



EUROPEAN UNION

A 34/10

**Address by HR Catherine Ashton,
at the Joint Debate on Foreign and Security Policy**

**European Parliament Plenary
Strasbourg, 10 March 2010**

I am delighted to be with you to discuss the big questions on Europe's international agenda.

Let me begin by thanking Mr. Albertini and Mr. Danjean for their excellent reports. You have underlined the number, range and urgency of the challenges we face.

From strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo to working with the emerging powers to share responsibility for global governance. From promoting peace in the Middle East – and I join US Vice President Joe Biden in condemning the Israeli decision to build 1600 new houses in East Jerusalem –, to providing shelter to the surviving victims of Haiti's earthquake. From dealing with proliferation problems such as Iran, to devising effective answers to "new" challenges such as energy, climate and cyber-security.

Europe is going through a phase of building something new. Where people have to adjust their mental maps and institutions have to find their new place. Doing so is messy and complicated. But also exciting. For it is impossible to over-state just how important this moment is.

Right now we have a chance to build what many across Europe – and many in this House – have long wanted: a stronger, more credible European foreign policy. Of course the European External Action Service will be key to deliver this. We have to build a system that is robust; that will enable us to deal better with the problems of today and new problems that will arise tomorrow.

For years, we have been trying to frame and implement comprehensive strategies. But the structures and systems we had, made this difficult. With the Lisbon Treaty and the EEAS we should be able to achieve this.

P R E S S

FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

Lutz Guellner - Spokesperson for the High Representative

+32 498/964 641 - +32 2 296 46 41 e-mail: COMM-SPP-HRVP-ASHTON@ec.europa.eu

www.eeas.europa.eu

At the heart of everything we do lies a simple truth: to protect our interests and promote our values we must be engaged abroad. No one can hope to be an island of stability and prosperity in a sea of insecurity and injustice. Ours is a world in flux. To engage with it effectively, we need to frame it first. To me the two most striking features of today's world are:

Deep interdependence - in political, economic and security terms. Technologies, ideas, diseases, money: everything moves. We are connected in ways we have never been before.

The fact that power is shifting. Both within political systems - roughly from governments to markets, media and NGOs. And between political systems - roughly from the old "West" to both East and South.

Both are the outcome of globalisation which is not just an economic but also a political phenomenon – both in its manifestations and in its consequences.

Think of the rise of China and others as major political players. Or consider the political impact of the financial crisis. The debts are in the West; the surpluses in the East. And this re-distribution of financial power is shaping political discussions.

Or consider climate change – which is not just an environmental problem but also one with security and geo-political ramifications.

So we have to deal with complex problems and do so in a new geo-political landscape. We need to adapt. This is not a time for flying on auto-pilot. Or for sticking to the narrow defence of national ways of doing things. This is a time to be smart and ambitious.

Let me give you some figures to illustrate the point. Europe's share of the world's population is 7%, down from 25% a century ago. In the last 60 years, our share of global GDP has shrunk from 28% to 21%. The economies of China, India and others are racing ahead at 10% per year. Economic weight is translating into political clout and self-confidence. You feel it everywhere: from negotiations on climate change to Iran, to big energy deals in Africa or Central Asia. If we pull together we can safeguard our interests. If not, others will make decisions for us. It really is that simple.

My preference is clear. We should respond, as Europeans.

First, by pulling together. Because unity is a pre-condition for influence.

Second, by taking action. Because the answer to a problem cannot be a paper or a meeting. If you want results, you have to act - and sometimes take risks. And Yes there is a tendency in Europe to put process ahead of outcomes.

Third, by being both principled and creative. Because we must be both. Principled in the defence of our values. And creative in how we forge bespoke solutions to complex problems.

As Mr. Albertini's report rightly points out: "a new approach is needed if the EU is to act collectively and meet the global challenges in a coherent, consistent and efficient manner". Out of this general picture come several core objectives:

First, to ensure greater stability and security in our neighbourhood, by promoting political and economic reforms. This is important in itself for reasons which are self-evident. But our wider international credibility also depends on getting the neighbourhood right.

Second, to address the global security challenges of our time. For this, we need comprehensive strategies, strong international organisations and the rule of law. Both within countries and between them.

Third, to build a network of strategic relations with key countries and organisations – because the problems we face cannot be solved by any single actor.

