

Remarks to the press by Javier Solana upon taking up office (Brussels, 18 October 1999)

Caption: Remarks made to the press by Dr Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council, High Representative of the European Union for the common foreign and security policy, upon taking up office.

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Remarks to the press by Dr Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council, High Representative of the European Union for the common foreign and security policy

Brussels, 18 October 1999

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have today taken up my functions of Secretary General of the Council and High Representative of the European Union for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

I am familiar with the work of the Council. I chaired it for the last time during the Spanish Presidency of 1995. I feel at home, among friends and long time colleagues. It is a great privilege to be entrusted with the task of helping build up an effective and credible Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union.

All Governments have reaffirmed their resolve that the construction of a visible Foreign and Security Policy of the Union should match the spectacular progress already realised in so many other fields of the European integration. Time is pressing. The Union of the XXI century will have a single currency. It should have as well an effective Foreign, Security and Defence policy. Events from the recent past have underlined this need.

We do not start in a vacuum. The European Union is already a global player on the world stage. Europe is crucial in the formulation of the major trade policies, financial trends and monetary decisions. It is high time for Europe to become a more active and influential global power.

Europe has to uphold and defend the principles and values on which our societies are based.

Europe has to be able and willing to define its common interests.

Europe has to be determined to pursue them in the international arena.

In order to do that, we will need to make progress in at least three decisive aspects.

* We have to set up a more effective decision making process for the Common Foreign Policy. With that aim, we have just created a Unit in charge of planning and early warning;

* We have to move towards a more active and less declaratory foreign policy. Our words have to be matched by deeds;

* We have to build up an effective policy on Security and Defence. The Cologne summit set the way ahead;

None of this is going to happen overnight. For this endeavour, I will count on dedicated officials in our institutions. I am sure I will have their full support and engagement.

All the Governments of the European Union are committed to collaborate closely with the tasks, which they have asked me to undertake, as stated in the European Council in Tampere. I rely on their diplomatic networks, their logistic capabilities, and their expertise in specific areas.

We are embarked in a collective, indeed common undertaking, in the interest of every Government represented in the Council. In the interest of every citizen of the Union.

I do not need to dwell at length on relations with the Presidency and Member States. I am here to assist them. I want to be useful. Naturally, I can only do this by working in symbiosis with the Presidency.

I am equally determined to set up a strong and collaborative relation with the Commission. I have visited

this morning the President, Romano Prodi. And I have already been throughout these past weeks in close contacts with him, Chris Patten and other Commissioners. We are committed to build a satisfactory co-operation in our work together. There can be no doubts about the total coherence in our action, which everyone wishes to see realised.

The European Parliament is also going to be a major political interlocutor in my work. It is my firm intention to have close and intensive relations with it. I will make every effort to brief the Plenary and the Foreign Affairs Committee as often as possible, or whenever it is appropriate to do so.

It is my personal conviction that the Union must be more attentive to the expectations and the wishes of its citizens. We must better explain our options and decisions and why we sometimes go through difficulties in reaching them. If we want the younger generations to grow up as European citizens, we need to reach out to them. We need to impress upon them that we are doing our best. And that we do so for the sake of a superior European interest, or in the name of the values that we share.

Finally, I strongly believe that the Union should strengthen its resolve, regarding the promotion and the protection of human rights anywhere in the world. All legitimate means can and must be used to discourage violations of human rights, and specially to repress such massive crimes as ethnic cleansing, religious persecution, racial discrimination. We should be uncompromising in upholding international law and conventions, especially humanitarian conventions.

I can assure you that I will devote all my energy and experience to foster a wider European Union enjoying peaceful and prosperous relations with all the countries in the world.

I count as well, on you, members of the media. I am looking forward to establish a regular and fruitful relationship with you. We have to work for a stronger Europe better prepared to prevent instabilities, with a robust sense of solidarity. A Europe determined to play all its potential in the world.

Thank-you very much.