Senato della Repubblica

Camera dei deputati

Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

MINUTES

The Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) took place at the Italian Senate in Rome on 6-7 November 2014.

It was attended by 33 delegations from the 26 member countries plus six candidate countries and Norway, making a total of 248 participants.

At the "**Meeting of the Heads of Delegation and the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Rules of Procedure**", chaired by the Chairman of the Defence Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, **Elio VITO**, the work centred on the adoption of the Rules of Procedure of the CFSP and CSDP Conference and on the drafting of a report on Best Practices. An amendment to the draft rules introduced by the Spanish delegation that the Ad-Hoc Committee had referred to the plenary in Rome for consideration was withdrawn after the Presidency agreed to add a new paragraph to the Conclusions thanking the Ad-Hoc Committee and declaring that the Best Practices constituted a further refinement of the Rules of Procedure for the future work of the Conference.

OPENING OF THE CONFERENCE

The President of the Senate **Pietro GRASSO** and the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, **Laura BOLDRINI** welcomed the attendees.

Senator Pietro Grasso illustrated how – following the coming into force of the Lisbon Treaty – the Inter-parliamentary Conference for the CFSP and CSDP had become an important part of the system of parliamentary oversight and a means to ensure the involvement of national parliaments. Referring to the difficulties affecting the EU, which is facing a severe economic crisis and a situation of instability on its international borders, he underscored the importance of finding a response to Euro-scepticism both by endowing EU institutions with new vigour and by strengthening the external action of the Union so that it might steer geopolitical changes rather than passively enduring them. The EU, he explained, had not yet succeeded in fully expressing the enormous political, economic and human potential that its size and history should warrant. As regards the "greater Mediterranean" area, he warned of the grave repercussions of unsustainable waves of immigration, and of the need for medium and long-term policies to achieve security in the area. With respect to the crisis in Ukraine, he expressed fears for the safety of the most vulnerable member countries and

concern at the potential economic impact on the Union of the possible loss of market and major energy supplies. He insisted on the importance of giving full backing to the actions of the High Representative, following up on the European Council Conclusions of December 2013 for a more integrated and sustainable European defence policy, pressing ahead with enlargement plans, the neighbourhood policy and development assistance, and pursuing an effective common trade policy by entering into strategic bilateral agreements.

In her speech, the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies Laura BOLDRINI declared that it was now time to buttress the EU's international capabilities. She observed that the results hitherto in the area of foreign policy and security were not entirely satisfactory. Suggesting that an immediate change of the current arrangements was unlikely, she proposed an approach based on ambitious realism. Europe, she continued, had to reaffirm itself as a role model for the preservation and propagation of democracy, the rule of law, human rights, conflict prevention, the promotion of sustainable development, and the assistance of people in need. She argued that these are values that Europe could not renounce as they formed part of its historical identity, and should not be sacrificed even when the EU was facing security challenges. With respect to the ongoing crisis in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, she called for the involvement of all Member States in the definition of common strategies and decisions. Observing that security, the economy and the protection of fundamental values are closely related, she said that a joint approach was needed when making CSDP-related decisions.

OPENING SESSION

The opening session heard speeches from the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, **Pier Ferdinando CASINI**, the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, **Fabrizio CICCHITTO,** and the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, **Elmar BROK**.

Pier Ferdinando CASINI drew attention to the opportunities for the further integration of the European Union afforded by globalisation, as well as to the challenges it posed. Acknowledging that Europe needed to continue gradually on the path towards greater political union, he stressed the importance of moving forward together, with unanimous consent. Referring to the EU's role as an international peacemaker, he argued that in some cases it was necessary to use force to restore stability (as the western Balkans proved). With respect to the new High Representative, Mr Casini affirmed the importance of her political role and said she needed to be given real powers

that would enable her to act effectively on the international stage. Turning to the crises affecting Ukraine and the Mediterranean, he invited the MPs in attendance to consider that the focus on the Mediterranean area should be renewed. He concluded his speech by expressing deep concern at the armed fundamentalist extremism spreading through the Middle East and North Africa, which posed a major challenge to security, democracy and freedom, especially religious freedom.

