

## **Speech to the European Parliament Plenary Session on Iraq**

**Wednesday 29 January 2003**

Watson (ELDR) - Mr President, with four EU Member States on the UN Security Council, including the chair, the EU should have the opportunity for real influence over current events and it would if it spoke with one voice. I wonder if Mr Solana would confirm that the meeting of four Security Council members, convened by the Greek Presidency ahead of Monday's General Affairs Council, was intended to achieve a single EU position? Will such meetings become regular events? Or was it simply an attempt to stitch up the outcome of the Council without consulting the remaining Member States?

Perhaps I could also ask whether, in the regrettable absence of a coherent EU strategy in the run-up to a possible conflict with Iraq, he would undertake to ensure that the EU starts work now to plan a post-conflict strategy in the region?

When we last debated the situation in Iraq in early September, the world seemed on the brink of a unilateral military adventure led by the United States. Our main concerns then were to prevent the credibility of the United Nations and of international law being undermined by a pre-emptive strike not authorised by the UN, and to get weapons inspectors back into Iraq. We may be the old continent but we remember our yesterdays rather well and our experience of war has been very different from that of the USA.

In the event, the United States did go the UN route last autumn, and secured a unanimous vote for a tough Security Council resolution. The UN weapons inspectors have been readmitted to Iraq and are doing a professional and thorough job. So we Liberals salute the efforts of Colin Powell, Hans Blix, Mohamed Elbaradei and others for reinforcing the multilateral rule of law.

Now that we are engaged on the proper path of international cooperation, we must make every effort to preserve that unity. However, following the presentation of Mr Blix's report to the Security Council, there is a new danger - a danger that the credibility of the UN and international law risks being undermined, not by unilateral US action, but by the failure of the international community to ensure that Iraq rids itself of weapons of mass destruction once and for all.

Mr Blix's report to the UN provides a damning if not yet conclusive account of Iraq's failure to cooperate fully with the inspectors. Saddam Hussein is required by UN resolution 1441 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Instead, we have seen half-truths, prevarication and evasion. Mr Blix has opened the case for the prosecution with powerful arguments, though the evidence he has presented does not yet provide proof beyond all reasonable doubt.

That is why Liberals in this House insist that the inspectors be allowed to continue their work. Mr Blix raises many disturbing questions in his report. Saddam Hussein clearly has

a case to answer. A peaceful resolution to the crisis is still possible provided that Iraq now demonstrates a real willingness to cooperate with the UN in disarming. But with the inspectors due to report again on 14 February, there is little time left to him before the court of the international community has to reach a verdict.

For Liberals, war will always be a last resort; recourse to military action means that the instruments of international governance in which we invest such high hopes have failed. But equally, the international community has to stand ready to enforce its will, or the rule of law will be flouted. And there is plenty of evidence that Saddam Hussein is in breach of international law, most notably of the UN Convention on Genocide for the murder of half a million marsh Arabs. So let us forget talk of allowing Saddam Hussein to slip off quietly into the night for a comfortable exile in a third country. He is a war criminal and he must be brought before the International Criminal Court. To those Members who intend to convey to Saddam Hussein the message that impunity in exile is an acceptable way out, I say, to borrow the phrase of the anti-war coalition: "not in our name". And I invite them to search their consciences. Is the best way to advance the cause of peace really to travel to Baghdad for a photo opportunity and risk being manipulated by the Iraqi regime?

Mr Blix told us yesterday that if Iraq chooses to cooperate, the inspectors can complete their work very soon. The inspectors must be given more time but if Mr Blix reports on 14 February that Iraq has failed to provide answers to his questions, and if the Security Council therefore determines that they are in material breach of the resolution, then the international community has a responsibility to act. If Iraq does not seize this final opportunity to cooperate, we must act together through the UN to enforce resolution 1441.