

SIXTH SITTING

Monday, 5 December 2005

1. Resumption of the session

The sitting was opened at 15.00 with Mr Goris, President of the Assembly, in the Chair.

The PRESIDENT – In accordance with the provisions of Article III of the Charter of the Assembly and Rules 2 to 10 of the Rules of Procedure I declare open the second part of the 51st session of the Assembly of the Western European Union – the Interparliamentary European Security and Defence Assembly.

2. Attendance register

The PRESIDENT – The names of those substitutes present at this sitting, which have been notified to the President, will be published with the list of representatives appended to the minutes of proceedings.

3. Adoption of the minutes

The PRESIDENT – In accordance with Rule 23 of the Rules of Procedure, the minutes of the previous sitting have been distributed.

Are there any comments on the minutes? ...

The minutes are adopted.

4. Examination of credentials

The PRESIDENT – The next order of the day is the examination of credentials.

The names of newly nominated representatives and substitutes of the Assembly are published in Notice No. 6.

In accordance with paragraph 1 of Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedure, their credentials have been ratified by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and formally communicated by the President of that Assembly.

I warmly welcome our new colleagues to the Assembly.

The PRESIDENT – I should now like to welcome the affiliate members, associate members, affiliate associate members, permanent observers, affiliate permanent observers, affiliate associate partners, permanent guests and special guests. Changes to the delegations are listed in Notice No. 6. In accordance with Rule A.6 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure, I invite the Assembly to ratify the credentials of the new representatives and substitutes in each of these categories.

I would also like to welcome the parliamentary observers from Albania, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cyprus, Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Malta, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

I would also like to welcome representatives of the European Parliament, and representatives of the parliaments of Eritrea, Senegal and Sudan.

5. Address by the President of the Assembly

The PRESIDENT – Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen, it is both an honour and a pleasure to open this week's part-session, which is taking place at the end of a busy year in terms of the activities and initiatives generated by the Committees, the Enlarged Presidential Committee, our members acting collectively and individually and, of course, your President.

The 12 months of my presidency have strengthened my conviction that our work and the message that we are trying to convey are now better understood and have gained more recognition, appreciation and acceptance than was the case last year. A number of governments were convinced then that it was

time to start preparing to denounce the modified Brussels Treaty and to put an end to the collective role of the national parliaments in the European Security and Defence Policy, a role that is embodied by our Assembly.

With all the uncertainty that is hanging over the future of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, we must forge ahead with our common European projects on the basis of the existing treaties and agreements, while adopting an innovative and imaginative approach. The reports and proposals that we will be debating over the next three days are, I am certain, the tangible proof that this is indeed the spirit in which we work in this Assembly.

Sadly, we again have to excuse the Chairman-in-Office of the Council, the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Jack Straw, who is dashing around Europe at present trying to secure a budget agreement for the EU. I understand the problem because our Assembly also is experiencing some difficulty in securing agreement for our 2006 budget! Our very competent Chairman of the Budgetary Committee, Ms Christine Lucyga, will give us the details tomorrow.

In Mr Straw's stead, his speech will be delivered on Wednesday morning by Sir John Holmes, the British Ambassador in Paris.

Our WEU Secretary-General, Mr Javier Solana, has also once again sent apologies. In his letter he says: "I will not be able to attend the Plenary Session. Indeed, I had to schedule my long-planned trip to the Western Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo, former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) on these days in order to prepare the important discussion foreseen at the next General Affairs and External Relations Council on 12 December. In addition, on 7 December, the informal Council meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers will require my participation. I wish you, however, a fruitful debate at the Plenary Session."

Once again, the overfull diary of one overworked individual deprives some 200 national parliamentarians from hearing what should be a very strong message, which we would wish to convey on Mr Solana's behalf to our electorates and to public opinion in all our countries.

These absences are in stark contrast to what we see happening elsewhere, which is not only a considerable renewal of interest on all sides in the Assembly's activities, but also the fact that the Assembly is increasingly being called upon to offer its services. An example is the hope expressed by governments that we will be able to bring our influence to bear in order to overcome the serious problems of funding the European Security and Defence Policy and its Headline Goals.

Another point we should mention is the growing interest being shown by the parliaments of several non-EU European countries in participating in the work of the Assembly and obtaining a status within it. Following Croatia, I would like in particular to mention Ukraine, which I have just visited, together with a small delegation of the Enlarged Presidential Committee in which all the Assembly's political groups were represented. We were impressed by the determination shown by the Ukrainian representatives whom we met to continue on the path to democracy as well as to accomplish Ukraine's ambition of joining the large family of countries that make up the European and transatlantic institutions. They expressed a strong desire for Ukrainian parliamentarians to become more involved in our Assembly's activities.

(The speaker continued in French) (Translation) – Furthermore, the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have expressed an interest in obtaining an official status within the Assembly. That request must be considered in the light of the decision that the European Council is to take next week on whether that country is to become an official EU accession candidate. I would not be giving you the complete picture if I did not mention the desire expressed by the authorities of Azerbaijan during my recent visit there for their parliamentarians to participate in our activities.

Our function as the European Security and Defence Assembly is also increasingly appreciated by the governments represented on the WEU Council. While we are strongly critical of the fact that, once again, the Council has been late in submitting the first part of its 51st annual report to the Assembly and its replies to the Assembly's recommendations, we take good note of its efforts to provide in some of its replies to our recommendations more substantive information about the ESDP than was the case in the past. We can only encourage the Council to continue those efforts, above all as regards the content of its future annual reports following the transfer of the functions of WEAG and WEAO to the European

Defence Agency. The greater the readiness of our governments to consult and inform the members of the national parliaments represented in our Assembly, without prejudice to the outstanding institutional questions, the easier it will be to resolve the deadlock in which the governments placed us at the Nice Summit.

Because they did not succeed in integrating the whole of WEU in the EU, our organisation has fallen prey to shameful political euthanasia. What has suffered most is the democratic legitimacy of the decisions on security policy taken by the EU governments in Brussels. Indeed, by limiting WEU's integration in the EU to its crisis-management and armaments cooperation functions, national parliamentarians have been deprived of the means of exercising their right to be informed and consulted by the governments, a right that is conferred on them by the modified Brussels Treaty. The EU is not bound by any treaty to inform and consult the WEU Assembly; neither, indeed, is it under any such obligation with regard to the European Parliament or the national parliaments, although the latter are the ones that finance its activities and approve the funding for EU military operations within the framework of national defence budgets.

The governmental dimension of WEU, which used to be at the very heart of the European intergovernmental dialogue on security policy and provided the link between the European and North American members of NATO, has now been reduced to a purely vegetative state. The generally harmonious relations that existed between WEU and NATO have been replaced by a degree of antagonism, rivalry even, between the EU and NATO.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me, in my last address from this rostrum as President before I leave office at the end of the year, to share with you my firm belief in the services that our Treaty and our Organisation still have to offer in the future in order to promote European defence and, more generally, the project of European integration.

Our Treaty and the so-called "residual" WEU can still take European integration forward in a number of essential areas: one of these is the field of collective defence, with the unconditional mutual assistance clause in Article V of the modified Brussels Treaty, and another is that of democratic legitimacy, where the WEU Assembly, with its well-tested system of involving members of the national parliaments in European decision-making procedures and the implementation of those decisions, can provide a model for setting up equivalent arrangements within the EU. Moreover, the extraordinary flexibility offered by our Treaty as regards the creation of subsidiary bodies and institutions may provide a useful model on which to base certain cooperation projects in the field of the ESDP.

A substantive dialogue has already developed between the WEU Assembly and the EU, thanks to the double-hatting of the Ambassadors to WEU, who are also their governments' representatives on the EU's main crisis-management decision-making body, the Political and Security Committee. As we saw from the last meeting between the Assembly Committees and the members of the WEU Permanent Council, the Ambassadors themselves are making increasing use of that double-hatted role. There is a growing awareness of the need to discuss security decisions with national parliamentarians, due in particular to the growing complexity of the EU's civil and military operations, which must have the support of the national parliaments in order to succeed.

Following the temporary setback in the process of ratifying the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, WEU can still be used as an intergovernmental organisation. It could be the vehicle for a solution to the EU's current institutional crisis in the form of structured cooperation in the area of security and defence. However, although this would make up for certain shortcomings of the Constitutional Treaty – in particular the way in which its pseudo mutual defence clause is worded, because it only makes provision for non-binding solidarity – governments are unlikely to opt for such a solution, which would be tantamount to admitting that they no longer believe themselves capable of any further progress in this area of EU policy. The fact remains, however, that the process of handing over from WEU to the EU has brought to light the insurmountable differences among the EU member states as regards the role of collective defence. And yet, in this era of terrorism, a mutual assistance clause is a key part of any credible common security strategy.

It is in the field of crisis management that the EU has made the best use of the preparatory work done by WEU. This area has clearly benefited from the transfer of responsibilities from WEU to the EU.

A whole new process has been launched. The EU has very rapidly acquired the capacity to conduct its first civil and military missions and is currently involved in a number of operations in Europe – for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Darfur (Sudan) and Asia (Aceh). In addition, the member states have been able to agree on a European Security Strategy. Javier Solana is greatly in demand as a negotiator all over the world. The EU is playing a decisive part in all international negotiations with just a few – albeit important – exceptions. For that purpose it has at its disposal a broad range of diplomatic, economic and cultural instruments, and now also military assets.

(The speaker continued in English)

Nevertheless, there are still shortfalls in the area of civil and military capabilities. The European Defence Agency is therefore under considerable pressure to produce results fast. The difficulties encountered in trying to make the specific rules governing the armaments market more transparent, the fact that national interests are constantly being put first in this sensitive area and the reluctance of the members states to increase defence equipment spending are all damaging the credibility of the ESDP: military structures without equipment or soldiers do not make any sense. The defence ministers are still all too often ministers for labour and regional development, with many local jobs depending on national defence budgets.

The concept of the Petersberg missions inherited from WEU is being put into practice, but without much conviction. Only a few member states are making serious preparations for the higher-spectrum Petersberg operations, in other words, high-intensity combat operations aimed at putting a stop to violent conflicts. Other solutions are generally preferred. The African Union, encouraged by substantial financial aid to create its own crisis-management forces, is facing enormous problems of logistics. Nevertheless, this type of assistance is likely to become more widespread in the future, because military intervention by various member states in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans and Africa has brought home the huge cost involved in deploying European troops.

