



European Security and Defence Assembly Assembly of Western European Union

Address by the President of the Assembly at the Berlin Congress on European Security and Defence

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year is the tenth anniversary of the launching of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) by EU governments at the Cologne Summit in June 1999 and there has been an avalanche of speeches and publications to mark this milestone. With the Lisbon Treaty having entered into force last week, I would like to use this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts about what has been achieved and give some indications of the challenges that lie ahead.

An important aim of the Lisbon Treaty was to further codify the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including what will henceforth be called the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

For the first time the Treaty includes all aspects of the EU's external action within a common set of principles and objectives.

A keynote reform in ESDP is the double-hatting of the new High Representative who will chair the Foreign Affairs Council and will also be the Vice-President of the Commission in charge of External Relations. She will therefore play an important part in the preparation of the CFSP and will ensure the implementation of the decisions adopted by the European Council and the Council, as well as representing the Union for matters relating to the CFSP.

A further important innovation is "permanent structured cooperation", which is meant to involve those member states with stronger military capabilities and that are willing to enter into more binding commitments with a view to undertaking demanding crisis-management tasks.

Some experts have suggested that this permanent structured cooperation could also be the basis for a future common Union defence, based on a text similar to Article V of the modified Brussels Treaty, but I tend to think that this will not be feasible. If there is going to be a common Union defence, it will have to include all the member states from the moment of its creation, without excluding any of them.

As the second Irish referendum taught us, what the Lisbon Treaty does not include is a common defence policy; there is no territorial or strategic defence policy in the classic sense with a binding mutual assistance clause.

The Lisbon Treaty stipulates that the CSDP "shall include the progressive framing of a common Union defence policy" which "will lead to a common defence, when the European Council acting unanimously, so decides". In fact, as far as common defence is concerned, Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union refers specifically to NATO. That is one reason why in my view more energy should go into improving relations between the EU and NATO and between the EU and the United States.

As regards the EU's relations with NATO, there is no denying that they are still problematic, which, among other things, makes the Berlin Plus Arrangement unworkable.

The EU could take initiatives which might lead to a solution by granting Turkey a status comparable to that which it enjoyed as an associate member of WEU and which, to Turkey's great regret and resentment, it was not granted in the new ESDP structures.

The EU's relations with the United States are another important issue which needs closer attention if Europe wishes to be considered as a serious partner and ally of a country which is playing a determining role in addressing the world's most serious problems.

Indeed, bilateral EU-US relations have become very significant for a number of major security issues such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process and also Russia, but they are usually based on ad hoc talks and lack a proper structure.

Many, if not most, of the EU member states have their own bilateral dialogue with the US, often based on the presumption or pretention that they have a special relationship.

I am not suggesting that there is no room for individual member states to conduct these bilateral dialogues, but when it comes to cooperation in strategic matters, including security and defence, it would be far more useful and efficient and also more in line with the acknowledged ambition of the Lisbon Treaty's CFSP, to create a structure for a regular all-encompassing strategic EU-US dialogue.

There is an urgent need for such a structure. A precondition is that the EU must be prepared to speak with one voice. That may be a tall order but a divided Europe will not have the strategic clout it needs if it is to be heard.

Another important issue for the EU's CFSP is its relations with Russia.

The EU is clearly failing in its ambition to conduct a coherent and effective foreign policy towards Russia – a vital partner for the EU and its member states – mainly because of continuing internal divisions over how to deal with Russia, which for different member states has different connotations which I do not need to explain here.

Despite many efforts, the EU has not yet been able to conclude a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia and there is currently no appetite for seeking a more robust cooperation framework for its security relations with Russia.

Indeed, there is a requirement to develop broader concepts of security cooperation in the not too distant future, but there is also an urgent need to immediately deepen practical security cooperation with Russia. The unresolved conflicts in the EU's and Russia's common neighbourhood must be addressed as a priority. We need to sit down together to resolve them before we can envisage new institutions. Otherwise we will only move these issues onto another table and not solve anything, and will give a false impression of being terribly busy but in fact achieve little.

Afghanistan is definitely an opportunity for cooperation because Russia has an interest in a stable and pacified Afghanistan, and this may pave the way for making progress at a later stage in other areas.

Last month's EU-Russia summit in Stockholm again showed that the two partners are still far from achieving a major agreement on security issues, including Georgia.

In a wider framework, we are all aware of the Russian proposals for a new European Security Architecture, now set out in a draft European Security Treaty, which are being discussed within the OSCE's Corfu Process. I am in favour of this dialogue and of the efforts to find a solution to the problems pointed out by the Russians and of which we are all aware. However, one should keep in mind that the difficulties the existing security architecture has in responding to crises and conflicts are not primarily institutional in nature, but rather the result of an unwillingness on the part of the countries within that architecture to seek compromise.

The Council Conclusions on ESDP as issued after the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 17 November show that at present any progress in ESDP depends first and foremost on the activities of a plethora of expert committees and working groups. All of them are doing useful work on a vast number of detailed technical questions but one has the feeling that the Council is reluctant to exploit to the full the bold

opportunities offered by the Lisbon Treaty and that there is no longer any impetus to take the political leap forward which is now needed, with many member states even emphasising the importance of the activities of their own foreign service in parallel to those of the European External Action Service now being established.

