



European Security and Defence Assembly
Assembly of Western European Union

**Address by the President of the Assembly
at the opening of the 57th session of the Assembly**

Paris, 1 December 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A year ago you elected me to be President of this Assembly. I was honoured by that mark of confidence and I hope very much that my efforts over these past twelve months will not have disappointed you.

I will not give a detailed account of the activities and achievements of our Assembly in the past year. You will find them in my Annual Report, copies of which are on the table outside the hemicycle. In all the activities I have undertaken for the Assembly, I have focused primarily on promoting the democratic scrutiny of the EU's Common Foreign, Security and Defence Policy, and in particular, the right of national parliamentarians to discuss these matters at an interparliamentary level in our Assembly.

The latest news that I am pleased to be able to give you is that this week a joint working group will be established composed of members of the Russian Council of the Federation and Duma Delegation to our Assembly, with a view to reinforcing our cooperation and our mutual dialogue.

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 entering into force today, 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.

As you will see in my Annual Report, this has been an extremely busy year for me and for the Assembly. Many of my meetings have been with the consequences of the Lisbon Treaty in mind and the challenges for the Assembly and its role in the post-Lisbon world. This is very much work in progress and I anticipate an even busier year in 2010.

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 combines the functions of the former EU Council Secretary-General who was also the High Representative for CFSP with those of Vice-President of the Commission in charge of External Relations.

A further important innovation is “permanent structured cooperation”, which is meant to involve those member states with stronger military capabilities and 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.

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.

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.

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 an 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 of which, by the way, the civilian dimension exists already.

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.

In contrast, 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.

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 the 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.

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 ESDP 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 ESDP 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 ESDP and how it is actually put into practice.

This Assembly's role in highlighting those challenges is unique. Each of us in our own national parliaments is fully aware of the constraints on all forms of public spending at the present time. Defence spending is never at the top of the priority list, but through our work here we know only too well what the challenges are.

Ladies and gentlemen, we alone have the ability to see the global view on European defence matters in the context of the critical budgetary environment that is faced by the governments and parliaments of member states.

It is therefore crucial that we continue our essential work in the democratic oversight of our vital common defence and security interests.

Thank you for your attention.