The EU member states should therefore reach agreement on new forms of financial solidarity. The current system of “costs lie where they fall” is dissuasive, as explained recently by the generals who addressed our conference on peacekeeping in sub-Saharan Africa, because each state has to bear on its own the costs of deploying troops and providing them with the equipment they need.

Our Assembly has put forward a number of proposals for organising the participation of national parliamentarians in the ESDP. Although no one contests the existence of a democratic deficit in the area of the ESDP, all attempts thus far to remedy it have failed – among other things because the idea of national parliamentarians forming a second chamber in Brussels was a source of concern for the European Parliament, which was jealous of its prerogatives. Conversely, some people would prefer the ESDP to come under the Community pillar, which would give the European Parliament co-decision rights. However, this is likely to remain in the domain of wishful thinking for a long time to come.

But, even if the ESDP were one day to move more in that direction, the national parliaments would still want to have a say in policy-making in Brussels. The need for this continues to be felt, as became clear in the debate on scrutinising the principle of subsidiarity which took place in connection with the Constitutional Treaty. As regards their activities at European level, the governments represented in the Council should be under an obligation to be collectively accountable to members of parliament as it is they who take the real decisions concerning the funds to be allocated to the ESDP and who, in many cases, are also the ones to decide on sending troops.

Perhaps the solution would be to set up in Brussels – where European policy is decided – a permanent forum composed of representatives of the national parliaments, which would discuss matters of security and defence, but also other areas of common interest. A deadline should be set. Let us say, 10 years. By then we will be able to take stock of the European Union’s progress and see whether there is a better solution for guaranteeing the participation of the national parliaments in European policy and the ESDP in particular. For I am sure I do not need to remind you that it is through the national parliaments that the electorate can make its views heard and that today, more than ever, European security really needs the support of public opinion.

These are one or two avenues to explore for the years to come. But for the moment we have not yet come that far and we need to use existing bodies such as our Assembly to move things forward by creating synergy with the European Union institutions and the European Parliament in particular. Indeed this is precisely what our Assembly has been proposing for many years.

Thank you for your attention.

6. Adoption of the draft order of business

The PRESIDENT – We now turn to the draft order of business for the Second Part of the 51st Ordinary Session of the Assembly.

I propose that we adopt the draft order of business contained in Document [1906](#).

Is there any objection? ...

I call Mr Mota Amaral.

Mr MOTA AMARAL (*Portugal*) (summary) said he wanted to make two comments regarding the order of business. The Secretary-General was not present. The President had noted this but the Assembly should protest. The second objection was that the speech from the United Kingdom Foreign Minister was to be delivered by the ambassador. The ambassador could not be considered in the same terms as the minister, as he could not be a substitute. He had every respect for the ambassador but did not think there should be a question and answer session after his speech.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Mota Amaral, a distinguished member of our Assembly and former Speaker of the Portuguese Parliament.

The majority of our Assembly could, I think, agree morally with your statement. On the other hand, I emphasise that there is a high level of interest in this subject. Together with you, Mr Mota Amaral, I had some important meetings in the Balkans only two weeks ago, when we went to Skopje, Pristina and Sarajevo. That tour was organised a long time ago by Mr Solana who has the same interest that we have in the matter. It was a good tour to make and was planned long ago on the same basis on which we are holding our discussion, and I was happy to see in what the Secretary-General sent to us much more content than we had previously.

On the presence of Mr Straw, the British Foreign Minister, I must say that the European Union is facing huge challenges over its budget. Mr Straw's mission is extremely important as he tries to fix the necessary budget for the EU. I would like us to hear the speech of the United Kingdom Ambassador, because to me the content of the speech is more important than the person who makes it. I was pleasantly surprised by the ambassador's speech at our previous sitting, when Britain was the incoming presidency, and when it comes to developing the ESDP, I hope that we will hear something similar from the ambassador in two days' time. I recommend my colleagues in the Assembly to listen carefully to the content of that speech, whether it is made by the minister or by the ambassador, and I hope that we can put questions that the ambassador will answer in a proper way.

Does anyone wish to comment? ...

I call Mr Walter.

Mr WALTER (*United Kingdom*) – I support Mr Mota Amaral's proposal regarding the deletion of questions and answers to the ambassador. As a member of the United Kingdom Delegation, I was acutely embarrassed at the last sitting of the Assembly when no minister of the United Kingdom was present. It would be wrong to have that repeated when the foreign ministry and the defence ministry contain other ministers. Once again to have just the ambassador to Paris, not even an ambassador with specific responsibility for WEU activity, is a slight on the status of the Assembly. It is inappropriate that an official should be treated in the same way as a minister, and we should not have questions and answers. We shall of course listen to the speech of Jack Straw, as the Foreign Secretary of the United Kingdom, in the guise of the EU presidency. To engage in questions, however, would be inappropriate to a parliamentary Assembly that should interrogate ministers, not officials.

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Lloyd.

Mr LLOYD (*United Kingdom*) – I did not intend to rise because you explained adequately why Jack Straw is not able to be here. In the meeting that he will attend at the time when we have a slot for the British representative, he will be acting as Chairman-in-Office, and his deputy will represent the British national interest, as would be the case for any national government. Inevitably, that has caused a problem, and I do not dissent from the word “embarrassment”.

However, when colleagues took the trouble to contact Colin Cameron, on behalf of our Secretary-General, and myself to make it clear that there would be a difficult clash, we faced the choice of not having a speech at all or of making a genuine attempt to say to the Assembly that it is valued. Ambassador Holmes is not a junior representative of Britain’s national interest but a senior ambassador and a man of great personal competence. The words that he speaks will be not his but those of the British Government. It is probably better if I do not engage with whether colleagues want to have questions and answers. I mean merely to establish that there has been no attempt to downgrade the role of the Assembly. In fact, rather the opposite is the case: over the last few months the British Government has been ever more determined to ensure that it has a proper relationship with the Assembly, and I hope that my colleagues will see the presence of the ambassador in that light.

The PRESIDENT – Does anyone else want to comment? ...

That is not the case.

If Mr Walter or Mr Mota Amaral draft an amendment, we can acknowledge their proposal. I invite them to do that formally, and we can then take care of the matter. We can deal with it later because we will not hear the speech until two days from now, but I ask them not to take too long.

Mr MOTA AMARAL (*Portugal*) – If you want to have a separate vote on this subject it should be excluded from the vote on the orders of the day. I and Mr Walter will move that the matter should be decided clearly by the Assembly.

The PRESIDENT – Colleagues, I put high importance on the content of the ambassador’s speech, which is important for the ESDP in general and the Assembly in particular. I propose that we take account of the proposal made by Mr Mota Amaral and, if he insists on it, we will have the vote after the ambassador’s speech on the question of whether we should have a question and answer session.

Mr WALTER (*United Kingdom*) – With respect, Mr Mota Amaral has made a proposal, which I have supported, to simply delete the line “questions and answers” from the draft agenda, and that we should vote on it now.

The PRESIDENT – An amendment to the order of business has been put forward by Mr Mota Amaral and Mr Walter. It is that on item 7 for Wednesday morning the words “questions and answers” should be deleted.

Mr Mota Amaral and Mr Walter are in favour of the amendment and Mr Lloyd is against it. Does anybody want to add anything to the discussion? ...

That is not the case. I shall now put the amendment to the vote by show of hands.

(A vote was taken by show of hands)

The amendment is adopted.

That means there will be no questions and answers after the ambassador’s speech tomorrow.

Are there any more questions? ...

That is not the case.

The draft order of business, as amended, is adopted.

The PRESIDENT – I would like to draw the Assembly’s attention to two events this evening. Following the end of our afternoon sitting there will be a briefing by Admiral Sergio Biraghi, the Chief of Staff of the Italian navy, on “Security in the Mediterranean and the role of the Italian navy”.

This will be followed at 18.45 by a ceremony in honour of the new honorary members of the Assembly.

7. Changes in membership of committees

The PRESIDENT – In accordance with Provisional Rules A.8 and A.9, I invite the Assembly to agree to the proposed changes in the membership of committees which are set out in Notice 6 which has already been distributed.

Are there any objections? ...

The changes are agreed to.

8. Election of a Vice-President

The PRESIDENT – The next order of the day is the election of a Vice-President of the Assembly, for the remainder of the session.

Rule 9 of the Rules of Procedure provides that proposals for candidatures for Vice-Presidents shall each be sponsored in writing by three or more representatives. Representatives who are members of a national government may not be members of the Bureau.

Also, Rule 6.1 lays down that substitutes may not be elected to the Bureau of the Assembly.

I have received the nomination of Mr José Eduardo Vera Jardim from Portugal for the vacant Vice-Presidency for the remainder of this session.

The nomination has been properly made in accordance with the rules.

If there is no objection, I propose that this nomination be approved by the Assembly by acclamation.

Is there any objection? ...

I take it that there is no objection.

I accordingly declare Mr José Eduardo Vera Jardim duly elected Vice-President, by acclamation. His seniority will be determined by age, under the provision of Rule 9.6.

9. Address by Mr Günther Platter, Minister for Defence of Austria, representing the incoming EU Presidency

The PRESIDENT – The next order of the day is the address by Minister Günther Platter, Defence Minister of Austria.

Minister, let me start by thanking you for receiving me in Vienna earlier this year and for finding time in your busy schedule to come and address our Assembly this afternoon. As we all know, Austria will take over the Presidency of the EU on 1 January 2006. We look forward to the contribution your country will make towards closer relations and even greater cooperation.

Minister, we are very interested in hearing your views on Europe's expanding role in global affairs, the challenges and threats in the new security environment and Austria's aspirations for its EU Presidency.

May I also say what a pleasure it is to welcome a former member of our Assembly, now wearing a ministerial "hat" – and the WEU pin – and to know that the forthcoming Presidency is in such good hands.

Minister, you have the floor.

Mr PLATTER (*Minister for Defence of Austria, representing the incoming EU Presidency*) (Translation) – Mr President, honourable members of the Assembly, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to speak to the WEU Assembly today and I would like to thank you for the invitation. I am very happy that when Stef Goris and his delegation visited me in Vienna, they invited me to come

here today to give you some information about the development of the European Security and Defence Policy and about Austria's upcoming EU Presidency.

I have here a pin that the President Stef Goris gave me. Normally it is only given to parliamentarians, but I was very happy to accept it, because six years or so ago I was myself in this Assembly and I therefore have certain ties with it, which makes it an even greater pleasure to address you today.

Ladies and gentlemen, given the events in 2005 and Austria's upcoming EU Presidency, I would like briefly to go into developments in the field of the ESDP and our programme for the EU Presidency.

