

27 May 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the European Parliament**

Mr. Chairman,
Honorable Members,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honor to be the first European President of the United Nations General Assembly having the privilege to address the EU Parliament. Chairman Brok, thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs is helping to shape the European Union's external relations in an environment that is becoming ever more globalized and interdependent, beset by one of the most profound, all-encompassing periods of transformation ever to occur in peacetime.

Such a geopolitical landscape is unlike any we have seen, influenced by a series of ruptures that seem to be building in intensity. Their effects can barely be kept in check.

The over five hundred million EU citizens you have been elected to represent live in the world that is at once becoming more volatile and more unpredictable. In my view, a number of distinct variables in the increasingly complex global equation require everyone's heightened attention. I would like to focus on three of the most important ones.

The first is across-the-board repositioning. A growing number of states and regional actors are determined to enhance engagement beyond their borders, aspiring to greater freedom of action. Power and influence in the international arena are becoming more diffuse, as we are in the midst of an unprecedented pivot towards a more democratized system of international relations.

Virtually no one's position is the same today as it was just a generation ago, making it more difficult for a meaningful and enduring consensus to be reached on significant items on our shared agenda.

Secondly, in our era, capabilities once thought to be exclusively in the hands of states such as the ability to inflict harm on a massive scale, or the capacity to critically alter economic circumstances could become more easily accessible to non-state actors. As the world becomes de facto smaller, some countries have come to feel more exposed. Additional ways to act in concert must be found, so we can more adequately meet the evolving, legitimate needs and concerns of nations across the globe.

A third variable in the new geopolitical equation is the quest for empowerment. Whatever the specifics of their circumstances and grievances, populations across the world seek to have a greater say in how their destiny will be shaped.

This is today perhaps most manifest in the Middle East. The Arab Spring advanced democratic aspirations in a number of countries. The fate of some others still hangs in the balance.

There are concerns, however, that the Arab Spring may generate a number of unintended consequences. These include escalations of sectarian loyalties, and ethnic as well as tribal tensions many of them long-suppressed. The legacy of the grand, noble quest of the peoples of the Middle East for empowerment hinges on how these and other dangers will be dealt with.

Given the region's global political, economic and cultural significance, what happens in the part of the Mediterranean basin which opens like a fan to the south and east of its ancient shores, has become critical to the security and well-being of the entire planet.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

During my presidency, the General Assembly has stood at the forefront of United Nations efforts to address the two greatest Middle Eastern tragedies persisting before the eyes of the world: the bloodbath of Syria and the plight of the Palestinian people.

I turn first to Syria, a country engulfed in an escalating maelstrom of ferocious violence.

Over the past 800 days, the conflict has continued to intensify, portending to consume the country in total anarchy and wanton destruction. This threatens to gravely imperil its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as stability of the region and perhaps beyond.

Evidence of chemical weapons use is coming to light. Hatred is begetting more hatred carving deeper and deeper wounds into Syria's society.

Several tens of thousands have perished since the start of the hostilities, with most of these casualties believed to be civilians. As the death toll rises with every passing hour, so does the number of refugees and IDPs. The UNHCR has registered a million and a half, who now live in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and beyond. Over four million more have been internally displaced since the fighting began, according to some estimates.

During the 67th Session, the General Assembly has twice come together to express the conscience of the international community on what is fast becoming the most horrific humanitarian catastrophe of our times first in mid-February; and again, less than a fortnight ago.

As I have made clear on a number of occasions, I believe all our endeavors need to be put in the service of bringing about the immediate unconditional cessation of hostilities, and inducing the conflicting parties to engage in dialogue.

The EU's support for the agreement reached by the Action Group for Syria last June in Geneva which was reinvigorated a few weeks ago in Moscow thanks to the joint efforts of Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State Kerry is greatly important in moving us closer to a consensual solution on how to go forward.

I hope that the outcome of the international peace conference to come will enable the citizens of Syria to begin the process of reconciliation and, in the end, freely determine their nation's future. I believe that in the time ahead, we should all play active and appropriate roles, investing our maximal efforts in the quest to bring this disaster to a close.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

The General Assembly has also been the scene of important developments in the quest to fulfill the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

On the 63rd anniversary of the adoption of UN Resolution 181, which called for a Two State solution, I presided over a historic session of the plenary in New York which granted Palestine Non-member Observer State Status in the United Nations.

I made clear that whatever significance that day may carry, it is no substitute for the achievement of a just and comprehensive settlement that will enable the two nations to live side by side in peace and security.

Now that elections in Israel have taken place and a new government formed, I believe the time has come for talks to resume in good faith.

As in the case of Syria, the work of honest brokers and mediators will play a crucial role in moving the peace process forward. Together with the UN, the U.S. and Russia, the EU is one of the four Principals of the Middle East Quartet.

In my view, it is well-positioned to help the international community build a bridge over the chasm that has unfortunately widened in recent times.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

One of the prerogatives of the President of the General Assembly is the right to choose topics for thematic debates on global issues which, in his judgment, merit significant attention.

Two of the most important ones have seen the EU represented at a high level, befitting its enhanced observer status at the UN, in accordance with Resolution 65/276.

