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Edited transcript of address by
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to the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs

Thank you very much Mr Chairman for your invitation.

I would like to show my solidarity with Poland and with the chairman of the committee for the terrorist attack that has taken place this morning in Baghdad in which the Ambassador of Poland has been wounded and the people accompanying him have been killed and injured. Mr Chairman, I want to show my solidarity to your country. The attack is clear proof that the situation in Iraq continues to be difficult and we have to be prepared as members of the international community to take a look at the situation, to see how we can help with the stabilisation of that country, which is not just a problem of one, two or three countries but for the international community as a whole.

Let me start by saying, since we are on Iraq, that there was a very good meeting in New York, from where I just returned. There were discussions in the General Assembly and in its margins. The General Assembly started on Tuesday morning. The week before, starting on Thursday, we had meetings in different geometries to analyse the most burning issues that are on the political agenda of the UN. It is those that I would like to address today: Iraq, Sudan, Kosovo, the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). And after that it was the issues that have been really hot. One is Myanmar, the other is the elections in Ukraine, to which I would like to refer to today. Any other questions that I do not tackle in the first intervention, I will be very ready and happy to answer those questions from you.

MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS (MEPP)

Let me start with this, because I think one of the most burning issues, if I may say so, for the EP, is the Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). I will describe to you my experience in the week-and-a-half that I was in New York, at the UN, at the meetings that took place in the context of the Quartet and also the meetings between the Quartet and the Arab League representatives on Sunday. My analysis is that these have been the best couple of meetings that have taken place vis-à-vis the MEPP, at least concerning the Israeli-Palestinian track.

We had a very good meeting of the Quartet at which we agreed on the most important events that are to take place from the month of September to the month of December. The Quartet meeting took place on Sunday and the ministerial Ad-hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) meeting was held on Monday. This is a committee that was born in Oslo and this was the first time ever that it met at the level of ministers. So, it was an important meeting, chaired by the Norwegians, the EU and the Secretary General of the UN.

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We will have also, in the second half of November, an international conference, and that will be followed in December with a pledging conference to help the Palestinians. Let me tell you that, as far as the whole process is concerned, I have been more — I don't know whether to use the term optimistic, but — much more positively inclined towards the possibilities that we have in front of us, the possibility of creating a new dynamic from here until December with all these sets of meetings. It is true that meetings do not mean solutions but I have the impression, after the meeting that took place among the Quartet members and the meeting with the Arab League countries that evening, that a new dynamic may be created.

As you know, in the last period of time, six meetings have taken place between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert. The sixth one is taking place now, it had not finished when we started this meeting. The five that have taken place were meetings in a format of two parts. One part with the two delegations, one from Israel, the other from the Palestinians, and the second part tête-à-tête between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas. Those meetings were in the late part of August and the early part of September and I followed them very closely. In those meetings all the fundamental issues that will have to be discussed in the endgame were discussed bilaterally by the President and the Prime Minister. That means the question of borders, the question of refugees and the question related to Jerusalem. At least those issues which are fundamental.

In the fifth meeting, which took place a couple of weeks ago, the decision was taken to delegate, by both sides, into committees that will begin to write down what took place at the five meetings between Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas. The meeting that is taking place today will be the starting point of writing a document that we expect will be agreed by the two sides and that will be the fundamental ingredient of the conference that will take place in the second part of November. If everything goes in the right direction, and I hope it will, this conference will have the possibility of beginning to define initial positions for the final negotiations on the issues I just mentioned, for which there has been difficulty in finding an agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

After Camp David, as you know, there was a meeting in Sharm el Sheik, in which I participated, representing the EU already. That meeting led to the Mitchell report and from that meeting the possibility of continuing negotiations in Ottawa also arose. Since then — 2000 to 2001 — I have not seen a possibility of moving the process forward until the sentiment I had the Sunday before last. With that I don't mean that it is going to materialise, but I want to convey to you the sentiment that the current dynamic produced something to my mind that will be doable, in the way of moving into a final agreement. Doable does not mean that it will be done. We have had many experiences in which things appeared doable but in the end were not done. I think that, once again, we have the possibility though I don't know if it will be done or not. We are going to do the utmost for the doable to be done and to be done before the end of the month of December. That does not mean that it will be the end of the process, but it should at least create a dynamic which is irreversible by the end of the month of December, after the pledging conference that will take place in December.

We have to see what happens today. It will be a key meeting today, because of the mandate to the two delegations, the Israelis and the Palestinians, to begin writing the document that will be necessary for the final agreement at the conference in November. This sentiment was shared by the members of the Quartet but because it was shared both by the members of the Quartet and by the Arab League representatives. The Arab League representatives are, let me remind you, the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Jordanians, the Qataris and the Syrians, so a good representation of the Arab League. These representatives had a long meeting with us and came out of it with a sentiment of a certain hope of creating a dynamic that will be positive.

What are the three elements of these dynamics? To my mind three vectors are interlinked. First will be the political negotiations. Second, and necessary to match the first, will be an economic scheme to develop the life of the Palestinian people. For that, the appointment of Tony Blair to be in charge of that process was, I think, an important decision that was taken by the international community and in this case by the Quartet. And, thirdly, the situation on the ground for the Palestinians, the question of access and movement, the lifting of checkpoints. All these elements, which will be absolutely fundamental for the standard of living immediately of the Palestinian people, have to take place.

