

Europe's Defense Policy and NATO's Strategic Concept  
A new Atlantic partnership for the 21st century ?

Excellencies, Ladies & Gentlemen, dearest students,

It is a real honour for me to intervene in this prestigious university. I will first focus on the priorities Belgium put forward during its presidency of the EU Council and then address the issue of EU-NATO cooperation, in the light of the New Strategic Concept.

As you know, Belgium has, since July 1<sup>st</sup> and for six months, taken up the presidency of the European Council in particular circumstances. And that has everything to do with the implementation of the Reform Treaty of Lisbon.

I'm sure you're familiar with the major implications of the implementation of this Treaty: Some key functions, before taken up by the rotating presidencies, have now switched to permanent positions, in the aim to get more continuity. So M. Herman Van Rompuy became the permanent chairman of the EU Council and Lady Catherine Ashton, Vice President of the European Commission and High representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

This transitional reality makes our Presidency a real particular one: Formally no longer in the driver seat, we adopted the role of

fully supporting the High Representative in the spirit of the Lisbon Treaty: ready to assist, to suggest and to facilitate.

Let me now focus on the main drivers for our initiatives during this presidency.

The first driver is our will to go for a swift and complete implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. Belgium believes that the new provisions in the Treaty will bring CSDP to another level. In this regard, allow me to go through its most important provisions with regard to CFSP.

In first instance, the Treaty offers new perspectives in military cooperation within the framework of the EU.

The permanent structured cooperation (PESCO) is clearly at the forefront. This mechanism can bring about a new dynamic among Member States that want to cooperate militarily in order to improve the European defence capabilities with a view to carrying out the most demanding missions.

What does this mean exactly? Member States of the EU whose military capabilities meet specific criteria, can enter into mutual commitments in order to further optimise their military capabilities. Thus, a group of countries can now integrate further

in the field of defence as well, without being opposed by unwilling Member States. The cooperation is open to all Member States that want to participate and meet a number of criteria.

Belgium is convinced of the potential of the permanent structured cooperation but we have come to the conclusion that there is a lot of uncertainty and lack of knowledge, and therefore also some scepticism about PESCO. Our first objective is thus to advance in the understanding of the concept.

In the current economic and budgetary context ever fewer nations will be capable to develop performing defence capabilities with a view to carrying out the most demanding missions. The synergies that can be attained through PESCO, should ultimately lead to a more efficient spending of the available defence budgets. A better cooperation should also eliminate the current duplications and perceived shortfalls with regard to defence capabilities. Besides the advantages in terms of capabilities, PESCO also offers perspectives in operationality of armed forces and better cooperation with regard to the development of defence capabilities.

Subsequently, the Lisbon Treaty provides instruments to ensure security on its own territory.

Not just NATO but the EU is now also involved in the defence of the European continent. The Lisbon Treaty does indeed include a mutual defence clause as well as a solidarity clause.

The mutual defence clause puts the Member States under an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power – therefore also military – to a Member State that is the victim of armed aggression on its territory. This clause, which is somehow comparable to NATO's Art 5, can be considered as an additional assistance clause. Together with the existing 'Petersberg Tasks' the EU thus covers the entire security and defence spectrum, from humanitarian operations to collective defence! From our point of view it is important to emphasise the political value of this clause, reflecting that threats can only be dealt with 'comprehensively'. The recent decision to end the WEU Treaty has even reinforced the value of this clause.

Furthermore, a solidarity clause has been included in the Treaty as well. In this clause the Member States commit themselves to act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or man-made disaster. The use of military resources is a possibility, here as well. This clause is different from the mutual defence clause in that it involves a joint action by the Union. This clause explicitly refers to support by the CSDP structures and the role of the PSC. The

use of CSDP instruments within Union borders is consistent with reality in which the distinction between internal and external security becomes increasingly blurred.

As just stated, in compliance with the Treaty, the EU troops can now also be deployed for a larger range of tasks. So far these troops could only carry out the so-called Petersberg Tasks. These tasks were mostly presented as being limited to humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks and crisis management; they were in fact quite broad already, as they included 'peace making'.