The first thematic debate took place on April 15th, and was entitled the UN and Global Economic Governance.

It aimed to generate ideas on how significant economic actors, including IFIs as well as informal groupings such as the G20, could better interact with the rest of the world in the future. The keynote address was delivered by President Barroso, who stressed that the EU was “one of the first key actors to recognize that the financial crisis required a globally coordinated response.”

One of the conclusions of the event was that the General Assembly where, in his words, “the entire international community is represented” can provide a unique platform for all developed and developing countries to exchange views and share information on common economic concerns. A next step, in my view, could involve the establishment of a baseline for effective, more regularized interaction between the G20 and the rest of the world in the General Assembly. I understand that informal consultations on this are currently taking place in New York, and that there is a growing sense of optimism that a draft resolution may be the result.

As a member of the G20 in its own right, together with four of the Union’s countries, the EU’s support for what a recent report by UN Secretary-General called a “more inclusive and more participatory system of global economic governance” remains crucial.

By putting its considerable weight behind such an endeavor, I believe Brussels would reinforce its standing in the world as an advocate of inclusive and transparent discourse on issues that affect the material destiny of the entire planet complementing existing international efforts without infringing on any established prerogatives.

Before turning to the second debate I wish to discuss in detail, allow me to draw this Committee’s attention to one that is to be held in early autumn. It will focus on the role of credit-rating agencies in global financial systems, and will take place on September 10th right after the G20 Summit in Saint Petersburg and a few days before EU finance ministers meet.

Given the influential position of credit-rating agencies in evaluating risk and external debt sustainability, I hope high-level representatives from the European Union and its member states will participate in this important event.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

On May 16th, I convened the General Assembly to thematically consider Sustainable Development and Climate Change, which featured a keynote address by Janez Potočnik, the EU Commissioner for Environment.

He spoke eloquently on the imperative for the industrialized countries to take the lead in changing the “unsustainable patterns of consumption and production,” which in his view is a “matter of necessity and credibility.”

The debate took place against the backdrop of last June's Rio+20 Conference on the post-2015 agenda, whose "follow-up and implementation" has been identified by the EU External Action Service as the Union's number one priority at the United Nations.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

In Rio, world leaders agreed for the first time to comprehensively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development namely economic, social, and environmental into a single, fully coherent whole.

They granted the General Assembly additional mandates. In essence, it was given the strategic task of crafting a new, ambitious global framework for the grand reorganization of human affairs.

They include conceiving and adopting the Sustainable Development Goals; designing options for financing them; and creating a workable arrangement for monitoring their implementation.

According to the terms set in the "Future We Want" concluding document, we have but one thousand days to carry out these assignments.

The General Assembly is also addressing the question of how to effectuate a smooth transition from the MDGs to the SDGs a critical issue that was not addressed in the Rio document.

To that end, world leaders have been invited to take part in the Special Event to Follow-up on Efforts towards Achieving the MDGs. To facilitate their participation, it has been scheduled for September 25th during the High-level Segment of the General Debate of the 68th Session.

I believe its outcome should be as substantive as possible, and feed directly into the General Assembly's three workstreams deriving from the Rio Conference, which must ultimately converge into one.

This is a strategic imperative, for there must be no duplication of effort in the generational task to establish the parameters of the global pivot towards universal sustainability. That is why I have initiated a series of informal consultations to effectively coordinate all the UN's post-2015 efforts.

Distinguished Parliamentarians,

I believe the EU's active participation in each of the General Assembly's additional mandates is critical to its ultimate success. I have therefore appointed the Permanent Representatives to the UN of four European countries to act as co-facilitators in achieving each of their respective objectives.

This is due not only to the fact that the Union, together with its member states, constitutes the single largest financial contributor to the United Nations system underwriting close to 40 percent of our regular budget, more than two-fifths of peacekeeping operations, and about half of all contributions to UN funds and programs.

I have also done so in recognition of the EU's leadership in transitioning to a green economy, its place at the vanguard of the global paradigm shift towards sustainable development, and its longstanding commitment to eradicating world-wide poverty in this generation.

Distinguished Parliamentarians.

We hold in our hands the power to ruin the Earth, or to sustain it for posterity to get lost in the blind alleyways of the status quo, or to reinvent the very definition of human progress.

The challenges of implementing the post-2015 agenda are no doubt technological, organizational, and economic in nature; but perhaps most importantly, they are moral as well. As one of Europe's leading philosophers has stated, "we must now be guided by a project for the future, not by any authority from the past."

To venture forth in this truly daring and unprecedented enterprise, we will need to put aside whatever differences we may have on other issues, and come to stand as one global family brought together, as if for the first time, by the stark realization that a failure to act for the common good will result in our planet's accelerated destruction.

This must be a time when mankind comes into its own, when we emerge from the dirt and grime of our carbon-driven way of life to bring about a revolution of the spirit and the mind.

This is perhaps our most consequential test in history one which may very well be impossible to pass without what I fervently hope will turn out to be Europe's most significant contribution to the advancement of humanity.

Thank you for your attention.