You know that 2005 has been a very eventful year for the European Union. Many hurdles have been overcome and we have achieved progress in the area of European Security and Defence Policy. However, a number of discussions have arisen within the Union. As you know, the Constitution was rejected by referendum in two countries and on top of that we also have problems with the Union's financing. I therefore believe, quite apart from the issue of European security and defence policy, that we in the EU, above all its political leaders, should listen more carefully to what people really think and believe.

I think the EU should set rough guidelines and not concern itself so much with the details. One thing of course is vital: that we have the support of our citizens as we proceed along the crucially important path towards the EU.

What do the two "no" votes mean for European Security and Defence Policy? There is one thing that we should make quite clear: opinion surveys show that 80% of EU citizens are in favour of further developing the ESDP. Furthermore, as far as security and defence policy is concerned, there is no problem at all in the absence of the Constitutional Treaty with moving ahead towards the 2010 Headline Goal, the battlegroup concept, the solidarity clause and the European Defence Agency. However, given the "no" votes and the fact therefore that we do not have a European Constitution, we cannot further develop permanent structured cooperation.

I should point out that all the members of the Austrian Parliament except one approved the EU Constitutional Treaty.

Before presenting the key points of our Presidency, I would like, briefly, to make a few fundamental remarks of a general nature about the EU, the ESDP and the current threat scenarios.

I think you will agree with me that we can consider ourselves very lucky to live in a peaceful Europe. For the past 60 years there has been peace in all the member countries of the Union. Looking back over the past century, at the First and Second World Wars, it is hard to believe what people were capable of doing to each other out of hate and envy. The misery and suffering that our parents and grandparents had to bear are hard for us to grasp. We must all make it our business to ensure that there can never again be war.

Peace is now taken for granted. The younger generation – of which I consider myself to be a part – can consider itself fortunate to be in such a situation. But in this discussion let us never lose sight of the fact that the Union is the peace project. The enlargement of the Union to include 10 new member states has at the same time extended the European security area, and we are now surrounded by friends.

If we take stock, it looks as though all is well. We live in peace, freedom and security. But on the other hand we are confronted with totally new threats which are very difficult to apprehend.

The major threats we face are: the collapse of law and order, state failure, regional conflicts, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, organised crime and, in particular, international terrorism. How do we deal with this situation? As a rule of thumb we can say that no state in the world is capable on its own of countering those threats. This means that we must have cooperation between all European states, that we must pool resources. We also need closer and more intensive cooperation with security organisations like the UN, NATO and the OSCE. If we are to achieve security in the long term, we must of course also have a stable environment. We cannot remain indifferent to the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo. (I'll come back to these points later). Neither can we be indifferent to the situation in Afghanistan,

The people of Afghanistan have lived in a state of war for almost 25 years. As long as those people have no prospects for the future, the problems they have there will spread to Europe. It is therefore our common responsibility to further develop the European Security and Defence Policy. By that I mean that the EU must become a stronger player on the international scene in accordance with the ideas put forward in the European Security Strategy.

Following those general remarks, ladies and gentlemen, let me turn to the Austrian Presidency. At the present time the EU Presidency is held by the United Kingdom. Then on 1 January it will be Austria's turn for the first six months of 2006, and after Austria, Finland.

Our task is to reconcile conflicting interests, foster dialogue and make compromises possible. But another particularly important point is that our own selfish interests must come second. We have what I would describe as an optional programme and a compulsory programme. The components of the compulsory programme are as important as the key points we plan to tackle during our Presidency. They include forging ahead with the EU's operations in the security area and the implementation of the 2010 Headline Goal, step by step, which means further developing military capabilities, developing the forces catalogue and improving rapid reaction capabilities.

The third point is the battlegroup concept, which in my view was a quantum leap in the area of security and defence policy. Already at the last Defence Ministers' meeting we filled the gaps to ensure the permanent availability of battlegroups for the period until 2008, and the next task will be to fill the further gaps after 2008. We attach particular importance to the fight against terrorism. Although this concerns an area within the remit of the Interior Ministers, we Defence Ministers are responsible for making available the requisite military resources for providing assistance. We must synchronise capabilities so that we can offer the best possible assistance in the fight against terrorism. In this respect we will endeavour next year to define more precisely the role of the ESDP in this area.

Another point we will pay constant attention to during our Presidency is that of relations with our international partners such as the UN, NATO and the OSCE. Relations between the EU and the African Union are also important. Those are the key points. Let me now turn to two particular priorities that we have set for our Presidency.

The first is civil-military coordination. Looking at the various operations in which we are involved, we see that almost none are traditional military missions; rather they involve a mix of military, civil and police operations. This means that we must achieve even better coordination of capabilities. Also – Africa, precisely, and Sudan in particular, is a good example – we must add a stronger civilian component to the military operations. A third area calling for civil-military coordination is that of assistance in the case of natural disasters. We saw this with the tsunami and with the earthquake in Pakistan. Indeed, Austria has 66 soldiers involved in setting up water filtration plants in Muzaffarabad. In those natural disasters the presence of the EU as such has been scarcely perceptible. They have brought home the urgent need for the EU to act in a coordinated fashion; we cannot have individual states competing to some extent with each other, each acting on its own in an uncoordinated fashion. This is why Austria, together with the UK and Finland, has drafted a non-paper which carefully studies this situation with a view to developing coordination in this area within the Union.

Where do we stand at present on this point? A Civil-Military Cell has already been set up within the EU Military Staff and we are also in the process of setting up an Operations Centre there. The procedure will be as follows, just to give you an idea of the next steps that we need to take: we need management of operations. This means, for example, in the event of a natural disaster somewhere that calls for international assistance, having a European pool of experts which can fly people out to the disaster area immediately, within 24 hours, in order to collect and convey to us the necessary information. Then we need civil-military coordination, with the Operations Centre in the EUMS planning and conducting civil-military operations. Let there be no mistake: these assistance operations will need to be organised as quickly as possible. We will therefore pay particular attention to the reporting of available capabilities so that we can have rapid access to the requisite resources in good coordination with the responsible defence ministers. I am convinced that by means of such measures and by speaking with a single voice, the EU will play its role at international level and make a major step forward in the area of disaster relief, with the Civil-Military Cell providing quick, efficient and competent assistance.

Our second priority will be the Balkans. You will easily understand that Austria – like, I am sure, all other member states of the Union – is greatly interested in the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Three weeks ago I visited fellow defence ministers as well as presidents and prime ministers of the Western Balkan region. So where do things stand as far as Kosovo is concerned? First of all, there are the negotiations on the future status of Kosovo. In addition, in spring 2006 there will in all likelihood be a referendum on independence for Montenegro. All these events will unfold during the Austrian Presidency and perhaps continue during the Finnish Presidency. The question is, what effect will all this – the referendum and the status negotiations – have on the population? How will the people of Kosovo react? Let me make one thing quite clear: we should not scale down the military presence in Kosovo. At present we have 17 000 soldiers deployed in the region. I know that this is a NATO operation, no question about that, but even so our aim is to ensure that there are no troop reductions. For the moment there are 17 000 soldiers. Once the referendum and status negotiations have taken place we will need to give fresh thought to how we should proceed in the future. Second point: Bosnia and Herzegovina. Althea is a classic EU mission. Things are going very well there for the EU: We have every reason to be satisfied with the developments in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In fact I was there only last Wednesday, because Austria has taken over the military command of Task Force North. We can be pleased with ourselves. But this military presence remains necessary. At the last Defence Ministers' meeting in Brussels a week ago we discussed the possibility of troop reductions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (there are 6 700 soldiers there at present). We agreed on a very small decrease (from 6 700 to 6 000), but this must not in any way detract from the quality of the operation. An important event in Bosnia and Herzegovina will be next autumn's elections; only after these have taken place can we reassess the situation and see whether troop reductions might be possible there. That will be the appropriate time at which to start that debate.

As regards the Balkans, I believe that in future – in the medium term – the EU must take even more responsibility, especially in Kosovo. I also think that in addition to the military presence there are a number of measures that we need to take. We must try to bring the countries of the Western Balkans closer to the EU. We must try to help to bring the training standards of those countries' military institutions closer to those of the EU. Furthermore, we need to assist with setting up security structures in those countries. Their civil infrastructure is also in need of improvement. To sum up, then, a military presence must go hand in hand with civil measures in order to guarantee long-term stability.

These then are our two main priorities. But let me add another point with regard to the EU Presidency. Obviously one cannot change everything in six months. What is important is continuity, which means good cooperation between the successive presidencies. We have excellent cooperation at present with the outgoing UK Presidency, as well as with our successor, Finland. After Finland it will be Germany. It is important to ensure that all the efforts we begin are taken forward. Only in this way can the EU function, which is why I attach immense importance to such continuity.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, since I am speaking to you in my capacity as Austrian Defence Minister – and by the way I am happy to see members of the Austrian parliament present in this chamber – you will certainly want to ask what contribution Austria is making to the further development of the European Security and Defence Policy. Looking back over the last 45 years, I see that Austria has sent more than 60 000 soldiers to various crisis spots all over the world. At present 1 300 Austrian soldiers are deployed in international operations: some 900 in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (which is the main thrust of our peacekeeping activities), 370 in the Golan (this is a classic UN operation), and we also have troops in Sudan and Afghanistan, in addition to the ones I mentioned in Pakistan.

We are in the process of reforming the Austrian armed forces. The key aspects of that reform have already been decided and were, I am pleased to say, the object of a national consensus across party-political lines. We wish to Europeanise our armed forces and to make them more professional, more efficient and more international, so that we can contribute further to the different peacekeeping operations. It is important too not to neglect our tasks at national level, because it would be a grave mistake not to live up to peoples' expectations at home.

May I say once again how pleased I am to have had this opportunity to address your Assembly. WEU is in my view an important consultative body, a consultative parliamentary body, I should say. In the future we will need to discuss to what extent there are possibilities for scrutiny by WEU. This calls for

close examination and it is a question that I follow carefully. There are different opinions in the different states. But I have already seen clearly that there are many areas in which WEU has given good advice for the further development of the European Security and Defence Policy. I am thinking for example of civil-military coordination and the whole issue of armaments. I am also thinking of the European Defence Agency. If I am not mistaken, the seed which grew into that excellent institution was planted here.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your attention. I am very happy to answer any questions you may have.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Platter, for your excellent address and for being with us. Your address was ambitious but at the same time realistic and pragmatic. You have put forward many interesting elements about which our colleagues can ask questions.

Eight colleagues have put down their names for questions but if anyone else wishes to ask one, please raise your hand and give your name to the Table Office so that Mr Cameron can take note.

