75 Years from the end of the Second World War on European Soil. Brussels, 8 May 2020

Josep Borrell

Abstract:

United Nations, New York In a special commemorative session of the UN Security Council HR/VP Josep Borrell looks back on the progress that Europe has made in 75 years of freedom, human rights and the rule of law. He stresses that constant efforts are needed to protect these values in a world of evolving threats.

Check against delivery!

Thank you for this invitation.

Ladies and gentlemen, Excellencies,

This debate comes not only on the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, but also during the 75th anniversary of the United Nations. And tomorrow, on 9 May, the European Union will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Schuman Declaration.

We are marking these occasions when not only Europe, but the world at large is facing its biggest crisis since the end of the Second World War: a health, economic and social crisis triggered by the outbreak of COVID-19. Our task is to use the commemorations to draw the right lessons, prevent future atrocities and protect human life and dignity.

The two World Wars left Europe devastated and hungry. But out of the rubbles, the European Union was born. The European Union's founders imagined a continent that instead of exporting war would promote peace, democracy and human development within its borders and around the world.

From the beginning, the European project has been based on the values of solidarity, openness, freedom, and respect for the rule of law. We of course share these values with the United Nations.

The European Union and the United Nations are sisters and brothers in our DNA: we share historical circumstances from which we stem principles and values upon which we are based. These are needed today more than ever.

The outbreak of COVID-19 clearly demonstrates that global challenges require collective action. It is a test for humanity, but also for the multilateral system itself.

The current crisis is shaking the foundations of our societies and exposing the vulnerabilities of the most fragile countries. It has the potential to deepen existing conflicts and generate new geopolitical tensions. It is a reminder that peace, democracy and prosperity must constantly be nurtured, expanded, and made more inclusive.

The rules based international order, with the United Nations at its core, must be upheld and strengthened.

The European Union is doing its part for international peace and security in many theatres and crisis on the agenda of the Security Council, in close partnership with the United Nations itself but also with the African Union, the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe] and others.

The European Union and its Member States also provide almost a third of the contributions to the United Nation's budget, to its funds and agencies.

We invest in them because we believe that it is in our own interest and that of the world to do so. Our contributions to the humanitarian and development activities of the United Nations are an investment in the security of all.

But today, we are now at a turning point. We need to strengthen solidarity and global cooperation to win the battle against a virus that knows no borders.

This is why the European Union has put its full weight behind Secretary-General Guterres' push to coordinate a United Nations-wide response. And we were one of the earliest and loudest backers of his call for a global ceasefire.

Ladies and gentlemen, Excellencies,

This is an opportunity to revitalise the peace and security agenda in terms of conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and strengthening of peacekeeping. We must guarantee humanitarian access to vulnerable populations and we must ensure effective global action on new security threats -¬ including those that use cyber technologies. In all this, we must safeguard the fundamental freedoms and rights of our citizens.

Today we need a United Nations that delivers for all and that is fit for purpose. At a time of growing scepticism, we need to demonstrate its added value and relevance, and to restore trust in multilateral cooperation for the common good.

That is why the European Union will always be at the forefront of those advocating a more effective, efficient and sustainably financed United Nations, in full support of the United Nations Secretary-General's reform agenda.

Beyond the immediate public health challenges of today, the international response must put people at the centre, tackle inequalities, and uphold human rights for all. Millions of people around the world are still displaced by persecution, conflict and atrocities.

We must not be afraid to insist that human rights are universal and must be upheld equally everywhere. That means also for Syrians, for Yemenis and Rohingyas, for Venezuelans and for Palestinians.

Also, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. We must act against the re-emergence of anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and authoritarian politics.

No one should be discriminated for their origins, or their religious or political beliefs. As the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, has warned, the pandemic risk in sitting waves of hate and xenophobia scapegoating and scaremongering.

The Security Council must provide the political will to act. And we must ensure early preventive action and assist states in fulfilling their responsibility to protect.

We are beginning to understand how human health and planetary health are linked and how existing inequalities are making us more vulnerable than we believe. This crisis is an opportunity to "build back better", just as our predecessors rebuilt a better world from the ashes of war.

A key way we can do so is by fully implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change. On this, the European Union's commitment on record is strong and we count on others to meet their obligations too.

At its best, the European Union is a symbol of the progress made since the end of the Second World War to advance human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and to set aside old tribal animosities.

At a time when is humanity is under threat, we need States – above all those who carry the heavy responsibility of Security Council membership – to lift their horizons, to reaffirm the founding values of the UN, and to promote those values at home and abroad.

As Robert Schuman, one of the founding fathers of the European Union, said 70 years ago: “World peace cannot be safeguarded without undertaking creative efforts proportionate to the dangers that threaten it”. And today the threats are bigger than ever and so have to be our efforts.

Each of us bear a special responsibility. The mural that decorates the room where these meetings normally take place tells us a story we should not forget.

Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to contribute keeping alive this memory.