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Education

Doctor of Law, (Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium)
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Diplomatic career

June 2002	Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Brussels
May 2001	Chef de Cabinet to the Foreign Minister, MFA Brussels
February 1998	Director General for Bilateral and Economic Relations, MFA, Brussels
November 1997 :	Acting Director General for Bilateral and Economic Relations, MFA, Brussels
July 1994 :	Deputy-Director of the Cabinet of HM The King, and Diplomatic Advisor to HRH Prince Philip, Royal Palace, Brussels

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- August 1991 : Minister-Counsellor, Belgian Embassy Washington
- November 1988 : Diplomatic Advisor to the Prime Minister, Brussels
- September 1987 : Counsellor, Permanent Representation of Belgium to the E.C., Brussels
- August 1983 : Counsellor (political affairs) Belgian Embassy London
- August 1980 : MFA, Brussels
- January 1978 : Belgian Embassy, Tunis
- February 1977 : MFA, Brussels
- October 1974 : Political and Press affairs, Belgian Embassy, Bonn
- February 1973 : MFA, Brussels

DOES EUROPE HAVE THE MEANS TO STAGE A MILITARY OPERATION IF IT WANTS TO?

First let me thank the Center for Defense Studies, the Royal Institute for International Relations and the Netherlands Clingendael Institute for the organisation of this symposium. May I express my congratulations on this successful and above all **timely** initiative! **First** we are looking forward to the conclusion of the intergovernmental conference, where a **political agreement** has already been reached on the defense dimension of the new European Constitution. **Second** the European security concept is currently being translated into **specific** programs. **Third** the debate on the **Defense Agency** is in full swing.

But **above all**, we are faced with the **increasing number** of crisis situations. It is within this framework that the EU can play its role as a "global actor" and can stage military operations.

At this point I would like to recall the shocking terrorist attacks in Madrid and to repeat the expressions of sympathy and solidarity towards the Spanish people in these terrible moments. These attacks have served as **wake up call** to all of us that security issues and crisis situations do not stop at the borders of the European Union. Internal and external threats are increasingly linked and demand a robust and concerted response from the Union, its Member States and our partners. Terrorist threats are asymmetric threats, to which military actions cannot necessarily offer a partial answer. Other measures in the civilian sphere, such as the increased cooperation among European intelligence services, as proposed by PM Verhofstadt, will have to be put in place.

I guess today, at this seminar, the right questions were asked, both by the speakers and the audience. Obviously in an open debate on current issues, some questions are bound to be left unanswered, provisional answers are likely to be given. Still, it is possible to draw some conclusions.

1. The European Union does **not consider military operations as a ultimate goal** on itself but rather as one of the many possible instruments it intends to use in a consistent manner in implementing its foreign and security policy.

In this context, the publication of the first European Security Strategy at the end of last year, was a milestone. This document sets the framework within which the EU will shape its external action.

Before pulling the anchor, the captain must have decided on which course to set for.

2. Yet, **even before** the Security Strategy was given shape the EU was already **setting up the decision-making structures and capabilities** for the implementation of its foreign and security policy.

Six years ago, in 1998, at the French-British Summit of St-Malo, the first stone was laid of what was to become the European Security and Defense Policy.

In the meantime, the European Political and Security Committee was hard at work.

The capability building has been making progress under the Helsinki Headline Goal 2003 and the European Capability Action Plan.

Additionally, since last year, the EU has conducted military operations of its own in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in the Balkan. And soon it will launch its first large scale operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, where NATO is to terminate the SFOR operation.

This is quite an achievement for so recent a structure that depends on the political will of 15 member-states today and 25 very soon.