I shall take questions in groups of three. First, I call Mr Walter on behalf of the Federated Group.

Mr WALTER (*United Kingdom*) – I thank the Minister for his informative and instructive address on the Austrian Presidency. He knows that he will take over responsibility for more than a dozen active defence commitments under the ESDP when Austria takes over the presidency. They will ultimately be the responsibility of the European Council and the General Affairs Council.

I have two questions. Given that the European Parliament has no competence in this area and that it would be impossible for the national parliaments of the 25 EU member states and of the other countries involved, does he feel that we should now move towards institutionalising and codifying the parliamentary scrutiny provided by this Assembly, which is the Interparliamentary European Security and Defence Assembly?

Secondly, would it be possible in his capacity as president of the General Affairs Council to instruct its most senior official, the High Representative, who is also Secretary-General of this body, that he should be subject to parliamentary scrutiny and attend meetings of our Assembly?

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Jelinčič.

Mr JELINČIČ (*Slovenia*) – Under Article 7 of the State Treaty after the second world war, Austria accepted that signs with bilingual town names would be posted in regions with an autochthonous Slovenian minority. You have done practically nothing to fulfil that international obligation. Will you work in the direction of annihilating the autochthonous Slovenian minority or will you change your policy, which is internationally unacceptable?

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Höfer.

Mr HÖFER (*Germany*) (summary) noted that Austria and Finland were both neutral countries, and asked how this was to be reconciled with the necessity for an active European defence policy.

Mr PLATTER (*Minister for Defence of Austria, representing the incoming EU Presidency*) (Translation) Mr Walter, you put the first question on the subject of parliamentary scrutiny. You were critical of the fact that the European Security and Defence Policy is mainly in the hands of the defence and foreign affairs ministers and you asked who is responsible for the scrutiny of those matters. First of all, in my view we certainly need to debate these issues at national level. Next week, on 15 December, I will be inviting all the responsible Austrian parliamentarians, the members of the Defence Committee, precisely in order to have an exchange of information and discussion with them. Indeed, it is important that we ministers should win the broad acceptance of members of parliament for the further development of the ESDP, because if we can achieve that, then we will increase acceptance among the public at large. As I said during my presentation, we are in the fortunate situation of having 80% of public opinion in favour of further developing the European Security and Defence Policy. We can of course discuss who should be responsible for scrutiny of that policy and to what extent the European Parliament should become even more involved and how far WEU should assume those tasks. You heard me say in my conclusions that this Assembly is a body which should of course discuss these matters. But then we need to give thought to the question of who is a member of this Assembly. At present there are 10 full members, the others have

associate or observer status. So if we were to seriously consider giving WEU a fully new responsibility for parliamentary scrutiny, then we have to look very closely at the composition of this Assembly, at voting rights and other such issues. We need to prepare the ground in that way and discuss on that basis. Obviously we need to sound out these issues at national level. Once the decision or discussion has taken place at national level, then I think it should be discussed here in order to draw the appropriate conclusions.

Regarding the second question concerning the High Representative, I do indeed of course meet him often and will pass the information on to him: I feel I have been given the responsibility for conveying that message to the High Representative on behalf of this Assembly. But you can believe me when I tell you that he is very much in favour of a broad exchange of information. He obviously has a huge number of meetings to attend but I will do my best to bring my influence to bear to that he may have the opportunity of speaking here. This then is the message I will take back to him.

Regarding Slovenia, you used some pretty tough language and I certainly understand your concern. Let me explain why I personally understand it so well. In Austria we had a similar situation in South Tyrol. I believe it is important to take problems of minorities extremely seriously and tackle them properly. My father is from South Tyrol, so I myself experienced a lot of discussion in my own family about the situation there, although it has since very much improved. Regarding the Slovenian minority, I can assure you that our Chancellor, Mr Schüssel, is extremely keen to resolve these issues. But on the other hand, we have to achieve a consensus. We must work on the basis of compromises, as the road which leads to conflicts is not the right one. We need compromises in order to find a solution that is satisfactory for both sides. Please understand that I can only speak on this matter as a member of the Austrian Government, not in my capacity as Defence Minister. The Defence Minister does not have responsibility for this issue, except indirectly as a member of the government. But I can assure you as regards security and defence policy that we have excellent relations with Slovenia. We have a very close dialogue and very extensive cooperation, including in the field of operations.

The last question was about Austria's neutrality. This is a question that is often raised, quite rightly in my opinion. Let me explain the legal and constitutional situation. In 1998 the government – the Grand Coalition – introduced Article 23(f) of the Constitution authorising Austria to participate not only in international peacekeeping, but also peacemaking operations. So there is now no legal obstacle to the Austrian armed forces' participation in all international peace missions and there is no problem for Austria in participating in the battlegroups. Even so, this question gave rise to a debate in Austria. Austria's neutrality has of course changed. The security situation has evolved considerably in the years and decades since the cold war, when the threats we faced were quite different. Now the key issue is solidarity. This is why it was necessary to adapt our constitutional law, our law on neutrality. I think that we have made and are making major efforts to achieve such solidarity. Now and in the future we will make our contribution to international peace missions, as indeed we did in the past. There are, however, three essential points as regards our neutrality that were agreed at the time with the signatory powers: no participation in a war, no participation in military alliances and no foreign troops on Austrian soil. These remain the core principles of our neutrality. But this does not prevent us from participating on the grounds of solidarity in international peace operations, including the battlegroups. As you know I am very pleased that Austria is to set up a battlegroup together with Germany and the Czech Republic; the preparations are currently under way. Thus Austria has a major contribution to make in all areas to the further development of the European Security and Defence Policy, now and in the future.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you. I have closed the list of speakers. We have nine members who wish to ask questions.

I call Mr Malins.

Mr MALINS (*United Kingdom*) – Thank you, Mr President, and I thank the Minister for his interesting and excellent speech. I wish to ask about the so-called battlegroups, which consist of about 1 500 troops, and I think that there are 30 of them. Could the Minister tell us which groups exist and which countries provide them, and what they are intended for? Have they been used in action, and if so where? Who commands them, and who makes the final policy decisions as to whether they can be deployed? Is there input to those decisions from national parliaments?

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Malins.

I call Ms Jipa.

Ms JIPA (*Romania*) (summary) asked the Minister for his view on the contribution Romania could make to security and defence in Europe.

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Falzon.

Mr FALZON (*Malta*) – I thank the Minister for his interesting address. As we are all aware, questions of defence in the Mediterranean area are discussed in Malta with particular reference to the problem of illegal immigration from the African continent to the southern coastal European countries. This is of great concern because of the arrival of several hundred illegal immigrants on the shores of Malta, who intend to establish a base within the European Union. As Austria will be the incoming European Presidency, I take this opportunity on behalf of the people of Malta to congratulate you and to hope that you will accomplish all your aspirations and ambitions.

Mr PLATTER (*Minister for Defence of Austria, representing the incoming EU Presidency*) (Translation) – Let me start with the question about the battlegroup concept. As you know, this concept was only recently developed and we are still at the stage of preparing those operations. A battlegroup is composed of 1 500 soldiers. The composition of battlegroups varies. Some are set up by a single nation, others involve cooperation among several nations. It all depends on the capabilities of the different countries. The important thing with this concept is that all EU member states are to be involved and commit forces. An important aspect of the concept is the rapid availability of forces to deal with a sudden crisis. I could mention, for example the unrest in spring of last year in Kosovo. There were violent incidents, such as churches being set on fire. If we had had battlegroups then we might have been able to stabilise the crisis spot rapidly. But unfortunately things were not done in such an optimum fashion in 2004. It is extremely important to have rapidly available forces to deal with such a crisis and battlegroups would have been a good solution. You mentioned an important point about the decision-making process at national level. Battlegroups mean rapid availability of forces: we must be able to deploy within five to fifteen days. So how is such a decision taken? In Austria, as indeed elsewhere, we need a decision at national level, but it needs to be taken quickly. In most EU countries parliament must approve the deployment of national troops abroad. This, in any case, is the situation in Austria and I cannot think of a single EU member state where it is not the case. For a Defence Minister this is quite a conundrum. You need a compromise accepted by all political parties. But the problem is that it has to be agreed fast. The system in Austria in the past – and presumably this will continue to be the case in the future – is as follows. The government can come to a decision fairly fast and then the Speaker of Parliament can convene the Committee very quickly in order to take a decision with the full involvement of parliamentarians. I should add that a deployment to a sudden crisis, like the one in spring 2004 in Kosovo, is a particular scenario, but that for normal operations such that with parliament will have taken place well before. For the battlegroups however there is the possibility of discussion with the national parliament. As I say, the key issue is the rapid availability of these expert forces.

Regarding the contribution that Romania can make, the Romanian Defence Minister visited me recently in Vienna and we had numerous discussions. I believe it is important to show solidarity, to show the readiness to participate in the different missions. What we do for all ESDP missions – this is the case for example of the EU-led mission Althea – is to cordially invite countries which are not EU members but are expected to join the EU to take part. This is in the interests of stability and of a secure environment in Europe.

Regarding Malta, I must say I am familiar with the situation there, because I spent two weeks on holiday there and of course I read the press regularly. Not a day went by in which there wasn't some reference in the press to the problem of illegal immigration. I appreciate therefore how difficult it is for your country. This question is of course not the responsibility of the Defence Minister but what I said applies in general: we need a stable environment, not just in the Balkans but also in Africa, for example in Sudan. Otherwise the problems there are exported and a country like Malta feels this particularly acutely and other European countries are affected too. We have a similar problem with the Balkans, because Austria is the first country of interest to illegal immigrants from that direction. We are in the process of adopting some tough measures to prevent such illegal immigration. On the other hand, as regards

immigrants living in Austria, we make every effort to ensure that they are fully integrated and involved in Austrian society.

Another important question is that of the Schengen standards, which is the responsibility of the interior ministers. We must ensure that all countries achieve those standards. Once that is the case we can develop a new security concept for the EU's external borders. This problem cannot be left to a single country to deal with. No country on the EU's new borders, such as Malta, can be expected to deal with it on its own. So these are the two aims: to achieve the Schengen standards and to adopt a common security concept concerning the EU's new borders. This is the only way we can deal with our common problems together.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Platter.

Six more colleagues wish to ask questions, so I would ask them please to be succinct because time is passing by and we still have two reports to discuss.

I call Ms Petrescu.

Ms PETRESCU (*Romania*) (summary) congratulated the Minister on his address, noting that the ESDP was to be important in Austria's presidency. She wanted to know what was meant by "civil-military aspects".