Now EU troops can also carry out disarmament operations, military assistance tasks and post-conflict stabilisation. Finally, the EU troops can now also play a preventive part and act before a crisis occurs.

According to Article 44 of the Treaty such operations can be entrusted to a smaller group of Member States. Any operation shall still require a unanimous vote, with constructive abstention, but a group of willing Member States can be entrusted with the practical execution. Moreover, this article is applicable immediately, and does not need an implementation act by the Council. Nevertheless, it looks rather essential to us that the EU Member States arrive at a common interpretation of this provision in advance: Does it only involve the entrusting of

missions? What are the financial implications? Is this clause just a confirmation of a practice that already exists?

In the last few years, funding all these operations was a difficult exercise. Two initiatives have been taken within the framework of the Treaty of Lisbon to try to solve this problem. The budget for urgent financing of initiatives makes it possible for operational expenditures to be charged to the Union budget. The Treaty also includes a Start-up fund for military expenditures.

Finally, the Treaty enables the enhanced cooperation to be extended to defence. Member States can mutually enter into an enhanced cooperation for the Union's non-exclusive competences, which has now been extended to defence, by making use of Union institutions. This cooperation should advance the Union's objectives, protect its interests and reinforce the integration process.

Contrary to PESCO an implementation act is not necessary. Article 20 is directly applicable. And, yes, it is an expression of ambition in CSDP; but the general impression is that the mechanism can hardly be used for defence issues since better alternatives are available, such as entrusting a task to a smaller group of Member States, which has less strict conditions, and the already presented PESCO.

Finally, a number of measures need to contribute to a reinforcement of the Union on the international scene.

An important role in this respect is set aside for the European Council, since this is the body for political initiatives, providing the Union with the necessary impetus and defining the Union's general political directions. The European Council takes the strategic decisions with regard to CFSP.

The six-monthly rotating Presidency has since January 1<sup>st</sup> of this year been replaced by a permanent President of the European Council and a HR/VP . The 'President of Europe' represents the EU on the international scene, coordinates policy and chairs the European Council. Thus, the permanent President, currently Herman Van Rompuy, and Lady Ashton, as HR/VP can provide the Union with more continuity in its Foreign and Security Policy, but also ensure better international representation of the Union.

The Foreign Affairs Council (also in its 'Defence format) is now chaired by the High Representative. Her positions of Commissioner for External Relations and the High Representative for CFSP means she is Minister for Foreign Affairs for matters of 'Community' competence as well as intergovernmental matters dealt with in the Council. This will undoubtedly benefit the cohesion of EU policy. She has more right of initiative and can also play a leading role in the representation of the EU in dialogues with third countries and in

other international organisations. The coordination of the civilian and military aspects of missions will undoubtedly improve as well.

In order to assist her, the High Representative will have the European External Action Service (EEAS) at her disposal. This instrument will primarily streamline Union action in matters of foreign affairs and security, for it will bring together the various EU means which are currently divided between the Council and the Commission.

On Sep 23/24 I received my 26 colleagues for an informal MOD Meeting in Ghent. Taking the benefit of a rather untraditional format (Lady ASHTON was in New York and joined us by VTC), this meeting offered an exceptional opportunity for us to have frank political discussions on how they intend to cope with this uncomfortable reality. The outcome was very clear and promising but needs to be exploited, first of all during the formal meeting of December. The key message is that the budgetary pressure will force us to accept more interdependency and cooperation, and particularly a more efficient and smart cooperation. One of the first challenges will be the identification of opportunities for pooling and sharing. It is clear that some countries have already multiple forms of cooperation. Belgium, for instance cooperates since many years very closely with NL in

the field of the NAVY (Admiralty BE – NL). With FR we have set up since 2004 a cooperation program for the training of our pilots. More recently, four EU-countries (Germany, the Netherlands, France and Belgium) decided to merge their C<sup>2</sup> for Air Tpt in the EATC (Eindhoven) for more efficient use of their resources. You may also have heard recently in the media about the UK-FR initiative on defence. It covers a wide spectrum of activities and there might be a possibility to anchor it in a European perspective. For the first time nations have no longer primary control on their assets.

