

Brussels, 20 March 2003

Statement by Pat COX at the beginning of the Extraordinary Session of the European Parliament on Iraq

I have taken the initiative to call this unprecedented special session of the European Parliament at this time of international crisis because as the largest directly elected transnational parliament in the world we have a duty to express ourselves and to be heard.

Last week when we debated the Iraqi crisis in this House we invested our hopes in diplomacy and inspection. Now the situation has changed and changed utterly. The war has begun and we enter a new and dangerous phase.

Our thoughts in this House turn to the vulnerability of innocent Iraqi citizens whose humanitarian situation already was precarious before a shot was fired. Our thoughts also turn to our fellow European citizens, mostly British, in the military services and to their families who now too carry a burden and special vulnerability.

Later today I have the opportunity on behalf of this House to address the Heads of State and Government at the European Council and I thought it proper before I should do so and before I formulate my remarks on your behalf to hear today what your assessment as a House is on the situation in which we find ourselves.

The Council and much of the debate in Europe has been rather a 'House divided against itself'. And a house divided against itself diminishes itself. One clear message which we, as a Parliament, need to give to our European leaders is that in the months to come we must learn and apply the lessons of how to work together to create a greater coherence, a greater presence and a greater balance in terms of international affairs.