

Towards a European defence policy: can Europe's security deficit be closed?

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to join you at this first European Congress on European Defence, and I congratulate my colleague Karl von Wogau for his role in convening this conference.

We in the European Parliament have spent many hours in recent weeks and months debating the enlargement of the European Union, and the political, economic and institutional implications of a Union of 25 Member States. But only 10 days ago, NATO experienced an enlargement which is perhaps even more historic, with the admission of a further 7 new members from countries including some formerly part of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The membership of the two organisations, NATO and the EU, will overlap to a great extent in 2004. Yet the gap between the capabilities of NATO and the EU in security and defence is exceeded only by the security chasm which separates Europe and the United States.

For years, the key question for many observers in the debate on European integration has been how to address the democratic deficit. The question I propose to address in my remarks today is: how can Europe close its security deficit and move towards a genuine European security and defence policy? Before examining this question, I will also consider the new security threats we face in an increasingly uncertain world, how NATO is reforming in response to those threats, and how the EU can best contribute to the global campaign against terrorism.

Before turning to these themes, I would like to recall the fundamental principles underlying the ELDR's position on ESDP:

1. The European Security and Defence Policy should not seek to compete with the Atlantic alliance, which remains in our view the foundation of the collective defence of its members. Neither should it mean the setting up of a standing European army.
2. NATO is and still remains the indispensable bond which links the USA (and Canada) to European security interests. The European Liberals attach great importance to the maintenance of good transatlantic relations, but we will not shy away from criticising our American ally where necessary, as only a candid friend can.
3. The Liberal Group welcomes the enlargement of NATO, which serves the building of peace and stability in Europe, and calls for the reintegration of French military forces with the Atlantic alliance.

Facing up to the new security threats

It has become a cliché to say that 11 September 2001 changed the world beyond recognition, but there can be no denying that the terrible events of that morning dramatically redefined the transatlantic defence relationship and changed the terms of reference for the debate.

One day later, at the suggestion of Secretary General George Robertson, the 19 permanent representatives of the North Atlantic Council invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time in the Alliance's history. This was a powerful sign of solidarity: NATO was founded as a collective-defence organisation to protect the territories of its member states from outside attack, and on 11 September, America was under attack from an outside threat. But the nature of the attacks and the shadowy foe that perpetrated them demonstrated that

NATO as currently constituted is not prepared to respond quickly and effectively to this new global threat.

Combating terrorism requires more than military means. In fact, a major military operation makes sense only if the source of terrorism can be linked with a state-actor. Even then, the fight will require a host of non-military measures, ranging from internal security to combating money-laundering, none of which NATO can fully address. So while the collective defence guarantee remains at the heart of NATO, the war on terrorism is a new type of conflict, and NATO has to adapt.

Some experts have suggested that NATO prepare to act collectively against the new out-of-area threats to the security of the Alliance. Most notably, US Senator Richard Lugar has called NATO "the natural defence arm of the transatlantic community, and the institution we should turn to for help in meeting new challenges such as terrorism and weapons of mass destruction."

But does the rhetoric stand up to the reality on the ground? It is certainly true that of the 18 US Allies in NATO that have armed forces, 15 have contributed to Operation Enduring Freedom. British, Canadian, Danish, German, and Norwegian troops have fought on the ground with some 1,000 special forces; pilots from several NATO nations have flown combat missions, and a multinational fleet has been stationed in the Indian Ocean to support the operation.

In addition, several European allies have contributed forces to the Turkish-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a 4,500-strong peace support operation that is providing internal security in and around Kabul which needs to be expanded elsewhere in Afghanistan. Some would argue that the military assistance by NATO allies proves that *Enduring Freedom* is not a unilateral American operation, and underscores the concrete nature of NATO's article 5 guarantee, even if NATO itself has no flag flying in Afghanistan

But one has to face up to the hard truth - when it came to the crunch, when America was under attack, it chose to act outside the framework of NATO to defend itself. While there are indeed many European countries with troops on the ground in Afghanistan, they are not there under NATO command.

So why was NATO sidelined in Afghanistan? Neither NATO nor the Europeans had ever prepared for operations, nor for a type of combat, requiring primarily special forces and air-delivered precision-guided munitions. The broad nature of the coalition was also a factor: there are at least 30 coalition partners participating in the operation. In addition to 15 NATO allies, active participants include Australia, Japan and other friendly countries with no treaty obligation to defend the United States.