This three vectors linked together, may create a new dynamic that may end up first in the political conference in November, and secondly in the economic conference, the pledging conference, that will take place in December. I cannot go any further at this point in time because, as I said, a meeting is taking place now — as we speak — between President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert.

And what about the comprehensiveness of the process? The peace process, of course, will not only be a process of the Palestinians and the Israelis, it will be the other two tracks, very important tracks. The Syrian track and the Lebanese track. I would like to tell you that the agreement we put forward at the last meeting two Sundays ago is that those two tracks would be part of the process, without any doubt, and that we started on the same basis on which the Palestinian-Israeli track has started. That means land for peace and the implementation of the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council. As you know, the members of the Arab League who participated in the follow-up committee to deal with the Quartet will be invited to the conference. The participation of the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Jordanians, the Qataris and the Syrians is also a really important reassuring message for the Palestinians.

So I think that we have this situation in which a potential new dynamic may be created. If this dynamic is created we may have a situation, not of finalising the whole peace process, but of giving a very important impetus, a new dynamic, that will materialise before the end of December. I don't want to dwell more on this issue. I am sure that you will have many questions to put to me; but I just wanted to leave you with the impression that, honestly, I had when I participated in all the meetings during last week with all the important players.

KOSOVO

Let me move, in view of the time that we have, to the second most important issue that we are going to be facing from here to December, which is Kosovo. I would like to transmit to you, that we had a very important meeting of the Contact Group, at which an agreement was reached and accepted by all the members of the Contact Group, including Russia, to give to the so-called Troika — representing the European Union, the Russian Federation, and the United State — a new process of negotiations with both sides and to see, by 10 or 11 December, whether they can offer the UN Secretary General a report on the way these negotiations have gone and whether we can find an agreement that can be accepted by the two sides, Pristina and Belgrade.

Two things happened in New York. First, the meeting of the Contact Group that, as I said, produced a statement that was accepted by everybody. But a meeting also took place — at the office of the Council of the EU in New York — for the first time between the three members of this Troika and representatives from Belgrade and Pristina. For the first time, there were direct talks between President Tadic and Prime Minister Kostunica on one side, and President Sejdiu and Prime Minister Ceku from Pristina. Nothing dramatic was produced in that meeting, nothing dramatic was

expected from the first time that the two parties got together with the three negotiators; but if you read the document that came out of that meeting and the calendar that has been put in place from here to the middle of December, I think that the possibility of moving the process forward is greater than a serious probability, given the sentiment that was developed in the meeting.

As you know, the next meeting of the Troika with the two sides will take place on 14 October and it will take place here in Brussels, again at the Headquarters of the EU. One of the elements that I want to share with you on a constructive and positive note is that the format we created, of these Troika-led new rounds of negotiations with the two sides, was a good idea and it has been rather positive in constructing a mechanism that is working, to my mind, fairly well.

We still have some time to go until December. We have, before the middle of December, important events. On 17 November there will be elections in Pristina, among the Kosovars, and we have to see what the results of those elections are and how the dynamic restarts in Pristina after those elections. But, in any case, these negotiations will continue. As far as Serbia is concerned, as you know, elections for the President of Serbia will have to take place before the end of the year. There is a certain contradiction between several laws that apply to these elections because the law says elections to the Presidency have to take place before the end of the year but, at the same time, there is a pre-law that says that two important laws have to be approved by the Parliament before the elections of the President can take place. These two laws are one on security, on defence, and the other one on the new competences of the President after the change in the Constitution.

How this is going to work between the majority in the Parliament and the President, President Tadic, is something that we don't know but in principle it is very likely that the elections for the Presidency in Serbia will also take place before the end of the year. So, I think that, for us together, it will be very important to follow very closely the period from now until 11 December, when a report has to be presented to the Secretary General of the UN.

What will happen after the Secretary General receives that report from the three members of the Troika? There will be, without any doubt, a debate in the Security Council after the Secretary General presents the report and the recommendation he may want to make to the Security Council. Will that be followed by a resolution? We don't know. But, in any case, there will be a debate in the Security Council and we have to be prepared as Europeans to continue to be in the driving seat to see what the outcome of this process will be. In any case, we have to be prepared to deploy the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission that has been agreed already by the Council, with the support of the Parliament. We have still to discuss with the Secretary General — and we have started that discussion — under what potential legal basis that mission could be deployed. We don't know exactly what the legal basis will be because we don't know yet what the outcome of these negotiations will be but, in any case, I want to assure you, that the ESDP mission will be ready for deployment the moment the UN or the Secretary General decides that it is the moment to produce a change from the presence of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) to another, different presence of the EU on the ground. I can tell you, and give you the certainty, that we will be ready to deploy the moment that we are asked to do it.

I want to underline — before I move to the third topic that I want to touch upon — that I think it is important that the next meeting will take place here in Brussels and that it will be under the leadership of Ambassador Ischinger, who is the person representing the EU in this Troika.

