

'The United Nations and the European Union'

Speech by Lord Hannay of Chiswick, Chair of UNA-UK, to Central Region UNA

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The subject on which you have asked me to speak today, the United Nations and the European Union, might seem at first sight a bit esoteric, a trifle theoretical, a bit technocratic even. Both these organisations suffer from a lack of general support and understanding. They often seem to be drowning in an alphabet soup of acronyms; to be run by bureaucrats for bureaucrats; to be far removed from the lives and aspirations of ordinary people. Why double the pain by lumping two such organisations together? What in any case does a universal global organisation like the UN have to do with a purely regional one such as the EU? And yet I would argue that that scepticism is misplaced; that your choice of subject matter is remarkably relevant to the period through which we are passing; and that it is a lot less dry than might at first be supposed. So, my congratulations to UNA Central Region on your choice; and I hope not to disappoint you too much.

When I first went as the UK's ambassador to the UN in New York in 1990, moving directly from five years as ambassador to the EU (and 20 or more spent in the corridors of Brussels), the two organisations might have been living on separate planets for all they knew about each other. Contact was infrequent and unsystematic; the diplomats who dealt with the two organisations tended to specialise in one or the other; if any view was prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic it was that the two organisations were in some sort of way rivals, competing with each other for scarce resources and political attention. Cooperation was approached with exaggerated caution and a determination not to surrender a single inch of precious turf. You should never believe that international organisations are natural cooperators with each other. They are not.

Now, less than 20 years later, all that has changed quite fundamentally. The European Union and the UN are working together in the four corners of the world and on a large range of subjects ranging from peace operations, through to efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and to combat climate change. I could easily put together a list far longer than that. Moreover, the two organisations now recognise that their efforts are more often than not complementary and mutually supporting; that they are partners, not rivals; that each one needs the other if their proclaimed policy objectives are to be achieved.

How has this total transformation come about? Not, I can assure you, simply as a result of sweet reasonableness on both sides. Much more because fundamental shifts in both organisations have pushed them closer together and put a premium on cooperation; and because developments in the wider world have brought home to both that what unites them is far greater than what divides them.

Take the UN first. The period since the end of the Cold War has been a pretty traumatic one. What at first was proclaimed as a new world order rapidly turned out to be a new world disorder, with many new, and some old, threats challenging the peace, security and prosperity of every country, and with no country on its own capable of mustering an adequate or effective response to most of them. Poverty, pandemic diseases, environmental degradation, state failure, together with more classical security threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, have often combined with each other to produce a witches' brew of genocide, regional mayhem, abuse of human rights, and deprivation – all threats to that international peace and security which the UN was set up to promote. The UN's record during this period has been a patchy one, characterised by a combination of indispensability and ineffectiveness. The organisation has ridden a roller-coaster of experiences, sometimes – following the successful reversal of Iraq's aggression against Kuwait in 1990 and well-conducted peace operations in Namibia, Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, East Timor and Liberia – considered capable of almost anything; at other times – following the disasters in Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia, the clash of interests over Iraq in 2003, and indecisiveness in Darfur – considered capable of almost nothing.

One common feature has run through all these experiences: overstretch. The failure of the UN's member states, often its largest ones, to give it the resources and the political support it needs to carry out the main tasks which they have, often rather fecklessly, piled onto its plate. Faced with this endemic overstretch, and an end to it is nowhere in sight, the UN has been compelled to re-think many of its approaches. It has taken up a much more positive attitude towards the security aspirations and activities of regional organisations, of the European Union and the African Union in particular. It has recognised that the European Union's block of now 27 countries, with more countries outside the Union following its policy choices on most issues, represents a critical mass around which a broader consensus can often be built; that those same countries now provide between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of the UN's assessed contributions both for the regular budget and for peacekeeping and often more than that for programmes which rely on voluntary contributions. And above all the UN has recognised that the European Union's

objective, set out in the European Security Strategy of 2003, of supporting effective multilateralism, fits perfectly with its own preference for eschewing unilateralism and the prescriptions for the reckless preventive use of force. It has seen the European Union, after an extremely shaky start in Bosnia, take on most of the burden of achieving security within Europe itself and fashioning a tool, through the policy of enlargement, which has already shown a capability of ensuring peace, stability and prosperity within the region going far beyond that of any other possible alternative. No wonder therefore that three successive Secretaries-General of the UN have come to regard the EU as providing more solutions than problems.