But the US decided to bypass NATO in the Afghan campaign in part because its command structure does not lend itself well to conducting this kind of warfare. The experience of Kosovo, where all 19 members of the Alliance had to approve targeting lists, left some in the United States convinced that NATO is too unwieldy a body to run a war.

However, while the United States may be in a position to act without NATO given its hegemonic military position, European politicians have to ask: how would Europe respond if, as seems likely in view of Al Qaida's large presence in Europe, we are the next target of a major

terrorist attack? Without wishing to tempt fate, if, for example, the next attacks were to come in Brussels, it is unlikely that the Belgian military would be capable of planning and commanding a similar operation without relying on NATO. So if NATO is to provide for the defence of all 19 Allies, it must adapt its structure to be relevant. And I believe that a European Security and Defence Policy has a vital part to play

Adapting NATO to the new terrorist threat

To help NATO rectify this situation, the Allies agreed major reforms at the Prague Summit. They included decisions to set up the NATO Response Force first proposed by US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in Warsaw in September, and to streamline NATO's military command arrangements. They also decided to make new commitments to improving necessary military capabilities,

The NATO Response Force should provide NATO with a more nimble and flexible instrument to respond to the new threats we face. When it is fully operational no later than October 2006, the NRF will be able to deploy in a matter of days wherever the Alliance might need to send it. The force will operate as a NATO Combined Joint Task Force, with up to 21,000 personnel.

Among the possible missions for the NRF could be crisis response, such as non-combatant evacuation; to deter aggression as a "proactive force package," designed to accept reinforcements; or as an initial entry force for large-scale operations that would secure ports and lines of communication and prepare a theatre for forces, such as NATO operations in Kosovo.

The NATO Response Force would be smaller but at a higher state of readiness than the EU Rapid Reaction Force. The US proposal envisions a rapidly deployable force of two brigades compared to up to the 15 brigades the EU seeks too be able to call on. In addition, while the EU force would be prepared for a range of missions from civilian evacuations to peace enforcement operations, the NATO force would need those capabilities plus the ability to fight in collective-defence missions under Article 5, and if necessary under nuclear, biological or chemical conditions

Some have argued that the NRF will undermine the EU's proposed Rapid Reaction Force, but they should be seen as complementary, not as competitors. NATO needs a capability to act out of area, but the EU also needs the capacity to act without America where necessary, but with the use of NATO planning and resources. That is why an agreement with Turkey on access to NATO resources is so vital - this cannot continue to be a pawn in the dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus, nor a bargaining chip in Turkey's ambitions for a date for EU accession negotiations to begin.

However, it is no use NATO creating such a force if it is unable to act due to a rigid and inefficient decision-making hierarchy. That is why the measures also announced in Prague to streamline NATO's cumbersome military command arrangements are so important. The intention is to finalise by June next year a leaner, more efficient and effective command structure. We will be able to consider the new structure a success if, for example, it enables decisions on which installations to target for missile strikes to be made more quickly, or perhaps even allow such decisions to be delegated to commanders on the ground on the basis of guidelines set by the Alliance.

The setting-up of the NRF and the streamlining of NATO's military command structure could be interpreted as NATO's response to the need to shift from a concept of collective defence to one of collective security. So what can Europe's contribution be?

Non-article 5 missions: a chance for Europe

In addition to the Article 5 operation in Afghanistan, the Allies currently have troops devoted to three non-Article 5 operations in South-eastern Europe. While NATO has done an admirable job in these missions, there is no overriding requirement for the Alliance to conduct every non-Article 5 mission.

The European Union has recognised that there are times when the Alliance as a whole may not wish to be engaged in a particular operation, and it has developed ESDP as a way for European countries to undertake such missions. Already, the EU is moving toward taking over Operation Amber Fox.

It is important to maintain a clear understanding of the different roles played by NATO, which has an Article 5 component, and the EU, whose ESDP is limited to the Petersberg tasks, which include humanitarian and rescue operations, peacekeeping, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management including peace enforcement.

Some observers have expressed surprise that the EU has played a limited military role in the war on terrorism. Others have claimed that the rise of ESDP means the inevitable demise of NATO, as European nations increasingly look to the EU and away from the transatlantic relationship.

