

**Address by the President of the European Security and Defence Assembly
(ESDA)/Assembly of Western European Union (AWEU), Mr Robert WALTER MP (UK),
at the Defence Summer University in Saumur (France),**

11 September 2009

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

Allow me to start by thanking Presidents Teissier and de Rohan for inviting me to this seventh Defence University and to thank the organisers for their excellent work: what a marvellous evening it was yesterday!

I am sure that thanks to this initiative on the part of France, we are in the process of weaving ties among all Europeans with an interest in defence issues. This is also one of the aims of the European Security and Defence Assembly, the Assembly of Western European Union, of which I have the honour of being President.

A number of my parliamentary colleagues from the Assembly are also here in Saumur: our aim is to work, in parallel with the European Parliament, in support of the ESDP and our governments.

Last year in Saint-Malo we celebrated 10 years after the Saint-Malo accord between President Chirac and Prime Minister Blair. This year it is ten years since the inception of the European Security and Defence Policy.

It is clear, particularly to France and the United Kingdom, that ESDP is not Defence Europe. Our Common Foreign and Security Policy under the EU banner is not collective European Defence. It is not, and under the existing treaties or the Lisbon Treaty cannot be, the Strategic Defence pact that protects our continent or that projects the foreign policy of France, the United Kingdom or of any of the major nations of the European Union.

Nor can ESDP be the vehicle for Europe's contribution to the security of our continent or our collective contribution to the Atlantic Alliance.

I do not wish to deny the achievements of ESDP or the useful role that it plays in both conflict prevention and crisis management. I do not believe that its role is simply in civilian operations. It has a key role in military as well as civil and military operations in peacekeeping and peace enforcement – in challenging threats to our security and that of our friends. The operations in Bosnia, Congo and Chad and the current anti-piracy mission off Somalia are testament to that.

But it is not, in its current form, the European pillar of the Atlantic Alliance, nor is it capable of defending us against any significant external threat or of projecting the foreign policy objectives of the member states.

Let us be clear. I am speaking to a predominantly French audience. Whilst I represent a pan-European organisation, I am also a British Member of Parliament. The French Republic

wishes to project its foreign policy objectives. The United Kingdom Government wishes also to project its foreign policy. One of the tools available to each of those nations is its armed forces, and its defence policy is an extension of its foreign policy.

As good Europeans we hope and pray that our foreign policy objectives are not in conflict. In fact we devote a considerable amount of time and effort to arriving at common positions. We earnestly wish those common positions should be common European positions.

We do so not in opposition to our major ally, the United States, but in our own interests as partners of the United States.

In military terms, we shall do so as the European pillar of the Alliance. Those are our aspirations. But as a continent we fail to deliver.

In the 21st century the largest economic bloc in the world should not be dependent on the United States. It should be allied to it, it should be an equal partner to it and it should be able to defend itself and look after the security of its own region.

That is a position that is pro-Europe and pro-NATO. It is a challenge for this debate. But as a British politician talking to a French audience, I say to you, between us we spend 60 % of the defence budget of the European Union: we together must form the core of Defence Europe – but in both our countries our aspirations go beyond our budgetary capabilities – we must cooperate, we must bring our European partners with us.

Collectively we have the technology, we have the manpower, we have the industrial skills. It is not a choice between NATO and the EU. We are in both.

It is a matter of whether we want to continue to project our values to a wider world through our foreign and defence policy: we can only do that if we work together to achieve the goal that if it delivers will be recognised as a true common European defence.