



European Security and Defence Assembly Assembly of Western European Union

Fifty-ninth Plenary Session - Press Release No. 45/2010

President Walter urges national parliaments to continue scrutiny of Common Security and Defence Policy

Paris, 30 November 2010 – A proper interparliamentary structure should be put in place to take over from the European Security and Defence Assembly (ESDA) when it is wound up next June, the President of the Assembly, Mr **Robert WALTER** MP (United Kingdom, Federated Group) said on Tuesday.

Opening the last “business as usual” session, he said: “It would be irresponsible of us all as elected members of national parliaments to now abandon the democratic oversight of European defence matters and leave it all to the European Parliament which, according to the Lisbon Treaty, has no added competence in this area”.

The ESDA/WEU Assembly was set up 55 years ago under the 1954 modified Brussels Treaty. It counts among its members national parliamentarians from the 27 EU nations, and includes five non-EU European NATO members as associate members and Russia, Ukraine and the Caucasus states as partners.

Turning to the order of business of the session which ends on Thursday, Mr WALTER said one of the worst consequences of events in Korea last week could be their impact on nuclear proliferation. To allow North Korea to act with impunity could encourage others to acquire similar weapons, he said.

In Mr WALTER’s view, this plus other “remarkable incidents” in the past two weeks might change the concept of security for some time to come. In particular, NATO and Russia had agreed to cooperate on a number of important issues, including missile defence. But everything now depended on implementation, as Russia had not yet committed to participating in the proposed missile shield from “Vancouver to Vladivostok”. Moreover, the agreement could unwind if the US Senate did not ratify the new Start Treaty that had “fallen hostage” to internal political differences.

NATO and Russia shared more security concerns than at any time since the cold war, including instability in Afghanistan and the neighbouring region, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology, and terrorist threats, Mr WALTER said. “Their interests may not always be identical, but cooperation invariably makes it easier to achieve important overlapping policy objectives”.

Although strides had been taken in Europe’s defence capabilities, permitting the EU to conduct Petersberg crisis management operations, “very little progress has been made in words of successive European treaties towards a common European defence”. This was because of a lack of political will, shrinking defence budgets and a lack of procurement cooperation, he said.

One promising recent development was “the remarkably wide-ranging Franco-British defence pact” which could provide the basis for “a more realistic organic development” than the structured cooperation set out in the Lisbon Treaty. This meant that NATO must remain responsible for the defence of Europe “for a long time to come”, and that the 26 European NATO members must pull their weight if the United States was not to look elsewhere for security partnerships, he said. “It is therefore urgent for EU members and candidates to take concrete steps before it is too late”, especially as regards resolving the dispute between Turkey and Cyprus.

The EU must pay more attention to improving relations with the United States, Mr WALTER declared. Although the EU-US summit earlier this month had been deemed a success, this was only because the partners had deliberately avoided areas of contention such as trade, data protection, and fundamental rights. Implementation of their intentions on integrated strategies on security and development and stronger cooperation in conflict prevention and crisis response was “still light years away”, he added.

Mr WALTER concluded his address with criticism of the way WEU staff have been treated over the closure of the Organisation.

Following Mr WALTER's address, the Assembly elected a new Vice-President, Mr **Philippe MAHOUX** (Belgium, Socialist Party).

Members of the Assembly will take part in a ceremony to rekindle the flame of remembrance on the tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Arc de Triomphe at 18.30 today. The ceremony is dedicated to the memory of more than 250 European citizens, soldiers and civilians, men and women, who have died in the various operations conducted during 2010.

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