

EU/DEFENCE: JAVIER SOLANA UNDERLINES NEED TO PROMOTE SOUND AND TRULY EUROPEAN DTIB

Brussels, 09/03/2009 (EDD) – Javier Solana, the EU High Representative for CFSP, agreed to answer our questions ahead of the European Defence Agency's annual conference 2009. He answered as follows:

EDD: During the 2007 conference you launched the catchphrase: spend more, spend better, spend more together. Is this still valid in these times of crisis or should one be resigned to see further cuts in defence spending?

Javier Solana: Now defence budgets may come under increasing pressure due to the financial-economic crisis it will be even more important to do more together. Within Europe there is too much fragmentation and duplication, from Research & Technology to industrial supply. More and better capabilities can be realised with the same amount of money when Member States collaborate more, which is exactly what the Agency is aiming at.

EDD: Given the vital shortage of helicopters, are the projects entrusted to EDA sufficient?

J.S.: The Agency has promising activities to improve the availability of helicopters for crisis management operations, focusing on training pilots in the short-term, on upgrading helicopters in the medium-term and on the development of the Future Transport Helicopter in the long-term. All these activities will contribute to increased availability of helicopter capabilities, which are essential for our operations.

EDD: The shortfall in helicopters is largely due to the refusal by some Member States to commit costly material to operations. Would the constitution of a joint fleet deployable for ESDP operations (a little after the fashion of the AWACS under NATO's direct control) be a possible solution?

J.S.: There are many different types of helicopters, which makes it difficult to create a European helicopter fleet. We are however exploring the potential for upgrade packages for helicopters of the same family, such as the MI-type. We are working on this together with European helicopter companies.

EDD: Despite efforts made by its two successive executive directors, the EDA is struggling to take off. One of the obvious reasons for its slow progress is a lack of confidence and the will to cooperate between Member States. How can this problem be resolved?

J.S.: Increasingly the participating Member States bring projects to the European Defence Agency. Recent examples are the Maritime Mine Counter-Measures project, looking at the post-2018 replacement of the current generation of mine counter-measures; and the MUSIS project for the next generation of earth observation satellites. In the area of Research & Technology the Agency has successfully introduced the new formula of Joint Investment Programmes (JIPs). Two JIPs are up and running. One focuses on Force Protection (with 20 contributing Members) and another focuses on Innovative Concepts and Emerging Technologies (with 11 contributing Members). I am optimistic that Member States will collaborate more and more under the EDA umbrella, simply because this is the logical choice for improving European military capabilities.

EDD: Strategic autonomy of European defence greatly depends on its EDTIB. To consolidate the latter and ensure its independence, the Fathers of Europe might perhaps have imagined a

European Armaments Community (after the fashion of the ECSC). Could this be envisaged?

J.S.: The Agency's European Defence Technological and Industrial Base strategy is leading the way. It seeks to create a true European DTIB, which is more than just the sum of the national DTIBs. This is crucial for the survival of European defence industries, which are not only dependent on the internal European market but have to compete at a global level. We have to identify which key technologies and which key industrial capacities Europe needs to maintain or develop, because it cannot be dependent for these on outside suppliers. This process is now under way. I don't want to speculate where it might end. Let's focus on the immediate challenges, namely to evolve from the current situation to a sound, truly European DTIB, which is competitive and able to meet the needs of the European armed forces in the longer term.