Let us look then at the EU. Here you have an organisation which in its earliest decades of existence was heavily concentrated on the building of a set of solidly-based internal policies – the consolidation of a customs union, its conversion into a single market, the addition of a single currency, the running of a wide range of agricultural and regional policies. All this was not achieved without difficulty and tension – the rows over enlargement, over Britain's accession, over the British budget contribution, and over the institutional development of the Union, most recently in the Reform Treaty now being negotiated, bear testimony to that. But gradually, in the last 20 years, the EU's attention has shifted outwards and concentrates to an increasing extent on external policies. That trend is likely to continue. So now you have a European Union which not only conducts its trade policy as a single unit but has an active policy of enlargement, and a neighbourhood policy for all countries in an arc from the Ukraine to Morocco; which participates in the quartet of powers trying to facilitate a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute; which has taken part in peace operations as far away as Indonesia and the Congo; and which is trying to give a clear lead in the negotiations on climate change to find a successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Its member states have now, collectively and separately, committed themselves to a timetable for achieving the UN target of 0.7 per cent GNI for development aid and are crucial to any hope of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Every part of this rapidly developing external agenda brings the EU into contact with and into cooperation with the UN.

So can we assume that this very real confluence of interest will simply deliver increased and more effective cooperation between the two organisations in the years ahead? I wish it were so; but I fear it is not. Certainly it is not easy to foresee any major falling out between the two, any divergence of fundamental interest which would sweep them in quite separate directions. If anything, the probable course of events seems likely to strengthen recent tendencies which have brought them together to such a remarkable degree. In November 2008 a new US President will be elected and thereafter a new administration formed. He (or she) could well set

a foreign policy course which seeks more multilateral UN-based solutions to many problems faced by the international community and which aims to work more closely with the Europeans; indeed the current President, in his second term, has sought to do just that. At the same time the number of global and regional problems which can only be handled by collective action is on the increase. And the viability and legitimacy of ad hoc coalitions of the willing, of the sort mustered in 2003 to deal with Iraq, has been seriously undermined by the subsequent developments in that country. One cannot see much enthusiasm for following that course again in the US; nor many willing coalition partners outside it.

Why then should there be a large question mark over the future course of EU-UN cooperation? Because there must still be doubts on both sides of that equation as to the capacity of each organisation to achieve the unity of purpose and to secure the resources and the political backing so essential if any cooperative ventures are to be successful.

Let us look first at the UN side of the equation. The reform campaign of 2003-05, led so determinedly by Kofi Annan, was not a complete failure, but nor was it by any means a complete success. The two new institutions established then – the Peacebuilding Commission and the Human Rights Council – have both got off to hesitant and shaky starts, the first suffering from lack of ambition and resources, the second from a recrudescence of that tactical diplomatic games-playing which crippled its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights. The responsibility to protect has proved every bit as difficult to implement in practice as we all knew it would be. Recent decisions make it possible now to hope that the long-suffering people of Darfur will finally receive some effective protection; but this cannot be taken for granted. And then the reform campaign remains as unresolved as ever. There is no agreed definition of terrorism to provide a legal base for outlawing that evil as surely as we have done piracy and slavery; the whole international structure for preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is looking increasingly shaky and is under threat from many directions. It not only needs to be shored up – it needs to be strengthened both by a resumption of moves towards nuclear disarmament by the recognised nuclear powers, and by an international system guaranteeing supplies of enriched uranium and reprocessing services to the next generation of nuclear power stations, whose construction is now inevitable, not least as a response to global warming, thus avoiding the proliferation risks that would arise from new enrichment and reprocessing facilities. The Security Council remains un-enlarged. The Secretariat remains largely unreformed. I would not myself advocate a new, comprehensive reform package; I doubt if the will exists for that. But a continued, sectoral drive for reform is surely a necessity if the UN's

effectiveness as a partner for the EU is not to be undermined. The risk is not that the EU will turn against an ineffective UN, but that it could well turn away from it and seek other ways and other partners with whom to achieve agreed European objectives.

