Speech by the High Representative, Mr. Carl Bildt, The Hague: “Europe and Bosnia: Lessons of the Past and Paths for the Future”

Few places are more appropriate when it comes to discussing the lessons to be learnt from the wars of Yugoslav succession in general and Bosnia in particular for our common European efforts than the Netherlands.

It was during the Dutch Presidency in 1991 that the European Union took the decision to move forward towards a Common Foreign and Security Policy, and during the very same Presidency that the ambitious European efforts to prevent war in Yugoslavia were launched.

And it is during this Dutch Presidency in 1997 that the member states of the Union are discussing whether to move forward with the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including a defense component, or not. This discussion is essentially a discussion on what we have all learnt from the past six years of diplomacy, fighting and peace-making in the Balkans.

In 1991, I was a recently-elected Prime Minister of a country which was not a member of the European Union, but eagerly seeking to pursue its ambition to open membership negotiations in order to become a member.

Upon becoming Prime Minister, my first foreign policy act, beyond the rituals, was to direct an appeal to the countries of Europe that we should jointly seek ways of stopping the shelling of Dubrovnik, then under way as a sign of the evil to

come.

And today, I am on the point of concluding a two-year mission for peace in Bosnia, first in 1995 as European Union Co-Chairman of the International Conference for former Yugoslavia as successor to Lord Owen, and then in 1996 and the first half of 1997 as High Representative under the Peace Agreement to monitor the implementation of the agreement and to coordinate primarily its civilian aspects.

It has been a long journey.

The break-up of Yugoslavia caught the world as unprepared as did the unification of Germany and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Very suddenly, we were confronted with the one major challenge after the other, without adequate preparations, without the instruments necessary and without agreement on the essential political framework for dealing with them.

This applies in particular to the European Union, but in general to nearly everyone.

Yugoslavia started to come apart as part of a general process of disintegration of socialist states and societies, and the resurgence of nationalist feelings throughout all of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe. But while we greeted the appearance of the old flags and symbols as signs of liberation after decades of oppression in Riga, Moscow or Bucharest, we more often than not failed to see the magnitude of the dangers this represented in the ethnic mosaic of South-Eastern Europe.

The European efforts to seek a political solution to the conflicts and tensions which suddenly erupted as Croats and Serbs clashed with each other and as the entire future of Yugoslavia was called into question were for their time both ambitious and promising.

We will never know whether there was a real possibility of them achieving some kind of result which would have prevented at least the worst of the violence which was to occur later. Franjo Tudjman of Croatia was as determined to carve out his national state as Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia was to build a state encompassing all the areas that he considered to be Serbian. And a conflict between them, with Bosnia being drawn in, always looked somewhat unavoidable.

But the European efforts of those days were in the end destroyed primarily by Europe itself.

As political pressure for action built up in different countries, there was not the patience to await the slow-moving political negotiations carried out under the instructions of the Presidency by Lord Carrington, and neither was there the willingness to support political action with limited military action where this could have had an impact.

Instead pressure rapidly built for speedy recognition primarily of Slovenia and Croatia, but by implication of each of the former republics of Yugoslavia, thus forcing the region into early and certainly premature attempts to set up nation states before the proper conditions for them has been agreed upon and implemented.

It is always easy to give judgment on what could have been done. And it should be said that we might well have been presented with a situation for which there was no possible immediate solution.

But I believe it is worth discussing whether there was not a combination of limited military intervention against the shelling either of Vukovar or Dubrovnik – thus sending a clear message to Belgrade – in combination with a refusal to move towards recognition of Croatia until the problems associated with its large Serb population has been settled – thus sending a clear signal to Zagreb – which might have created the

conditions for a political settlement that at the end of the day could have saved Bosnia as well.

But the conditions simply were not there.

No European government, not to speak of the United States, had any interest in any sort of military action or show of force. And when domestic pressure arose in certain countries, most notably Germany, for an early recognition of Croatia, other countries accepted this in the interest of preserving a semblance of European unity following the complicated negotiations for the Maastricht Treaty.

The conflict between the Serbs and the Croats was bound to cast doubt on the future of Bosnia.