She asked the Minister about Romania and defence policy and how Romanian efforts were progressing towards EU accession.

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Mercan.

Mr MERCAN (*Turkey*) – On behalf of the Turkish delegation, I too should like to congratulate you on your presidency.

As you know, Turkey has just started the membership process with the EU. Turkey has also been a major contributor to the ESDP as well as other defence instruments within the EU. Yet Turkey, together with Norway, has been prevented from being an active participant in the European Defence Agency as a result of blocking by one member country. I should like to know what your presidency will do to resolve that issue. All EU members except for one want Turkey and Norway to be active participants in the EDA. What will your presidency do to solve that problem?

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Murauer.

Mr MURAUER (*Austria*) (summary) noted that the Minister had underlined the importance for security of the Balkans and south-east Europe. What was the role for the European Union in that area? Austria was neutral but helped in the development of assistance and solidarity outside the framework of the draft European Constitution; it was not a member of NATO but supported PfP, the Partnership for Peace. What cooperation would there be between NATO and the EU? Would it be intensified and would it be more than "Berlin plus"?

Mr PLATTER (*Minister for Defence of Austria, representing the incoming EU Presidency*) (Translation) – Of course we attach the utmost importance for our Presidency to the issue of security and defence policy. As I explained at the beginning of my remarks, the engine of the European Union has stalled and I think the ESDP could act as a kind of lubricant to get it up and running again. We have many possibilities and the situation is extremely favourable, in that there is broad support among the citizens of the Union for continuing resolutely with the development of security and defence policy. Regarding the civil-military component, a particularly important aspect, as I tried to make clear just now, is that of natural disasters. Citizens expect the EU to provide the same sort of coordinated assistance and to make available the same military resources in terms of personnel and equipment as they expect at national level. In Austria and Germany, for example, the population expects the armed forces to help deal with the consequences of a natural disaster at national level, because the civilian and voluntary services simply would never have the capacity to cope on their own. The population has very high expectations as regards the provision of those resources, even if this is not a classic task for the military. They have the same expectations at international as at national level. This is why Austria, the United Kingdom and Finland have launched an initiative in this area.

Another question was how to resolve the problem of the EU Constitutional Treaty. Again this is not directly the task of the defence ministers, but we do need to decide how to move resolutely forward with the ESDP in the absence of a constitution. We could take the example of WEU, which was founded in 1948, with its mutual assistance obligation in Article V. In fact it has gone more resolutely down that path than NATO, while the EU has been unable to adopt the necessary implementation measures. As regards the constitution as a whole, therefore, we need to find compromises, but that is not enough. With referendums being held, it is necessary to increase overall public support for the development of the EU. I do not believe that the “no” votes signified a rejection of the constitution itself. I cannot of course judge the specific situation of the countries concerned, but I think that the “no” votes were above all a means to an end, a way for people to say that they were not very happy with the way things were going in the EU. We all know that we have here a unique opportunity. From the military standpoint, in terms of the project for peace, it is an incredible achievement. I think it is up to us to listen more closely and give careful thought to how we can get the public to support us along this road towards the Union. I believe it is in everyone’s interests that we should think very carefully indeed about each step. If we move too far and too fast with enlargement, this may not only be disadvantageous for the accession country, but it may also affect people’s support for the Union. This is the problem we have to tackle. If the population at large no longer supports the steps we take we will find ourselves not with two, but with a number of countries which reject the constitution. Thus, although this may sometimes be hard to accept, we need in some cases to proceed with caution. That is my personal opinion.

(Ms Petrescu repeats her question about the 1 January 2007 date for Romania’s accession).

It is difficult here and now to give a firm date. What is important is that standards be met and then we will take stock of Romania’s progress and take the decision accordingly.

Regarding the question about Turkey, I would like to say that I had excellent talks with Turkish Defence Minister Günül, including in Ankara. I took a cautious position, not because I wished to offend anyone, but for precisely the reasons I have just described. We simply must think carefully about each step that we take. The negotiations will take place, the standards have to be met and the EU constantly needs to give careful thought to what it can reasonably accept and what it can cope with at a given time. This is why it will be incredibly important to be able to convince the public to support each of the steps we take.

You mentioned the European Defence Agency. Of course I am not the chairman of that Agency: that is Mr Solana himself. It Mr Solana’s job to conduct the necessary preparatory work and then we will see what decisions will be taken in the future. At the present time the members of that Agency are the EU member states, but we have many problems to overcome. At the last EDA Steering Board we agreed on a voluntary code of behaviour so as to ensure that the European dimension of armaments procurement programmes takes precedence over national interests. I am sure that Mr Solana will work very effectively in this area.

Another question was about how I see things developing in the future in south-east Europe. I think, as I said before, that the Union must shoulder even more responsibility in Kosovo. I can imagine that UNMIK might be taken over by the EU in the years to come, perhaps even at the end of next year, as a step on the way towards the Union sooner or later conducting a classic EU mission in Kosovo. Hence this interim administration by UNMIK is an opportunity for the EU to issue a clear signal and we are currently in the process, particularly at the level of the foreign ministers, of preparing the ground for all this.

NATO and the EU: quite frankly there has always been some friction. In particular those countries which are members of both organisations have the problem of avoiding duplication, of having to make available more resources at a time when they do not have the possibility of doing so, because the European countries’ defence budgets are not exactly huge. This is why an ESDP liaison cell has been installed at SHAPE, while NATO people have been installed in the EU Military Staff so as make for even better cooperation. But we must not imagine we can cope with all the problems ourselves in the framework of the ESDP, We need close and effective cooperation with NATO. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, we need to have recourse to NATO structures to be able to effectively conduct our operation there.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Minister. We have a final round of questions from our colleagues. I remind everyone once again of the time because we have two reports coming up.

I call Mr Gubert from Italy.

Mr GUBERT (*Italy*) (summary) said that the basis of defence for the European members of NATO was NATO. What did this mean to an Austrian, neutral presidency?

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Monfils.

Mr MONFILS (*Belgium*) (summary) said that he was not interested in the membership of the EDA, but in what the EDA should do. The code of conduct was a minimum. What would happen in the next six months: would there be more common programmes? Would there be political pressure to strengthen the EDA in its partnership with the United States? At present, the ratio was one to ten in defence matters: the EDA could create a better balance.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Monfils. The next question is from our colleague, Tony Lloyd, from the United Kingdom.

Mr LLOYD (*United Kingdom*) – Thank you, Mr President.

In your wide-ranging and excellent speech, Minister, you emphasised several times the very varied nature of the challenges that we face both in Europe and beyond it. One of the brutal realities, however, is that when Europe has faced challenges post-cold war, Europe itself has often not been capable either in resource terms or in terms of political will to match up to those challenges. On some occasions, we have certainly had to rely on the United States, for example.

Does the Minister believe, in the very difficult trade-off that exists in all our societies in which we need to persuade public opinion that defence budgets do matter, that we are prepared to gift the resources to our common security? Are we in the process of ensuring that we have those resources so that when these crises break out – as some day they almost certainly will – we are prepared and properly able to face them.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Lloyd, for your question.

I call Mr van WINSEN.

Mr van WINSEN (*Netherlands*) (summary) wondered whether the Minister thought that there should be more emphasis on fighting terrorism within ESDP. How would it be possible to involve the EU's eastern neighbours, including Russia?

The PRESIDENT – I call the Minister to reply.

Mr PLATTER (*Minister for Defence of Austria, representing the incoming EU Presidency*) (Translation) – Thank you for those questions. I would like to answer the last question straight away, because it is a question to which I attach particular priority. Let me make it clear that when I referred just now to optional programmes and compulsory programmes, I did not intend in any way to minimise the importance of the fight against international terrorism, quite the contrary. The fight against international terrorism is a compulsory programme to which we attach the utmost priority. I mentioned civil-military cooperation and the Balkans as two key tasks for our Presidency: the first is a new development that we need to pursue to take on board our experience of past events, and the second is important of course because the EU must assume greater responsibility for that region in the future. But international terrorism is *the* problem we face at the moment. The solidarity clause was a crucial step in that it provides for mutual assistance in this area.

Unfortunately the attacks in Madrid and London brought home the fact that terrorism is now in Europe, and that no country is immune to that threat and that no country can afford to be indifferent to it. This is why we are in the process of ensuring that all the necessary means and resources are made available. This entails first of all taking a number of preparatory measures at national level. I am referring here to the interaction that must take place between the different bodies. The Interior Ministry is the overall body in charge and it must coordinate with the military structures and the various other services

and voluntary bodies, including the fire brigade and Red Cross. They must draw up plans and scenarios at national level in order to be as well prepared as possible in the event of an attack.

The second aspect is international assistance. We have not yet completed the process of reflection on that point, and we need to further discuss and define the precise role to be played by the military structures of the EU member states in the fight against international terrorism. This is a point which we will pay particular attention to during our Presidency. I take the view that the military should make available all the necessary resources. We must work with specialists at national level to draw up the arrangements for taking action in case of need, for protecting people and property and so on in the event of a terrorist attack. A particularly important point is cooperation among the different services. The armed forces, defence ministries and interior ministries must exchange the information needed to make an assessment of the situation. We must know where there is information about a likely terrorist attack: you know that some information usually trickles through somewhere. But all that information needs to be collated. I know that the different countries tend to be somewhat sparse in the information they provide but we must demand that we receive it from the different services so that we can assess the situation and judge where and when a terrorist attack is likely. Indeed I call on all the national parliaments to insist that this information is provided so that, in cooperation with other organisations, we can get put together a complete picture in Brussels. That then is my position on international terrorism.

Another speaker mentioned the brutal realities of the post-cold war period. It is true that during the cold war, the front lines were clear. Today they are less clear and the situation is more difficult to apprehend. But we know what the problems, the main dangers are. I mentioned them earlier: regional conflicts, organised crime, international terrorism. And we need the help of the United States. We Europeans cannot deal with these problems on our own. Anyone who believes otherwise is mistaken. I am deeply convinced that without the US and without NATO we cannot resolve the difficult crises we face. This is why this cooperation between the European Union and NATO is so important.

Regarding defence budgets, our own budget is small compared with that of other states; I freely admit that we do not have much money available in Austria. We need to work within the framework of available resources – because let us have no illusions, in no country are there likely to be any big increases, given the immense problems we have to deal with elsewhere: in the social, economic and health spheres, on the labour market. But however thrifty we are, we must remember that without peace and security companies will not invest, there will be no jobs. However, not all countries need to have identical resources. The whole point of the ESDP is that the different countries make different resources available to each other. Take the problem of airlift, for example: we have huge problems there, only a few countries have the requisite capabilities. But not all armed forces must be capable of all tasks. The whole idea, precisely, of the battlegroups is to pool resources.

