

“A PEACOCK DIPLOMACY? THE ROLE OF THE UNION IN THE WORLD”

Speech, as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, presenting the Foreign Affairs Committee Report on “The Role of the Union in the World”, European Parliament

27th May 1998

Mr. President, we are required under the Treaties to hold an annual debate on the development of CFSP. My Report discharges that duty in the same format as last year. There is a tabular comparison of the details of use of Joint Actions, Common positions and Declarations over a four year period. There is a review of CFSP on a regional basis, starting with our near abroad and moving outwards. I have nothing of particular interest to note in the use of instruments, other than their continued failure to address the real challenges which Europe faces in the world. My report also reprises the observations made in Parliament's Opinion on the Amsterdam Treaty. The best we can say is that we are looking at a CFSP in transition.

In 1997 our real interest should be firstly in the Inter-Institutional Agreement on Financing the CFSP and on parliamentary involvement. Its effectiveness will depend on a close co-operation between the Budget and Foreign Affairs Committees. And secondly it should be on the Council document on the Main Aspects and Basic Choices of the CFSP, which flows from that agreement. It is a minimalist document stripped of meaning by pre-publication editing in Council working groups. It is historical and narrative, devoting only a page and a half of the future and then only with the vaguest of words.

Observant colleagues will have noted that we have changed the title of this year's debate to “The Role of the Union in the World.” There are two reasons for this, one functional and one temporal.

Europe's role in the world is more than the limited and as yet undeveloped activities covered by the CFSP. It encompasses the commercial and other competences of the Commission and the role of this Parliament, its President, Committees, Delegations. It must also encompass the foreign policies of the Member States. As I say on page 9 of my report “we are creating a Common foreign policy, not a Single foreign policy. The parallel with a Common Currency rather than a Single Currency may be instructive if not exact. A Common Policy magnifies effective influence. A Single Foreign Policy would be the product of a single state which the Union is not.” We should be striving to maximise Europe's influence in the world - for our own good, and I would maintain for the good of the world. To do so we should use all our resources, in all of the institutions and in the Member States.

Mr President, the period we are looking at covers three presidencies, conducted in three very different styles, with three very different degrees of experience. Looking at all three, I am forced to conclude that it is impossible to run an intellectually or politically convincing Presidency given the tension between the weakness of the current institutional structures and the ambitious rhetoric of the CFSP. Time and again we see Europe accepting that the real decisions are taken by the Americans. We tamely follow them around, voting funds and troops into situations such as Bosnia where we have abdicated from political decision-making. They say and we pay.

An optimist will say that the CFSP is in transition. Surely the position will be improved when rather than sending the President in Office on a one day administrative errand to Ankara, which fails to persuade the Turks to turn up to their own Association Council, we can send the High Representative. Surely the existence of an Analysis and Planning Unit would improve our state of preparedness. At the moment we managed to be ill prepared not just for the predictable such as the Indian test, or the perennial such as Saddam Hussain - but even from the frankly overdue such as Kosovo.

What we have at the moment is the worst of all worlds. We are too proud to hand over Europe's interests lock, stock and barrel to Uncle Sam. We are too vain to remain decently silent. We have too much memory and not enough vision to create our own foreign policy. What we have is a ‘peacock

diplomacy' - designed for display and not for use. The prime role of this Parliament, and of the national parliaments, is not to control the Executive in their conduct of foreign policy, but to encourage them to have a foreign policy worthy of the name. To have a Europe impotent in the Middle East Peace Process, silent on the Subcontinent and sidelined in the Balkans is quite simply not good enough.

Mr President, I commend the report of the Foreign Affairs Committee to Parliament.



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