We know that Tudjman and Milosevic held a series of talks on the possibility of dividing Bosnia. But when their conflict went on, with the Vance Plan for the introduction of UN forces into the Serb-dominated areas of Croatia seen as merely a pause, Tudjman felt the need to safeguard łhis¸ Croat areas in Bosnia at the same time as Milosevic felt the need to establish clear areas of control through Bosnia between Serbia proper and the disputed areas of Croatia. The Bosnian Muslims, in general content with the way Yugoslavia had given them gradually increasing rights, were brutally caught in the middle.

With the conflict between Serbs and Croats unresolved, the hopes for Bosnia were faint. But if there was a hope it lay in the efforts to set up and operate truly power-sharing arrangements between the three communities of the country. And following the total domination of the three nationalist parties in the November 1990 elections, an informal coalition of the nationalist parties started to emerge.

Talks on a constitutional settlement for Bosnia made progress during the early parts of 1992 under the auspices of European efforts by Ambassador Cutilheiro of the Portuguese Presidency.

But the constitutional principles signed by the three nationalist leaders in Lisbon in February of 1992 could not be carried forward into a concrete arrangement.

Until then, European efforts had been the dominant and the decisive ones in terms of diplomatic initiatives. The US had taken a conscious decision to leave to the Europeans problems arising from what was after all Europeąs backyard.

But with the failure of the Lisbon agreement comes the first case where the question of different policies on different sides of the Atlantic comes into the picture.

Although he denies it himself in his recent book, it is has been claimed that US Ambassador Zimmerman directly or indirectly encouraged President Izetbegovic not to move forward fully with the Lisbon agreement.

One way or another, it proved impossible to move forward with an internal arrangement inside Bosnia, tension was building up rapidly in the country and pressures were mounting for a speedy recognition of Bosnia. And with recognition come the expected full-scale extension of the conflict into Bosnia itself.

The lessons of the failed efforts to prevent the wars of Yugoslav secession from happening are thus clear.

First, a political strategy must be able to count on the backing also of military resources at critical times.

Second, a European Union policy not fully supported by all of its member states will be as ineffective as a fully supported European Union policy directly or indirectly undermined by non-European actors.

With the situation in Croatia ŀfrozen¸ by the United Nations presence, Bosnia moved into the horrors of ethnic cleansing and war in the spring and summer of 1992. Fairly early, ethnic

territories were carved out by a process of ethnic cleansing led by the Serb forces, but by no means unique to them.

More than a million people were forced to flee their homes and, in many cases, their country. Europe was suddenly confronted with the largest humanitarian tragedy since the Second World War.

With the political initiatives to prevent the conflict having failed, the Europeans took the lead in setting up the humanitarian intervention which was protected by the United Nations troops which started to deploy in the country in the late summer of 1992.

But at the same time, new diplomatic machinery was put in place. This time, the European Union joined efforts with the United Nations in setting up the International Conference on Former Yugoslavia (ICFY), headed by the two Co-Chairmen David Owen and Cyrus Vance.

And during 1993 they presented the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (VOPP) with its elaborate scheme to try to prevent the complete carve-up of Bosnia into homogeneous ethnic territories through different cantonal arrangements. Supported by the European Union, it was never endorsed by the United States, and ultimately failed.

During 1994, the experience of 1993 led to a new effort through the setting up of the Contact Group, which tried to integrate the Americans and the Russians into the peace efforts. While necessary in itself, this combination created the strangest of birds in the form of a half-plan in the summer of 1994, which in the end did more to prolong than to end the conflict.

And when winter started to give way to spring in 1995, it was obvious that Bosnia was headed for the worst year of war since 1992, with all-out Bosnian Muslim efforts to regain lost territory, clear-cut Bosnian Serb efforts to clean up the map

in the anticipation of a coming settlement and Croatia just waiting for the opportunity to cleanse its territory from its Serb inhabitants.

The story of the complex series of events which at the end of the day produced the Peace Agreement in Dayton has yet to be written. But it is far more complex than the simplistic notion of just a few bombing sorties producing what until then had not been possible.

In essence it was the question of the United States for the first time being willing to consider constitutional and territorial terms for a settlement that fulfilled some of the minimum demands of the Serb side.