But there are just as many, perhaps even more, question marks over the EU. Will the newly re-fashioned instruments, designed to deliver a more effective Common Foreign and Security Policy and set out in the Reform Treaty currently being negotiated, be approved by the member states? And subsequently ratified by them? And will they work? All these are big questions which will only be answered over a period of years. A negative answer to any of them is only too likely to leave the EU a less than fully effective partner for the UN.

Will the enlargement fatigue which is currently manifest in Brussels block the road to the further enlargement of the EU and thus risk the return of instability to the Balkans and the alienation of Turkey? These developments would be seriously damaging to the UN as well as to the EU. They would involve, among other negative consequences, the continuation of the Cyprus dispute unresolved, thereby leaving incomplete the process of reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. But the rejection by the EU of a democratic Muslim country could have a wider and more damaging fall-out than that, undermining the whole counter-terrorism strategy the UN has adopted.

Even before the issue of the further enlargement of the EU is put to the test, its capacity to cooperate effectively with the UN will be sorely tried over Kosovo. The clock is now ticking on the 120 days (from the end of July) for further negotiation between Serbia and the Kosovars set by the Security Council to see whether an agreed outcome can be reached. The omens are not good; and Russia continues to threaten to veto any resolution the Serbs do not accept – surely an unacceptable throw-back, not to the Cold War but to the pre-First World War system of spheres of influence in the Balkans which had such disastrous results, since there is no discernible Russian national interest at stake in the matter. In the event of further deadlock the EU's unity will be severely tried. Some member states are deeply reluctant to accept a unilateral declaration of independence by Kosovo because of the supposed potential read-across to their own separatist minorities. But the EU is an essential player in Kosovo, the guarantor and implementer of the system of "supervised independence" put forward by the UN's mediator, Martti Ahtisaari, and surely the only viable way of moving ahead while protecting the human rights of the Serbian minority in Kosovo. I will not attempt to predict the outcome of this

particularly complex diplomatic tussle, but it will seriously affect the EU's capacity to be a reliable partner in the future for the UN.

But over and above these crucial peace and security issues in Southern and Eastern Europe there are a whole host of other challenges to EU-UN cooperation. Will the EU honour its pledges to the Millennium Development Goals, given at Gleneagles and the subsequent UN World Summit in September 2005? It is good that Gordon Brown has called for a fundamental, high-level stock-taking next year on progress towards the MDGs. That is very necessary and the EU's role in it will be crucial. But it will need to look beyond the developed countries' performance of their commitments and go also into what the developing countries themselves are doing to achieve these goals and to put international development aid to good use. Then there are the climate change negotiations due to get underway this autumn, with meetings first in the US and then in Bali. The EU has given a lead in accepting some ambitious targets for capping carbon emissions. But will it be able in practice to deliver on those targets when the painful issue of allocating responsibility for them among its member states has to take place? And will it be able to negotiate with the necessary combination of firmness and flexibility so as to bring within the scope of the much-needed global response to this question both, on the one hand, the US and Australia, and on the other the big developing countries such as China, India and Brazil? And will the European Union be an effective force for the early conclusion of the Doha Round of world trade negotiations on a basis which does genuinely offer developing countries a trading system which is both freer and fairer? Or will its Common Agricultural Policy remain an insurmountable obstacle to that? These trade negotiations may not be a UN responsibility in any formal way; but their success or failure will affect fundamentally everything the UN tries to achieve in the development field.

In the Middle East another attempt is getting under way to revive and drive forward a peace process, whose neglect brought such a poisoned harvest last year in Lebanon and Gaza. Here too the EU and the UN are critical players, both as members of the Quartet and more widely. Will the EU prove able to play a more pro-active role in the search for peace than it has done in the past, moving away from the caricature of it as signing the cheques while the US calls the shots? Will it support a move away from an exclusive focus on interim solutions and roadmaps to look also at the core, final status issues? Will it work for a fully inclusive process, keeping open channels of communication to all the stakeholders on the Palestinian side, which must include Hamas? These are not easy questions to answer, but continuing to duck them will make the EU a less useful partner for the UN.

Well that is surely enough to demonstrate just how much is at stake in the strengthening relationship between the UN and the EU. It is not the whole story by any means, but I think I have covered the salient features. What it demonstrates is how much rests on the strengthening of each of the two pillars on which cooperation depends. Britain has an important role to play here as a key member of both the UN and the EU. Let us hope it will pull its weight and give a clear lead.