



S062/09

## **EDA Conference: “Helicopters – Key to Mobility”**

**Opening Address by**

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**Brussels, 10 March 2009**

**FOR FURTHER DETAILS:**

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This year we celebrate the European Security and Defence Policy's tenth anniversary.

Has ESDP achieved what European leaders expected when they launched it in June 1999 at the Cologne Summit? ESDP has indeed delivered positive results. We began in the Balkans. Since then, the European Union has contributed to security in four continents. ESDP is one part of a tool kit of instruments that the European Union can deploy to bring stability to turbulent regions.

Our military and civilian missions operate in sometimes inhospitable terrain: from our police reform mission in Afghanistan and the monitoring mission deployed in Georgia, to the Security Sector Reform mission in Democratic Republic of Congo, our military operation EUFOR in Chad and in the Central African Republic, or the counter-piracy naval operation in the Gulf of Aden, EU NAVFOR Atalanta.

Helicopters are thus essential to our operations because they offer tremendous flexibility, mobility and the capability to respond quickly. Let me give you some examples from our current missions.

In Chad helicopters are essential to allow us to operate in the remote, vast and difficult terrain. The area of operations is more than half the size of France. The seasonal rains make ground movement impossible. Helicopters allow us to survey the terrain, to supply our troops with water and ammunition, and they are vital for medical evacuation. When refugees came into southern Chad from Central African Republic recently, helicopters enabled EUFOR to rapidly secure the area and transport UNHCR personnel to the area.

In the Gulf of Aden, the area of operations of EU NAVFOR covers 3000 miles of coastline. Helicopters launched from our frigates give us the capability to cover large areas quickly. The arrival of helicopters at attempted pirate attacks has a strong deterrent effect.

Despite the importance of helicopters, we have a significant shortfall in their availability. This is a problem for NATO and the European Union alike.

The European Defence Agency has made a quick start to improve the availability of helicopters for ESDP. This follows the proposals launched by France and the United Kingdom at their bilateral summit in March last year. We are all aware that there is no shortage of helicopters in Europe. Inventories are high in numbers but the problem is that they are not deployable outside Europe in sufficient numbers. Third state partners assist in our ESDP operations. We are grateful to them for their contributions, but we must not be dependent on them for key capabilities such as helicopters.

The Agency is producing short and longer term solutions.

In the short term, European-level training will help to adapt the skills of helicopter pilots not yet trained to fly in more challenging environments, such as deserts and mountains. Initial training of Czech helicopter crews will take place this spring.

For the medium term, the Agency is looking at options for upgrading existing assets, in particular the Mi-type helicopters. Hundreds of which are in the inventories of Central and East-European countries. European helicopter industries will have to be closely involved to provide upgrade packages at reasonable cost. Many of them are represented here today.

For the long-term, beyond 2020, the French-German project for the Future Transport Helicopter offers an excellent opportunity for wider participation in Europe. I hope this project comes to EDA soon. It also offers potential for transatlantic cooperation. The market for such an expensive heavy transport helicopter is simply too small in Europe alone. Combining forces would strengthen the helicopter industrial base, both in Europe and in the United States.

Today's conference on helicopters comes at the right moment. The EDA project offers huge potential for

- European cooperation
- for close EU-NATO coordination
- and for transatlantic cooperation.

We need all these three elements. Why?

European defence cooperation is the answer to fragmentation and duplication of efforts in Europe. The scale of improving the Member States' capabilities will exponentially grow if we do more together. The costs will be lower through economies of scale. It also supports the realisation of a true European defence industrial base.

EU and NATO are cooperating at the political level and coordinating at the operational level in the field. On capability improvement the Agency and NATO work closely together to improve the Member States' capacities. This is beneficial to both sides. Helicopters are a good example. NATO is focussing on addressing immediate needs for Afghanistan, while EDA is working on more structural solutions.

With the arrival of the new American administration there are new opportunities for EU-US cooperation. We should use them. European and American security can only gain from closer cooperation. The regular EU-US dialogue should be used to the maximum extent. I have tasked EDA to establish a substantial dialogue with the US to explore concrete opportunities for transatlantic partnership.

ESDP is entering its second decade. I am optimistic, despite the economic crisis. Defence cannot stay outside the European integration processes anymore. It is politically desirable and economically necessary.

Let me say a word on the future. Increasingly, the distinction between civilian and military will become less relevant. The focus will be more on whether a mission is executive or not. We are currently reorganising our strategic planning capability in this way. We are exploring how the development of our capabilities can be used for both civilian and military purposes. We must continue to work dynamically and creatively in this direction.

I wish you all a very fruitful conference. Thank you.

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