And they did this under the double threat of open hostilities over Bosnia policy breaking out both between the Congress and the Administration, and across the Atlantic.

In the former clash, there was a risk of the Senate overriding a Presidential veto on openly arming the Bosnian Muslim side.

In the latter case, key European governments in the absence of any agreed and credible political strategy to end the war, were preparing to call on NATO, and thus on US ground forces, to help with the extradition of the UN forces from Bosnia.

The Dayton Peace Agreement is often seen as a Pax Americana for Bosnia. And there are ways in which this is certainly true. Without the active pursuit also by the US of a realistic peace settlement, a collapse of the entire international effort would have been difficult to avoid.

What had been demonstrated in 1993 and in 1994 was that European efforts alone were not enough, and that there had to be at the very least the unconditional support of both the United States and Russia.

And what was demonstrated in 1995 was that when it finally got

involved, the United States did so with great force and energy, but in ways which did not always take into account the fact that to be successful the Bosnian peace effort had to be a coalition effort.

With the ability of the different parties to the conflict to play on the different actors on the international stage, we were in a situation in which no actor alone – neither the United States nor the European Union or Russia – could on its own secure a settlement.

It was only be acting in concert that there was any chance of having the desired impact on all of the parties to the conflict at the same time.

Following the Peace Agreement, the implementation part of the łpeace coalition¸ was organized as the 60.000-man strong and NATO-lead military Implementation Force (IFOR), as well as the far weaker civilian effort which was only supposed to be łcoordinated¸ by a High Representative.

In the initial phase of peace implementation, the military tasks were at the forefront. But without in any way wishing to take any credit for their success away from the NATO-lead forces, it has to be said that their tasks were fairly straightforward.

All the armies were tired of fighting, there was a consensus on the need to withdraw and disarm, there was the overwhelming military superiority of the NATO force and there was the simplicity of using the threat of force to separate less sophisticated forces from each other.

If the military task was to separate the armies – partition – the civilian and political task was to start to bring the country back together again – unification.

This process has started, and it has made substantial progress in the 17 months of emerging peace we have had now in Bosnia.

There are small miracles happening every day as meetings are held and agreements are concluded – but there is still a very long way to go until all the wounds of 44 months of what turned out to be essentially a civil war can be healed and peace can be said to be safe.

I have said that there is no such thing as a surgical-strike approach to peace-making. And US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright last week noted that what Bosnia needs is not an instant cure but a process of long-term rehabilitation. And there in no part of this process of long-term rehabilitation that realistically can be expected to be completed by June of 1998.

Working both with the peace negotiations in 1995, and with the peace implementation issues since then, I have often had occasion to reflect on the differences between the US and the European approaches.

There is no doubt that the US has come to dominate the public perception of the peace process. Providing only a small part of the reconstruction assistance, and being clearly smaller in the military forces provided than the combination of the European Union countries, they have nevertheless successfully strengthened the impression of a Pax Americana process.

This they have done primarily by their ability to coordinate and orchestrate diplomatic, economic and military activities, using not only the diverse assets of the United States itself, but also the positions US personnel are holding as part of the different international coalition efforts. US strength, in my opinion, lies less in their ability to devise strategies and set out policies, than in their superior ability to orchestrate action and support for whatever policy happens to be theirs at any given moment.

There is thus created the impression – rightly so, to a large extent – that only the United States can act and only the

United States can deliver.

And increasingly this perception of the ability of the United States, combined with the somewhat less than impressive performance of the European Union, has created the impression throughout the region that they are and will remain the only force which counts.

When discussing these questions, there is often a tendency in European circles to be irritated with the Americans stealing the limelight and dominating the scene.

But this is the wrong reaction. The United States is not responsible for the shortcomings of Europe – only Europe itself is.

To a very large extent this is the result of the limitations of the present approach to the creation of the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Although it does aim – and has achieved some success in this – to coordinate the actions of the different member states, the European Union effectively lacks instruments to project and implement and act according to any policy produced by the elaborate coordinating machinery.

The CFSP process has been most important in shaping a European consensus on all key aspects of the peace process in Bosnia, but the European Union as such has restricted its activities to general and financial support for the coalition efforts. It has to a very large extent left actual political intervention on the different issues which need to be addressed to the Americans.