Another paramount priority during our Presidency is the further development of military capabilities, particularly in these times of financial constraints. Capabilities, needed to support a credible Common (European) Security and Defence Policy. Finding reasonable answers to the paradox between the increasing demands for capabilities on one hand, and the in some cases drastic defence budget cuts on the other hand will undoubtedly be our challenge for the coming years. They want to cooperate actively in doing so, in developing what I called the “Ghent Framework”.

This brings me to my next driver, namely the Comprehensive Approach. This coherent approach, incorporated in the spirit of

the Lisbon Treaty, is a strong specificity of the Union. Indeed, we have all the instruments and resources necessary to act comprehensively. Our biggest challenge lies in bringing the existing elements together in a coherent and structured mechanism so that we can put this comprehensive approach in an operational way in the field, in the theaters, as we call it in military terms!

The civilian-military approach merits our special attention as we need to develop it. The essence of the comprehensive approach is already visible in the Union's institutional structures, like the Crisis Management Planning Directorate, but it should be further developed. Indeed, a civilian-military way of thinking and acting should become the logical and natural process when planning and executing EU-missions in the future. They deserve our special attention as these missions are the most visible expression of the Union's ambitions in the field of Security and Defence.

The CSDP is unique by its comprehensive approach. This way to manage crises both from a military and civilian perspective is reflected by structural provisions at the strategic level in the Lisbon architecture. More and better civilian and military synergies are needed. The EU will be a major partner in helping and assisting in civilian crisis-management. It will develop a lot

of capabilities to this end. But everybody feels and knows this will never be sufficient; it is my wild guess that in most cases military means will be called upon. We should anticipate when we think about common efforts in developing and acquiring capabilities in order to maximise our output. Close cooperation between NATO and the European Union is an important element in the development of an international “Comprehensive Approach” to crisis management and operations, which requires the effective application of both military and civilian means.

And now what about our partnership with NATO:

NATO and the European Union are working together to prevent and resolve crises and armed conflicts in Europe and beyond. The two organizations share common strategic interests and cooperate in a spirit of complementarity and partnership. Both organizations have 21 member states in common.

EU-NATO relations will continue to be very much at the fore, with a particular stress on concrete measures to increase cooperation in line with the High Representative’s letter addressed to the Secretary General of NATO. The approach of the Belgian Presidency is mainly capability-oriented, with a substantial input for the EU-NATO Capability Group. The NATO-EU Capability Group was established in May 2003 to ensure the coherence and mutual reinforcement of NATO and EU capability

development efforts. This applies to initiatives such as the EU Battle Groups, developed within the “Headline Goal” for 2010, and the NATO Response Force, and efforts in both organizations to improve the availability of helicopters for operations. Following the creation, in July 2004, of the European Defence Agency (EDA) to coordinate work within the European Union on the development of defence capabilities, armaments cooperation, acquisition and research, EDA experts contribute to the work of the Capability Group.

Progress will also be sought in other areas, such as effective EU-NATO security arrangements in missions. Beyond cooperation in the field, other key priorities for cooperation are to ensure that our capability development efforts are mutually reinforcing, as well as to combat terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Both NATO and the European Union are committed to combat terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. They have exchanged information on their activities in the field of protection of civilian populations against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) attacks. The two organizations also cooperate in the field of civil emergency planning by exchanging inventories of measures taken in this area.

In line with earlier political guidance, we have supported the focus on practical cooperation opportunities in the theatres of

common operations. Additionally, we have encouraged and proposed bottom up and pragmatic initiatives.

We facilitated an EU-NATO visit to the respective OHQ's at NORTHWOOD. And we hosted an unclassified NATO Counter IED demonstration that we hoped to open to EU Member States as well. Unfortunately, in both cases it appeared how the political blockages still put a serious burden on even this very basic initiatives.

Belgium has always sought a balance between European integration and loyalty to the Alliance. NATO and EU (CSDP), due to their respective membership and the values and interests for which they stand, should work better together, not only in theatre but first and foremost on the political and strategic level. Both organisations are no competitors. This is clearly, an essential priority for Belgium, especially since the Belgian EU-presidency coincides with the negotiations on NATO's New Strategic Concept. Concrete steps must be taken in order to bring both organisations closer to each other. With the now implemented Treaty of Lisbon, the EU member-states could strengthen their coordination inside NATO.

