

The United Nations and European Security

Statement
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(to ~~Students~~ from New York University)
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

1. It is my pleasure to welcome you to Geneva. This city is well-known for many different reasons but, perhaps most of all, for its devotion to internationalism. Once home to the League of Nations, Geneva now houses the UN's European Headquarters - second only to New York in volume and scope of activities.

2. Indeed, Geneva International is a busy and dynamic place. Up to 70% of all United Nations operational activities are conducted from this city, including assistance to refugees, humanitarian relief operations, promotion of human rights, defining of international technical standards, codification of international law, to name but a few. Here in Geneva, there are five UN specialized agencies, two High Commissioners - for refugees and for human rights - and a unique international body - the Conference on Disarmament, which is the world's major forum for the preparation of multilateral agreements in arms regulation and disarmament.

3. The activities of the Geneva-based UN bodies receive world-wide coverage. However, their main focus - especially for the UN Office at Geneva (or UNOG) - is Europe. UNOG is heavily involved in European matters and

in particular in cooperation with European regional structures, such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and so on. Thus, in my brief presentation today, I would like to speak primarily about European problems as viewed from a UN perspective.

4. During the Cold War, Europe was a relatively stable and politically-predictable place. The two military blocs which opposed each other had positioned huge amounts of weapons in the region. However, both sides well understood that any attempt to use this arsenal would be suicidal. Nuclear deterrence actually worked - for many decades, there was not a single armed conflict in Europe and this continent enjoyed relative calm and stability.

5. Almost overnight, the situation changed. With the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet bloc, the whole structure of relations among States in Europe collapsed. The continent is now exposed to a whole new set of risks which present a considerable challenge to European politicians. At the same time, the changed political situation has opened up new opportunities which, if wisely exploited, could lead to the establishment, for the first time in the history of the continent, of a genuine pan-European system of stability and security.

6. What are the major challenges? First and foremost is the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. Among the numerous negative consequences of this conflict, one, in particular, is especially alarming from a political point of view. This is the fact that, despite the general desire of the European nations to bring about an end to this war, so far, all attempts to do so have not produced much in the way of results.

7. The former Yugoslavia provides the most chilling example of the destructive tendencies which are now being witnessed in Europe. In other, Eastern European countries, the political situation continues to be unstable; tensions and, in some cases, armed conflicts persist between some of the newly-independent States of the former Soviet Union. Nationalist and separatist movements are on the increase. Indeed, many European countries, including some in the West, are experiencing problems of this kind. For example: Portugal has the Mayorka Island separatists; Spain, the Basques; the current conflict in Northern Ireland has been going on for some 25 years; recently, Poland and Germany had a rather unpleasant exchange over the Slavic Luzitan minority in Germany; and so on.

8. Another important phenomenon is the change in the role of the State. In many regions of the world, and in Europe in particular, transnational structures - such as the European Union institutions - are developing rapidly and, in fact, now assume some of the functions which previously belonged to the State. At the same time, the focus of political life is switching from a national to a municipal level. People are primarily interested in what is going on in their immediate neighbourhood - their city, canton or district. This is a global phenomenon. In Europe, the power and authority of the State is still relatively strong - so far, there have been no "failed States" such as Cambodia or Somalia. However, signs of this particular process may already be seen in this continent.

9. This metamorphosis of the role of the State engenders a number of very important social and political consequences, some with destabilizing effects. For example, State borders are becoming increasingly penetrable which, combined with instability or lack of economic prospects in certain countries,

leads to increased immigration flows, thus fuelling the fears of other States and generating hostility and ethnic strife.

10. The weapons arsenals concentrated in Europe, particularly those of mass destruction, present more dangers than ever before. For decades, military strategists believed that a nuclear war could only be started as the result of a large-scale conflict between super-powers. Today, this is a somewhat remote possibility. However, given the instability in some Eastern European countries, there is now a tangible risk that a nuclear explosive device could be smuggled out of this region by a terrorist group or extremist political regime. Reports in the press indicate that such attempts have already been made.

11. Potentially the most troublesome regions in the continent continue to be Central, and parts of Southern, Europe. Having parted with the East and failed to integrate politically and economically with the West, Central Europe lacks the kinds of institutions which would strive to overcome or reduce differences and offer an equal political and economic chance to all ethnic and national groups. The risk of conflict erupting here is much greater than anywhere else in Europe. The differences in living standards are already sufficiently marked to tempt minorities into launching efforts for reunification with their motherlands for purely economic reasons. In this connection, it should be stressed that the conflict in the former Yugoslavia could have a very dangerous impact on the countries of this region. It is, therefore, equally important to contain this conflict, as to settle it.

12. Turning now to the positive effects of the current changes, the most important is that, since the removal of the "iron curtain", there has been no real justification for the existence of any closed blocs among the European States.

Of course, there are still some economic and cultural gaps, for instance, between the East and the West of the continent. However, with sufficient effort, these gaps are easy to bridge and there is a real chance of uniting the entire continent and adjacent countries - the area which is often called "Greater Europe" - under one collective security system. In fact, Europe has become a sort of international political testing ground. If it manages to establish new partnership relations among the Nations of the continent and to direct the process of change down a peaceful, non-violent route, an example will be set for the rest of the world to follow.