The political visibility of the Union in Bosnia is extremely limited. A small and dedicated Commission office is struggling with an over-centralized Brussels machinery on reconstruction issues, and its total staff is less than the staff the United States Embassy has only for information purposes.

And the occasional visit by a high-level official from any of

the Union countries is nearly always in the form of a national visit to the troop units of that particular country, or to deal with some other aspect of purely bilateral relations.

A concerted European political approach on the ground to supplement and support the international efforts and to act in concert with the corresponding United States efforts is distinctly lacking.

It might be asked if this is a state of affairs about which we have reason to complain. If the United States is ready to do the work, is there then any real reason for Europeans to be concerned ?

Can we not leave the management of the security issues to the United States or to some sort of emerging US-Russian entente cordiale now developing under the umbrella of NATO?

As long as we in the European Union do not manage to set up an effective Common Foreign and Security Policy, this is undoubtedly what will happen.

All the rhetoric apart, during my two years in and with the Balkans, I have seen a diminishing rather than an increasing European role.

And the United States will, in my opinion, remain a world power ready to intervene and act also on European and related security issues. This is in our interest as well. I do not fear a United States retreating into isolationism. It has never worked in the past, and it will never work in the future.

But in much the same way as I am convinced that the United States in the future will be triggered into political or even military intervention in crucial situations, I am concerned that these will continue to come too late and too abruptly – and that well before this happens the hesitations of the United States will undermine the efforts of others if these

are not sufficiently strong.

This, in essence, is what happened in Bosnia.

Had the United States in 1993 or 1994 been ready to support a constitutional and territorial deal along the lines they did in 1995, I am convinced the war would have ended then. Many thousands of lives would have been spared, hundreds of thousands of refugee tragedies would not have been played out and the wounds to be healed in Bosnia would not have been quite as deep as they now are.

And there is a risk that this pattern will be repeated; that European inability to deal with concrete situations, in combination with initial US unwillingness to do so, will produce a situation which sooner or later will make a larger US role imperative.

This is neither in the interest of the European Union nor in the interest of the United States.

It is thus an absolute necessity to forge a true Common Foreign and Security Policy in order for Europe to be able to take its responsibility, as well as to develop that partnership with primarily the United States, but increasingly also with Russia, which will make it possible to address all the challenges on the horizon.

For this to happen, it is not enough to have discussions on policy guidelines in the European Council, the Council of Ministers or in the different sub-groups set up on political and other issues. There is no shortage of coordinating bodies on the organizational charts.

What is lacking are the instruments of preparing and of implementing and of acting. Europe needs a machinery to prepare and to implement the common policy on which it decides.

And such a machinery will have to be more than the famous telephone number which Henry Kissinger asked for. It must be able to analyze, plan, coordinate and act on all the issues of common concern to the countries of the European Union.

The Commission and its machinery make up an important part of the process – in Brussels as well as its large apparatus in the form of its delegations all over the world.

But this will never be enough. And the reasons for this are partly connected with the institutional structure of the Union itself.

There should always be an element of constructive tension between the Commission and the Council. This is a natural consequence of the unique role as the initiator of issues and initiatives given to the Commission from the very start.

But this constructive tension, so fruitful on a number of other issues where there is a need for a force to carry the process forward, is ill suited to the needs for a CFSP which must always be shaped and implemented in close coordination and consensus with the absolute majority of the member states, and most certainly with the leading ones.

It is unrealistic to expect, and wrong to demand, that the member countries of the Union should immediately be ready to submerge their national foreign policies into a common European one.

There will remain national interests of special concern to national governments for a very long time to come, and there will be national aspects also to the common European interests which gradually will become more and more important.

It is thus obvious that the focal point for the efforts to develop the CFSP must remain the Council and its efforts to create near-consensus on one issue after the other.

It thus seems to me, that it is the Council Secretariat that in one form or another must be the nucleus of the efforts to set up a true CFSP. But for this to be effective, it must be more than another bureaucracy. Just to add staff to a structure does not produce a policy.

Two changes would be important.

First. The military dimension.