On the practical side, progress has recently been made in a number of areas, and I welcome the fact that regarding the flexibility and deployability of battlegroups an overall agreement has now been reached among member states under the Swedish Presidency. States taking part in a battlegroup may authorise the use of an element or of a whole battlegroup in situations not involving a rapid response. This use will, however, require the unanimous agreement of all 27 member states.

Under the Swedish Presidency of the EU, remarkable progress has been made towards the establishment of a Europe-wide maritime surveillance system from the northern maritime basin to the Mediterranean Sea. This system will cover a range of issues from border control to emergency response.

The European Council has also acknowledged the growing need to ensure that civilian ESDP missions are an effective tool for crisis management and are able to be deployed rapidly alongside other instruments. A positive development is that the member states have made progress in implementing national measures facilitating the deployment of civilian personnel.

The Council has now also created the integrated civil-military Crisis Management and Planning Directorate which will be established within the European External Action Service and which is expected to give important impetus to improving the efficiency of ESDP operations.

A logical consequence of the creation of this directorate will be to start setting up a civil-military headquarters, the civilian dimension of which, by the way, exists already.

The EU has indeed made considerable progress in developing its capabilities for deploying ESDP missions abroad and can boast a number of successful missions, such as those in Chad, eastern Congo and Aceh and the anti-piracy operation off the coast of Somalia. However, we must not lose sight of the shortcomings which still need to be addressed: the EU's civilian action in Afghanistan is a case in point.

The EU has had and is still facing problems in framing a genuine common policy on Afghanistan; as a result of political differences between member states its approach remains piecemeal.

The EUPOL Afghanistan mission has encountered many of the problems that have plagued other ESDP civilian missions: political indecisiveness in Brussels, logistics problems in this naturally difficult theatre and slow planning and deployment due to the reluctance of member states to contribute the requisite staff.

EUPOL Afghanistan has not been able to achieve the channelling or better coordination of the EU member states' police reform efforts that would seem to be the logical consequence of an integrated European mission. Even inter-institutional relations between EUPOL, the Office of the EU Special Representative and European Commission programmes have proven to be complicated, and so far there has been little progress towards striking a better match between the Commission's financial resources and EUPOL's expertise and political profile in the area of security sector reform.

The 16 November General Affairs / External Relations Council has now given EUPOL the right to coordinate member states' and third countries' projects under its responsibility, but its mandate will expire at the end of May 2010 and one wonders whether this decision has been taken too late to have a real impact.

Lastly, due to the problems in EU-NATO relations, there is no comprehensive EU-NATO agreement on the provision by ISAF of security for the EUPOL staff and no possibility to exchange classified and often vital information.

As a consequence, EUPOL has had to conclude individual agreements with Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) lead nations and has even been obliged to hire a private company to guarantee its security and to adopt an extremely tight security policy. Moreover, Turkey and the US have not concluded technical bilateral agreements with it. All this has slowed down EUPOL's deployment and hampered its effectiveness.

A number of recent Council decisions on a technical level may help to address some of the abovementioned problems, but more steps, including of a political nature, will need to be taken in the near future.

To my great regret, little progress is being made on the important question of resources. While the EU's foreign and security policy ambitions are growing, national defence budgets, which provide most of the money, personnel and equipment needed for ESDP operations, are decreasing every year.

The effects of the economic and financial crisis, which are now becoming visible, do not bode well for the armed forces, with major cuts in defence spending on equipment in 2010: minus 3 per cent in France, minus 5 per cent in the UK and minus 7 per cent in Italy and Spain.

Only a few member states are spending more than 2 per cent of their GDP on defence.

Financial constraints and budget cuts should be an incentive to increase defence cooperation and further develop standardisation and interoperability. European cooperation through the European Defence Agency is part of the solution.

A report being submitted by my Assembly's Technological and Aerospace Committee welcomes the growing role of the European Defence Agency as the central organisation for shaping a European policy for defence and technological research and development programmes, but it rightly criticises the fact that, with a budget of 31 million euros, the Agency's financial resources are lower than those of the poorest member states.

The transformation of armed forces in order to adapt them to different operations is a slow and protracted process and a number of key shortcomings still have to be remedied. If the member states are serious about putting flesh on the bones of ESDP, they will have to provide the appropriate financial means.

In today's world, soft power alone is not enough to shape the world around us in a way which is advantageous to us. I am not arguing in favour of an aggressive hard power, but we certainly will need more military capabilities than at present, and be prepared to use them if required.

The present geopolitical situation is far from reassuring: not only is the world still feeling the shock waves of a very serious financial crisis and its aftermath, but there is also an ongoing war in Afghanistan and growing tensions in a number of regions: the Middle East, large parts of Africa and also in the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

In this fragile environment, it is important for CFSP to be sustainable. This will depend on a joint political assessment of the challenges and threats facing the EU's member states, on their ability to identify their key common interests and on the member states' decision as to whether they want to use CFSP as the instrument to respond to these threats and challenges. The EU should now make a dedicated effort to close the gap between discourse on CFSP and how it is actually put into practice.

If the EU continues to be weak and divided, it will have little influence in the shaping of a new global system where not only the US but also Russia and, even more importantly, countries like China and India are playing a major role.

The EU must take into account the fact that growing Euroscepticism, public indifference and sometimes even hostility towards it limit the national governments' scope for strengthening the role of the EU institutions and intensifying cooperation at EU level.

That is also why the involvement of national parliamentarians in the CFSP debate at an interparliamentary level is crucial for the further development of Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy.