

Intervention on External Action made by the Rt Hon Peter Hain, Representative of the UK Government, at the Convention plenary on 20 December 2002.

I am grateful for the skilled and sensitive way in which Jean-Luc Dehaene chaired this Group. We all agree that Europe should be a formidable power on the international stage – using trade, development, foreign and defence policy in harmony to advance our interests, global prosperity and global responsibilities. That means the Council – both Member States and the High Representative - and the Commission working together in partnership to deliver a strong and coherent EU foreign policy.

Communitisation of CFSP is not the answer. The UK, and, I suspect, many other Member States, will not be able to agree. Communitisation would not mean automatic agreement within the EU or a stronger foreign policy. In fact the differences of view may become more obvious as people pursue their vital national interests independently.

My opposition to one person acting as both External Relations Commissioner and High Representative has been strengthened by the view of Javier Solana, who has

almost single-handedly won credibility for Europe in global diplomacy because he enjoys the confidence of Governments. No-one has yet answered the key questions he has consistently posed: who would mediate in a disagreement between the Council and Commission? Who would chair the external part of the GAERC if the High Representative were doublehatted with a Commission College role? How can a full member of the Commission College chair a discussion of defence issues? It would be folly – actually gesture politics – to undertake this important institutional step without convincing answers to these questions.

We must be hard headed about how the EU is represented in international fora. I just don't see how reducing the number of seats Europe has (from 15 to 1 in some cases) will give us a stronger negotiating position, or ensure that our voice is better heard. What matters is that we use all our representatives, all our voices, to deliver a single message negotiated in advance.

The proposal to simplify the European Community's international development assistance, within the current budgetary framework, is welcome and will make aid more effective. Member States and the Commission should

work in support of each other, and with a focus on poverty reduction in developing countries. The Commission's aid must be directed to the poorest countries, and delivered via partners who can use it well.

One final point: of course it makes sense to increase contact between Commission, Council Secretariat and Member State diplomats working on EU external policy. But greater coherence is not the same as merger. Why create new institutions such as an EU Diplomatic Service and EU Embassies when we can cooperate much better in more practical ways?

Jean-Luc has identified that we are at a turning point in Europe's role in the world. If we can agree answers to my questions, then we can create the effective and coherent foreign policy both Europe and the world desperately needs.