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Javier Solana, EU High Representative for CFSP, attends ceremonies for termination of Operation Concordia and launch of Mission Proxima

Skopje, 15 December 2003

Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, took part today in the ceremonies marking the termination of the EU-led military Operation Concordia and the launch of the EU police Mission Proxima in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

On this occasion, he made the attached remarks.

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Remarks by Javier Solana
at the ceremony marking the end of the EU-led Operation Concordia

"Mr President, Mr Prime Minister, Excellencies and Friends

This day marks the end of Operation Concordia, and at the same time the end of the international military presence in the field following the crisis in 2001. It is a good day, a day of achievement, for all of us here.

First and foremost, it is a good day for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It is a day that signifies that the process towards stabilisation and normalisation has reached a point where the country is in a position to wish good bye to foreign troops. A day to look back, and to realise that the process based on Ohrid Framework Agreement, and supported by all far-sighted political leaders of this country, has led the country a long way in the right direction. But also a day to look ahead, to further progress on the Ohrid agenda - and here I would like to welcome the adoption by the Government of some important draft laws regarding decentralisation - and to a time when stability and security of Macedonia will be fully in the hands of its elected leaders.

For the European Union it is a good day, as we have been able to contribute to this positive development in a country that is close to the Union and, after all my visits here, close to my heart. What started as the EU's first ever military mission is now successfully concluded. I wish to extend my gratitude to Admiral Feist as Operational Commander, to Major General Nelson Dos Santos and before him Major General Maral as Force Commanders, and to all those who have served under EU-flag here in Macedonia. You can be proud over your contribution to this historic European effort.

I would also like to express my gratitude to our partners, the United States, NATO, which has provided assets and capabilities to this operation, thereby implementing successfully the Berlin Plus agreements, and the OSCE.

The end of Operation Concordia is in no way the end of the EU engagement in this country. But as the main threat to stability is no longer armed conflict but criminality, the emphasis of our support must be police and not military. At the same time as we lower the flag here, the flag will be hoisted at the Headquarters of the EU Police Mission Proxima. The Union will also remain present through its Special Representative and through our technical and financial assistance.

We will have lots of challenges to tackle, together, in the future. But today we celebrate a joint success, a milestone on the path leading former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia away from conflict and towards integration with, and eventually into, the European Union."

Remarks by Javier Solana
at the opening ceremony of the EU Police Mission in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (EUPOL PROXIMA)

"Mr. Prime Minister, Excellencies, dear Friends,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all here today at the headquarters of the new EU Police Mission in this country.

Following an invitation from the Government of this country, we are today launching the second ever EU police mission within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy.

Under the leadership of Police Chief Commissioner Bart D'Hooge, the 200 man-strong EU Police Mission will monitor, mentor and advise the police in this country. Proxima will be a unique mission carried out in strong partnership with the Government. We want to support you in the further development of an efficient and professional police service, living up to European standards.

Proxima is a symbol of the impressive distance this country has travelled since the crisis in 2001. I have been visiting this country numerous times in the course of the past decade - often under challenging circumstances.

Today, however, the context is a different one. It is a day of hope and of progress – and of confidence. Today we are entering a new phase of our close cooperation. Proxima is part of the wider Stabilisation and Association Process aimed at strengthening the rule of law and the mission will support your efforts in moving closer towards the EU.

The launching of Proxima is also an important step for the EU. The mission is also a sign of the EU's ability to adapt the tools of the ESDP to specific situations, with specific needs. We began by taking over a military operation, which due to the positive achievements on the ground, ended today.

Now we are launching a police mission – the fourth ESDP operation this year – which will also support the Government's police reform. So, while the overall commitment of the EU will remain the same, the concept of the EU presence will be quite different. This ability to adjust the EU's presence will be a prerequisite for handling the challenges of tomorrow.

I will finish here by wishing the men and women of Proxima as well as their future Macedonian colleagues the best of luck with their mission.

Expectations are high but I have every confidence that with a combined and dedicated effort we will meet our common goals. I am therefore certain that Proxima is the right mission, in the right place, at the right time."

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