

**Statement of the  
Young Europeans Meeting**  
at the  
**IX. International EuroDefense Meeting**  
Bonn, September 24<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, 2003

Dear Presidents and Vice Presidents of EuroDefense, ladies and gentlemen, let me first thank you in the name of our group of young Europeans for the opportunity to participate in this meeting and to present our views and ideas. If you allow, I would like to give you a broader overview of what we were discussing yesterday evening rather than solely focus on the question of public opinion.

Public opinion towards the further development and strengthening of ESDP was difficult to assess for the group without some underlying scientific material. We nonetheless tried to give an impression of the respective public opinion in our countries.

As has been stated already today, throughout Europe, polls indicate that public support for ESDP is quite strong. Also, security and defence matters are increasingly perceived as no longer merely national, but European issues.

We felt, however, that there is too little information on and awareness of security and defence matters in the broader public for people to be able to form an objective and clear opinion. Consequently, there is also little public debate on security and defence issues in European countries at all.

We also noted that when there is public debate on issues of security policy and especially military affairs, it is often overshadowed by other issues. For instance, the question of a professional army in Germany focuses not so much on the respective pros and cons of conscription vs. professionalization but rather on the impact a professional army would have on civil service.

We believe, however, that the Iraq crisis might have increased public awareness of security and defence issues and also strengthened public support for the development of a autonomous security and defence policy of the European Union.

Apart of the question of public opinion, we also decided to focus on those questions outlined in the agenda where we felt we could make a more valuable contribution to the discussion.

When discussing the current security issues in debate in the countries of the European Union, it soon became apparent that these discussions in European countries had several things in common.

For one, European military forces are faced with defence budgets that are in decline throughout Europe. Measured in their share of GDP, defence budgets are in the range of 0,8 percent to 2 percent for most European countries.

Secondly, there is an absence of a clearly defined strategic concept in most European countries and a resulting lack of clear understanding what the spectrum of requirements that the armed forces will be expected to meet will be.

Some countries, such as Austria, have only recently adopted a new security strategy that reflects the security environment after the Cold War. Most countries emphasize the aspect of international operations. Some countries favour missions in the context of the European Union, while others are leaning more towards a NATO framework.

Thus, while there is a general agreement throughout Europe that the ability to act and to project power, including military force, on a global scale becomes ever more crucial in the present day security environment, there are insufficient resources to meet this objective.

The development of a European Security and Defence Policy within the European Union is a factor in all the national debates. There was some disagreement as to whether European military capabilities should be developed independently of or within the framework of the NATO second pillar.

Arguments that were brought in favour of strengthening Europe within NATO was the existing and functioning command structure and the fact that US and European security interests are more likely to be similar than not.

Those that favoured an independent European military capability, including a command capability, stressed that without such a capability, Europe will not be able to formulate its own political will independently, make the according political decisions and be able to implement them without the need for recourse to capabilities provided by the US.

Military means are, after all, a means to an end, and if Europe wants to act and to be perceived by others as an autonomous actor on the international scene, it must be able to act on its own in the full spectrum of military missions.

It was also pointed out that the key US strategic interest is gradually moving away from Europe and focusing more on the Asian-Pacific area, where China could be emerging as a new great power within the next few decades. Europe, therefore, cannot take continued US engagement for granted and must be prepared to assume greater responsibility for security and stability in its neighbourhood.

There was some debate about the importance of common procurement within the European Union. Some argued that common procurement decisions necessitate the prior formulation of a common European threat assessment and strategic concept.

Others pointed out that procurement processes take a very long time and have very lasting impacts upon the armed forces of a country, and it is thus necessary to harmonize procurement decisions well in advance of developing more integrated European armed forces.

Linked to the question of procurement, the issue of country specialization was brought up. It was pointed out that such specialization couldn't substitute for common procurement since it would require the assurance that assets one country does not possess would indeed be immediately released by those who do have them in case they are needed. This, in turn, would necessitate a broad surrender of sovereignty in security and defence affairs to a European authority.

When it comes to the transfer of sovereignty rights in the field of security and defence policy, strongly contrasting national opinions became apparent. While some countries such as Germany and probably Austria would probably be willing to communitize security and defence policy, other countries such as Portugal are more likely to insist on retaining national decision making. The solution might be a Europe of two speeds in the area of security and defence. In the case of France and Great Britain, authority over the nuclear forces of these countries would create additional problems. A "Europeanization" of the nuclear deterrent could for instance face problems with regard to the provisions laid down in the NPT. The nuclear issue, however, is at present not a factor in the development of ESDP and will only have to be considered much further down the road.

These considerations sum up the main points of our discussion yesterday evening. I hope that this presentation was of some interest for you. Thank you very much.