

Opening remarks by Javier Solana at the EU Special Representatives' seminar (Brussels, 29 June 2005)

Caption: On 29 June 2005, in his opening remarks at the first seminar, held in Brussels, attended by the European Union Special Representatives (EUSR), Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council and High Representative for the CFSP, describes the key role of the EUSR in the common foreign and security policy and opens the discussion on the consistency between the various crisis-management instruments.

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Opening remarks by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP (Brussels, 25 June 2005)

Seminar with EU Special Representatives

I am delighted to be with you this morning. This first-ever EUSR seminar is an extremely valuable initiative. It offers an opportunity for all of us:

First, to take stock of the state of our Union; to assess where we are in overall EU foreign policy; and to have a discussion of what our future priorities ought to be.

Second, to reflect on the experiences we have had with the EUSR instrument and draw some 'lessons learned'. The central question is: how can we maximise the potential of the EUSRs to contribute to the coherence and effectiveness of the EU's foreign policies?

As you know well, these are complicated times for the EU as a whole. There is no point denying that we have had some setbacks recently and that the overall political climate is tense. Europe needs a new consensus: on the purpose and direction of the European Union; on the kind of structures, reforms and budget it needs; and on how we can re-gain people's trust and confidence. As a convinced European and a great optimist, I believe we can forge this new consensus. In any event, we do not have a choice.

My principal message is that – now more than ever – we need to show that Europe in the area of foreign policy offers a tangible added value. We should prove, to the member-states and our citizens, that the EU is not 'on hold', inward-looking and watching history go by. Our international efforts must continue: with full determination, with all the instruments at our disposal and with a clear focus on getting practical results.

In this latest period, I have been struck by two things:

First, whatever people's ideas on the direction of the EU, the Constitution or the budget - and the range of views on these issues is pretty wide – there is broad support for a Europe that makes its weight felt in a fast-changing and disorderly world. Whenever political leaders or commentators come up with a list of tasks they want the EU to perform, foreign policy ranks highly. The verdict from public opinion polls is equally clear. That broad support is encouraging but also a call to duty.

Second, in all my conversations with non-Europeans – and the diversity of interlocutors has been pretty extensive – one unmistakable message has come through. Around the world, there is a clear demand for a strong and self-confident Europe. That too is something we should keep in mind and which should encourage us to continue our efforts.

You as EUSRs are the visible expression of the EU's growing engagement in some of the world's most troubled countries and regions. The list of where we have EUSRs is, in part, also list of where our foreign and security policy priorities lie: the Balkans, the Middle East Peace Process, Afghanistan, the southern Caucasus, Moldova and the African Great Lakes. I am pleased that we have this network of EUSRs, present on the ground, in most of the conflict regions that matter most directly to the EU. And as you know, plans are afoot to appoint EUSRs for Central Asia and Sudan, to reinforce our deeper engagement in these areas.

If you add three the representatives on non-proliferation, terrorism and human rights, you get a rough picture of what EU foreign policy is all about: conflict resolution, crisis management, tackling the new security threats and standing up for our values and interests. We seek comprehensive solutions to complex and multi-dimensional problems. We try to bridge political divisions. We focus on building international partnerships. And we support local forces that favour the path of negotiation, compromise and political reform.

You operate in different environments. At one end, we have Paddy Ashdown who provides guidance to two large ESDP missions, and in his double-hatted capacity, still has executive powers. At the other end, we have the new travelling representatives, with only a very limited staff.

But I also think you share a lot. All of you are the face of EU in the field. You help to co-ordinate the various elements of European engagement. You liaise with, and sometimes play honest broker among, the parties. And you both contribute and in part help to execute EU policy. It is clear that if we are to make progress in addressing long-standing political conflicts and in promoting regional co-operation, you have a key role to play.

The question is what role and especially what kind of 'lessons learned' we should draw? The fact that we are in the process of appointing new EUSRs makes it essential to reflect on the instrument of Special Representatives. How can we maximise its potential for crisis management and conflict resolution?

As we all know, being able to ensure coherence is fundamental. It is true that the EU's unique asset is the ability, in principle, to bring together the full spectrum of conflict management instruments – military, civilian, diplomatic and economic. That is clearly what today's security challenges require. But we have to deliver on that potential and optimise synergies.

I would like to hear your general views on how we are doing in ensuring coherence across the whole EU family. What opportunities are we missing? Are the obstacles institutional in nature or lack of creativity on our part? Can we apply some of our lessons learned, for instance in the Balkans, to other conflict zones or is every situation unique?

In particular, I would welcome your thoughts on the following three dimensions of the 'coherence' imperative.

First, is our own internal organisation in order? What, if anything, should we do to ensure effective co-operation between EUSRs in the field and the Council in Brussels, including the PSC, the Secretariat and so on?

Second, in those cases where the EUSR operates in an area where we also have an ESDP mission, do we have the right co-ordinating mechanisms in place? At the moment, arrangements on political guidance, relations with the local authorities and media, vary considerably. Is that appropriate, because it is flexible, or should we aim for some form of standardisation?

Third, how can we promote smooth and effective working relationships with the Commission and its delegations in the field? Is there scope for a greater pooling of some resources?

Let me finish where I started. We have an ambitious and demanding international agenda ahead of us. We have to be reliable, efficient and effective. The onus is on all of us – and on you in the field – to prove that our international engagement not only continues but can deliver tangible results.

We have said many times that we want the European Union to take its full responsibilities. Promoting peace. Assisting countries with post-conflict reconstruction. That is our calling. And that is what we will have to do.