It is obviously important to bring key military issues into this process. And it will not be enough to restrict these issues to the often referred to Petersberg tasks defined by the WEU. Any reflections on the situations we have gone through in former Yugoslavia should make this clear.

Although decision-making on defense issues is a more complex matter, there should be integration with the Western European Union when it comes to setting up structures to prepare and implement policy, and to ensure that there is the ability to talk to and within NATO with competence and clarity on these issues.

With essentially the same governments taking the decisions in the European Union and the Western European Union, although the rules and obligations differ, the closest possible integration between the respective mechanisms could be a constructive step forward.

Second. The face of the Union.

The European Union and the CFSP is represented primarily by the Presidency. Having worked closely during my time with the French, the Spanish, the Italian, the Irish and now the Dutch Presidency, I have seen what an increasingly Herculean task it is to hold the Presidency even for nations well prepared and with substantial resources. And this situation will certainly not change for the better in the years to come.

Although I believe that the Council, and thus the Presidency, must be the key external representation of the Union, there is a strong case for appointing for specific missions or areas, and often on a temporary basis, Special or even High Representatives to represent the Union as a whole.

Such Special Representatives could be tasked with developing policies and to use not only the common machinery which exists but also the combined national assets of the member countries in order to pursue specific policies.

Such representatives could bring life to the concept of the CFSP in different areas. But for this to be more than just a gesture in thin air, they have to be backed up by a solid infrastructure of information, communications, logistics and policy coordination.

On specific issues and in specific areas, they would give Europe not only a face, but also a voice. When looking at the Common Foreign and Security Policy, it is natural for me to look at ŁmyEuropeˇ – South-Eastern Europe. It is here we have faced, and failed, the most critical of tests since we left the ago of the Cold War. And it is in all probability here that we will continue to face the most difficult situations in the future.

Looking only at developments during the past few months, it is obvious to me that there is a need for a substantial improvement in the way we act.

Let me give you two examples of what could have been done – and what needs to be done.

The first example is Albania.

The European Union had the option of taking the lead on the Albanian support operation which everyone knew was necessary, but in the end it decided not to do so. And it is important to note, that the decision was not whether there should be such

an operation or not, but whether it was to be conducted within the general framework and under the general guidance of the European Union.

With the European Union unwilling to take on this role – in spite of the efforts of the Presidency – it was left to the OSCE to take responsibility for the political aspect of the operation, leaving key European Union member states to supply key parts of the military force and the Union itself most certainly the vast bulk of the financial resources which sooner or later will be necessary.

The wisdom of this policy eludes me. The Union did not stop an operation and will not get rid of the necessity of footing the bill for the economic and humanitarian efforts. The only thing the Union did was to abdicate from the political role in it, and hand it over to an organization substantially less capable of undertaking this task.

Apart from willingness to assume a political role on critical issues, there was also an important element of solidarity between member states involved.

Italy as well as Greece faced a situation in which they feared that substantial national and regional interests could be endangered by a failure to act, and called on their colleagues in the European Union to help and assist.

But with its unwillingness to help, the Union sent the signal that this type of solidarity is not necessarily on its agenda, thus potentially weakening its chances of acting preventively or actively in other situations in other parts of Europe in the future.

With the lessons of Bosnia fresh in the memory, this was not the finest hour of the Union.

If Albania is the obvious case of the Union so far not willing to shoulder its responsibilities, the case of Kosovo provides

another, and somewhat more complex one.

All European countries share a deep concern over the situation in Kosovo, and have made progress towards some sort of substantial autonomy for Kosovo a precondition for a substantial improvement in their relations with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

But when it comes to political initiatives, the Union has once more been handicapped and unwilling to pursue political initiatives or efforts on its own.

As part of my inheritance from my period as Co-Chairman of ICFY before the Dayton Peace Agreement, I have under my wings also the question of a Special Representative for Minorities, who dates back to ICFY efforts during 1993, 1994 and 1995 to deal with the different minorities issues in the different parts of former Yugoslavia. Obviously, Kosovo is among the most burning of these.

Since this fits less than perfectly into the structure of the High Representativeąs office, it has been my ambition to transfer this function to the European Union, and to explore the possibilities of a coordinated approach between the Union and the United States on this crucial issue for stability in the region.

