

Forty-seventh session

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

PROVISIONAL VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 10th MEETING

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on Thursday, 24 September 1992, at 10 a.m.

Mr. COLOMBO (Italy) (spoke in Italian; English text furnished by the delegation): First of all, I have great pleasure in congratulating you, Sir, and your country, Bulgaria, on your election as President of the General Assembly. I should also like to express Italy's satisfaction, and my own, at seeing here present the delegations of the new States admitted to our Organization during the past year: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Slovenia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. May I be permitted to extend a particularly warm welcome to the delegation of San Marino, a State with which Italy has close ties of very long standing.

I should particularly like to express my Government's most sincere appreciation to the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who is giving the United Nations the benefit of his wealth of experience in political affairs and diplomacy. Even in his first year he has already worked tirelessly and constructively to apply the principles which we all support and which are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

The points I am about to make follow on the comments, which Italy fully endorses, made by the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, the current President of the European Community.

Since the historic events of 1989, no General Assembly session has been held, or will be held in the near future, against the same international background as the session of the previous year. Since the demise of bipolarism, international society has become subject to processes of reaggregation which are made more laborious and arduous by an array of historical, cultural, ethnic, religious and nationalistic factors. There are certain groups that, wishing to assert their own specificity, are not content to be recognized and safeguarded within the State framework to which they belong, but seek to express their own identity in the form of statehood.

In the East, what was once a monolithic structure has been falling apart, and, in some cases, is being fragmented into a multiplicity of separate entities, each demanding to translate its own history, culture and national identity into an international personality. In the process, they are resorting to all available means, including conflict and violence.

The obstacles preventing the restoration of equilibrium are not really new: they derive from factors that have long been chafing under the heavy yoke of dictatorship. Constrained in ideological straitjackets, they have been unable to engage in an open dialectic. Denied all opportunities for natural development, they have maintained the potential for confrontation and conflict.

With the fall of ideologies and the break-up of the Soviet empire, the nightmare of a nuclear holocaust has receded. But while the spectre of a world war has been banished, we are still seeing a proliferation of local wars. These and the manifold antagonisms underlying them now pose a new threat, particularly in geographical areas that have regained their freedom but find it marred by violence and conflict and are unable to build a new structure based on tolerance and peace.

There are therefore hotbeds of war, signs of revolt and unresolved conflicts in areas formerly belonging to the Soviet empire, which is now divided into a number of republics united only by tenuous economic relations and very fragile political ties.

In Central Europe, ancient nations which have graduated from limited to full sovereignty are endeavouring to become pluralistic democracies with a market economy.. They, too, are having their share of problems.

And how can we forget the war raging in the very heart of Europe - the most complex, dangerous and tragic of all these conflicts and the one thus far untouched by all international appeals? In the territory of the former Yugoslavia, and particularly in Bosnia and Herzegovina, bloodshed and strife are accompanied by violations of the dignity of the human person. After the horrors of the Second World War, we had all hoped never again to witness acts of discrimination and violence against those belonging to a different ethnic group.

What gives us cause for pessimism is the fact that after the London Conference a new and original experiment, which brought together round

the conference table the United Nations, represented by its Secretary-General, the 12 members of the European Community, the members of the United Nations Security Council, and representatives of Serbia and Montenegro, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Macedonia, and after clear commitments were entered into and undertakings were even signed on such matters as cessation of the violence, control over heavy weapons, the cessation of "ethnic cleansing" and the closure of concentration camps, nothing - I say nothing - has been done apart from some occasional checks on heavy weapons.

In spite of the assurances and undertakings given by Prime Minister Panic, which we consider sincere and deserving of support, shooting continues in the towns and in the mountains, and planes are being shot down, as in the case of an Italian aircraft carrying relief supplies. Four airmen died in that incident, and three French soldiers belonging to the United Nations Protection Force have been killed. Many other lives have been lost. A miserable winter lies ahead and people will suffer from hunger, cold and disease. It is now too dangerous to provide humanitarian assistance, and the threatened sanctions are not entirely watertight.

Can the international community and its institutions permit this ongoing tragedy to persist in spite of the solemn promises and pledges made at high-level peace conferences? Can the perpetrators of heinous and odious crimes be allowed to escape international judgement, also at the legal level? This question must be answered by those whose duty it is to do so, including myself, in the appropriate forums.

However, going beyond politics, I should like to reiterate an appeal voiced by one of the greatest writers of this century:

"What we need today is a 'militant' humanism imbued with the conviction that the principles of liberty, tolerance and doubt must not be exploited or defeated by a fanaticism that knows no doubts. If European humanism has lost its robust capacity to review its ideas it will end in ruin, and we will have a Europe whose name is no more than a geographical term."

In the third world, too, the end of bipolarism has eliminated for many States the need to "belong" and to heed the dictates of a particular bloc, even in a non-aligned context. Crises exist also in this area, as in the case of Somalia, Iraq and Mozambique, although we hope to see this latter crisis resolved, also as a result of Italy's mediation efforts.

At this point we should ask ourselves a question: Now that the gulf between East and West has been bridged, are we not about to face a rift between North and South? We must counter this danger and reactivate the dialogue in all possible forums and translate the concept of assistance into a living reality. We should also oppose methods and procedures that use development cooperation to help the economic agents of donor countries; work on the basis of established programmes; ensure that assistance is not wrongfully diverted both in the countries of origin and in those of destination; and reorganize and coordinate the various sources of financing. Italy realizes that it has not yet reached, owing to its financial imbalances, the generous development assistance targets it had set for itself. A reorganization of the country's financial structures will also facilitate a renewed effort to fulfil this pledge.