

# Five minutes with Javier Solana: 'Europe must respond to the refugee crisis as it would have liked the world to respond to its suffering'

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12/11/2015

*How should the EU respond to the multiple challenges it presently faces, from economic malaise to the refugee crisis and the conflict in Ukraine? In an interview with EUROPP's editor Stuart Brown, **Javier Solana** discusses why Europe should take inspiration from its experience during two world wars in its efforts to help refugees, how the EU can play a greater role in bringing peace to Syria, and why it would be a clear mistake for the UK to leave the EU.*



**The EU is currently facing three immediate challenges: the refugee crisis, tensions in Ukraine and the continuing fallout from the Eurozone crisis. Is the EU capable in its current form of meeting these challenges?**

It is true the EU is presently facing – at a minimum – these three challenges. With regard to the economic challenges, the solution is clear, in my opinion: it lies in the solid execution of the new architectural components of the EMU, and I believe they will be implemented as foreseen and on schedule.

The Ukraine situation is highly complex, given that the issue lies not only within the state of Ukraine itself but also in the relationship with Russia. Regarding the former, we have seen two positive developments of late: on the one hand, the recent agreement with the IMF, and on the other, Ukraine's new government, which includes some strong, young professionals who I believe will truly strive to modernise the administration and implement reforms. Time is of the essence, however.

With regard to the relationship with Russia, the Minsk II agreement is fundamental. Since September, the situation on the ground has not worsened and the ceasefire appears to be holding. In addition, at the Paris meeting in October, the participants concluded that the Minsk process would require more time than initially foreseen. This was a sound, necessary decision: it is vital that the steps outlined in Minsk, including local elections and constitutional reform, are executed well – and this extension should provide the necessary time to do so.

**What particular challenges does the refugee crisis pose for EU security and how should the EU seek to find a solution?**

Firstly, it is summarily important to recognise that it is both a legal and a moral obligation for the EU and its member states to help the refugees arriving at Europe's borders.

We must not forget that during and after the world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many Europeans were refugees. After the catastrophe of World War I, an international regime emerged to coordinate responses to such crises and to alleviate the suffering of those Europeans forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. Europe must live up to its international commitments, and in doing so, reflect on its own history, responding to today's refugee crisis as it would have liked the world to respond to its suffering.

This solution to the present-day crisis does not lie, I believe, in reversing the Schengen Area of border-free travel: our task as EU members is not to erect internal borders. In addition, it worries me that some of the EU member states have taken positions in this crisis that diverge wildly from the EU's position, which is rooted in its well-known values and obligations. The gap within the Union on this matter is highly disturbing. Meanwhile, election cycles and their outcomes are not helping to solve the problem.

## **Should the EU play a more active role in bringing peace to Syria?**

Yes. Moreover, the recent successful agreement in the EU/E3+3 negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme offers clear evidence that the EU can be of great constructive and instrumental value in diplomacy in the region.

For years now, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and other states on Syria's borders have been experiencing, directly and within their territories, the consequences of the extended and terrible Syrian civil war. The immense suffering has sent millions of refugees across the borders: Lebanon, for one, with its population of just 4.5 million, has taken in over 1 million refugees, and over 2 million Syrians now reside in Turkey.

Now the refugees have reached our European borders and territories. We are seeing the consequences of the Syrian tragedy up close: these people are fleeing from conflict and persecution. If our aim is to alleviate the refugee crisis, we must go straight to the roots, and this starts largely with providing active assistance in the processes to bring peace to Syria.

In fact, I would have expected the EU's engagement in these processes to be stronger than it is at present. Given the current situation, the reasons to engage in the process to bring peace to Syria have multiplied. The EU should not lose this opportunity to increase its engagement

## **In a wider sense, the EU also faces a long-term challenge stemming from the shift in economic power toward Asia. Is further integration the route to addressing this issue?**

The shift of the economic centre of gravity towards Asia and the Pacific is evident, and it is undoubtedly affecting the entire world, including the EU and its citizens. China's spectacular growth, which last year led to its first place in the ranking of global economies (based on PPP-adjusted GDP figures), is a historical change of vast significance.

Given this context, the EU should strive for an open, intense relationship with China – and I am convinced this is something Beijing seeks as well. On the other hand, the EU and its member states will have to adapt to the new reality, in myriad ways. The main problem here is that it is incessantly repeated that we must adapt – yet it is unclear and rather uncertain, in my opinion, whether the policies being designed at present truly take into account this change and seek to rise to the challenge.

## **The UK will be holding a referendum on its EU membership before the end of 2017. Would leaving the EU damage the UK's influence over foreign and security policy at the global level?**

Yes, undoubtedly so. In our modern world, it is self-evident that major powers can no longer act alone. One single country, even if it is a very important one, will automatically lose significance on the global stage if it separates from the EU.

The UK has reaped substantial benefits from its membership of the European Union. If it wishes to retain its international influence and role, it would be a clear mistake to leave the EU.

*Dr Javier Solana delivered a recent lecture at LSE entitled 'The EU and the Challenges Ahead'. For more information see [here](#).*

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## About the interviewee

### Javier Solana

Dr Javier Solana is president of ESADE Center for Global Economy and Geopolitics (Barcelona-Madrid), and distinguished fellow in Foreign Policy at Brookings Institution. He is also a visiting professor at the London School of Economics. From 1999 to 2009, Dr Solana was Secretary General of the Council of the European Union (EU) and High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU; and from 1995 to 1999, Secretary General of NATO.



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