The European Defence Agency will certainly offer possibilities as regards the financial and procurement aspects. The focus of that Agency is European armaments, of course, but not only that. We must also make progress in the area of research and development. I am thinking for example of UAVs and space research. Also we must push through common projects.

You asked what contribution we can make. Austria has contributed to one European programme, the Eurofighter project, indeed this gave rise to much parliamentary debate in Austria. Yet this is a purely European product involving Germany, Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom. I believe therefore that we need to procure such common products which are important for our autonomy in the area of procurement.

Another question was: how does a country that holds the EU Presidency but is not a member of NATO behave? The answer is, very correctly. Austria, it is true, is not a member of NATO but we have been a member of the Partnership for Peace for 10 years and are involved in many NATO operations, for example in Kosovo and Afghanistan. We are therefore very sensitive to the need for dialogue between the EU and NATO in order to avoid duplication and to cooperate effectively in order to build the stability that is the prerequisite for peace and security.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you for your excellent address and for answering so many questions. I also thank you for your invitation to the Defence Committee to make a study visit to Austria in February.

We look forward to welcoming you back in June, at our next meeting, so that we can debrief you about your European presidency activities.

(Mr Hörster, Vice-President of the Assembly, took the Chair)

**10. The way ahead for the European Security and Defence Policy and its democratic scrutiny –
reply to annual report of the Council
Parliamentary debates and public opinion on European integration**

The PRESIDENT – The next order of the day is the presentation of and joint debate on the report of the Political Committee on the way ahead for the European Security and Defence Policy and its democratic scrutiny – reply to the annual report of the Council; and the report of the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations on parliamentary debates and public opinion on European integration.

I call the Rapporteur, Mr Manzella, to present the first report.

Mr MANZELLA (*Italy*) (summary) said that his address had been preceded by an important address from the President and an interesting exchange with the Austrian Defence Minister.

The report revolved around three areas, the first of which was the institutional framework of the European Security and Defence Policy. The ESDP operated within its own framework which the Constitutional Treaty had set out to include. The treaty spoke of structural cooperation. At a practical level, this would have involved a level of cooperation between full integration and the current level of cooperation. It was important to stress that, in spite of the crisis in Europe, the ESDP was still moving forward. Civil military defence was important, and close cooperation between the military and civil sectors was vital. The development of the multinational gendarmerie was important for combating the new threats. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty should not be seen as a reason to halt closer cooperation in this area. This, and the presence of EU forces around the world, were also important symbols demonstrating that in defence Europe was moving forward.

The reports of the Assembly were the only reports prepared at EU level. He noted the link between the WEU apparatus and democracy, and asked what the Assembly was. The answer was that it was a meeting point between the European Parliament and national parliaments. Mr Solana had an important role.

His next point related to the role Europe was to play in Africa and the Balkans. Africa was seen as a source of problems, but it should serve as a source of optimism for Europe. The Balkans were also important: they were inside but also outside Europe.

On Iran, Mr Solana, with France, Germany and the United Kingdom, was doing his best to avoid another war. When WEU representatives went to Washington, they found differences of opinion on Iraq but not on Iran. He asked what Europe was doing then – it was trying to avoid a war. Domestic threats in Iran were not helping.

Europe needed to go beyond military policy. The greatness of the European Constitution was that it did away with the concept of war and moved on to peacekeeping. This was to happen even where countries had neutrality clauses in their constitution. It was a pity in this respect that there were problems with the constitution. Nevertheless, these problems meant that WEU was important.

He also mentioned that there had been problems with financing operations.

The relational framework should also be mentioned. There were two points. One was the founding relationships of the ESDP with NATO and how to go beyond the Berlin plus arrangements. This was a political problem. The framework was out of date and WEU had to work on this. The Americans adopted a practical approach to relations but they needed to understand how Europe worked.

Relations with eastern borders were the second point. While the strategic partnership with Russia should stay intact, relationships with eastern states were also important. Countries on the eastern borders required stability, and this was in the report.

The Assembly should recall what was written in point 27a of the Treaty on European Union – that the EU must find its identity by acting as a coherent force on the world scene.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Manzella.

I call the Rapporteur, Lord Russell-Johnston, to present the second report on parliamentary debates and public opinion on European integration.

Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON (*United Kingdom*) – Mr President, colleagues, one would be forgiven for being a bit pessimistic today. It has not been what one would call a good time for Europe. First of all, there were the hammer blows of the French and Dutch referendums, then quite a big budgetary dispute, and finally a really rather uninspiring British Presidency – so far anyway. It is as if the bleak winter winds, which are already making us shiver, are being replicated throughout the structures of the EU.

But forget not the words of the poet: “If winter comes can spring be far behind?” There are already propitious signs. The malaise will pass. I am in no doubt whatever that if Europe does not unite, it will perish. Of course, that would not happen at once, but it would happen ineluctably and with pervasive force.

If, as a group of small and medium-sized long-established states, with our histories of the prejudices that they breed, cannot recognise that our only salvation – and by the way, the salvation of the value system that we have evolved, often with difficulty and pain and out of the blood of wars into which we have dragged the whole world – is to work together, we will be engulfed.

At this moment, the United States is the pre-eminent world power. I wish it were more interested in international cooperation. But the rising economic and hence political and cultural challenges, which in particular will come from Asia, are evident for all to see. China towers over all. But India, for example, had a growth rate of 6% last year, and Japan is still powerful and innovative.

So the report, apart from recording what has happened in respect of the EU Constitution, which was intended to make Europe more integrated and therefore more able to stand as a unit, sets out the history, which is not very extensive. But when it comes to advocating action, essentially all I say to my colleagues – to you – is that you must go out and do something about it. Paragraph 7 of my explanatory memorandum states: “At the time of writing, the situation is still muddled. Some countries have continued with the ratification process while others have shelved it until solutions are proposed.”

Remember that the situation within the European Union is not the same everywhere. There is a vast difference, for example, between the attitude in Spain and that in France, and there are many other contradictions. The purpose of this report is, once again, to encourage parliamentarians to play an active part. We must not neglect the opportunity of engaging in dialogue with citizens who have so clearly withdrawn their support for European policies implemented by an elite that has become isolated from the electorate. That is not true everywhere, of course, but there is a lot of truth in it. So the European Security and Defence Policy plays a pivotal role.

A well-known British newspaper, the *Financial Times*, carried an excellent article by the French Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie and I would like to quote some of it so that it can be included in our report. It was a really constructive, encouraging and helpful article. It is headed – the heading is very good and positive – “Security could be Europe’s great rallying point”. We have already heard the Austrian Defence Minister as well as our own President pointing out that, in all the opinion polls, whatever the variations in attitude from one country to another in respect of the proposed Giscard constitution, there is commonality of attitude in respect of the need for more effective defence and security cooperation.

Madame Alliot-Marie writes as follows: “I believe a combined initiative in the defence and security field could help revive both confidence and action in Europe. This, after all, is the domain that attracts most support across the EU, as demonstrated in the constitutional campaign” – by which she meant in France – “not least, the EU’s citizens are aware that development of the European Security and Defence Policy contributes to their daily security . . . In recent years ESDP has acquired an indisputable operational credibility, thanks to its operations in Macedonia, in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, today, in Bosnia, where ‘Operation Althea’ has taken over from NATO. Europeans have real know-how in terms of crisis management and an ability to play a part at a military as well as civilian level.”

I shall provide just two more quotes. It is seldom that I have the opportunity to quote a French defence minister at length, but she deserves every quotation to be read out. In fact, I was almost tempted to read the whole article. She says, and I very much agree; “To back up future EU operations, we must also develop a common European strategic culture.” That is very sound thinking. We all caught the enthusiasm of Günther Platter a few moments ago, although he kept saying that he was a cautious fellow, so it is possible to have enthusiastic, cautious people. It is not a contradiction. Our President was also enthusiastic. Colleagues, we have a clear cause to proclaim, and we must go out and do it. The public will respond.

Finally, I end by publicly thanking Marisa Nudda and her taut little team, which supports the Parliamentary and Public Relations Committee, for all the hard work that went into researching the report. I also take the opportunity to congratulate my co-Rapporteur Vilija Aleknaite of Lithuania before she speaks. I am sure that I will be in trouble for mispronouncing her name but it is not badly meant. She has produced a pellucidly clear picture of what took place in a new member state. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT (Translation) – Thank you, Lord Russell-Johnston.

Does the co-Rapporteur, Ms Aleknaite, wish to speak?

Ms ALEKNAITE (*Lithuania*) – Dear colleagues, it is of course not so easy for me to make my speech after Lord Russell-Johnston, whose English sounds so good, but not only for that reason. It was useful for me as a new politician in our Assembly to take part in the preparation of this report. I remember our spring session, but I am afraid that in the spring, the mood was a little bit better.

Before taking any action, we were faced with two possibilities: we can succeed or we can fail. This is not an original idea. I have only cited Mr Giscard d’Estaing, the former President of the Convention on the Future of Europe. He used this phrase in his inaugural speech in the year 2000. I am thinking about the present, and the stiff fate of the report prepared by us. I do not want to state that we have failed – not at all! However, we are witnesses to the undeniable fact that the process of ratification of the constitution for Europe became a serious political problem for the future of Europe.

When I return from our session in Paris, I and my colleagues from the Committee on European Affairs will meet to discuss how Lithuania and its politicians can contribute to the implementation of plan D, proposed by the European Commission. The introduction of the euro in Lithuania in 2007 is the most important issue for my people. On the other hand, how can we explain to our electors that the decision-making mechanism in Europe is beginning to crumble?

There is no clear consensus for a compromise on the financial perspective. Even the consideration of the formation of the EU budget for next year faces difficulties. The worst thing for us as politicians will be explaining these problems to Lithuanians, who, until now, put more reliance on EU institutions than on the political parties of Lithuania. Before going to meet our electors, we have to answer one simple question: what does Europe mean for us – the politicians of contemporary Europe?

Observing the vibrant European political theatre, one could conclude that the EU and Brussels have often been assigned the negative role of political actors. If you read some leading European newspapers, you could imagine that Brussels was a fairytale dragon with whom a rivalry is always worth while. You could start to believe that the brave political leaders of nations, prime ministers and ministers live in permanent battlefield, where they are waiting for the right time to fight so that they can demonstrate their courage in front of their electors. Victories in Brussels can lead to victory in the next national elections.

