

Brussels, 17.02.2003

Address by Pat COX at the Extraordinary European Council on Iraq in Brussels

I would like to thank the Greek Presidency for taking the initiative of calling this Extraordinary Council. This was something the European Parliament called for. Some questioned whether this Summit should be called, or the timing, but we believe you were 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. We hope that you will find today the collective wisdom which puts to the fore that which unites us, which is far greater than that which divides us.

The European Parliament is a tribune of the people and is, as such, a gauge in one form of public opinion. I fully 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.

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 multilateralism through the UN process.
- And we seek the maximum expression of Europe's common view.

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

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.

But we also have to recognise that the incremental willingness of the Iraqi regime to cooperate more fully 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 must be the last resort. The more united we stand, the more Saddam Hussein will understand. There is no choice.

The pressure must be maintained. Failure on his part 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. I appeal to Heads of State and Government to recognise that effective multilateralism cannot be multilateralism à la carte. This is the package.

But our common European purpose must go beyond the immediate question of Iraq. We have common aspirations. Since 9/11, we, the Europeans, 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 in the European Parliament ask that you should 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.

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 from this a willingness to learn, 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 act in the absence of European action or carry the burden. Doing nothing in the face of this threat is not a viable option. As we saw last weekend, with the very robust demonstrations of civil society, there is a keen interest in the work we do here today. European citizens are right to expect European leadership and a clear vision.

And if we allow European divisions to stay to the fore, then it is dictators like Saddam Hussein who will triumph. If we subject our traditional alliances to excessive 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 world order, then we must do nothing which could jeopardise the United Nations' credibility and its ability to act in all circumstances.

Like the UN, the European Union's aspirations are pacific, but 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.

It is not just a massive political challenge but also a humanitarian challenge. With the Group Leaders of the European Parliament, I met earlier this afternoon Kofi Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations. He talked about the precarious humanitarian situation in Iraq. Whatever the outcome of the current crisis, prudence requires that we anticipate

and develop appropriate plans for dealing with what is potentially a deepening humanitarian tragedy. I offer the European Parliament's cooperation in any such endeavour with Council and with Commission.

And so, Mr President, the European Parliament appeals to you and the Heads of State and Government, to work together to the highest common factor, and not the lowest common denominator, to express and develop a European approach to the immediate problem of disarming Saddam Hussein and 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, which is compelling and necessary.

If this current debate teaches us anything, it exposes a gap between our aspirations and our capacity to act. At a time when we are debating the future of Europe, we have to realise that constitutions and institutions will be merely empty vessels, if not animated by determined political vision and will. That is the challenge. If you draw up conclusions at the end of this meeting, use them to breathe new life into our common purpose.