SUDAN / DARFUR, CHAD, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC (CAR)

Let me move on to the third topic I would like to talk to you about, which is Sudan / Darfur, Chad and the Central African Republic (CAR). I have to tell you also that the meeting that took place two Fridays ago in New York on Sudan / Darfur, Chad and CAR was really constructive. It was chaired by the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, together with the President of the Commission of the African Union (AU), Mr Konaré, the former President of Mali. As you know, at the meeting we had in Paris some months ago the Africans were not present. In this meeting the Africans were present, represented by Mr Konaré, the President of the Commission of the African Union. Therefore it was a much more complete meeting and it was much more successful.

What were the most important elements of that meeting? I will underline three: firstly, a political meeting will take place in Tripoli before the end of October. The chairs of those meetings will be someone representing the AU, Mr Salim Salim, and somebody representing the Secretary General of the UN, Mr Eliasson, who, as you know, is a former Swedish foreign minister. The possibility of moving that process forward is something that we have to consider very high. It is possible that a better result than the result of the Abuja talks may be the outcome of this meeting in Tripoli. We have to congratulate ourselves on the fact that by the end of October there will be the possibility of a meeting between the two sides, plus the rebels. And, as you know, a good number of the rebels are guaranteeing their participation.

Secondly, as you know, there was agreement on deploying the so-called "heavy package", which is an economic and a security force. It will be deployed very soon and it will be the embryo, constructed upon AMIS, of the hybrid force that has been agreed by the UN resolution. That is the first time that it has been agreed, and for the first time we have commitments on dates for that to take place. I think this is good news as far as the Sudan / Darfur solution is concerned. Of course this is not a guarantee of success. We have been doing things of that type, remember that we talked here about the AMIS force which was an important deployment already. But the AMIS force was only a force of the African Union (AU) with the support of other countries, including members of the EU that were not on the ground but only in the planning capability. I think that we have a much better possibility. The hybrid force will be a force of more than 20 000 people, and the mandate of UN Resolution 1769 says the force deployed must be robust. We may still have a little bit of a problem to see how much of that force will have to be African in nature and how much of that force will be from other countries that are not African. We respect the AU's central role in the process but at the same time I think they need the help of other countries to participate in that force.

There is also, if I may say so, the question not only of Darfur but also of the North-South agreement. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has to be maintained, it has to be supported. There will not be peace in Sudan if at the same time that we resolve, or we try to resolve, the Sudan crisis we don't maintain the same level of commitment, of engagement, in the North-South CPA agreement. If at the end of the day the North-South fails, there will be no possibility of maintaining Sudan as an integrated country. Therefore we have a double commitment: a commitment to resolve the Sudan / Darfur crisis, but at the same time to maintain what has been done for the North-South agreement. As you know, the North-South agreement has an endgame which will be the potential referendum at the end of the day in order to see if the separation may take place between the North and the South. If that is the case, I think it will be a very difficult situation. Therefore, to create the conditions to maintain the North-South as a unity will be fundamental. If you have in mind a map of Sudan and you see where the wells of oil are, you will see that a split between the North and the South will be catastrophic from the point of view of the resources of the country and, therefore, it is essential to get the country united and at peace.

What about the regional aspects? The Sudan / Darfur issue is not only a Sudanese problem, although it is mainly a Sudanese problem. It is also a problem that has consequences for the region, and in particular for two countries, Chad and the Central African Republic. For that reason, the EU is considering very seriously a mission that has been accepted already by the UNSC resolution that was approved last Tuesday to deploy a force led by the EU that will accompany a police mission from the UN. Eventually, when the first part of the mission is done, the EU will be replaced by a UN force. I want to tell you that we are working very hard on that mission, it is an important one, it is very much wanted by the UN, as well as by the Presidents of the CAR and Chad. We are working on that and I have the sentiment that we will be able to deploy it in the time set by the Security Council resolution in order to cooperate also to the stability of the region.

UKRAINE

Now, let me move to the fourth point that I would like to touch upon today which is Ukraine. On Ukraine, as you know, we had a summit before the first day of the campaign. It was a good summit. I had the opportunity the day before for a tête-à-tête with President Yuschenko, then I met also with Yulia Tymoshenko, then we had also a formal meeting with the President and after that we had a meeting with Prime Minister Yanukovich.

We sent a very clear message of the importance of ensuring that these elections are well conducted, free and fair, and we have already today the results of the elections. As we were preparing the meeting with you this morning, a lot of things took place. We had the latest results, with 96 per cent of the votes already counted. As you know, a majority of the Yuschenko-Tymoshenko parties could be possible, but President Yusschenko made a statement a few hours ago, before I came here, saying that he will be much more inclined to a unity government. That statement by the President has been well accepted by Prime Minister Yanukovich in a statement but for the moment it has not been accepted by Yulia Tymoshenko. So still we don't know how the situation is going to be resolved politically. But the indication is already — with 96 per cent, or 99 per cent almost, by now — that the first party will be the Party of the Regions of Prime Minister Yanukovich, the second will be the party of Yulia Tymoshenko and together with President Yuschenko's party it will be able to form a majority but, as I said, the President held a press conference a while ago before I came here saying that he may be considering the possibility of a wider coalition.

