

European Defence Agency

Annual Conference 2009



Helicopters – Key to Mobility Brussels, 10 March 2009

Welcome Address by

Alexander Weis
EDA Chief Executive

Ladies and gentlemen,

- I would like to welcome all of you to this annual EDA conference and in particular
 - o the High Representative and Head of the Agency, Dr Javier Solana,
 - o and the other two keynote speakers:
 - Henri Bentégeat, Chairman of the EU Military Committee,
 - and Allan Cook, the President of the AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe.
- This is the fourth EDA Annual Conference. Its topic is high on EDA's agenda.
- The lack of available helicopters for crisis management operations is a burning problem, well-known to politicians, military commanders and civilian operators.
- The European Union, NATO, the United Nations and other organisations - they all face the same problem.
- But there is no shortage of helicopters as such.
- Let's look at Europe. The Member States of the European Union have 1735 helicopters of 22 different types in their military inventories.
- Yet, today they deploy together only a very small number of these helicopters in crisis management operations.
- In the ESDP operations in Bosnia and Chad, 22 helicopters are deployed.
- In NATO's operation in Afghanistan EU Member States have about 80 helicopters flying.
- Even taking into account that there are probably a few more flying around elsewhere in other operations, it seems that European countries are only deploying about 6 to 7 percent of their helicopters in crisis management operations elsewhere in the world.

- So, the first fundamental question is - what are the reasons for the lack of deployed helicopters?
- The more target-oriented subsequent question is what can be done – taking into account the number of 1735 existing helicopters - in order to increase the number of available helicopters?
- Without pre-empting our discussion today, the answer to the first question is - we are suffering from a lack of helicopters in ESDP operations because very often the existing helicopters and the aircrews are not “fit for flight” in demanding operational scenarios.
- Under the political impetus from the Franco-British Summit in March 2008, the European Defence Agency has developed activities for the short-, medium- and long-term.
- For the short-term, EDA’s agenda is focussed on training. Our objective is to construct at European-level a *Helicopter Tactics Programme*, to be launched in 2010.
- For the medium-term, the Agency is exploring the potential for upgrading helicopters by grouping those Member States operating the same type of helicopter.
- Finally, EDA’s long-term activity will be the Future Transport Helicopter, once two Member States – France and Germany – have brought this project to EDA.
- The transatlantic aspect of the Future Transport Helicopter is an important dimension.
 - o In that respect, I cordially welcome the participation of Al Volkman, from the US Department of Defence, as one of our panellists.
- But, let’s start with the main speakers. I am very pleased that we have three distinguished speakers this morning and I would like to thank all of them for their participation.
- I am also looking forward to the more detailed contributions and discussions in the two panels which will follow the keynote speeches.
- At the end of the day:
 - o I hope to conclude with some useful next steps, resulting from today’s debate.
 - o The EDA Annual Conferences have by now a well-established record of follow-up in terms of strategies and practical activities.
 - o Today’s Conference should not be an exception.
 - o So, I call on all participants, including the audience, to keep very much in mind this orientation on practical steps during their contributions.
- It is now my honour to give the floor to the Secretary General/High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Head of the European Defence Agency, Dr Javier Solana.