

The President of
the European Parliament
Mr. Josep Borrell Fontelles
Rue Wiertz
B-1047 Brussels

Berlin, Febr 17, 2005

Dear Mr. President,

We are addressing this letter to you and the Members of the European Parliament after decades of diplomatic service in international diplomacy, including postings to Near and Middle East countries. Just as we were in the years of our active careers, we continue to be concerned about peace and security in that region, notably about a current state of affairs which has increasingly been marked by conflict and dangers to peace affecting the relationship of the West with the Islamic world.

It has become obvious over the years that the West's foreign and security policy vis-à-vis that region is not likely to deliver a kind of strategic answer to the expanding phenomenon of „Islamism“ that would help towards a peaceful living side by side of the peoples of the Orient and the Occident in the longer perspective (the general term of „Islamism“ is being used to denote what are actually diverse or even divergent political movements that have been active in Islamic countries and have meanwhile established a presence also in Europe).

On the contrary, there are quite a few indications that the „clash of civilizations“ prophesied by Harvard Professor Samuel P. Huntington may become a reality. Not because this were unavoidable, but rather because there is a perception in Islamic countries that Western policy is an attempt to control the region's natural resources, to impose dominance, to encroach upon deep-seated values, moral norms and religious feelings, in addition to what they see as a lack of sensitivity toward the Islamic culture area. Just as many Moslems feel threatened by the West, many people in the West, influenced by the language of politicians and the media, have developed a hostile image of Islam.

According to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's judgement, politics of escalating force and counterforce, predominant resort to military means and Western interventions in Islamic regions and states have made the world more insecure rather than more peaceful. There can be no doubt that people everywhere have to be protected against terrorism and that there is need for a decided fight against terrorism. However, the lopsided, militarily dominated policy concept has proved a failure, as manifest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in Afghanistan, Iraq, Central Asia and Chechnia. It has merely produced a greater pull of terrorist networks. It would therefore be politically wise and reasonable to critically review and to revise the strategy pursued so far. Is it not time to think about how peace can best be achieved, with an assurance of peaceful coexistence between the West and the Islamic world for a long time to come?

We are deeply worried to see that there is no end conceived for the „war on terror“. Instead, there has been evidence of attempts since 11 September 2001 to rehabilitate war as a means of

international politics, which amounts to disregarding for Europe's key lesson from two world wars. It took European governments only a few months to design programmes and mechanisms and to allocate resources for the war against terrorism. But a blueprint for peace is still missing. The question of peace, we believe, needs to be the focus of discussion, and of the debate in the European Parliament for that matter. What seems to require clarification first and foremost is: what peaceful, political and diplomatic ways are on hand to overcome the dilemma of war? What alternatives are available to the currently prevailing kind of conduct towards Islamism?

The European Parliament, Mr. President, should have the capacity to map out and pursue a course of action vis-à-vis the Islamic world that could lead to a *modus vivendi* of peaceful coexistence. The political and socio-political aims of the Islamic social opposition are by and large well known, and the major structural causes of social discontent and tension are not in the dark: underdevelopment in a broad sense, reform and democratization deficits, and prevalence of an anti-Western basic mood, which is also nourished by the West's behaviour towards the Islamic world.

Political circles in the EU area are increasingly aware of the problem in question, and this is reflected in foreign policy endeavours by member states to mitigate rather than exacerbate the conflict-ridden situation in relation to Islam and the Islamic world. This provides a sound basis, we think, to overcome before long the persisting state of belligerence and foreign intervention and the crisis in seeking a settlement to the conflict over terrorism. Such an approach calls for alternative initiatives that would shift the question of peace into the focus of the ongoing debate. There is need for discussion about how Europe can return to a concept of peace and about ways which may lead out of the dilemma over terrorism and prevent any further internationalization and perpetuation of this dilemma.

Mr. President, it appears necessary for Europe to prepare for a long period in which political movements in Islamic countries will articulate their demands in religious terms based on Islam, in an Islamic way, not in a secularistic one. The current dilemma over Islam has roots in historical developments, with a dimension of domination in the West's dealings with the Islamic world that, indeed, goes back to the era of European colonialism. It will take a long process to eradicate those roots, but the process should be started now.

We believe there is a potential for concrete action to this end, i.e. for a reorientation towards a peaceful way of conflict settlement. Surmounting the present state of belligerence and initiating a confidence-building process need to be the initial objectives, for which politico-diplomatic instrumentalities should be developed shortly and pragmatically.

* A first dimension of an immediate non-military approach would consist in an in-depth analysis as to which concrete matters in dispute have to be addressed and what political and diplomatic concepts have to be developed for a settlement; whether and to what extent a differentiation can be made between extremist and moderate Islamists; whether talks and confidence-building are possible, with whom and in what way.

* Something that appears immediately feasible is a demonstration of European readiness for a „new beginning“ in the relationship with the Islamic world. Recognition of the

integral nature of common security and respect for each other's civilizational values and evolutions would provide the core for newly designed relations based on cooperation and coexistence. Europe has a store of experience gained both from the CSCE process and the European integration process in order to shape and maintain such relations, which would certainly not mean abandoning respective values and principles.

- * Europe should work for immediate tension-easing moves vis-à-vis the Arab, west Asian and southwest Asian regions. For the Middle East, a speedy settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an end to the occupation of Iraq are matters of priority. Europe should support proposals coming from within the Arab region for a settlement in Iraq, such as those presented by Secretary-General Amre Mussa of the Arab League: an end to the occupation, troop withdrawal under a timetable, reconstruction of Iraq (in ways planned and decided by the Iraqis themselves), full self-determination of their future by the Iraqis themselves rather than by foreigners.
- * Finally, we consider it important to that the future profile of European policies towards the Islamic region and its ongoing socio-political processes be redefined. This would also have to include a self-critical appraisal of own mistakes.

Mr. President, we would like to propose that the European Parliament consider the anxieties, questions and suggestions we have raised, and we would be grateful if you would kindly bring this letter to the attention of the Members of the European Parliament.

With assurances of our highest consideration,

Dr. Arne C. Seifert, Ambassador (ret.)
on behalf of the retired Ambassadors who have joined the initiative.

Signatories:

Dr. Wolfgang Bator, Ambassador ret.; Prof. Dr. Siegfried Bock, Ambassador ret.; Klaus-Dieter Ernst, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Werner Fleck; Ambassador ret.; Wolfgang Grabowski, Ambassador ret.; Prof. Dr. Horst Grunert, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Jürgen Hellner, Ambassador ret.; Norbert Jaeschke, Ambassador ret.; Karl-Heinz Kern, Ambassador ret.; Heinz Knobbe, Ambassador ret.; Wolfgang Konschel, Ambassador ret.; Roland Lindner, Ambassador ret.; Günter Mauersberger, Ambassador ret.; Peter Mende, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Kurt Merkel, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Bernhard Neugebauer, Ambassador ret.; Otto Pfeiffer, Ambassador ret.; Achim Reichard, Ambassador ret.; Roland Lindner, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Hans-Georg Schleicher, Ambassador ret.; Manfred Schmidt, Ambassador ret.; Freimut Seidel, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Arne C. Seifert, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Hans Voß, Ambassador ret.; Ronald Weidemann, Ambassador ret.; Erich Wetzol, Ambassador ret.; Dr. Heinz-Dieter Winter, Ambassador ret.