25 September 2010 – The United Nations and many of its key organs need to adapt to keep pace with changing international realities, European leaders told the General Assembly’s high-level debate today, calling for reform of the Security Council, the Assembly and peacekeeping operations.

The UN is the only organization capable of confronting global threats, responding to major natural catastrophes and tackling inter-connected problems that straddle national boundaries, Portuguese Prime Minister José Socrates said, stressing the case for reform.

“Any reform of the United Nations must reinforce, not weaken, the objectives that presided over its creation… For the UN is the sole forum where nobody feels excluded, the sole body where all States, including small- and middle-sized countries, have their own voice and their own say in solving global problems,” he said.

Mr. Socrates welcomed the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission, which is tasked with helping countries emerging from conflict to stabilize and avoid slipping back into war or misrule, saying it was “a significant step in the reform process.”

But he said the 15-member Security Council must be enlarged so that it is more representative, transparent and efficient.

“In our view it is illogical that countries like Brazil or India that have today an irreplaceable economic and political role are still not permanent members of the Security Council,” the Prime Minister noted, adding that Africa also deserves consideration “to take due account of the remarkable political and economic progresses that we have witnessed in that vast continent.”

Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor described reform of the UN as “long overdue,” with the Security Council “visibly out of date” and the work of the General Assembly needing revitalization.

Progress in reforming peacekeeping operations worldwide – the UN currently has 15 spread across four continents, as well 11 political missions – would also “strengthen all other UN activities relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, including preventive diplomacy and post-conflict peacebuilding.”

Mr. Pahor also said the Human Rights Council, which replaced the widely-criticized UN Commission on Human Rights, “seems to be on a good path” since it was formed in 2006.

“However, although the progress achieved so far is encouraging, it is not sufficient. The Human Rights Council review, planned for 2011, will be therefore a good opportunity for addressing the current shortcomings and challenges.”

Jan Peter Balkenende, Prime Minister of the Netherlands, said “ground has clearly been lost” by the UN in recent years and the Organization needs to recover rather than reaffirm its central
European leaders press for ‘long overdue’ UN reform to match changing world

role in global governance.

“The G20 and not the UN has taken the lead in tackling the economic crisis, for example. The UN climate summit could have delivered more if the world had been able to unite behind the tough decisions,” he said.

“And where the MDGs are concerned, we see mixed results,” he added, referring to the social and economic targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which world leaders have agreed to strive to reach by 2015.

“What these examples show is that the UN is losing its position – and its convening power – as the obvious global platform for discussion and decision-making.”

But Dr. Balkenende stressed he was confident “that the UN can continue in the future to claim its vital role as the world’s overarching governance organization.”

He emphasized the need for the world body to show that it can achieve practical results on key issues, saying that was the best way of ensuring its legitimacy.

Václav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, voiced frustration in his address that the Security Council had not been reformed “to reflect the geopolitical, economic and demographic reality of the 21st century,” despite almost two decades of negotiations on the issue.

But he stressed that reform of the UN should not divert the Organization away from its core principles of maintaining international peace and security, promoting friendly relations among countries and achieving international cooperation to solve global problems.

“It should not search for alternative or substitute projects to those which enhance peace, freedom and democracy. It should remain an intergovernmental platform, based on the plurality of views of its Member States, and on our mutual respect towards their sometimes differing positions.”

Mr. Klaus added that the solution to complex problems such as the recent financial crisis did not lie in more bureaucracy aimed at governing the world economy.

“On the contrary, this is the time for international organizations, including the United Nations, to reduce their expenditures, make their administrations thinner and leave the solutions to the governments of the Member States which are directly accountable to the citizens of their countries.”

For his part, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini said Security Council reform must be based on a “realistic compromise” that both garners the broadest possible consensus and yet ensures an adequate representation of African, Arab and other under-represented groups of nations.

“More than 15 years of negotiations have proven that the membership is profoundly divided,” he said. “It is now time to search for genuine and far-reaching compromise.”
Mr. Frattini said the 192-member General Assembly should also be revitalized to “restore its central role” of identifying both the main problems threatening the world and the best strategies for dealing with them.

Later today Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon met with Mr. Frattini on the margins of the Assembly session, with the two men discussing the situation in Somalia and in Sudan, as well as the need to revitalize the Conference on Disarmament.