

Draft speech by President Cox, European Council, 17 February 2003

1. I would like to thank the Greek Presidency for taking the initiative of calling this Extraordinary Council. You are right to give priority to seeking more coherence in the position of Member States, in order to foster a common approach and display the necessary solidarity, one to the other, through the Presidency.

2. The European Parliament is a tribune of the people and is, as such, a guage of public opinion. I recognise that war and peace are, first and foremost, matters for the Member States. The United Nations is an intergovernmental organisation where Member States are represented. I would like, nonetheless, to inform you of the views of the Parliament.

3. Those views, which were set out recently, may be summarised as follows:
 - Iraq must disarm.
 - We support the work of the weapons inspectors.
 - We are opposed to unilateral preemptive military action.
 - We insist on respect for the UN process.
 - And we seek the maximum degree of European consensus.

The European Parliament, and in this, we represent the views of the citizens of Europe, is not convinced that military intervention is justified at this moment.

4. The unambiguous message from Parliament and, indeed, all our Institutions has to be that Baghdad must comply with UN Resolution 1441, must disarm, must provide verifiable proof of this disarmament. The inescapable burden for this verification falls on Saddam Hussein.

5. But we also have to recognise that the incremental willingness of Saddam Hussein to cooperate with the inspectors on disarmament is not some sudden benign conversion to the rule of international law, but a recognition of the unanimous weight of the Security Council of the United Nations behind Resolution 1441, and backed up by the credible threat of force in the case of non-compliance. We recognise of course that the use of force is the last resort. The more united we stand, the more Saddam Hussein will understand. There is no choice.

6. The pressure must be maintained. Failure to provide "immediate active and unconditional cooperation" would make Saddam Hussein responsible for the serious consequences that would flow from this. The credibility of the UN implies that, when necessary, all the Member States should show their willingness to apply to the full the decisions of the UN Security Council. Belief in effective multilateralism cannot be multilateralism *à la carte*.

7. But our common European purpose must go beyond the immediate question of Iraq. We have common aspirations. Since 9/11, we have contributed fully to the worldwide fight against terrorism. We have developed an approach to the Middle East, which provides the only perspective for reconciliation and reconstruction in the region. We insist on the immediate publication of the road map as a first and necessary step. And we must develop and refine our vision for the future of the Middle East, our relations with the Arab world and Israel, and for a world free of terrorism. In short we must enhance the capacity of the European Union to act.

8. On the question of weapons of mass destruction, Iraq is a key danger amongst others of a slide into a more chaotic, less secure, more dangerous world. We have to develop a European vision and the capacity to give real leadership at the global level, in accordance with our values, based on a common threat assessment, a policy of graduated response, and a philosophy and practice embedded in effective multilateralism. We, the Europeans, need to get our act together. It is no use us whingeing if and when others, in the absence of European action, carry the burden. Doing nothing in the face of this threat is not a viable option. As we saw last weekend, public opinion has demonstrated a keen interest in the work we do here today. European citizens are right to expect European leadership.

9. And if we allow European divisions to stay to the fore, then it is dictators like Saddam Hussein who triumph. If we subject our traditional alliances to strain, we provide succour to dictators not democrats. If, on the other hand, we believe that the United Nations method, the UN Charter and the Security Council provide unique instruments to lay out a new peaceful order for the world, then we must do nothing which could jeopardise the United Nations' credibility and its ability to act.

Like the UN, the European Union's aspirations are pacific, not pacifist. Our approach is multilateral, not unilateral. Our vision is global and shared. We have, therefore, a duty to develop a European approach, faithful to these values and determined to use all multilateral means to ensure the effective compliance with UN Resolutions.

10. It is not just a massive political challenge, it is also a humanitarian challenge. Whatever the outcome of the current crisis, prudence requires that we

anticipate and develop appropriate plans for dealing with what is a deepening humanitarian tragedy. I offer the European Parliament's cooperation with the other EU Institutions to prepare an appropriate response, if necessary.

11. And so, Mr President, the European Parliament appeals to you and the Heads of State and Government here present, to work together to the highest common factor, and not the lowest common denominator, to develop a European approach to the immediate problem of disarming Saddam Hussein, to the broader issues of peace and security in the Middle East, and a wider European perspective on policies of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

12. If this current debate teaches us anything, it exposes a gap between our aspirations and our capacity in the making of foreign policy. At a time when we are debating the future of Europe, we have to realise that constitutions and institutions are empty vessels, if not animated by determined political will.