What will be the end? I don't know. As I finish this meeting and before I take off to another country I will have the possibility to talk to the three of them and see what is the most likely possibility. In any case, the message we have passed to them already is that whatever the solution, a government should be formed and the sooner the better. The country needs stability. These elections were elections that should not have taken place, in principle, because it was not the time for them to take place but it was necessary due to the complicated political life of Ukraine. In any case, I passed the message that a government should be formed as soon as possible so that the economy does not suffer and the political life does not suffer in Ukraine. But as I said I cannot be more precise at this point in time because we are listening to the latest cables that are coming from Kiev and the latest telephone calls that we have been maintaining with Kiev in the morning and early afternoon.

AFGHANISTAN

The fifth point that I would like to mention to you is Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a very complicated theatre, not only due to the insecurity elements, but also due to Afghanistan's relations with its neighbours. As you know, there will have elections in Pakistan on the 6th of this month that without any doubt will also affect the very important border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. We have also a third element that disturbs pretty much the life of the country which is the production of poppy and other narcotics, which produces in the country a level of potential — I won't go any further than that — of potential corruption that affects very much the life of the country. In any case, as you know, the EU is engaged, both with some members of the EU through NATO and also through the mission that has been agreed by the EU on police training. I received a letter from the Chairman, I answered the letter in detail, and I don't think I have to go on any longer now but if you want to ask questions I will be pretty happy to respond on that.

This mission has been very well accepted, not only by the government of Afghanistan, but also by third countries. To give you an example, early this morning the Prime Minister of New Zealand was here and we signed an agreement for New Zealand to participate in the mission that is going to be led by the EU. So there will be a EU-led mission but with members not only of the EU but also with third countries that don't belong to the EU.

I know you are talking about the budget during these days and I would like to pass to you a message that I hope will be listened to. When we have to do operations of this nature, where we require rapid deployment, we require rapid handling of the means that we have. I would like very much, and I urge you to think about it, that the procedures and mechanisms are more rapid than those that we have today. If this is not the case we may arrive, but we may arrive a little bit late and arriving late in a crisis like this is very damaging. It is very damaging for our credibility and it is very damaging for the resources that we have to provide because later we have to provide more resources and it is very damaging also for the solution of the problem. Therefore, we may have to change our approach when we are talking about peacekeeping operations, operations of this nature, that require a more rapid deployment than in the course of the relations we may have in normal times with third countries. I have been in touch with the President of the Commission and I would like to transmit this to you because you have a tremendous importance in tackling these issues in the most efficient manner.

MYANMAR

The sixth point I would like to touch upon, and I think my time is almost up, is Myanmar. In the midst of the General Assembly, the situation in Myanmar went, as you know, very wrong and we made a statement at all the possible levels: members of the P5, the EU collectively, and — also very important — we passed very serious messages in two troika meetings that we had in New York, one with China and the other with India, two countries which are fundamental in the case that we are talking about, Myanmar.

The first thing that I would like to say is that we talked also to the members of ASEAN and the President of ASEAN, which in this case is the Philippines, for them to produce a statement. That is really a fundamental change, that the members of ASEAN, of which Myanmar is a member, produced a statement condemning the situation in Myanmar at this time.

Today — I don't know if it has finished already — the COREPER has met and has agreed to present to the members of the Council at the meeting on the 15th of this month, a decision to increase the sanctions that are already on Myanmar to see if that way we can help to bring about a change in the position of Myanmar. As you know, the representative of the Secretary General of the UN, Mr Gambari, has been there and he has returned already to New York. This Friday he will report to the Security Council and in the light of that report we will react in a manner that is compatible with the decision that I am sure the President of the Security Council will take at the end of the report. We will be able to react, sending somebody to Myanmar, if a visa is granted, but we would like to wait until the report of Mr Gambari.

Mr President, very briefly I have touched upon these six most important topics that we have on the agenda in the coming period of time. I hope very much that we will continue to follow this up from now to the end of December, when many or some of the important issues that I have mentioned will be, if not resolved, at least part of a very important dynamic that will be approaching final decisions, be it in the Middle East, or in Kosovo, or the results of the negotiations in Sudan, or the formation of a government in Ukraine or the situation in Afghanistan.

Once again I want to express my condolences and my solidarity with Poland for the events that have taken place so dramatically this morning and have affected the Ambassador of your country, Mr Chairman, in Iraq.

I stop here and I will be happy to take as many questions as time permits. Thank you very much.

Questions and Answers

Salafranca:

Q1: Yesterday the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament attended our committee, so there were a huge number of questions about the withdrawal of troops from there. He decided that, in the wake of the avalanche of questions, he needed to withdraw and didn't really answer us, so then there is the idea of handing over our base before Christmas to the Iraqi authorities. Have you been informed if there is such a decision which is the competence of the Member States? Have you been informed directly of it since it came from a Member State or not?

Q2: And then there are the elections in Ukraine, I am sure you have seen the media's reports of the threats of the Gazprom authorities to cut off energy supplies. How do you assess the president's proposal of setting up the position of a high official to deal with difficult energy issues of that kind?