On top of all this comes the creation of the European External Action Service. This is both a means to achieve the other three objectives and a way to deliver on the promise of the Lisbon Treaty.

Since taking office, I have devoted all my time to these core tasks. I first went to Washington and New York which was the right way to start given how important our relations with the US and UN are. I have since been to Moscow, Kiev, the Balkans and Haiti. And I will go to the Middle East next week and again to New York at the end of the month. In between, I have chaired the Foreign Affairs Council three times, attended the informal European Council plus several meetings of the College. And I have worked hard to build the necessary internal EU consensus, visiting various capitals: Berlin, Paris, London, Vienna and Ljubljana.

Naturally, I have spent a significant amount of time on the creation of the EEAS. This will continue in the weeks ahead, including with you in the European Parliament. I know there is keen interest in the House in the EEAS. That is why I have ensured involvement from the EP in the High Level Group. I will discuss it this afternoon in the Conference of Presidents. And when I will come to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 23 March we will have an opportunity to have an in-depth exchange in the presence of all relevant committees.

Any time you create something new, there will be resistance. Some prefer to minimise perceived losses rather than maximise collective gains. I see it differently. And I hope this Parliament does too. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build something that finally brings together all the instruments of our engagement in support of a single political strategy.

This is huge chance for Europe. We should not lower our ambitions but rather give ourselves the means to realise them. This is a moment to see the big picture, be creative and take collective responsibility.

If we get it right, as we must, then we will be able to shape a European foreign policy for the 21st century with an external service designed to achieve that. One where we mobilise all our levers of influence – political, economic, development and crisis management tools – in a co-ordinated way. A service that is representative of the EU in geographic and gender terms. It is the only acceptable way to go.

Let me illustrate what I have in mind when I say "comprehensive approach" with a couple of examples:

The Western Balkans. I was pleased to travel to the region recently. In a way, the Balkans is the birthplace of EU foreign policy. More than anywhere else, it is where we cannot afford to fail. My aim was to establish good working relations with political leaders; engage with civil society about what belonging to Europe could mean; and ensure co-ordination among the different EU actors on the ground.

One conclusion I drew is that the region is making progress – even if it is uneven and incomplete. The European perspective remains the overarching framework - both as our objective and as the main incentive for reform.

As I stressed everywhere: progress on the path to the EU depends on the commitment to reform at home. On human rights, the rule of law and regional co-operation. We are backing up our strategy with all available foreign-policy tools. In Kosovo we have our biggest civilian mission – and it's a success. In Bosnia we have adjusted ALTHEA as the situation has stabilised and are developing a training programme. And we are pushing the European message hard in the run-up to the October elections. Throughout the region we are making progress on visa liberalization and people-to-people contact. So our Balkan strategy is what it should be: strategic in its objectives, multi-faceted in terms of instruments and tailor-made in terms of implementation.

The Horn of Africa is another good example. It highlights the interplay of state fragility, poverty, resource competition including water, with piracy, terrorism and organised crime. The only possible answer is a comprehensive one. Which is exactly what we are doing. Our naval operation Atalanta has been widely hailed as a success. One next step is to further develop our options for the transfer of suspected pirates for prosecution in the region. We are also adding a training mission for the TFG in Somalia, with deployment expected in the Spring. Through the Stability Instrument we are funding flanking measures such as capacity building and training for maritime authorities while also moving ahead with longer-term development work in Yemen and Somalia on poverty, literacy and health.

The way we are engaged in Georgia follows the same script. When a frozen conflict erupted into open conflict in August 2008, the European Union responded immediately. We took the international lead, brokered a truce and deployed a 300-strong monitoring mission in record time. Since then, we are engaged across the spectrum of community and CSDP means to prevent a return to violence and build stability in Georgia and the region. With the UN and OSCE, we lead the Geneva talks, the only forum where all concerned meet.

We hosted a donors' conference for reconstruction and economic support for Georgia. We also included Georgia – together with Armenia and Azerbaijan – into the European Neighbourhood Policy, and continue to promote reforms and closer EU ties as a key element of regional stability. We work on trade and visa liberalisation. And we support confidence building measures to re-build ties with the break-away republics. There is more work to do in Georgia, and we have a full agenda when we discuss it with Russia, as I did only ten days ago with Sergey Lavrov. In this case we demonstrated what the EU can do when we fully mobilise the resources we have. Those involved in these hectic weeks have told me, however, that what was done in this case was exceptional. So we need stronger structures, more flexibility and better preparedness if we want Georgia to be the benchmark for the future.