13. Throughout Europe's modern history, its political system was shaped through wars. The Napoleonic Wars, for instance, resulted in the Vienna system; World War I in the Versailles system; and World War II in the Yalta-Potsdam system. The system now being shaped - which will continue to evolve in the foreseeable future - will, for the first time, reflect evolutionary change, even though such reshaping is the consequence of the ending of a specific kind of war, labelled the Cold War.

14. Today, there are a number of European structures which purport to provide security arrangements in the continent. After World War II, when the UN Charter was signed, there was not a single regional organization here. Now, Europe has the most developed system of regional structures in the world. This includes NATO, the European Union and the Western European Union in the West and the Commonwealth of Independent States in the East. In recent years, in addition to such structures as the Nordic Council, a large number of new regional and sub-regional organizations have emerged - the Pentagonal Initiative, the Council of Baltic States and the Organization of Black Sea States - many of which deal both with economic and political matters.

Finally, there is the CSCE - the only organization which embraces all the countries of the continent. In fact, the CSCE is more than just a regional organization since it actually covers most of the Northern hemisphere. Today, it has 53 members from three continents, including the USA, Canada and the countries of Central Asia. Japan has observer status with the CSCE and the Republic of Korea has recently indicated its interest in joining this organization.

15. The European system of regional arrangements is now in the process of transformation. It still retains some traces of the Cold War political structure of the continent. For example, organizations such as NATO - which, like the CSCE is a trans-continental institution - have limited membership and seem rather reluctant to admit new members.

16. It would appear that the CSCE is the most promising international structure which could be instrumental in building a new security system in Europe. This organization was set up nearly 20 years ago to ease the confrontation situation which existed between East and West and for many years it served primarily as a forum for ideological warfare. However, it did manage to facilitate cooperation between the countries of the continent and created preconditions for the relatively peaceful changes which took place at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s. It has contributed significantly to stability by absorbing the political shocks caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall. The CSCE dissipated rivalry and competition among the major States and actively facilitated compromise solutions by filtering national interests through common laws and expectations.

17. The end of the Cold War gave a new lease of life to the CSCE. On 21 November 1990, the CSCE Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government

adopted the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. The Charter established the Council of Foreign Ministers of the CSCE as the central forum for regular political consultations; the Committee of Senior Officials, to review current issues, prepare the work of the Council and carry out its decisions; and three permanent CSCE institutions, namely the Secretariat; the Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna; and the Office for Free Elections in Warsaw (subsequently renamed the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights). In July 1992, the CSCE Parliamentary Assembly was established. The CSCE will hold its third summit meeting in Budapest this Fall.

18. The advantage of the CSCE is that it can serve as an umbrella organization, uniting all other European bodies and establishing an interlinked system with a network of interaction. Given its trans-continental coverage, the CSCE can also help to strengthen links between Europe and its neighbours and to prevent the creation of any closed political blocs. Thus, the CSCE is a key to the solution of the problems of European security. Together with such trans-continental structures as the emerging Pacific Rim and the evolving Non-Aligned Movement it can become part of the triangle of global stability.

19. Currently, there is a debate going on among European politicians and diplomats as to how better to adjust the CSCE to its new international role. A number of proposals have been put forward, including some plans for far-reaching reforms of the whole organization. There are suggestions, for example, that the CSCE be more actively involved in preventive diplomacy, peace-making and peace-keeping. It is worth mentioning that the CSCE has already initiated a number of missions to conflict zones for fact-finding, reporting and monitoring purposes, including to Kosovo, Sandjak, Vojvodina, Skopje, Georgia, Estonia and Moldova.

20. Among the recent proposals was a suggestion to set up within the CSCE an organ similar to the UN Security Council to deal with the problems of European peace and security. There is no doubt that the CSCE needs certain structural changes, in particular the improvement of the decision-making process. The rule of consensus which is currently employed at the CSCE is obviously hindering the organization's effectiveness and ability to respond quickly to urgent situations. The CSCE also needs to strengthen its secretariat and to develop a mechanism for implementation of its decisions. Any organization - be it national or international - needs a "reasonable sufficiency" of bureaucracy in order to function properly. However, the effectiveness of creating a second Security Council raises some serious questions.

21. There is only one Security Council in the world today - that of the United Nations, which bears prime responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. One of its tasks is to prevent the arbitrary use of force by any country or group of countries without the prior agreement of the other members of the international community. Perhaps the CSCE does indeed need a high-level coordinating body - however, its functions should be strictly defined in deference to the UN Charter. Whilst it would have an enormous amount of work to do, there should be one limitation - such a body should not have the right to employ force. This should be the sole prerogative of the UN. Article 53 of the UN Charter states quite clearly that "no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council, with the exception of measures against enemy state". This provision of the Charter is one of the few barriers which prevent the world from tipping over the edge into anarchy. If a regional organization were to assume the right to use force independently, this would set a very dangerous precedent with unpredictable consequences.