So far, this has failed. The United States have made it clear that they do not want any coordination with any European efforts, and the Union has not been able to take a decision on a representative of its own on these issues, fearing that this might come into conflicts with efforts underway by the OSCE.

But as the efforts of the OSCE are of a different nature, the result so far is that we are without any coordinated European Union efforts, and that the de facto absence in addition of a US policy leads to a situation in which none of the parties to the potential conflict has any incentive to start to move on the question.

Looking ahead, we have to devise a coherent and coordinated strategy for this part of Europe as well.

South-Eastern Europe will be the main challenge for the Common Foreign and Security Policy in the years to come.

However important is remains that European countries speak with the same voice concerning human rights in China or the reform of the United Nations Security Council, here we will be dealing with questions of war or peace, of life and death, the outcome of which will have a profound impact on practically all European societies.

And the area south of Slovenia and north of Greece remains the only area for which the Union has yet to formulate a consistent long-term strategy.

The decision on the regional approach is a tentative start, the coming Commission opinion on the membership applications of Rumania and Bulgaria an additional part of the structure and the recent resolution of the European Parliament an important document in setting out the more ambitious agenda for the future which will be necessary.

It is only a coordinated and clear European strategy of integration – in the region, and between the region and the rest of Europe – which over time can start to overcome the tensions and the problems and the conflicts.

Such a strategy must have a number of components.

That there has to be a military component has been amply demonstrated over the last few years.

In 1990, there were no outside forces in the region. But today, we have international military forces in substantial numbers deployed in Hungary, Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia and Albania in order to deal with different aspects of the instability of the region.

And this is not the end. There is no short-term military exit strategy possible without a substantial political collapse as a result.

What we must do is shape a coherent security structure for the region as a whole which includes the stationing of outside forces at key positions in order to be able to deter any attempt – by anyone in the region – to resort to aggression, war or large-scale violence.

There also has to be an economic component, which will grow in significance as there is a gradual return to normality in the region.

The challenges are enormous. During the years when the other socialist economies went through a decisive period of reform, the economies of this area went through war and sanctions – and without getting rid of socialism.

We now have a belt of poverty and despair across the Balkan peninsula stretching from Bosnia, Montenegro and Albania through Serbia and Macedonia into Bulgaria and Rumania. And this could breed and fuel further social and political instability.

There is now the beginning of an economic strategy with the recent decision on the so-called regional approach. But I believe the Union must be far more daring and visionary in its approach to the area, opening up the prospects for substantial investments in trans-european networks, the establishment of a customs union or the extension of the single market into the region.

But there also has to be a political component to the strategy, with the European Union ready to act and to assume responsibility when it comes to trying to sort out the different conflicts and tensions. The active political presence of the Union, through Special or High Representatives as appropriate, could be one important part of such a

political strategy.

In Sintra on Friday, I expect the Foreign Ministers of the Steering Board of the Peace Implementation Council to take a decision on my successor as international High Representative in Bosnia.

And the key task of my successor must be not only to keep the international coalition for peace in Bosnia together, but also to re-forge it in view of the long-term uncertainties coming up as we are approaching the arbitrary military deadlines of 1998 and the end of the consolidation period of 1997 and 1998.

The United States will continue to play an important role in the region, and this we must welcome. It will continue to act without the multilateral framework or outside it, dependent on the particular needs of the particular circumstances.

Russia will continue to play its constructive, and often under-reported role. And this we must encourage not least in the context of the gradually closer relationship we are now establishing with Russia.

But for the international coalition to be able to devise and implement a truly effective long-term policy, there has to be also a stronger European voice and a stronger European arm.

We had an excuse for failure in 1991 in that we had not had the time to devise the instruments for the post-Cold War situation. We no longer have the luxury of that excuse when it comes to the problems of this region in the years to come.

And it is my hope that Amsterdam will be able to bring us closer in terms of instruments to the goals set up in Maastricht six years ago. At the end of the day, it will be the political will of the member governments that will decide the future of the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

The experience of Bosnia, in war and in peace, has

demonstrated its necessity.