A real institutionalized relationship between NATO and the EU does not exist. We are numerous NATO Allies and EU member states to regret it deeply.

What well does exist, and I welcome them warmly, are regular informal consultations between the High Representative of the EU Lady Ashton and the Secretary-General of NATO, Mr. Rasmussen. Meetings take place at different levels including at the level of foreign ministers, ambassadors, military representatives and defence advisors. There are regular staff contacts between NATO's International Staff and International Military Staff, and the European Union's Council Secretariat and Military Staff as well as the European Defence Agency. Forms of cooperation between the NAC (North Atlantic Council) and the PSC of the EU also do exist. Permanent military liaison arrangements have been established to facilitate cooperation at the operational level. A NATO Permanent Liaison Team has been operating at the EU Military Staff since November 2005 and an EU Cell was set up at SHAPE (NATO's strategic command for operations in Mons, Belgium) in March 2006.

The framework for permanent relations between both organizations must be found back in the NATO-EU Declaration on ESDP, agreed on 16 December 2002, reaffirmed the EU assured access to NATO's planning capabilities for its own military operations and reiterated the political principles of the

strategic partnership: effective mutual consultation; equality and due regard for the decision-making autonomy of the European Union and NATO; respect for the interests of EU and NATO members states; respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; and coherent, transparent and mutually reinforcing development of the military capability requirements common to the two organizations.

As part of the framework for cooperation adopted on 17 March 2003, the so-called "Berlin-Plus" arrangements provide the basis for NATO-EU cooperation in crisis management by allowing the European Union to have access to NATO's collective assets and capabilities for EU-led operations, including command arrangements and assistance in operational planning. In effect, they allow the Alliance to support EU-led operations in which NATO as a whole is not engaged.

But, unfortunately, you all know the difficult context in which we are today since the accession of Cyprus to the European Union...I won't go further on this topic but of course, I do very much regret the current systematic blocking in that area.

And last but not least, we also have de facto cooperation on the field. Goodwill improves the situation. Take for instance the recent mandate given by the European Council to the High Representative Catherine Ashton to identify all possible means

in order to enhance the cooperation between NATO and the EU in the field of crisis management.

We have to note however that progress, in the current situation, is not easy. We are all aware of it and I call all interested countries to show as much flexibility as possible.

Cooperation between both organizations is also important to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort, to ensure transparency and to respect the autonomy of the two organizations.

I want to stress one further point regarding crisis management: NATO does not have to do everything on its own. The Alliance could ensure secure planification of the 'comprehensive approach' inside the Alliance. Then, it has to assure the interface and the interaction with the other crisis management actors in the framework of the partnerships with the UN, and more specially the EU.

Finally, a word about what the New strategic Concept says about the EU-NATO relation. The project echoes the need to build a 'true strategic partnership' between the EU and NATO, what Belgium welcomes warmly. The paragraph on EU-NATO relation is well structured and brings the right ideas to the forefront but needs a more prominent place inside the text. Besides the project sets that NATO is the 'unique transatlantic forum' where security issues with North America can be dealt

with, which is naturally not the case, the EU, increasingly raises strategic aspects in its dialogue with the US or Canada.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With this overview I gave you an insight on the major characteristics of the ongoing Belgian Presidency, driven from the co-pilot seat. We covered the particularity of the transition to the more permanent Lisbon structures and I gave you the highlights of the initiatives. We should be realistic and accept that no spectacular progress and results in the field of CSDP are to be expected in this transitional period.

To conclude, I would appreciate if you retain from this speech that we are at a key moment for a new atlantic partnership for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both organizations are at a crossroads: the EU implementing the Lisbon Treaty giving the Union more instruments to be more credible on the international scene, and NATO about to adopt its New Strategic Concept.

On the one hand, NATO, a military alliance, remains the cornerstone of transatlantic security, and the Strategic Concepts underscores it, but on the other hand, the EU is becoming a more credible actor in the field of Common Security and Defence Policy. Each organisation has its own specificities but they need to complement each other.

Thank You.