



**European Security and Defence Assembly
Assembly of Western European Union**

**Address by the President of the Assembly
at the opening of the 58th session of the Assembly**

Paris, 15 June 2010

Check against delivery!

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you all know, on 31 March 2010, the member states of WEU declared officially that they had collectively decided to terminate the modified Brussels Treaty, thereby effectively closing the organisation, as it stands now, by the end of June 2011. But as our agenda for this plenary session demonstrates, for the time being it is business as usual.

The WEU founding treaty provides the legal basis for the European Security and Defence Assembly, which will therefore be dissolved. The governments nonetheless underlined “the specific nature of CSDP” and therefore “encouraged as appropriate the enhancement of interparliamentary dialogue in this field, including with candidates for EU accession and other interested states.

They also suggested that Protocol 1 on the role of the national parliaments in the European Union, annexed to the Lisbon Treaty, may provide a basis for such dialogue.

I consider that, in the discussions that are to take place over the coming months on what form this “enhancement of interparliamentary dialogue” is to take, it is essential to avoid any weakening of the national parliaments’ powers of scrutiny

over the CSDP. It is urgent to take steps to implement Protocol 1, making sure that the national parliaments continue to be the main pillar and driving force for the activities mentioned in that document if interparliamentary scrutiny is to be truly effective and contribute to strengthening the CFSP, an intergovernmental policy that is crucial for Europe's future.

Clearly, our Assembly does not wish to stand in the way of implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. But with the disappearance of the WEU treaty there is a danger that the national parliaments will lose the only tried and tested interparliamentary instrument they currently have for scrutinising the CSDP. The national parliaments and you all as national parliamentarians must therefore call for an ambitious implementation of the Lisbon Treaty provisions on interparliamentary cooperation in the field of the CFSP. We must all promote the only credible model for interparliamentary scrutiny: a lightweight but permanent and efficient structure. It is a matter of respect for the legitimate powers of the national parliaments and of the effectiveness of the democratic scrutiny that it is their full right and duty to exercise on behalf of the citizens who elected them.

Therefore I am happy to be able to tell you that since the announcement by the governments that the life of WEU is coming to an end, several initiatives have been taken by Ministers and by national parliaments. The Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 26 April 2010 concluded that it "acknowledged the important contribution of the WEU in the development of the European security and defence architecture, including the substantial role of the interparliamentary WEU Assembly in developing a European culture on security and defence" and that "the Council encouraged as appropriate the enhancement of interparliamentary dialogue on CSDP issues, including with candidates for EU accession and other interested states".

The French Senate has adopted a resolution which argues that “the disappearance of the WEU Assembly should be made subject to the creation of a structure that would bring together parliamentarians from the 27 member states – at least from those member states that so wish – who are specialised in defence matters”.

This has resulted in a proposal to set up a defence version of COSAC, which was debated at a COSAC Plenary session on 30 May and 1 June in Madrid. Views on how to address the issue, however, varied widely and no decisions were taken regarding this proposal. At present, it is unclear how it will be taken further.

Another hopeful sign came from the EU Speakers’ Conference which was held on 14-15 May in Stockholm. In the conclusions to their meeting, Speakers stressed the fundamental role of national parliaments in the future parliamentary scrutiny of the common foreign and security policy, including the CSDP, in particular given the special nature of the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and the role of national parliaments in the smooth functioning of the European Union. The Speakers asked the incoming Belgian EUSC Presidency to take the discussion forward on this basis, with a view to reaching an agreement at the next meeting of the Conference of Speakers of EU Parliaments in April 2011.

In the light of all these developments, the Assembly is also deploying activities which may contribute to finding an appropriate solution for the role of national parliaments in following and discussing CSDP.

The Presidential Committee has now agreed to the holding of a plenary session in December 2010 and to the idea of holding an extraordinary meeting in May 2011 to “hand over” the work of the Assembly to a successor body.

In order to ensure coordination between government and parliamentary positions on how to continue interparliamentary scrutiny of the Common Security and Defence Policy, I am proposing that a steering committee should be set up under the joint chairmanship of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the incoming Belgian EU Presidency (represented ideally by the Speakers of the Senate and the Chamber) to determine the way ahead and in particular the legal and financial basis for such scrutiny.

Recently, you all may have seen a document signed by myself and entitled “Parliamentary scrutiny of the CFSP and CSDP: the way ahead”, which includes proposals for a future parliamentary body.

Yesterday, the Presidential Committee set up a working group under my chairmanship to prepare a document which will be presented to the Belgian Presidency of WEU/EU in July.

I believe it is important that all the interested parties – the national parliaments and the EU Council in particular, have a clear vision of the future by the end of this year. A formal approval of the new structure can take place at the EU Speakers’ Conference in April in time for a formal handover of responsibility at our May final plenary.