Q3: Then there is another important issue: there was an exceptional event, an exhibition was forced to be dismantled yesterday; it was a photographic exhibition on the brutality practised by the Russian forces in Chechnya; M. Landsberg was one of those supplementing the exhibition and it was removed from Parliament. We would like an explanation of the basis on which that decision was taken.

De Keyser:

Q1: I would be measured in my optimism as regards the situation in the Middle East because this is not the first time that we have hoped to arrive at a solution to the conflict. My question will focus more on the humanitarian situation: if we are going to try to achieve peace we cannot allow the humanitarian situation to deteriorate. An EP delegation left for Gaza last week and I think that we will have a resolution at the next session in Strasbourg. With all the energy we have left to ask the EU to put pressure on to get the blockade of Gaza lifted, could you tell me what can be done? Because this really is an extremely urgent situation, we can not afford to fail in this.

Q2: Secondly, you didn't say anything at all about the situation in Iran, which is a sensitive subject, not only the nuclear dimension of it but also because of its regional relations. The president of the Iraqi council, who was here with us yesterday, told us that of course we can withdraw troops straight away, but if we do that Iran is going to invade Iraq and that may be a little bit simplistic but it shows what are the intentions of this country.

De Cappato:

Q1: I would like to know whether you have asked to have access to Myanmar / Burma. Have you actually submitted a request to go there?

Q2: We have just received some information, it would appear that Saddam Hussein was in fact prepared to go into exile. He would have been prepared to go into exile allegedly in exchange for money. Apparently it was a kind of agreement with Aznar and Bush. Therefore, Sir, I wanted to ask you whether you were aware of this phenomenon or everything along these lines.

Beer:

Q1: Mr. Solana, I have to say I admire your optimism to this very day, but I also have to say that I am concerned, very concerned. With regard to Iran and the statements that have been made by France, El Baradei and Iran are again in the negotiations and therefore I would like to know whether El Baradei has your support or not. I am interested in that because after all the Parliament is preparing its next mission to this region, so I would like to know more.

Q2: Secondly, Kosovo is a litmus test for the security policy here in Europe. What about putting pressure on Serbia? Is not this an opportunity to say this: they lost it 10 years ago, they would not have it back.

Q3: A final point on Chad. There is the military mission led by France. Our Parliament actually made some requests on that point: we wanted a neutral operation in the region. What about the Chad troops, do you think they are neutral?

Pflüger:

Q1: On Chad: I think it emerged in the Council but, apart from France, nobody really would be prepared to second troops there and therefore I would like to know exactly what troops would be available for such a possible mission? We have also talked about the neutrality of this mission. Neutrality has been called into question so is this mission a neutral one or not? And what would be the theatre of operation of this mission?

Q2: On Afghanistan: is it true that the Council took a decision saying that EUPOL will be working in very close cooperation with ISAF and with operation Enduring Freedom?

Q3: On Kosovo: I would like to know what would the EU do if there were to be some kind of declaration of Kosovo's independence after 10 December? Will there be some kind of unilateral recognition of the State?

Von Wogau:

Q1: On Chad: you know that the European Parliament has adopted a resolution on this point with a broad majority. We said that on the one hand there was a political process, negotiations with rebels that have to continue. On the other hand of course there were some conditions that needed to be met for such an operation. Moreover we talked about the headquarters, the headquarters being in Brussels. I think that this is very important also when it comes to choosing a commander. Who will be in charge of this operation? And, of course, we need to have a clear exit strategy. Therefore I'd like to know from you how can we guarantee that this mission will be organized according to those principles?

Q2: With regard to the ESDP: you have your security strategy from 2003, that is still a point of departure, but perhaps we need on this point some kind of white paper in order to continue with the implementation of our security policy on behalf of the EU.

Paleckis:

Q1: President Putin recently has made an interesting statement that showed that very probably the next Prime minister of Russia will be Vladimir Putin. Some politicians and some EU countries expressed the opinion that this may be not so good because in Russia the concentration of power is more and more visibly in the hands of one party. What is your personal assessment of such intentions?

Mr Solana's answers to the first set of questions:

I will try to be as precise as possible but at the same time as rapid as possible.

Mr Salafranca, you asked about the withdrawal of a country from Iraq. I presume you are talking about the UK. You asked whether I have been consulted. Well no, I have not and there is no reason to consult me. I have spoken to them, yes, but I have not been officially asked or consulted before the UK took a decision. As you can see it's not part of my prerogative but yes we have talked to the British government because we have close relations in every theatre, in Afghanistan and Iraq, the two where the UK is most closely involved and very generously too, in terms of the use of their forces.

On the security of energy supply: in the light of everything, the recent declarations and statements that have been made, there has been a report by the Chair. There are proposals in it and it sounds to me very good and I have no difficulty in accepting them. On the contrary, I think it is very important. Hardly a week goes by without me being approached by other leaders, the head or the CEO of an energy company, because of course those in the energy business know very well that their resources are absolutely key, not just for economic reasons but because of other factors, there are a huge number of strategic implications and factors involving energy, so yes I agree.