But such declarations of surprise and alarm ignore the different objectives and capabilities of ESDP and NATO. ESDP is meant to give European countries a military capability to enhance the credibility of their foreign policy objectives and, if necessary, to manage crises without needing to rely on their North American allies. The single corps that is to make up its rapid reaction force would be sufficient only to carry out an operation like IFOR (the initial deployment in Bosnia) or KFOR. NATO, by contrast, is a collective-defence organisation responsible for defending its members against outside threats, drawing on the overall military strength of both Europe and North America.

If it develops properly, ESDP can augment NATO capabilities, run peace operations, and enable European nations to act alone to manage crises if the North American Allies choose not to become involved. The two organisations must complement each other, not compete with each other, by giving more space for NATO to be more involved in combating terrorism. But for ESDP to make this contribution, Europe needs to start taking defence seriously and making a real commitment to closing its security deficit.

Closing Europe's security deficit

In comparison with the US, NATO's 16 European Nations spend a total of \$ 500 million a day, compared with \$ 1 billion by the US. The US defence budget for 2003 has been increased by \$ 48 billion, which is more than the defence spending of any single European state.

With the exception of Greece, whose defence spending is around 5% of its GDP, EU states spend less than 3% of their GDP on defence, with seven of them spending less than 2%. Until a short while ago, only Greece, Germany and the Netherlands had shown substantial increases in their defence spending. However, the United Kingdom recently declared an increase of £3.5 billion (€5.5 billion) between now and 2005-06, providing annual average real growth of 1.2% in the defence budget - the largest planned boost in defence spending in the UK in 20 years. French President Chirac immediately followed with a call for a €1 billion rise in French defence spending.

In Prague, the UK and France were joined by the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Portugal in promising to raise their defence spending. This commitment is a necessary step, but although European countries have to face up to the need to spend more on defence, we also have to spend better. The main problem is that hardly any European country can deploy useable and effective forces in significant numbers outside its borders, and sustain them there for months, let alone years. Europe still needs US help to move, command and ensure provisions for any major military operations.

Among the forty areas where deficiencies in military equipment have been identified, the most crucial shortfalls are in: strategic transport, munitions and guided missiles, special forces, attack helicopters, control and command systems, exchange of information, communications and theatre missile defence.

It is important for Europe to close these gaps, not because they limit the scope of any autonomous mission that the EU may wish to undertake. They are also a huge problem for transatlantic relations. It is hard for Europeans to answer the question of American sceptics - "where's the beef?" - when many of their governments appear to be doing very little about developing the necessary capabilities.

Addressing these deficiencies is therefore a major priority whether viewed in the NATO or EU context. Progress can be achieved primarily by rationalising defence efforts and increasing the synergies between national and multinational projects. A strong, efficient and viable European Armaments industry, including research and development capacities and an effective procurement policy, is vital to the development and the improvement of ESDP.

Fortunately, some progress was also made in Prague in planning to close the capabilities gap: each NATO nation committed itself to provide specific equipment, from aircraft and missiles to field hospitals, within defined timeframes. In all, they signed up to 408 commitments to produce forces that can deploy further and faster with all they need to fight, support themselves wherever and for however long they need, defend themselves effectively against any enemy or weapon, and strike hard with increased accuracy. I hope that NATO will closely monitor progress towards meeting these commitments, and name and shame any country which fails to meet its targets. Its record in the past few years has not been encouraging.

Concluding remarks

For we are now operating against the clock - there is no room for complacency in the current uncertain world. Europe can no longer afford to free ride on higher US military spending. It is time for the European Union to develop political and military muscle commensurate with its economic clout.

We have to make the case to our citizens for a sustained increase in defence expenditure, but accompany this with reforms to get better value for our spending through economies of scale at European level. NATO is working hard to prove its relevance in a changing world by reforming as well as enlarging itself - the European Union has to do the same.

A European Security and Defence Policy can usefully complement the collective security provided by NATO provided there is a rationalisation of Europe's arms procurement industry, added value in the form of a doctrine based on conflict prevention and crisis management backed by the credible threat of military action, and a more coherent and unified approach to Europe's security policy. If we fail to rise to the challenge not, Europe's security deficit will become unbridgeable.

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