I am also taking initiatives to address the principal concerns of the Assembly’s staff such as non-discriminatory implementation of the “Social Plan”, the possibility for those staff who will have to find a new job to be redeployed in other coordinated organisations, the European Union institutions or other international organisations and obtaining a guarantee about the continued payment of pensions for present and future retired staff.

I would also like to draw your attention to a report by the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations, prepared by Marietta KARAMANLI and Rik DAEMS, which takes stock of the ongoing discussions on this issue and of the proposals that are currently on the table. It is a working tool which will continue to be updated until the Assembly's next session in December 2010.

As I mentioned earlier, the EU Foreign Affairs Council, meeting on 26 April 2010, acknowledged in its conclusions the important contribution of WEU in the development of the European security and defence architecture, including the substantial role of the interparliamentary WEU Assembly in developing a European security and defence culture and encouraged as appropriate the enhancement of interparliamentary dialogue on CSDP issues, including with candidates for EU accession and other interested states.

Against that background, the EU High Representative, Catherine ASHTON, has personally assured me that she welcomed the reflection being undertaken by the WEU Assembly to explore future avenues for interparliamentary cooperation on CFSP/CSDP issues.

Now I would like to turn to political developments in the EU's CFSP/CSDP which, as you know, is the main interest of our Assembly. The Lisbon Treaty is ambitious in its aims and Europe has indeed no other choice, with new economic powers emerging which will profoundly alter the existing power relations in the world.

A report by the Political Committee, prepared by Paul WILLE, encourages EU member states to pursue the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and in particular the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) despite a difficult political and financial context. The initial

difficulties with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty should not discourage member states from working towards a more coherent, capable and active EU.

Although CSDP is one of the Union's most dynamic and innovative policy areas, its development has now reached a stage where there is an obvious risk of stagnation unless courageous steps are taken. The EU is certainly an actor in international politics, but not yet a strategic one.

The EU has now entered a crucial new phase with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty and the beginning, unfortunately, is rather disappointing. Core elements of the new structural set-up designed to strengthen foreign, security and defence policy have either yet to be established (European External Action Service, and I will come back to that specific subject later) or to get to grips with their positions and tasks (High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission; President of the European Council), or are already in dire straits (permanent structured cooperation). This last subject is discussed in a report by the Defence Committee, prepared by Lord DUNDEE.

Other structural building blocks have been established but have either not yet been used (battlegroups), have exhausted their possibilities (Berlin Plus), or have not yet fully tapped their potential (European Defence Agency).

Finally, I would like to say a few words on the EU's common foreign policy. After protracted negotiations and long discussions, at the end of April European foreign ministers reached an agreement on the main aims of the future European External Action Service (EEAS).

This European diplomatic service will not be integrated into the Commission, a decision which is, I believe, supported by national governments and national parliaments but is being contested fiercely by the European Parliament, like a number of other dispositions on this subject.

High Representative Catherine ASHTON was hoping to reach an informal political arrangement with the European Parliament on 10 June which would include the initial structures of the EEAS being up and running by 1 December 2010.

But the existence of a High Representative and of a European Diplomatic Service which may number six to eight thousand officials which she is heading does not mean that Europe has a common foreign policy. We should be aware that this will be a long process with progress being piecemeal.

There have been successes, such as the 8 December 2009 EU Declaration on the Middle East Peace Process, and also failures, such as the vote in the UN Human Rights Council on the Goldstone Report regarding the human rights violations in the 2008-2009 Gaza war, where the eight EU countries which were members of the UN Human Rights Commission have expressed different opinions and shown different attitudes when a vote was taken.

We will have to accept this slow process, but the governments of our respective countries will also have to live up to the ambitions which they have laid down in the Lisbon Treaty and presented as a leap forward in European unification.

If they are serious in meeting these ambitions, member states must adapt their behaviour.

Heads of state and government will have to seriously coordinate their positions, inform each other of their respective approaches and discuss them within the Union framework.

Of course, bilateral meetings in the foreign policy area will continue to be a normal practice, but EU institutions should be informed about these meetings and not learn about them in the press.

In this respect, the stable presidency of the European Council, an office now held by Herman van ROMPUY, is a step in the right direction which is leading to results.

The European Council now meets practically every month and takes this opportunity to discuss events across the board. As a result, all the European heads of state and government are now directly and permanently involved in European affairs. It may be a timid start, but it offers scope for further development.

It will be up to the next EU/WEU Presidency (Belgium) to inject an extra dose of enthusiasm and dynamism in order to proceed with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, speed up the process of finding a follow-up mechanism for interparliamentary scrutiny and sort out how to properly wind down WEU and its Assembly while ensuring that optimum use is made of its experience, staff and other assets.