I did not touch on every aspect of the Middle East, which we have discussed so many times. On humanitarian issues, I have to repeat over and over again: the EU as a Union has not let the Palestinians down, not at all. It has been a constant contributor on the humanitarian front in Gaza and the West Bank. We continue to play that role. Now we are putting as much pressure as we can for a breakthrough and we are trying to get those responsible in Gaza to reach agreement and that is very well known by the Palestinians, Egyptians and Israelis. We have not managed to come to an agreement on lifting those restrictions, there are some border posts where that presence is more useful than others. And from a personal point of view I wouldn't like the Rafah forces to be pulled out because I think they are useful. No, I don't think we can be blamed for the humanitarian situation, we are doing what we can. There are others who are not willing to shoulder their responsibilities. Now, at the UN, they are doing everything they can and I think we need to pay tribute to the way that the UN agencies have behaved in Gaza. We will continue with our efforts, we will continue to support Gaza. All its citizens, Palestinians, either there or in Ramallah, are people we have no desire or intention to abandon. We know that there are problems but we don't know what else we can do at the moment. If there is anything we could do we would do it.

I have spoken with the Prime Minister Fayyad and we are making sure that officials in Gaza are getting their salaries, not just those in Ramallah. It's not easy to do this but they are trying everything possible in that direction. And Mr Fayyad is doing everything possible to try and manage a tragic and dramatic situation. But at present I can't see any way of intra-Palestinian dialogue resuming. If the political dynamic develops it might be necessary for that to be more dynamic among the Palestinians themselves. But I think the only way of getting things moving is to get a political perspective on the Israeli-Palestinian situation. We shouldn't forget that President Abbas, in addition to being the elected leader of the Palestinians, is also the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization and therefore he has to lead negotiations on behalf of all the Palestinians. He is the only one, whether in Ramallah, Gaza or the diaspora, who can move that process forward. So that's what we are trying at the moment and I think if it makes progress that will trigger a certain dynamic.

Of course we cannot guarantee that it will work but we hope to be able to see progress and that will probably lead to some improvement on the intra-Palestinian question. But we have to keep an eye on things, it is in our interest and that is what we want to do.

On Iran, I am sorry, I don't really want to talk about Iran but I would say two or three things to make a more general point on the meeting as a whole. On Friday, a meeting took place between the P5 plus one countries in order to reach a decision on this double track idea. As you know, the thinking behind this is that we maintain a dual track. That means that there will be negotiations but also action in the Security Council of the UN. The UN area of action was approved in March. Now we want the permanent members of the UN Security Council to start working on a resolution. But in order to put a resolution on the table two things have to be in place: first of all, the report by Mr El Baradei on the schedule of events between Teheran and Vienna and then the work I am doing with Mr Larijani from Iran. I don't want to give you the dates for those two reports but I hope it will be before or by the middle of November. I hope to have a meeting with Dr Larijani as soon as possible and then to have as many meetings as necessary before putting that report before the Security Council.

The situation is very difficult. There is a lot of pressure from different quarters, from the EU and elsewhere, and that is cranking up the pressure. We need to keep an eye on that, we need to get our message across clearly to Teheran that we cannot wait forever, and we have to see that negotiations are moving ahead in Vienna and that political negotiations with ourselves move ahead. And then we will be able to have more formalized talks. And there is a risk of more sanctions and it is a real risk.

We have to get that across. That is where we find ourselves. So the next couple of months are very important indeed. So I would invite you to read the statement dated last Friday from New York where the six countries directly involved with Iran give a description of actions taken and actions that will be taken if there is no progress in the political talks and if the discussions between Vienna and Teheran do not prosper. So we hope to be able to make political progress, that is what everyone wants, and I am certainly doing anything possible to try move things in that direction.

You asked whether I would be prepared to send someone to Burma. Well yes, but it may be more politically correct and more intelligent to wait for Mr Gambari's report. He is working for the UN Security Council there and he is going to produce a report for the Security Council on Friday. I will be in contact with him after that and if there is a need we will send someone from the EU with responsibility for human rights. We will try to — because the visa question is outstanding — but we are doing everything possible to achieve that.

On Iran I don't know if you need more than what I have said. If that is the case I would be happy to take more questions.

As far as Kosovo is concerned, I think we will be much more intelligent if — as the three negotiators have asked the two parties and us — we do not produce statements. That would not contribute to a good outcome of these negotiations. Nobody knows what the outcome will be; it may be successful or it may not but at least we have to make every effort to cooperate with the negotiators in order to reach an agreement that will be acceptable by the two sides. And in the meantime let them do it without statements and so as not to complicate the final outcome I will not make any more remarks on that.

On Chad, I would like to say that the mission is not a French mission, it is a European mission and it will be neutral. I have been in contact with President Déby and with the President of the Central African Republic. I explain to them regularly what is the situation, how is the evolution here, what is the planning, how is it going, etc. Now let me also tell you that I think that tomorrow, or maybe the day after tomorrow, the military committee will appoint the operation Commander, who is a general from Ireland. This is a really clear message that I want to send you: this is a European operation that will be led on the ground by a general from Ireland and neutrality in the field will be guaranteed. That is what we have agreed with President Déby and also with the Secretary General of the UN. Remember that this is part of the UN police mission that the Department for Peace-keeping Operations (DPKO) is working on in good cooperation and planning with the EU.