Let me now move on to our Common Security and Defence Policy.

I agree with the broad thrust of the Danjean report. About how important our missions are. They save lives. They create the space for functioning politics to work. And they mean that Europe can draw on all instruments of power to meet its responsibilities.

It is striking how far we have come in the last ten years. More than 70,000 men and women have been deployed in this period in more than 20 missions. We do crisis management the European way. With a comprehensive approach. In support of international law and agreements. And in close co-operation with key partners.

We work well with NATO together in Bosnia and Herzegovina and along the coast of Somalia. In Kosovo and Afghanistan it is more difficult due to well-known political problems. We need to get this right. I am working with the NATO Secretary General to improve EU-NATO relations in practical areas and set a positive climate. Let's see how we can develop our relations pragmatically.

The UN is another key partner. There are many good examples of the EU and UN cooperating on the ground - such as Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and indeed Kosovo. In recent years, we have got to know each other better. But we can and should strengthen this by focusing on areas such as planning and sharing of best practice.

In the Danjean report, and more widely, people raise the question whether the EU should have its own permanent operations HQ. This is a serious issue that deserves a serious debate. No one contests the need for an HQ, able to plan and conduct military operations. The question is whether the current system, relying on SHAPE or national HQs, is the most efficient way or whether we need something else. People often approach this question in terms of structures. I think we should first analyse what functions need to be performed.

From that, decisions on structures should flow. I see three main functions:

The ability to plan and conduct military operations, including advance planning, to be able to react quickly when there is a need;

The ability to develop civilian-military co-ordination in a more structured way, to maximise our capacity to link the various instruments; and

The ability to establish links with other actors, to optimise the overall co-ordination among different actors – or what we loosely call the "International Community".

If we use an analysis of these functions as the starting point for our discussions we should be able to establish the necessary common ground among Member States.

The Danjean report also calls for the establishment of a Defence Council. This idea too has been around for some time. The next meeting in April will follow established practice. But at the informal meeting of Defence Ministers in Palma de Mallorca, a consensus emerged based on my proposals to hold Foreign Affairs Councils in Minister of Defence formation. This would enable Defence Ministers to take decisions, for instance on capabilities development.

My last point in this block relates to the suggestion of a civil protection force. Let us start with the Haiti lessons learned exercise now underway. Then let us apply the Lisbon spirit and see what options we have to mobilise assets of Member States together with EU instruments to support either the UN and OCHA or act as EU. The watchwords ought to be: maximising synergies and avoiding "hard" or artificial splits between how we handle EU internal and external crises.

Let me, finally, turn to the issue of non-proliferation, given your oral questions. Let me mention the two most significant items:

First, the NPT Review Conference scheduled for May in New York. I intend to participate with the aim that we as EU do our bit to get a successful outcome.

We should make no mistake: the entire treaty-based non-proliferation system with the NPT as a corner-stone is under growing pressure. To respond we should be ready to make our contribution

- on access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, in particular for developing countries, while avoiding proliferation risks. This includes work on multilateral nuclear fuel cycle approaches. I note that 84 countries which have benefited from EU assistance projects.
- with progress on nuclear disarmament. Politically, this is fundamental to create a constructive atmosphere.
- by addressing regional proliferation crises, in particular the Iranian case, which has the potential to derail the Conference.

As you know, the EU is leading efforts to find a diplomatic solution. We fully support the UNSC process on further restrictive measures if, as is the case today, Iran continues to ignore its obligations.

Secondly, there is President Obama's Nuclear Security Summit. We share the goal of this Summit namely to strengthen the security of nuclear materials and prevent terrorists from getting access. I recall that since 2004, the EU has been providing support to the IAEA to assist countries in this area – and we will continue to do so.

Let me come back to where I started. The demand for European global engagement is huge. We must ensure that supplies match that demand. The Lisbon Treaty gives us the chance. We should act in line with both the letter and spirit of the Treaty, remembering why European leaders negotiated the Treaty in the first place.

The reason was clear: to build a stronger, more assertive and self-confident European foreign policy. I know many in this House share this goal. And that is why I count on your support to make it happen.