Fabrizio CICCHITTO reflected that the serious economic and financial crisis that has swept through Europe had been accompanied by conflict within Islam and between part of it and the West. He noted that the Al-Qaeda and ISIS versions of Islamic fundamentalism were in the main aimed against the Islamic world. They sought to overrun state borders and struck at the religious, civil and political life of traditional communities that had contributed to the wealth of the Middle East and it was therefore necessary, he suggested, to examine the past mistakes made by the West and find political and, if necessary, military solutions for the future. In particular, international and regional organisations had to support the Kurds and create humanitarian and military corridors between Syria and Turkey. Touching upon the desperate immigration situation, he noted that the Mediterranean Sea demarcated the boundary of the entire European Union, and that Operation Triton had to provide for the start of fresh dialogue with the migrants' countries of origin and seek out adequate solutions to their security and humanitarian problems. The security of Israel and the creation of conditions leading as soon as possible to a two-state solution were the necessary starting point for any solution in the Middle East, he said. Touching on Ukraine, he drew attention to the spirit that had informed the elections there and the victory of the liberal-democratic forces supporting stronger relations with Europe.

Looking back at the history of European integration and invoking the principle of the territorial integrity of states, Elmar BROK conducted a detailed review of the Ukrainian crisis. He expressed his confidence that the new High Representative, with the contribution of parliaments, would revamp the European CFSP and steer it in a new strategic direction. He expressed the view that no single EU Member State could manage the complex crises of the present day on its own. He reiterated the principle enshrined in the Treaty of Lisbon that Member States should operate in concert to support the CFSP. On the question of the Mediterranean, he spoke of the immigration crisis and suggested the EU should offer help through development aid and support for the process of democratisation, so that humanitarian needs might be harmonised with security demands. Regarding the religious persecution currently being perpetrated in some Middle Eastern countries, he hoped that the major monotheistic religions might work together.

The Italian Minister of Defence **Roberta PINOTTI** delivered a talk entitled, "Defence as a pillar of European integration," in which she claimed that Europe had been born from the need not only for economic integration, but also for common defence, and that this had already been recognised in 1948, when the first agreements on collective defence were signed. Many advances had been made since 1948, she said, to the point where the EU now had a High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy and had developed a common security strategy. In recent years, the changed geopolitical context, characterised by the crisis at the European borders, had increased the relevance of defence and security, which now rivalled the economy in importance. She therefore reiterated her belief in greater European integration in the field of defence. The EU needed to make the most of the instruments at its disposal, including its military instrument, to safeguard global security, she said, and should also be capable of developing new mechanisms to coordinate military spending and introduce greater complementarity in the use of Member States' military instruments.

SESSION I

The Mediterranean and the crises at the borders of the European Union. Regional and global challenges: from the Middle East to Ukraine

The Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, **Paolo GENTILONI**, said that although the economic crises had contributed to a crisis of legitimacy, Europe remained a major centre of attraction, especially for areas in a state of constant tension such as the Mediterranean, which is going through its most profound transformation since decolonisation. He then spoke of Libya, the source of as many as 160,000 migrants and refugees, of whom around 132,000 landed in Italy last year. He warned that the Libyan crisis was a threat not only to Italy, but also to the entire European Union, and that the establishment of the Islamic Caliphate in Iraq and Syria posed a threat to all. Turning to the crisis in the Middle East, he appealed to the conscience of Europe, and regretted that the two-state solution for Israel-Palestine, though recognised as the only possible way forward, had not yet been attained. On the Ukrainian crisis, he reiterated Italy's position, which is for the respect of the territorial integrity and independence of Ukraine. This, he explained, was the reason that Italy had refused to recognise the elections in Donbas and supported various forms of pressure on Moscow, including sanctions. He stressed, however, the need to leave room for a political solution, which would require on the one hand the maintenance of a firm stance and, on the other, a willingness to keep open all channels of dialogue with Russia, which remained an essential interlocutor. The Minister concluded by saying that Europe's security could not be delegated to others, and declared his conviction that a common foreign policy would help Europe regain its momentum and mission in the

world. However, he added, only by meeting the expectations that surround it could Europe overcome the crises that currently threaten it.

