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**Javier Solana: Negotiations on new EU-Russia agreement should be allowed to take the time necessary to achieve all goals**

**Talks on a new basic agreement on partnership will be launched at the upcoming Russia-EU summit. How long will these talks take and what kind of new agreement is expected, in your view, Mr. Solana?**

The new EU-Russia agreement should provide a comprehensive framework for our relations for the foreseeable future and help develop the potential of our relationship. The aim is to have a good agreement, which will put our relations on a new strategic footing. These are our goals, and I know that we share them with our Russian partners. I think that it is important that the negotiations are allowed to take the time necessary to achieve these goals.

Regarding energy, this is obviously one of the most important elements of our relations with Russia. It is an area where our interdependence is very strong, and it is of course only natural that this should be reflected in the new agreement. The aim of the EU is to build a true energy partnership with Russia, based on the principles of transparency, fair competition, reciprocity and non-discrimination. As we see it, this partnership should offer security and stability for both sides. It should also pave the way for the necessary long-term investments in new and existing

capacity, and promote greater attention to energy efficiency, energy savings and renewable energy. These are obviously the general goals that we will pursue in the negotiations. But I think it would be too early to talk already now, when negotiations are only about to start, about what kind of provisions will be put in the agreement.

**Does the European Union intend to have a dialog with Russia to address issues concerned with Lithuanian demands to Russia, in particular those relating to the resumption of oil supplies to Lithuania through the Druzhba oil pipeline and some others?**

This issue, just like other bilateral issues, is brought up regularly by the EU in our political dialogue with Russia - just as Russia raises with the EU its bilateral issues with EU Member States. Although such problems are of course best solved directly between Russia and the Member States concerned, I expect that this issue will come up.

**Do you agree that the Irish rejection of the Treaty of Lisbon reflects the difficulties that the European Union has faced, including due to its enlargement?**

No. The EU has benefited from enlargement rather than suffered from it. The EU will also continue to function, with or without the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Of course, reform of the EU is still desirable, and work on finding a way forward was already launched by EU leaders at last week's European summit in Brussels.

**How do you assess the situation on protection of the rights of minorities in the Baltic countries? What do you think about Russia's decision to grant a visa-free entry for people having non-citizen status in Estonia and Latvia?**

This is a sensitive issue. Our view is that all EU Member States meet their international commitments on human rights and the protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities. I also think that there is general agreement that naturalization and integration is the best way forward, and the EU will continue to

assist Member States in their efforts to promote this, in line with OSCE and Council of Europe recommendations. Russia, too, can take steps in this direction.

**EU Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy Benita Ferrero-Waldner said recently that the EU wished to see a modified peacekeeping force in the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zones. Do you support this opinion? Will the EU guarantee the signing of the ceasefire agreement between Tbilisi and Sukhumi as the Georgian leadership wants?**

The situation in the Georgian conflict zones is both complicated and serious, as I had the opportunity to see for myself during a recent visit to Tbilisi, Batumi and Sukhumi. We are already engaged diplomatically in these issues, and we have a modest presence also on the ground, which focuses on the implementation of confidence-building measures. I have signaled that the EU is ready to step up its engagement, if this can help moving the peace processes forward. Russia, as a neighbor and a Member of the Friends Group, will continue to play an important role, and it is our hope that we can find ways in which the EU, Russia and the Friends Group can cooperate productively and get the peace processes back on track.

**Does the EU realize that the issue of reformatting the international presence in Kosovo can be resolved by the UN Security Council and not personally by the UN Secretary General? When could Serbia become an EU member and on what conditions?**

We welcome and support the report by the United Nations Secretary General on UNMIK and his intention to reconfigure the international civilian presence in Kosovo. The EU is committed to play a leading role in Kosovo, in particular in the area of rule of law. The steps taken in New York will allow for the EULEX mission to intensify its deployment, in close cooperation with the UN, and take on an enhanced operational role in Kosovo.

As for Serbia, we were very happy to recently sign a Stabilization and Association Agreement, an essential and long-awaited step on Serbia's path towards EU. The Serbian leadership knows very well what are the conditions and the progress to fulfill the next steps, and we hope to see early and rapid progress on this

path.

**Mr. Solana, not so long ago you handed over new proposals on the settlement of the Iranian nuclear problem to Tehran. Do you agree that, if Iran brushes aside the latest offer that you and the six mediators made, the Security Council will have to impose greater sanctions on Iran in an effort to curb its nuclear ambitions? What kind of these sanctions could be?**

I traveled indeed recently to Teheran to present to Iran – on behalf of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany and the EU – a proposal seeking to resolve the concerns that Iran's nuclear program raises within the international community and to enter into a normalized relationship with Iran in all areas. It is a generous and comprehensive offer, which we would like to be the starting point for real negotiations. The Iranian authorities are now studying the offer, and I hope they will give us an answer soon, and that it will be a constructive answer. The EU will continue its two-track approach, but we hope very much that Iran will favor the track of dialogue. We have not received Iran's answer yet, so let's not prejudge that it will be a negative one.

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