



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

**Address by the President of the Assembly
to “Young Europeans attending the Eurodéfense Conference”**

Paris, 13 July 2010

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me welcome you to this building, the home of the European Security and Defence Assembly. We meet at a fascinating time for European defence. The Lisbon Treaty is full of promise, but it does not give us “Defence Europe”. French total re-integration into NATO comes at a time when the Alliance is questioning both its ability to mount an out-of-area expeditionary campaign in Afghanistan and its own purpose, its “strategic concept”, 20 years after the end of the cold war.

And, finally, all nations are facing an economic crisis that brings into question the luxury of “state of the art” military technology and defence spending in a world of new and different threats.

I would like to start with 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 adopted at the Assembly's last plenary session in June 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).

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).

Where do we really stand now with Europe'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 has now concluded a political arrangement with the European Parliament which provides for the initial structures of the EEAS to be 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.

So much, then, for the common foreign policy. And where do we stand with the prospects for a common defence policy and a common defence? I would like to emphasise here that the Lisbon Treaty does **not** lay down 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.

To my great regret, little progress is being made on the important question of the resources needed to realise Europe's security and defence ambitions. 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 CSDP operations, are being reduced every year.

The economic and financial crisis is now having a strong impact on national budgets and this does not bode well for the armed forces of the EU member states.

Only a few member states are spending more than 1.5 per cent of their GDP on defence.

In 2010 there are major cuts in defence spending on equipment: minus 3 per cent in France, minus 5 per cent in the UK and minus 7 per cent in Italy and Spain, with more to come in 2011.

For 2011, the UK Ministry of Defence has been asked to present cost savings of between 10 and 20 per cent.

France has announced a reduction in its defence budget of 3.5 billion euros over the next three years. Its defence budget for 2011 will stand at 30.1 billion euros, as in 2010.

Italy is reducing its defence budget by 10 percent and in the other EU member states the situation is no better.

As a consequence, there will be no European defence for the next decade. European security policy will be reduced to “soft power”; there will be renationalisations, a technological standstill and the calling into question of the current forces structure.

In the meantime the United States continues to spend more than 4 percent of its GDP on defence, Russia over 5 percent and some Asian countries even more.

For Europe, defence means having the capacity to realise its strategic ambitions, including being capable of projecting its power into remote theatres of operation where its economic future is at stake.

If we are serious about developing a European defence, we should start by further improving our mutual cooperation.

Closer European defence cooperation can offer opportunities for cost cutting in times of scarce resources, among other things through the pooling of certain military capabilities.

Certain states might also decide to develop niche capabilities. Establishing such a system would not be easy, but we should not be afraid of discussing it in depth.

European cooperation through the European Defence Agency is part of the solution.

A report submitted by the European Security and Defence 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 CSDP, they will have to provide the appropriate financial means.

In today's environment, soft power alone is not enough to shape the world around us to our advantage. I am not arguing in favour of aggressive hard power, but we will certainly need more military capabilities than at present and we must 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 a decision as to whether they want to use CFSP as the instrument to respond to those 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.

The member states must learn how to cooperate more effectively within the EU across cultural and political divides and improve coordination so that together they can formulate genuine strategic responses to complex policy questions.

In the long term, the EU has no choice other than to become a committed and autonomous actor determined to promote stability in the world and safeguard its member states' security.

For that to become a reality, the EU will have to work arduously in order to develop its own strategic identity. Among other things, it will have to start considering the security of the Eurasian continent in the perspective of its own interests (and not as a derivative of American interests).

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

Lastly, there is an urgent need for the EU to acknowledge 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 deepening cooperation at EU level.

The governments need the support of national parliaments, whose members have a responsibility to inform the public about what the EU is really doing to take foreign, security and defence policy forward. It is for this reason that 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.

And finally, I will conclude closer to home. 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.

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.

A subcommittee of the Assembly’s PC under my chairmanship has now prepared a document which will be presented to the Belgian Presidency of WEU/EU. This document calls for a Standing interparliamentary conference on CFSP/CSDP based on Protocol 1 of the Lisbon Treaty and established by the national parliaments and the European Parliament. This standing conference would enable national parliamentarians to exercise their autonomous constitutional scrutiny rights at European level.

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.