

The United Nations and the European Union: An Ever Stronger Partnership

18 May 2004

Palais d'Egmont – Egmontpaleis, Brussels

Welcome Address:

Mr. François De Kerchove d'Exaerde, Director-General, KIIB/IRRI

Welcome to all of you in the Palais d'Egmont on the occasion of this Seminar on the United Nations and the European Union, co-organised by the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven -in particular the Institute of International Law- the UN Association Flanders Belgium and the Royal Institute for International Relations.

On behalf of all of you, I would like to extend our gratitude to all those who have accepted to contribute to the quality of our discussions today by either delivering a speech, taking part in a panel or assuming the role of chair/moderator.

I believe that their contribution will be absolutely critical for the quality of our session today, all the more since this session is what you can call a 'hot topic'. Your massive presence today here reflects, I believe, the fact that the subject we are going to deal with, as I just put it a minute ago is very much relevant. The title of this conference: "***United Nations and European Union: An Ever Stronger Partnership***", is somehow self-explanatory, it means that there is already something of a partnership going on between the UN and the EU (and here 'something' equals 'substantial'). But it also means that there is a strong expectation that very important developments take place in this partnership. This is only normal when you consider the growing role of the EU in the management of world affairs, the fact that this role is based on the very principle of multilateralism, and the fact that multilateralism –evidently but worth repeating a number of times- is best incarnated by the UN, which is a true guarantor of a genuine international legitimacy. To deal with that topic we have a contribution by both practitioners, people from the UN and from EU institutions, as well as academics. I believe that this complementary approach will give rise to a very interesting cross-fertilisation of ideas.

The programme of this conference, quite logically, goes from the general principles of structural cooperation and partnership between the UN and the EU, to the more specific, that is to say, the sectors where this cooperation already takes place and should be reinforced in the future. Obviously, it was impossible for the organisers to be exhaustive in the many different subtopics of this theme; however, we hope that this conference will just be the beginning and that it will be followed by other initiatives of that type. To start today we have the honour to welcome Ambassador Alex Van Meeuwen, who is Director General of the DG Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in that capacity, of course, is directly responsible for, among others, UN-related matters, so, without further delay I would like to leave him the floor right now and to thank him on your behalf for his presence here today.

Keynote address:

**Belgium, the EU and the UN Ambassador Alex Van Meeuwen,
Director-General DG Multilateral Affairs and Globalisation, Belgian Federal
Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation:**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this assembly on a subject that is both timely and in progress. The growing relationship between the European Union and the United Nations is certainly not entirely new. But, as of late, this cooperation has taken a new spin: sometimes of a more practical nature, sometimes more conceptual. If you allow me, I would like to focus this morning on four subjects: the EU Security Strategy, the Security Council, the recent Commission's Communication and Crisis Management.

As you know, last year the EU Council endorsed a new European Security Strategy. One pillar thereof is an effective multilateralism centred around the UN. Europe was drawing the lessons from its diligence in the Security Council on how to deal with the Iraq crisis and from the perceived unilateralism of the American intervention. Belgium shared the vision outlined by Javier Solana in order to deal with threats such as terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction, as well as failed states and transnational crime. We could easily agree with the recommendations that argued in favour of international relations based on multilateralism. The Strategy also made it clear that multilateralism should not be equated with weakness and inefficiency. All member states of the EU had agreed to share these objectives. We would like to believe that this was made easier by the fact that multilateralism is inscribed, as some have said, in the genetic code of the EU. There would be no EU without the will to define the common good. There would be no EU either, without respect for the rules which have been multilaterally agreed upon. And there would be no EU if there were no sanctions in case of a breach of these rules. We would like to think that this can serve as a model for international relations in general. The adoption of this strategy has coincided with the launching by the Secretary General of the United Nations, of a reflection on the collective response to threats and the place of the UN in this response. A panel of eminent personalities has been appointed by Mr. Kofi Annan to make proposals to the next General Assembly. The EU has produced its own contributions to the work of the panel, which draw largely on the Security Strategy. It is, nevertheless, too early to say whether the panel will make Board recommendations on some of the most sensitive issues for the future of the UN. One of them will be the adaptation of the composition of the Security Council in order to respond to the geopolitical changes that have taken place since the creation of the organisation and to the need for reinvigorating the legitimacy of the Council.

This is my second point, for Belgium it is essential that in a not too distant future, the EU and its Foreign Policy find their own voice and representation within the Security Council. Minister Michel has pleaded firmly in favour of a permanent seat for the EU. We are, of course, aware that before this happens, institution changes need to take place, both in the EU and in the UN. But it would be the only logical consequence of the development of a true common European Foreign Policy. In the meanwhile, we should use all the possibilities offered by article 19 of the Treaty of the EU, not only to exchange information between

member states, but also to build a position agreed within the EU. May I recall that, in the same spirit, the European Commission has presented in September 2003 a Communication to the Council and the European Parliament, entitled "***The EU and the UN: a choice of multilateralism***". The general trend of this Communication has been endorsed by the General Affairs Council, but it later will have to revert to the specific aspects of this communication in the light of future institutional changes. The Commission –rightly- suggests that the EU needs to develop a more forceful and coherent way to deal with the UN. The Commission outlines three approaches for a more efficient participation of the EU to the purpose and the activities of the UN. First: making the EU a front-runner in the development of proposals and in the negotiation of UN decisions. Second: improving cooperation between the EU and the UN. And third: promoting the values and interests of the EU in the UN. The Commission recommends implementing these broad approaches in a variety of sectors, and has submitted a detailed plan of action for their implementation. Belgium fully supports this approach, and hopes we will soon have a chance to go into a deeper examination of the Commission's proposals. If implemented, they would move us away from the rather routine-like manner in which the EU has sometimes dealt with the UN. It would give the enlarged Union and its member states a sense of ownership about UN matters. It would strengthen the coherence of our positions and allow for greater influence. In doing so, we will have to apply towards a greater UN membership, with the same methods of building consensus that have made the EU possible.

Let me now come to my fourth and last remark, of a more operational nature: crisis management and peace-keeping. Encouraging results have recently been yielded. First, in Bosnia Herzegovina, the EU Police mission successfully took over from the UN International Police Task Force, and second, in Eastern Congo with the Artemis operation. I won't remember all the steps that have been taken in the creation of this Artemis operation, but as you know, Artemis was the first autonomous EU military operation and the first ESDP operation outside of Europe. And it became a reference point, not only for ESDP, but also for the potential complementarities between the UN and the EU in the field of Security and Peace Keeping. This successful operation has had a deep influence on the thinking about the cooperation between the EU and the UN on Peace Keeping. Clearly, the UN is in need of rapidly deployable, robust and mobile forces in order to clear the way and facilitate the deployment of more classic UN Peace Keeping Operations, which they have time to piece together. And the EU can provide these, following the Artemis model. This model has not been replicated up until now, but let me finish with two last remarks on this. First of all, the EU is currently examining the concept of battle groups to be put at the disposal of the UN and not later than yesterday, the EU Council has reconfirmed that work on that concept should be pursued as a matter of urgency and completed by the end of the Irish presidency. Our aim is to achieve an initial battle group capability in early 2005, and complete development in 2007. Second remark, the Artemis model –this operation- has also led to an increased dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the UN on crisis management. In September 2003, the EU and the UN adopted a Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the Management of Crises. We agreed to constitute a joint Consultative mechanism to enhance mutual coordination and compatibility in planning, training of military and civilian personnel, communication and best practices. Since then, a steering committee has effectively been created, and contact and exchanges have become frequent between the UN and the EU on these matters.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen, in this introduction I have only touched briefly upon some of the most recent aspects of the cooperation between the EU and the UN. They reflect, I believe, the new attraction of the EU. This power of attraction becomes clear with successful

waves of enlargement, but it is noticeable here as well, in the attraction of the EU to international organisations. And the more here, we can speak about a reciprocal attraction. From your work programme I gather you will have the opportunity throughout the day, to go much more into the details of the various aspects of this ever stronger partnership. I wish you a very fruitful meeting, and I'm looking forward to your conclusions.

I thank you for your kind attention.