Colleagues, remember that some years ago we all came together to march in the battle for the enlargement of Europe and now we have to deal with the issue of having no additional public expenses. Some leaders have even proposed that the new member states should give in for the better future of Europe. I am talking about the financial perspective. Is it really intended that plan D should be implemented according to these national scenarios?

Some may say that I am over-colouring the situation. Of course, I am a little, but while the political schemes and rivalry with Brussels and the defence of national interests look highly acceptable in the context of public relations nationally, eventually it becomes a problem for us politicians when we have to sacrifice some of our national ambitions in order to reach a fair compromise.

The theatre of public relations always seems a little virtual, but the real drama of Europe begins when we face the real challenges and threats. It is not always comfortable to name them. There are many internal and external challenges nowadays. The demographic crisis is deepening. There is reasoned consideration of the flexible immigration policies that can prevent European economies from deteriorating.

At the same time, some strange processes occur in some communities of migrants who do not show enough enthusiasm for accepting European values and principles and who do not put enough effort into integrating into European society.

Threats are posed by the persistent global flashpoints and, globally and around us, by rising oil prices, and by Europe's increasing single-sided dependence on Russian energy resources. A common European voice and position in this respect would be very significant. It is no wonder that the Baltic states and Poland are concerned about Russia's attempts to sign bilateral agreements with the old member states of the EU, without the involvement of European central institutions.

For example, Russia came to an agreement with Germany on gas delivery that ignored the strategic interests of the new member states. If Russia notches up a success by what is in fact dividing Europe, it could lead to the renaissance of underhand dealings and the subdivision of spheres of influence in European policy. The common European position on foreign and security policy would be an appropriate antidote to the aforementioned threats.

The European Constitution provided a mechanism for joint action. Although it was incomplete, the most important thing was that it was adopted by compromise. The constitution will not eliminate the differences between the power of the large and small member states but it would be helpful if we could eliminate the psychological dividing line that still exists between them. With the ambitious EU enlargement, the introduction of the single currency and the ambitious constitutional process, the EU could become a very powerful player in world politics as well as the main political player in world trade and, importantly, the player who does not pose a threat to world peace or the future of mankind. As Mr Giscard d'Estaing said, "Every inhabitant of our planet would feel better if he or she could head a loud and solid European voice." I assure you that Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonians would really feel better.

The PRESIDENT (summary) thanked the Rapporteur and the co-Rapporteur for their presentations on behalf of their committees, and said that as the debate was behind schedule and there were now nine members on the speakers list, the list was closed.

Mr ZACCHERA (*Italy*) (summary) said that he had four points to make. First no convention on combating terrorism had been agreed by the United Nations General Assembly. This was important, because if there were no common approach to, and no common definition of, terrorism, there would be divisions.

The second point was the Euro-Med partnership. More forces were needed in the Mediterranean, not only for security reasons but also to help integration with North Africa.

The third issue was relations with Iran. The question of Iranian nuclear weapons had been hitherto considered only as a foreign policy issue: it should also be a defence issue. Defence ministers should be involved since it was vital to develop a policy to deal with the possible eventuality of Iranian nuclear weapons.

The fourth point was relations with Russia and eastern Europe. The European Union now had a special relationship with Russia, but problems continued nonetheless, arising out of relations between Russia and countries which had formerly been members of the Warsaw Pact. Poland, for example, wanted to develop its own relations with Belarus, the Baltic states and Ukraine. It was not possible to have a discussion on defence and security without talking about Europe's borders. The draft recommendation and resolution contained of the report should be approved.

The PRESIDENT (Translation) – I call Mr Gubert.

Mr GUBERT (*Italy*) (summary) said that, according to studies, people trusted the army and the police more than other public institutions; this was in stark contrast to the past. People would trust the

armed forces if they felt that they produced security. Democratisation of the modern state had also helped improve trust, as it meant that the armed forces were democratically accountable.

The EU security strategy document saw a global role for the EU in guaranteeing security. Sometimes this would necessitate the use of force.

The European Parliament did not have a role in the scrutiny of ESDP, but neither did national parliaments. This had weakened democratic accountability of European armed forces. The creation of a European state required a military capacity. There should be a similar relationship between European institutions and the European army as there was between national institutions and their armies.

Respect for subsidiarity was vital to securing approval from the people of Europe for a European army.

(Mr Goris, President of the Assembly, resumed the Chair)

The PRESIDENT (summary) said that the session would continue in parallel with the address of the representative of the Italian Navy, which would begin in five minutes. He anticipated that the session would finish within 35 minutes.

He called Mr Walter.

Mr WALTER (*United Kingdom*) – Thank you, Mr President, I shall try and be as brief as possible.

These are two excellent reports. I do not agree with every word of their recommendations, but I think that the Assembly can support their basic thrust. This afternoon, we saw the Assembly do its job in respect of democratic accountability and scrutiny with the way that it approached the Austrian Defence Minister. As an Assembly, we should try to develop that approach over the coming months and years.

We must be very conscious that, in many areas, the European Security and Defence Policy operates under the authority of the European Council, but I disagree slightly with the Rapporteur's suggestion that the European Parliament provides democratic scrutiny. As I said in my question to the Austrian Defence Minister, the European Parliament has no competence in this area, so member states undertaking intergovernmental actions are responsible to their national parliaments and parliamentarians.

We must be very conscious that national parliaments cannot take a collective view on European defence policy and thus provide that democratic scrutiny. That would be impossible, although the suggestion was made in the deliberations that we should have some form of scrutiny. The Constitutional Treaty has not been ratified formally by all the member states, and it will be some time before we return to it but, essentially, it limited the role of national parliaments to that of a conference of European parliamentary committees.

In the report, the Rapporteur quotes Mr Wilhelm van Eekelen, the former Secretary-General of WEU, as saying that that “would be a step back in comparison with the work of the WEU Assembly, because the members of COSAC do not have a mandate... Infrequent and non-committing parliamentary conferences cannot replace the institutional arrangements of a fully fledged assembly.” However, this is a fully fledged Assembly and we should be moving towards institutionalising and codifying our parliamentary and democratic scrutiny. For that, we need the cooperation of our national governments.

One of the first moves that we should make in that direction is to change the status of many of the nations represented here. That means that many of the nations that have recently joined the European Union should be invited to sign the modified Brussels Treaty to make them full members of this Assembly. In that way, we would meet the criticism made by the Austrian Defence Minister, which was that this Assembly was not representative of all the nation states.

This is an excellent debate and these are two excellent reports. Although I said that I disagreed with some of the detail, I have no hesitation in supporting both of them.

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Mercan.

Mr MERCAN (*Turkey*) – Thank you Mr President. I shall cut my speech short.

I would like to thank the Rapporteur for his very comprehensive report. I am especially impressed by the way that it argues why, in further developing the ESDP, one should bear in mind the WEU *acquis*, which was very instrumental in the formation of the policy.

I cannot deny that, as a WEU associate member, the nature of the relationship that Turkey enjoyed with the organisation was more open and transparent. Today, we also enjoy a close relationship vis à vis ESDP.

Let me add also that, since the inception of ESDP, Turkey has made very clear her intention to support and contribute the policy in parallel with our prospective membership of the EU. Today I am happy to share with you the fact that Turkey has become one of the major contributors to the ESDP, both in terms of operations and capability cooperation. Turkey is an indispensable component of European defence since the second world war when it became party to all major European organisations and initiatives. However, that is even more true in the field of armaments. Strong and coherent European defence requires Turkey and other non-EU European allies to be in the picture. Otherwise one of the main principles of European defence and security – indivisibility – will be under serious threat.

Against that background, the Rapporteur rightly points to the EU's obligation to finalise the necessary arrangements between the European Defence Agency and Turkey and Norway. Unfortunately, the deal is blocked by one EU member state. I regret to say that I could not get a clear answer to that question from the Austria Defence Minister this afternoon.

Furthermore, there is a tendency in the EU to isolate Turkey from the EDA. That is not in compliance with the WEAG-WEAO *acquis*, nor with the principle of the indivisibility of security. I repeat that Turkey's lack of participation poses a serious challenge that may jeopardise the further development of European defence. I urge my colleagues here to bring this issue to the attention of their governments once again.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise that we see merit in the valuable work carried out by this Assembly in providing democratic scrutiny to the ESDP on the one hand, and on the other in bringing together under its roof the members of national parliaments, thus providing an opportunity for closer contacts and the exchange of views between peoples.

This Assembly provides the most inclusive forum to discuss European defence security with all EU members, candidate countries for accession and non-EU European NATO allies. Therefore, in the coming years, this organisation must continue to play its role as the Interparliamentary European Security and Defence Assembly.

The PRESIDENT – I call Ms Becerril.

Ms BECERRIL (*Spain*) (summary) said that the period of reflection following this referendum should have been used to explain the nature of Europe to the public; however, this had not happened due to other issues which had distracted the British Presidency. Although cooperation between nations was to be supported, it remained necessary for the EU to take a clear position on integration. Furthermore, the immigration issue had to be raised up the agenda.

The PRESIDENT – I call Mr Cebeci.

Mr CEBECI (*Turkey*) – Thank you, Mr President. I should like briefly to express my opinion on the report on parliamentary debates and public opinion on European integration.

Dear colleagues, from the initiation of the project at the Laeken summit for the establishment of a convention for drafting a Constitutional Treaty to the signing of the treaty in Rome, Turkey has been involved in this historic process. Our colleagues in the Turkish General Assembly have participated actively in and contributed to the deliberations of the convention.

Turkish Government representatives have also participated as observers in the ICG meetings on the Constitutional Treaty. During this period, our Government continued to brief us on the negotiations as regards the Constitutional Treaty. Following the initiation of the ratification process in member countries, my colleagues from the Turkish General Assembly have been invited to seminars and discussions held in various member states so as to present Turkey's view and experiences in this important debate.

Given such active involvement, it was upsetting to observe that the recent unfortunate developments on the future of Europe, and in particular on the Constitutional Treaty, have indirectly but adversely affected the debate on Turkey's EU membership.

It is natural that enlargement constitutes one of the aspects of the debate on the future of Europe, and Turkey is happy to participate in that debate as a prospective member of the EU. However, recent trends to exploit this issue, to the extent of making Turkey out to be an obstacle, are nothing more than a distortion of the real picture. The EU cannot ask the candidate countries that have started the accession negotiations to shoulder responsibility for the recent unfortunate events.