On Afghanistan, Enduring Freedom and ISAF are two different operations. ISAF is a NATO operation, Enduring Freedom is not a NATO operation, it is a national operation. But of there will also be close coordination with the other police operation that we have already on the ground. We have had a very little problem that may be become a bigger problem because of the lack of security guarantees of NATO for the police force deployed by the EU. We are working very hard with the Secretary General of NATO, with the North Atlantic Council, to see how we can solve the problem, but it is a problem that we have. I hope that this problem will be solved and I hope very much that we will be in position to have the same behavior for security crises, assessments etc. The Member States which are deployed through NATO are the same Member States that are deployed with the EU on the police line.

On the reaction to a potential unilateral independence declaration (by Kosovo), again, I would prefer not to make any comment today, it is too early to comment, we will see how things evolve. I don't think we should make an analysis of what may happen. I think we have to let the negotiators continue because there may be different outcomes depending on how the negotiation moves on.

Again, on Chad, it is a European operation. I stress that the commander will be Irish and the exit strategy that you asked about will be linked also to the UN. As you know, the UN wants to deploy a peacekeeping force in Chad and the Central African Republic. What we have to do now is to make a bridge between that moment and the moment, which to our mind is much more important, when the hybrid force is deployed in Sudan. Without any doubt, our priority should be to deploy the hybrid force in Sudan. This, to our mind, is the most important thing. All the other initiatives we may take should be secondary to the deployment of the force in Sudan.

On the security strategy, as you know, we are going to review it. I don't know in what manner it will be done, it is not agreed yet but the security strategy needs today an upgrade. I will not be able to tell you in what manner, if it will be done by different chapters, different elements or in a global way. I don't know if a global outlook will be necessary, what we may need is to develop further some of the elements which are contained in the security strategy. We would like to start probably in the Slovenian presidency and see if we can finish it during the year 2008. That means during the second semester of 2008. But we have still not agreed in the Council how to do it and whether to do it globally or to have chapters which can require a more in-depth analysis in view of how the situation has evolved in the last period of time.

On the elections in Russia, allow me to wait and see how the elections take place. It is not today, it is in March and so far the only thing we know is that President Putin is going to lead probably one of the parliamentary lists. The lists will be presented for the elections but I think it is too early to say what is going to happen on 3 March 2008. It would not be prudent on my part to make any comments on that.

Second set of questions:

Onyszkiewicz: I would like you to comment on the Israeli air strike on Syrian alleged nuclear facilities. Syria was known as having a limited nuclear program. Now it is accused to be a place where some outsourcing, either from Iran or from North Korea, takes place. Could you comment on that? Thank you.

Meyer Pleite:

Q1: Did you know that the minutes just come out of the meeting which took place on 22 February 2003 between the then Spanish Prime Minister Aznar and President Bush? Those minutes counter what was said publicly that the invasion of Iraq would be linked with disarmament. In fact, Bush had decided to invade Iraq regardless of what Mr El Baradei or the UN said. Now obviously we echo the condolences that you expressed concerning the attacks this morning but this immoral war began with the minutes of that meeting which was based on a lie, the whole thing was based on a lie.

Q2: Do you think that the EU should support what Hugo Chavez is doing between the Columbian government and the FARC ?

Ibrisagic: I am not actually going to put a question. I just have an appeal. We have been witnessing events in the Balkans over the last three to four years, so we know there is a big problem there, the reform of the police, and we know that this is very important also in the context of the Stabilization Agreement.

In June of this year the Special Representative, Miroslav Lajcak, met with you and it was decided that the problem would be resolved over the course of the last three months. We have got representatives from the Bosnian side, representatives from the Serbian side and thankfully they have been able to come up with an agreed text. It was not exactly what Mr Lajcak suggested but at least it is something and on the basis of that we hope to go forward. So, I would like to put an appeal to you, Mr. Solana, and also to the entire audience, please support Mr Lajcak in whatever he does, please give him your full support and backing. Thank you.

Yañez Barnuevo-Garcia: The President of Iran has been visiting Latin America: Nicaragua, Bolivia and Cuba. How do you assess the situation there? Because you have not had an opportunity to talk about Latin America yet. Have you had any contacts with the presidents there and particularly on the risks of possible sanctions against that country? I would like to know what your reaction is.

Agnoletto: Yesterday in the Afghanistan delegation we listened to some very serious reports about the security situation there and about how it is impossible to send a delegation there. The opium industry is booming there. Does Europe think to take an initiative independent of the US? Because everyone coming back from Afghanistan makes it clear there is a real split between the occupied forces and the population

Rucek: Mr. Solana, do you see any improvements in EU-Libya relations since the release of the Bulgarian nurses? And I have in mind especially the cooperation concerning the floods of illegal immigrants to Italy and Malta.

Mr Solana's answers to the second set of questions:

Mr Onyszkiewicz you put a very complicated question and I don't have the answer. I don't have the answer because, whatever you go and ask for, the answer is "no comment". As you know this is the most disturbing answer that has been coming from all the capitals which have been engaged in any way.