In the ensuing debate, 26 delegates took the floor. The speakers generally felt that in the face of current challenges, Europe had to assume a leading role and give united and joint responses. According to contributors, the common defence and security policy had to shift up a gear, possibly through the activation of those parts of the Lisbon Treaty that provided for new instruments, such as permanent structured cooperation activities in the area of defence. Speakers emphasised the importance of the role of the High Representative for Foreign Policy, who had to discharge the duties assigned to her by the Treaty and develop responses and concrete policies. Regarding the crisis in Ukraine, members underlined the importance of dialogue with Russia, but spoke also of the need to ensure respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine and to oppose the violations of the rule of law and international law by Moscow. They therefore insisted on the need to act unambiguously so that Russia might be clear about Europe's stance. They also urged the adoption of a comprehensive strategy to support Ukraine in a variety of ways. One of the points raised regarded the need for Europe to diversify its energy supplies. In respect of the situation in the Middle East, the opinion of some of the speakers was that in addition to contributing to reconstruction, Europe should take on a greater role in the peace process, especially in negotiations on a two-state solution. On the situation in the Mediterranean, it was agreed that the Mediterranean Sea marked the border of all Europe, and not only of certain states, and that a common response was therefore needed. On migration and the need to quell it, it was felt that action must be taken at source both to combat lawlessness and to stop ISIS from penetrating into Europe through the waves of migrants. Finally, the question of relations between Cyprus and Turkey was also raised. After the contributions from the Floor, Minister Gentiloni made a brief rejoinder.

SESSION II

Prospects for European defence: strengthening the cooperative approach with strategic partners

The Chairman of the Defence Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, **Elio VITO**, reaffirmed the need, already voiced by the European Council in December 2013, of intensifying ongoing efforts to improve the effectiveness, flexibility and visibility of the CSDP. He expressed the hope that the next meeting of the European Council in June 2015 would be decisive in presenting concrete actions and identifying tangible advantages. He indicated a number of desirable strategic objectives, such as greater integration of the European defence market, improvement of the rapid response capacity

of the EU, strengthening the industrial and technological base of the defence sector, and channelling efforts into joint research and technology projects. With regard to cooperation with strategic partners, he reaffirmed the validity of the transatlantic partnership as a cornerstone of the CSDP, and reiterated the need for constant dialogue with a number of non-NATO European states: Bosnia and Hercegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Croatia.

The Italian Undersecretary of State for Defence, **Domenico ROSSI**, recalled the Conclusions of the European Council of December 2013 relating to the strategic action of the EU in its capacity as a global player, and the "multidimensional approach" that was first outlined in the European Security Strategy Document of December 2003. Arguing that it was fundamentally important for the EU to use all the tools at its disposal, ranging from non-coercive persuasion to hard power. He advocated close global, regional and transatlantic cooperation between the EU and its partners in a spirit of mutual reinforcement and complementarity. The new crises required an integrated approach and a rapid decision-making capacity that would enable the prompt deployment of forces. He cited the EUFOR-RCA mission as a good example of EU-UN cooperation. He also emphasised the importance of being able to combine the broad range of instruments of the European Union with the far-reaching capabilities of NATO for defence intervention.

In the course of the ensuing discussions, in which 15 MPs took the floor, a general consensus emerged on the need for the effective implementation of a common European defence system, even though several questions were raised about the tools and resources actually available for use. Delegates voiced general support for strengthening the strategic partnership with NATO and for the activation of concrete structures such as battlegroups.