Public opinion in Europe, especially in France and the Netherlands via referendums, and in other countries via consultative ballots, has shown how remote people feel from the EU. As the Rapporteurs correctly said, European public opinion is unfortunately indifferent to the ongoing debate in the EU. The reason for that indifference may be the failure to establish a proper connection between people's lives, demands, concerns and the issues of the EU, and the incomprehensible language sometimes used by the EU.

As elected representatives of our people, it is our duty to ensure that people's concerns are reflected in the decisions adopted on the future of Europe. We have to be the forerunners in taking further initiatives to launch debates on the future of Europe in our own countries.

We as Turkish parliamentarians attach great importance to the efforts aimed at better informing and explaining to the public at large the issues concerning the future of Europe. Those efforts would, I trust, also result in erasing the prejudgments prevailing against Turkey's EU membership. In that respect, I hope and trust that I will receive the cooperation and support of my fellow parliamentarians in this Assembly.

Throughout the ongoing debate on the future of Europe, many pros and cons of the Constitutional Treaty are being mentioned. I observe that contradictory and various views unite on one aspect – that the EU needs a treaty, possibly with a constitutional dimension. This period of reflection should be utilised for choosing the best option on how to proceed. Whether the Constitutional Treaty is revised or a new one drafted, the core would still be the same. What needs to be done at this time is to communicate it better to the people.

I congratulate the Rapporteur on an excellent report on the subject. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT – Once again, I ask the four members who still wish to speak to be as succinct as possible as we are running out of time.

I call Mr Clerides.

Mr CLERIDES (*Cyprus*) – I will try, Mr President, to be as succinct as possible, although the subject matter of the debate is huge.

I, too, congratulate the Rapporteurs on their excellent reports, although I do not necessarily agree with all their conclusions.

I start with the report on the constitution for Europe and public opinion on European integration. Of course, there is much that may – I emphasise may – be done to revive the dead constitution. Suggestions have been made and they should be followed, but whether they will succeed in reviving it, I am not sure. I am not sure whether it would be possible to revive the constitution in the minds of the people when the percentage of those unemployed has reached double digits in most European countries.

Sometimes European institutions have to struggle to “fight terrorists”, but there is a danger of sacrificing human rights on the altar of political expediency. There is a lack of coherent policy on international issues such as Iraq. We have heard talk of old Europe and new Europe, but we now hear talk of spying on telephone calls and recording conversations for six months. That does not help to create the proper climate for going forward with the constitution. As Europeans, we really have to tackle the gist and the substance of the problems. Yes, we need policies; we need dialogue; we need the help of non-governmental organisations; we need debates: we need all of that. However, we must tackle the real problems that are of concern to the European citizen, including the new enlargement – the widening, as opposed to the deepening of Europe. Those are the concerns of the European people.

All that relates, of course, to the issue of Turkey, which has already been touched upon by two of my Turkish colleagues. Of course, I realise that this is not a debate about the accession of Turkey to the European Union, but I want to remind my friends, in connection with the European Security and Defence Policy, of the complaint of Turkey that it is being prevented from becoming a full member. The report, as I see it, does not recommend full membership because we cannot put the cart before the horse. If you cooperate, you have a role to play, but you also have to bear in mind that the negotiation framework on Turkey's accession states that there has to be a normalisation of relationship with all 25 members of the European Union. The French Prime Minister made it clear when he referred to the unfortunate situation of Turkey failing to recognise a member of the European Union – the Republic of Cyprus. We have to implement the Ankara protocol and extend it to all 25 members – not 24, but 25. Finally, Turkey must not block Cyprus from participating in various other international institutions. There is therefore a long way – a thorny way perhaps – until the final destination is reached.

Finally, on the question of defence, we have come a long way. It is true that we have missions, we have special representatives, we have Headline Goals and we are working towards building a common foreign, defence and security policy. However, we still have problems. I will conclude on this note: the problems arise because we sometimes forget that we must have a common culture relating to defence and security. That common culture can be based only on full respect for the principles and values of international law, international community and, of course, the ideas of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Only when we can inject into this proposed policy those common European values can we hope for a better future. Thank you.

The PRESIDENT – I call Ms Petrescu from Romania.

Ms PETRESCU (*Romania*) (summary) thanked Lord Russell, Rapporteur and Ms Aleknaite, co-Rapporteur for the excellent report on this subject. The report talked about the Constitutional Treaty, and was optimistic, despite the rejection by two founder member states. The report was useful and talked about the positive contribution that could be made by colleagues.

The PRESIDENT – The next and last speaker is Mr Aarna from Estonia.

Mr AARNA (*Estonia*) – Thank you, Mr President. I should like to add some comments to the report on parliamentary debates and public opinion on European integration. Let me start by congratulating the Rapporteurs, Lord Russell-Johnston and Ms Aleknaite, on their realistic insights into the problem and for their comprehensive coverage.

The Estonian delegation fully supports the initiatives described in the draft resolution to this document. Developments in the field of European integration have much in common with respect to the three Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Our nations have devoted overwhelming support to our accession to the EU. More than 60% of votes were in favour of European integration in the national referendums.

Concerning the ratification of the Constitutional Treaty, the situation is somewhat different. Lithuania was the first country to ratify the treaty in November 2004. Latvia did the same in June this year. In that context let me quote paragraph 36 of the explanatory memorandum: “Estonia planned to ratify the Constitutional Treaty through a parliamentary vote. In June the Estonian Parliament decided to postpone this vote until the autumn. The text of the treaty has been transmitted to Parliament, which still has to decide whether it will be put to a consultative referendum. According to the latest Eurobarometer opinion poll, Estonians are still fairly keen on the Constitutional Treaty although there has been a significant drop in support of 12 points.” Everything stated in the explanatory memorandum about Estonia is correct. I must admit that during the autumn session of our parliament there has been a modest debate and no decisions concerning ratification. Additional legal expertise has proved that the parliament has full power to ratify the treaty. That situation seems to be applicable not only for Estonia.

I have one final remark concerning a statement in the first paragraph of the explanatory memorandum, which reads, “The public at large is not really interested in other issues such as the European Union's somewhat incomprehensible budget problems, the functioning of its enlarged institutions”, and so forth. The visit of Prime Minister Tony Blair to Estonia and Hungary last week and

his discussions with the prime ministers of the so-called new members of the EU have definitively shown that the EU financial perspective for the period 2006 to 2013 has generated a wide public resonance.

I conclude by calling on my colleagues in this Assembly not to underestimate the ability of our electors to understand complicated European Union issues and draw the relevant conclusions.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Aarna.

The debate is closed.

I call the Rapporteur, Mr Manzella, to speak on behalf of the Political Committee.

Mr MANZELLA (*Italy*) (summary) addressed the questions related to his report. He said there was a need for greater cooperation between the EU and the United States. The management of ports was also important. He believed that nowadays there was a better understanding of the democratic role of the armed forces, since they were better integrated into society.

The President had been clear over the competence of European Parliament in defence policy, but the existence of a Defence Sub-Committee in the European Parliament meant that in practice it did have a role. The WEU Assembly was different to national parliaments and to the European Parliament, but *de facto* cooperation, even though it was growing outside the Treaty, should allow Turkey to become part of CFSP. It was necessary to uphold shared values: this was true of CFSP, but also of all European Union policy.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Mr Manzella.

I call the Rapporteur for the Committee for Parliamentary and Public Relations, Lord Russell-Johnston, to reply.

Lord RUSSELL-JOHNSTON (*United Kingdom*) – I shall speak also for my co-Rapporteur, Ms Aleknaite, who does not wish to speak again. I thank all members who said nice things to both of us about the report. We appreciate that because everyone likes people saying nice things about them.

Ms Becerril was right on the ball. She was very good. She was right to say that when there has been the most criticism of the EU and what it is doing, members of parliament are afraid to go out and tackle the issues. In all our countries, we are becoming responsive all the time. When I went into politics 50 years ago, I went out to meetings to tell people what I believed, not to ask them what I should say. There has been a change in that respect that is not necessarily for the best.

I agree with Mr Clerides that human rights are often sacrificed on the altar of expediency and that that is happening now. It is also true that unemployment and enlargement are drawing the attention of many people in many countries.

If this is the deal that is to be worked out on finance, it does no credit to the British Government if it is to arrange to maintain its rebate while reducing the structural moneys of the east. I believe that that is a wrong approach but I am only speaking personally.

Mr Aarna said that there would be no referendum in Estonia. I agree with that decision because I do not believe in referendums. What are parliaments for but to learn about the issues and defend or reject them before the public?

I did not really say that people did not understand, but that they were not necessarily terribly interested. They do not go to bed at night clutching their copy of the European constitution so that they can read the next chapter.

The PRESIDENT – Thank you, Lord Russell-Johnston.

The Political Committee has tabled a draft recommendation to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft recommendation contained in Document [1915](#).

Under Rule 35 of the Rules of Procedure, if five or more representatives or substitutes present in the Chamber so desire, the Assembly shall vote by roll-call on a draft recommendation.

Does any member wish to propose a vote by roll-call? ...

That is not the case. We shall vote by show of hands.

(A vote was taken by show of hands)

The draft recommendation is adopted.

The Committee on Parliamentary and Public Relations has presented a draft resolution, to which no amendments have been tabled.

We will now proceed to vote on the draft resolution contained in Document [1912](#).

Under Rule 35 of the Rules of Procedure, if ten or more representatives or substitutes present in the chamber so desire, the Assembly shall vote by roll-call on a draft resolution.

Does any member wish to propose a vote by roll-call?...

That is not the case. We will vote by show of hands.

(A vote was taken by show of hands)

The draft resolution is adopted.

11. Date, time and orders of the day of the next sitting

The PRESIDENT – That concludes our business for this afternoon.

I propose that the Assembly hold its next public sitting tomorrow morning at 10.00 with the following orders of the day:

1. Peacekeeping in Sub-Saharan Africa: a practical approach. (*Presentation of the report of the Political Committee, Doc. [1913](#) and amendments*)
2. Address by H.E. Ambassador Said Djinnit, Commissioner for Peace and Security, African Union Commission
3. Peacekeeping in Sub-Saharan Africa: a practical approach. (*Resumed debate on the report of the Political Committee and vote on the draft recommendation, Doc. [1913](#) and amendments*)
4. Statement by Ms Lyubov K. Sliska, First Deputy Speaker of the Duma, Leader of the Russian Delegation

Are there any objections?

The orders of the day for the next sitting are approved.

Does anyone wish to speak?...

The sitting is closed.

(The sitting was closed at 18.50)