3. The results may fill us with **satisfaction**, but we must take care **not** to become too **self-confident**. A lot of work still has to be done, but is already 'work in progress'. The suggested post of Minister for Foreign Affairs of the EU, can only add to the coherence and effectiveness of the external action of the European Union. A new capacity building perspective by 2010 is being worked at, focussing on quality rather than on quantity. Interoperability, usability and deployability, those are the guidewords for the coming years. A strong Defence Agency should be the driving force behind this new momentum.
4. It must be pointed out that, similarly to any other field of European integration, the building of a European Defence capability needs **a step-by-step approach**. We therefore welcome the current approach of the Union to look actively for tasks and missions to which it can make some contributions in the short term. In this respect, Belgium follows with great interest the issue concerning the "battle groups", combat units with a troop strength of 1500 soldiers each, that are to be available at very short notice for missions requested by the United Nations, mainly in Africa, in preparation of a conventional peacekeeping operation carried out by the United Nations or a regional security organisation.
5. In order to plan and conduct these and other autonomous EU operations as well, the European Union will naturally have to take appropriate arrangements in order to develop its own collective operational planning capacity, often referred to as **the EU planning cell**. As you know, together with France, Germany and Luxemburg, Belgium has actively pleaded in favour of this project during the Brussels Summit on 29 April. Although this issue aroused strong discussions that undoubtedly left some scars, a compromise was found on the European Council of 12 December last year. The way this compromise will be fleshed out is one of the challenges that have to be met in 2004.
6. The compromise of 12 December has clarified the relationship between the EU and NATO as well. It was a welcome and timely result. Indeed, the European Security and Defence Policy does not operate in a vacuum. As a result of the confrontation of ideas last year, the **awareness** that NATO and the EU must work hand in hand in order to promote effective multilateralism, with respect for

each other's autonomy, **has been growing**. The framework of this teamwork is provided by the Berlin Plus arrangements of February 2003, on the basis of which the EU is given access to the NATO communication and command facilities when carrying out certain operations. The operation in Bosnia will be covered by this arrangement.

As each country only has one set of forces available, there is **no other option than gearing NATO and EU initiatives** relating to capacity building and rapid reaction, for instance, **to one another**. EU and NATO have to be **complementary** to each other and to cooperate, as far as possible and where needed, in a spirit of mutual trust and transparency. This also is a process that must be built up step by step.

It does not mean that the efficiency of NATO takes away the relevance of building a European Defence capability. European Defence voices European solidarity and provides a basis for European integration. Moreover, a European Defence capability allows us to set out a proper European foreign policy. **A strong Europe empowers the NATO structure**, which will be based on two pillars of equal value: the United States and the European Union.

7. Furthermore, it has to be acknowledged that in many European countries such as Belgium for instance, **the Union has another appeal, other than that of NATO**. A European Defence policy, defined and conducted in an efficient way and aimed at goals that are clearly delineated, will help the European governments convince their public opinion to back difficult decisions concerning further inevitable defence reforms. It also is a process that has already been launched in Belgium by the means of the new Defence Steering Plan but that still will require big efforts.
8. Together with Spain, Europe has fallen victim to international terrorism in a shocking manner. The bombings in Madrid have killed 200 people and wounded hundreds more. The tragedy in Madrid must strengthen us in our conviction that Europe must quickly develop its own defence, police and intelligence capabilities And it must strengthen us in our conviction that it is important for Europe and the United States, as well as for other countries, to work on a joint strategy - as fully fledged partners.
9. The answer to the questions asked during this Symposium is: **yes** indeed, Europe is **capable** organising military operations. This has already been stated officially at the Laeken Summit, under Belgian EU presidency. But there is no use to rush things: **let's not run before we can walk**. Building ESDP is a gradual process. Belgium is determined to maintain the momentum as regards the building of a European Defence capacity, both on the institutional and on the capability level.

Europe has also fallen victim to international terrorism in a shocking manner. The bombings in Madrid have killed 200 people and wounded hundreds more. The suffering may not be on the same scale as on September the eleventh, but each human life lost to terrorism is one too many. The tragedy in Madrid must strengthen us in our conviction that Europe must quickly develop its own defence, police and intelligence capabilities. And it must strengthen us in our conviction that it is important for Europe and the United States, as well as for other countries and international organisations, to work on a joint strategy - as fully fledged partners.

Challenges are becoming bigger, and so are our ambitions. The key issue is to make sure that the building and deployment of military capabilities are sustained by budgetary resources, political choices, and, not in the least, have the necessary support of public opinion in Europe.