a single strategy. The Commission, for example, may be bankrolling police support to help head off a conflict; or we may be arranging the training of border services where uncontrolled mass migration is generating conflict; or we may be helping to re-establish administrative structures in countries emerging from crisis — as we see in the Balkans today. The Commission has an impressive range of instruments and expertise which need to be incorporated into the EU's overall approach in crisis situations — from de-mining projects to mediation to support for independent media. All this means that we need to be involved in the day-to-day work of the emerging security structures of the EU. The Commission is currently working with the Member States to develop non-military headline goals that will complement the military goal.

— The second reason it makes no sense to try to fence off the emerging security structures from the Commission is that defence trade and production cannot be treated as a *chasse gardée* within the Single Market. Competition between defence companies. Research and development. Exports of defence equipment. Internal market aspects of defence trade, and dual-use goods which have civil as well as military applications. All these are areas in which the benefits of the Single Market should not be denied to European industry.

These are areas in which the Commission needs to tread with great sensitivity. As I have said, we do not seek a role in defence or military decision-making. But I would plead for the indivisibility of European foreign policy, which cannot be confined to one pillar of the Treaty. The Commission needs to be fully associated with all of CFSP.

Let me conclude with this:

The Common Foreign and Security Policy has developed slowly in the European Union, and is still weak, because it is an area in which the Member States are rightly jealous of their national prerogatives. There are distinct limits on how far they want to go in pooling their capacity, and on how much they want to spend. But in recent years they have begun to fashion a Common Foreign and Security Policy which can be more than just declaratory. And they have recognised that this needs to integrate three strands: **national** policies, **Community** policies, and **CFSP** itself (the so-called 'Second Pillar'). European foreign policy must combine all three, and it will become stronger as that combination becomes seamless.

The Commission will play its role in this important work. If CFSP is to be taken seriously, this will involve hard choices. The Commission will try to make Member States face up to those choices, which will sometimes mean saying things that are unpopular. We shall tell the Member States, for example, when we consider that they are willing the end without providing the budgetary means. But if we are to do that we must retain the independence which is our strength as an institution.

Europe's foreign policy ambition should extend a long way beyond the present reality. CFSP is still in its infancy. If it is to grow to maturity it needs the nurture of both its parents: the Member States, and the Community institutions. And — as any psychologist will tell you — the child is more likely to be happy and healthy if those parents love one another.

(1) Anthony Forster and William Wallace: Policy-making in the European Union. 4th ed. OUP 2000.