

Annual Conference 2008

Opening remarks

Alvaro de Vasconcelos, director EUISS

The Annual Conference is the most important event at the EUISS, and I hope it constitutes a major event as well in the European Union's foreign and security policy debate.

This is the occasion when the High Representative presents his vision of EU foreign policy in what is often called the 'State of the Union' address on foreign, security and defence matters.

Our Annual Conference is an occasion for the SG/HR **Javier Solana** and other EU strategic thinkers and practitioners to exchange their views on current international trends and challenges, and to develop a vision for how global governance can shape those trends and meet those challenges.

This Conference looks at ways for the Union to engage with and build partnerships with global and major regional players, like China, India, Brazil and Russia, and also South Africa.

We are very pleased to have with us many scholars and decision makers from all these countries, as well as from the EU's closer neighbourhoods, the United States and from other parts of Latin America and Africa.

The European Union's strategic objective is to make multilateralism truly effective in an age where the world is increasingly 'multipolar.' And this all-important goal can only be achieved by reaching out to others. This is our broad topic, as well as our operational approach at the conference.

Each year at this conference, we select topics that address the likely main challenges that the Union and its partners should imperatively face together. But each year we are faced with new and unpredictable developments. This was most obviously the case this year. Two major crises have indeed found their way into our agenda: the ongoing financial crisis and the war in Georgia.

The scope and seriousness of the international financial crisis, and of the economic crisis that seems to be unfolding in its wake, places a fundamental question to all of those concerned with international relations:

- Is the current system, built after the Second World War, still fit for the present day and able to mobilize the efforts of all states and regions of the world in a common effort?
- How should it transformed?
- How can global governance be devised and set in place so as to address crises like the one we are witnessing and avert future crises?

This summer, war yet again broke out in Europe. The war in Georgia has brought to the fore all the complexities of relations among great powers in the contemporary world, and demonstrated the urgency of finding the right answer to some fundamental questions:

- What principles will govern relations between the ‘poles’ of the world system in the twenty-first century, and how can we best shape and ensure universal adherence to those principles?
- What common approach to security can be built between the new major global and regional players?
- Will that common approach to security be derived from the concept of human security?

These broader questions can of course be broken down into no less pressing ones, relating particularly to peace and security.

- How can states, in particular the present members of the Security Council as well those who wish to be there, take up their responsibility to protect the citizens of the world from brutality and conflict, from ethnic cleansing and other forms of violence?
- How can intractable crises and protracted conflicts be resolved, and new ones be prevented?

We must bear in mind that some of them, like in the Middle East, have been the theatre of anger and violence for almost sixty years.

These are some of the questions we would like to put to you, the participants in this conference. I might add, since we are only a few days away from an all-important American election, another couple of points:

- How do we expect the new US President to answer these and certainly many other questions?
- How can we make the most of the window of opportunity that may open with a new US administration, in order to influence its course of action and approach to world affairs?

We hope to put forth, in the concluding session of our conference, a set of priorities that will have arisen from our debates; in particular, from the working group discussions, where we should try to define the priority issue for the international community in each area under consideration, and the policy orientation that the European Union and other global and regional players should take to deal with that issue.

I am certain that Javier Solana's speech, which we are all so much looking forward to, will be a very important contribution in helping us come up with the right answers!

Many thanks to all of you for being with us today, it is indeed a great pleasure to have you here – and it is my pleasure and my privilege to give the floor to the Secretary General Javier Solana, whom I want to thank for all the support and encouragement he has given to the EUISS!