

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

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Palais d'Egmont – Egmontpaleis, Brussels

Closing statement

Jan Wouters, President of the UNA:

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the absence of Ambassador De Bock, I have been asked to give you the closing address and I was also kindly suggested to keep this closing address very short and that is exactly what I intend to do. It is indeed not possible, and I think, not even desirable to summarize the rich variety of presentations and discussions, which we held today at this colloquium. As Mr. De Kerchove already indicated this morning, this conference did not have the aim of an exhaustive treatment of the UN-EU relationship and as we have sensed from the presentations, in particular from the presentations of Dr. Omar Bakhet, Mr. Jim Cloos and from the keynote speech from Ambassador Alex Van Meeuwen, this relationship has nowadays become a very comprehensive one, stretching from development, human rights, humanitarian aid to fields like security, terrorism, or at least the fight against terrorism, which was rightly stressed by Mr. Rietjens, the environment and so on. This is not about subcontracting any more, it is about a partnership, an ever-growing and stronger partnership. We have been selective in our program with the aim of bringing together experts from the EU and the UN family, in order to show us how this partnership is developing into an ever-stronger kind of partnership and cooperation. This conference, in other words, was meant to be a kind of eye-opener and to set the stage for a number of follow-up events, or so we hope, which may focus more on specific themes and go in more depth and discussion. That does not mean at all that our distinguished speakers, in spite of the concise character of their presentations, were not able to paint us a very accurate and telling picture of the EU-UN relationship. From this we have learnt that in spite of the important, and in some respects even spectacular progress in the cooperation between the two organisations, there still remains much more work to be done. Let me just say something very briefly about a number of the challenges that lie ahead, both at the level of the EU and its member states, and at the level of the UN and its members. With regard to the EU, I think today again we have learnt that the institutional complexity, as was pointedly illustrated by Mr. Kuijper in his presentation, remains very high. Simplification, such as merging the European Community and the EU, as is also scheduled under the draft Constitutional Treaty, I think is long overdue. The current model of consensualist policy-setting at the CFSP level, is also very burdensome and costly in terms of meeting, preparation and HR, and it sometimes leads, as Mr. Wilkki has said, to a lack of focus and less complete positions. It is a difficult process to continue, and that was rightly stressed by a number of participants and speakers, because we need to update our mechanisms, especially in an EU with 25 and more member states. Also the representation of the EU within the UN and its organs and specialized agencies needs to be carefully reconsidered. Mention was made of various arrangements that were developed over time,

stretching from observer status, such as the European Community's status at the UN General Assembly, to full membership, as is the case in the FAO. And it may be time to re-assess these arrangements and bring more coherence and effectiveness into this, and hopefully such an exercise can go hand in hand with the entry into force of an EU Constitutional Treaty, that provides for some new mechanisms, including the new EU Minister of Foreign Affairs. But apart from the institutional on-going exercise that needs to be done at EU-level, I think that especially with regard to policy making, the EU needs to continue to improve the consistency of its policies within the UN Framework. This is of course taking place continuously, but one needs to go further: we heard some illustrations with regard to the use of force, the treatment of refugees, achieving the development Millennium Goals, the environmental policy goals, so even at the policy-making level a lot of work still continues to be done.

Then I come to the UN, and as various speakers have stressed, the UN, its programs and its agencies are on a number of points in need of reform themselves. And this is of course a very complicated and burdensome process, even more than in the EU maybe, but the EU should consider contributing very actively to this process, in line with its own credo of effective multilateralism. The effectiveness-part of the multilateralism was very rightly stressed by Mr. Cloos. But, indeed, for that purpose, the EU needs to come with a comprehensive approach to the UN. You can not focus on just one or more of the various problems, you have to try to find a comprehensive position, even with regard to the most delicate issues, such as the whole matter of membership and operation of the UN's Security Council.

Finally, I think it is most of all in the policy field that both organisations need to make their cooperation fruitful, with the same objectives and values to be pursued, with compatible instruments that make an efficient operationalisation possible, in order to contribute effectively to the provision and the delivery of what we call global public goods. As was again stressed in our last session of today, this needs to be done in an ongoing partnership with civil society.

I would like to then once again our speakers, all of you for your very active participation and last but not least, our co-organizer IRRI for the excellent cooperation.

Thank you very much.

END OF SESSION 4