I do not have the answer but I have some elements of information on the collaterals because I was in Israel a few days before and I met with the Foreign Minister of Syria two or three days before in Cairo where I had the opportunity to meet with the Arab League. I transmitted to the leaders of Syria what the leaders of Israel had told me and they told me, in a manner which was very clear, that Israel after the high moments of temperature in the summer time did not want at any price to have a misunderstanding vis-à-vis Syria. They did not want to have any risk of wrong understanding. In that sense, as you know, those days the Government of Israel took a decision to stop a manoeuvre that was going to take place in the Golan and move that manoeuvre to the desert of Negev.

This has an organizational meaning and a political meaning. The political meaning is that I could pass the message to the Syrians and I did so. After two or three days, when the event took place, it was a surprise for the Syrians what I told them. They called me, I called Israel and I got the "no comments" answer and for the moment nobody has made any comment. In order for you to have an idea of the events that took place, as you know, three days later a meeting of the six-party talks with North Korea was supposed to take place, a very important meeting because it was the first time after the agreement; the meeting took place, was successful and, as you know, one of the obligations

North Korea has under the agreement is to convey to the six parties' members, or at least their representatives, the engagement that North Korea had in the past with its partners. It is important also to know what is the proliferation system in the world. We have a lot of the knowledge, but not full knowledge about the network in Pakistan. We don't know yet all about the network that might exist from North Korea but in these post-negotiation talks some of these issues may become more clear. So I think it's better to wait to answer that question in more detail (as far as it can be answered). We do not participate in the six-party talks but we have information. As you know, the other parties I mentioned are normally not very transparent in things of that nature, as you know, as a minister of defense.

Mr Meyer Pleite, you asked me two questions. I don't know whether you needed to read this report in the newspaper, I didn't have to read it. If you had to read it, well, I suppose you lose out for being too innocent; this was published everywhere and also in numerous books, I expect you have read some of them if not all of them, but I don't think there was any great news in that newspaper report.

Your second question is about the negotiations between Colombia and Venezuela and the FARC. That is something that does need to be negotiated and agreed by the Presidents of Colombia and Venezuela. If there can be a humanitarian solution we will go ahead, if there is an agreement we will support it fully. We have to support solutions such as exchanges of prisoners or other conditions.

Moving on to Bosnia, Mr Lajcak, our representative in Bosnia and Herzegovina, will be supported all the way to the end. I think he has done a splendid job in time to get an agreement on the police reform. The agreement that has been reached is an agreement largely agreed by Mr Sladic and Mr. Dodic.

This agreement is not compatible with all the values that the EU has defended. Therefore, if that agreement is necessary to continue the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Bosnia it is not enough to move on. Mr Lajcak has said rightly: once you start talking about it, keep on talking and keep moving to what the EU is asking you to do. If that is the case, as you know, we will be ready, the Commission will be ready to restart the negotiations, because they are practically finished. So it is in the hands of the two leaders Mr Sladic and Mr Dodic to come to an agreement which is compatible with the philosophy that we defend for an integrated police in Bosnia Herzegovina. And Mr Lajcak has all the support from all of us and in particular from myself.

On the meetings between Ahmadinejad and some Latin American political leaders, I don't have any more accurate information than what we can already read in the papers. I don't have any recent discussions with those leaders. I wouldn't say they are the greatest buddies, if I can put it like that, him and the Latin American leaders. I cannot see that there is any great advantage for Nicaragua, Venezuela and Bolivia in building a special relationship with a country that is subject to UN sanctions — as is the case for Iran — but they are all free to make the decisions they see fit.

As I said in the beginning, the first meeting of the COREPER has been today. I don't have completely the agreement of the COREPER that will be presented to the Council of Foreign Ministers on 15 October in Luxemburg. My impression is that after I left the building the idea was to advise deeper sanctions than those that exist already. I have not read the document because I left before the COREPER was over but this is the way that I imagine the COREPER was moving.

On Afghanistan I think the will of everybody, no doubt about the EU, is that the presence of the international community in Afghanistan should not be considered as forces of occupation. On the contrary, it should be considered as forces which are helping President Karzai's government to develop the country and to see how to finally secure the stabilization that is important not only for the Afghan people, but also for the region. That is the direction in which the EU is working, and the Member States of the EU which are acting through NATO. They are trying to do so not only in Kabul but also in the Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) that they are in charge of.

As far as the narcotics are concerned, that is a much more difficult question, as you know. A good strategy to fight the growth of narcotics is a very difficult thing. What is going on now — and that is why the regional meeting that will take place at the beginning of October is very important — is that some of the production may be moving to other countries on the other side of the border, Pakistan or another "-stan". I am trying to go from 9 October to that region to visit not only Afghanistan but to visit also the border countries in order to see how we can mobilize them to be more cooperative on the traffic of drugs. On top of the problems that Afghanistan has with security, with lack of control of the whole country by the central government etc, you have the money produced from drugs. The capacity of corruption that this money has would make all our tasks much more difficult. And the effort to fight that is a fundamental element of the strategy for the rehabilitation of Afghanistan

On Libya, some things are going better, no doubt. On migration there is still something to be done. The Commission is working very hard on that and Mr Frattini will be in a position to answer that in more detail. Some better noises are coming but still it is not completed.
