

5 June 2004

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,
at the European Forum Wachau**

Rt. Rev Clemens Lashofer, Madam Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Governor, Madam President of the European Forum Wachau, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen:

As I reflected on this 2004 European Forum Wachau, I could not help but conclude that this is an excellent time to participate. Apart from the impressive historical surroundings here in Gottweig, the ranks of the European Union have been expanded significantly by ten new states, which are for the first time, participating in this European Forum Wachau as full members of the European Union.

Thank you, Madam Minister of Foreign Affairs of Austria for inviting me to participate in this Forum - I am honoured to be here. The presentations I have heard this morning have been very instructive, and I shall keep them in view in my continuing efforts to provide effective leadership for the Fifty-eighth session of the United Nations General Assembly.

It has been some fifty-nine years since the creation of the United Nations. Had the matter of a European Union been mooted at San Francisco in 1945, I would venture to say that it would likely have been considered an improbable proposition. Today, the European Union is a reality, an integration movement that has gone further and faster than even its most optimistic proponents would have imagined possible.

The progressive strides the European Union has made and its standing as a major player on the world stage is a matter that has been analyzed at length, and on which many conclusions continue to be drawn. I do not consider myself to be in a position to add to the body of knowledge and information about the European Union. But as President of the General Assembly, I do welcome the opportunity to share some perspectives on "The European Union in the Global Context", albeit in the selective context of the United Nations, and in particular, the General Assembly.

The European Union's significant influence in the United Nations is without question. This is to be expected from a Union whose twenty-five member states represent more than one eighth of the United Nations 191 Member States. Whether individually or collectively they participate in virtually all United Nations bodies, agencies and programmes. European Union members constitute almost one third of the members of the United Nations Security Council. Two of them - France and the United Kingdom - have the veto.

I submit, however, that the European Union's influence at the United Nations and in the international community has much to do with its standing in the world and its approach and contribution to the goals and objectives of the United Nations Charter. It is a widely shared view at the United Nations that the European Union understands that enlightened self-interest is implicit in multilateralism, and this is demonstrated by its strong support for the organization. Taken together, EU member states are the largest financial contributor to the United Nations system, accounting for some 28% of the United Nations regular budget, and about one half of all United Nations member state contributions to Funds and Programmes. The European Union is therefore acknowledged for its invaluable contribution to the essential work of the United Nations.

The European Union has also shown a keen appreciation of the multifaceted approaches that must be taken to development, if the social progress and better standards of life inscribed in the Charter are to be realized. How to achieve sustainable development is, indeed, one of the critical issues with which developing countries are grappling today. The European Union has earned high regard, particularly among developing countries, as the collective contributor of over one half of the world's official development assistance (ODA). Its decision to collectively raise ODA levels to 0.39% of GNI by 2006, as a first step towards the 0.7% United Nations goal, has been greeted with keen appreciation by developing countries.

ODA constitutes an important catalyst for sustainable development policies and programmes in the developing world. Therefore, developing countries continue to look to the European Union as partners in financing for development, and other initiatives to implement the outcomes of the last ten decades of United Nations summits and conferences in the economic and social fields.

Regarding trade, another critical issue on the international agenda, the importance of the European Union's twenty-five states membership as the largest trading entity in the world cannot be overstated. As globalization and trade liberalization continue to dramatically change the world economic order, threatening to marginalize numerous developing countries, many are looking to the European Union to help resolve some of the thorny problems in this area. Problems such as agricultural subsidies, market access, capacity building and special and differential treatment are all desperately in need of resolution. Developing countries are convinced that there is no substitute for a fair and equitable global trading system. The European Union is seen as critical to achieving this objective.

Socio-economic development or lack thereof can be the underside of conflict and strife, and indeed of the many conflicts that engage the attention of the international community in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. The European Union has demonstrated its commitment to conflict prevention and resolution as well as post conflict peace building by the priority it has attached to these issues.

The European Union plays an important role in collective security in line with the United Nations Charter. It meets some 40% of the United Nations peacekeeping budget, and its state members are exemplary for their contribution of troops for United Nations peacekeeping operations. I was

pleased to receive a briefing just two days ago from the Austrian Presidency of SHIRBRIG, the Multinational Stand-by High Readiness Brigade for United Nations Operations.

The European Union is to be commended for its commitment to improving United Nations conflict prevention and peace-keeping capacity through the SHIRBRIG initiative. The EU is also highly regarded for its support, not only of the Charter but also of international law. Drawing on its common foreign and security policy, the European Union membership has been able to speak with one voice, in providing leadership in such critical areas as the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court, and in matters relating to the International Conference on Financing for Development.

In the General Assembly, the European Union has been consistent in seeking to negotiate consensus on myriad issues on the international agenda. The European Union has been particularly effective in negotiations of fractious and difficult resolutions, emphasizing that the interest of all sides are best served by cooperation rather than confrontation. This has been particularly so in resolutions on the Middle East. Here, The EU has consistently sought to play the role of "honest broker". Cooperation between the European Union and concerned states has resulted in texts that have permitted the vast majority of UN Member States to rally behind positions of policy and principle.

I have spoken highly of the European Union, as well I should. This is not to imply, however, that there are not some issues which some Member States of the United Nations would wish the European Union to look at more closely. It is fully understood that European Union member states are at the same time part of the European Union, and as well, are individual sovereign states, some of which have been members of the United Nations since its inception. Happily for the United Nations, the European Union is able to offer a collective viewpoint on a broad range of issues and has, I am told, been able to join consensus on some 95% of all resolutions passed by the General Assembly since the mid 1990s.

Differing viewpoints are nevertheless to be expected. These, perhaps, are more evident in the Security Council, and in respect of foreign and security issues. The matter of military action in Iraq and its aftermath is a case in point. In the General Assembly, the European Union consistently strives to negotiate a common position among its member states, to facilitate consensus in broader Assembly negotiations. Arriving at European Union consensus can be a tedious and time-consuming exercise. Agreement so painstakingly reached can leave little room for flexibility in seeking to negotiate compromises with other states and groups of states that make up the majority of the membership of the United Nations. I am sure that these are issues that the European Union will address, as it continues to develop as a community of European nations.

Taking all matters into account, I consider it important to emphasize here that this President of the General Assembly highly values the cooperation and support he has received from the European Union, under the Presidencies of Greece, Italy and now Ireland. It is this contribution,

together with the support I have received from other Member States and groups that has helped us to keep a perspective on just how relevant the United Nations is.

It is this cooperation and support that has helped us in our continuing efforts to strike the right balance between development and peace and security so as to address critical issues such as poverty and debt, deadly diseases such as HIV/AIDS, to implement the outcomes of summits and conferences in the economic and social fields and the Millennium Development Goals, the situation in Iraq, the crisis engulfing the Middle East, revitalization of the work of the General Assembly and reform of the Security Council and other critical issues on the international agenda. In short, the issues that, as United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan remarked have brought the organization, "to a fork in the road".

We know there are many challenges the European Union will have to take up as it continues to enlarge its membership. But we know also that we will be able to count on members of the European Union, both individually and collectively, to play a crucial role at the United Nations, and on the world stage. The world needs the European Union's constructive engagement now, more than ever before.

I thank you.