

Statement by Javier Solana on the debate on the reform of the Council (Strasbourg, 15 May 2002)

Caption: At the plenary sitting of the European Parliament of 15 May 2002 in Strasbourg, Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council and High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), makes a statement on the reform of the Council. He sets out the main proposals included in his report of 7 March 2007 concerning the European Council, the General Affairs Council, the Presidency of the Council and the legislative activity of the Council.

Source: Summary of the intervention by Javier Solana, High Representative of the European Union for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Plenary session of the European Parliament - Debate on the reform of the Council.

Strasbourg: Council of the European Union, 15.05.2002. 5 p.

http://www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/discours/70546.pdf.

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http://www.cvce.eu/obj/statement_by_javier_solana_on_the_debate_on_the_reform_of_the_council_strasbourg_15_may_2002-en-a43e715c-796a-4fe1-a016-4270a6a652e5.html

Last updated: 18/08/2015

Summary of the statement by Javier Solana, High Representative of the European Union for the Common Foreign and Security Policy — Debate on the reform of the Council (Strasbourg, 15 May 2002)

Plenary session of the European Parliament

Mr President,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Three years ago, the Council, like other institutions, undertook a reform of the way in which it works, designed to step up the efficiency of its dual legislative and executive role.

This process began in March 1999 with the report by my predecessor, Juergen TRUMPF, on the "Operation of the Council with an enlarged Union in prospect" in which over 100 suggestions, none of them requiring an amendment to the Treaties, were set out. With this report in mind, the Helsinki European Council adopted certain operative guidelines and recommendations in December 1999, some of which were introduced into the Council's Rules of Procedure in June 2000.

However, these initial reforms turned out to be insufficient, as the Parliament itself noted in its Resolution of October 2001, following the report from my friend Jacques POOS. I therefore submitted a new report to the European Council in Goteborg in which I emphasised the urgent need to press ahead with reforms and changes along the same lines.

The European Council then asked me to submit further proposals so that the necessary decisions might be taken by no later than June 2002. In response to this request, I submitted my report in Barcelona in March. The report focused on four points: the European Council, the General Affairs Council, the Council Presidency and transparency in the legislative activity of the Council.

From Barcelona to Seville

With a view to the adoption of firm measures by the Seville European Council, the Barcelona European Council charged the Presidency to begin appropriate talks with personal representatives of the Heads of State and of Government, in close cooperation with myself. These talks are taking place at this time. Prime Minister Aznar will be able to consult all his colleagues during the tour of capitals planned for the first two weeks in June. Thereafter, the General Affairs Council on 17 June will examine the proposals in the context of preparations for the European Council meeting in Seville at which the pertinent decisions must be adopted.

Main aspects of the reforms to be adopted

Most of these reforms can be agreed on and implemented without any amendment to the Treaties. It is not necessary, therefore, to await ratification of the Treaty arising from the work of the Convention on the future of the European Union and of the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference.

These reforms are urgent. Within less than a year, the European Council, the various configurations of the Council and all preparatory working parties will in fact be comprised of no longer 15 but 25 members. As happened at the time of the last round of enlargements, the representatives of the future Member States will, from the time the Accession Treaty is signed, take part as active observers in all Council configurations at every level, but will not vote.

The reforms which I am proposing cover **four areas** of concentration for the decisions taken at Seville:

1. steps to rationalise and organise the work of the **European Council**, with particular emphasis on:

– refocusing the European Council's role in laying down strategic guidelines and adopting the major political

decisions of the Union. The European Council must be the Union's driving force;

- improving the preparations for its meetings by the new General Affairs Council;
- agreeing on a set of rules for the efficient organisation of proceedings (annotated agenda, possible use of a type of indicative voting, drastic reduction in the size of delegations, etc.);
- focusing conclusions on the key elements of encouragement and decision in order to avoid members of the European Council spending too much time in drafting meetings;
- fitting proceedings into a single 24-hour period (dinner in the evening and close of proceedings in late evening of the following day);
- ensuring confidentiality of discussions.

All of these measures should be set out in a "code of conduct".

2. Measures intended to separate clearly the **Council's** "general affairs" and "external relations" roles. This should be done not only by adjusting the agenda, as was decided in Helsinki, but by creating two separate Council formations which would meet on different dates with different agendas. Logically, Governments would be free to choose which Minister would represent them in the new General Affairs Council. The main role of this Council formation would be to prepare for meetings of the European Council and ensure implementation of its decisions and guidelines.

3. Measures designed to reform the **Council Presidency** and which do not require a revision of the Treaties, such as:

- more extensive programming of work over several Presidencies (over two or three terms);
- Presidency chosen or appointed by the Committees or Working Parties, or by some of these;
- reduction in the number of Council formations (from the current sixteen formations to around ten).

With regard to reforms requiring an amendment of the Treaties, I believe that the Heads of State and Government could usefully begin to reflect upon this important matter. In my view, it will not be possible to maintain the current system of six-monthly rotation in a Union enlarged to 25 or more Member States. It will also be necessary to consider the specific case of external relations. Having served as the European Union's High Representative for two and a half years, I am fully convinced that if Europe is to have any influence and weight in the world, it must speak with one voice and be proactive. We have enormous potential and a whole battery of instruments, at the level of both the Community and the Member States, that should make it possible to assert Europe's identity on the international scene; to promote our values better and to defend our citizens' interests; to see to it that Europe – a more politicised Europe – becomes a key player in a world marked by globalisation and profound change. I am prepared to share my thoughts and experience with both the Convention on the Future of Europe and, subsequently, the Intergovernmental Conference in order to make for a more politicised, powerful and influential Europe on the world stage.

4. Lastly, I should like to dwell on various measures relating to the **Council's legislative activity**. It would be wise to bring the public in on the Council's deliberations on all matters for which legislative decision-making is being shared with the European Parliament. Also, Council legislative debates need streamlining through some organisational measures drawing upon Parliament's practice, such as limiting and sharing speaking time or submitting amendments in writing.

In short, Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am proposing change and reform for the Council's work which seem both urgent and reasonable to me – and, I daresay, reflect common sense. Change and reform which are necessary if this institution is to act efficiently and speedily when taking decisions, no longer with

15 Member States, but with 25 or more. This will help Europe continue to be the prime factor of political stability and economic prosperity on our continent, allaying our citizens' growing worries and projecting to the rest of the world our values and principles and our model of coexistence marked by tolerance and mutual respect.