SESSION III

The EU as a global player: **priorities and strategies within the CFSP and CSDP**

In her address, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, **Federica MOGHERINI,** declared that owing to the severity and gravity of the crises taking place in the regions to the south and east of the European Union, according them equal attention was a matter of necessity. She then reviewed the short-term challenges facing the European Union. With respect to Ukraine, she said supporting its democratic transition to a united country under the rule of a central government was essential. She called for a dialogue with Russia conducive to real action. She expressed deep concern at the risk of civil war in Libya and its aftermath on the entire European Union, and

proposed that parliamentary diplomacy would be a particularly useful way of contributing to the process of national reconciliation. Ms Mogherini warned that in the absence of a political plan, the fight against IS might be jeopardised and that the European Union would have to exercise its proper responsibilities in this matter along with the United Nations. On the Ebola epidemic, she stressed the importance of the time factor and advised that the challenge had to be tackled through the coordinated management of the various different components of the European Union. Finally, with regard to the tensions in the Middle East, she noted the deterioration of Israeli-Palestinian relations, but suggested that the common threat posed by IS might pave the way to a different scenario that was more open to dialogue.

Looking at the past, she cited Tunisia and the Balkans as examples of how crises had been resolved with the European Union helping to create situations of stability. Looking ahead, she cautioned that the EU could not become an effective global player unless it first became an effective regional player, and that it therefore needed to act to promote political transition in Ukraine and to prevent civil war in Libya. The long-term challenges for the EU, she said, were international terrorism, arms proliferation, human trafficking, human rights violations and energy security. Dealing with these challenges would necessitate bringing the enormous untapped potential of the EU to bear, which would also entail applying to the letter the provisions of the treaties in respect of the CSDP and the coordinated deployment of all the instruments at the disposal of the Union.

With respect to the foregoing, she announced her commitment to working with the European Defence Agency. She concluded with the hope that the goals she had outlined would be espoused by European parliaments and national governments, the European Parliament and the EU Council.

The ensuing discussions saw contributions from thirty-four MPs, who were almost unanimous in supporting a more proactive role for the EU and greater cohesion in its external dimension, and in favouring the exploitation of the full potential of the Treaties also to stabilise EU borders. The themes touched on by the speakers regarded mainly: the crisis in Ukraine and relations with Russia (with calls to recognise errors made, resume dialogue and maintain a resolute stance); the Middle East and the Israelo-Palestinian issue (the priorities indicated by the High Representative were well received, and calls were made to support moderate Palestinian forces and recognise the Palestinian state); the crisis in Syria and the challenge of IS (members advised that the European Union had to accept its responsibilities, including by supplying weapons to the Kurds, and should coordinate its efforts with the United Nations); Libya (it was suggested that once a situation of greater stability had been reached – which should be pursued by means of urgent political dialogue for the reconciliation of the parties – requests for asylum might be managed by the delegations of the European Union). On European defence, there was general consensus on the need to launch the battlegroups

(with the exception of some, who felt it would be more useful to commit present scarce resources to strengthening the partnership with NATO). The implementation of articles 42, 44 and 46 of the Treaty was also strongly urged. On a new European security strategy, many delegates stressed the urgent need for an updated analysis and the development of a common approach. Finally, speakers agreed on the need to diversify energy resources and the need for prompt coordination to combat the Ebola outburst. With regard to relations with the United States, particular emphasis was placed on the importance of the negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Treaty.

In her reply to the contributions from the Floor, the High Representative promised to pursue a political programme characterised by ambition, decision and determination. Accepting that the European Union needed credibility and coherence, she announced her intention to innovate.

SESSION IV

The Libyan crisis

The opening speech was delivered by the Chairman of the Defence Committee of the Italian Senate, **Nicola LATORRE.** After explaining that the Special Representative and Head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya, Bernardino Léon, was unable to attend the Conference owing to the worsening of the situation in Libya, he called upon European parliaments to support Mr Léon's work. He expressed the view that in the wake of the Libyan Supreme Court ruling voiding the elections of 25 June 2014, the attempt to reconcile the warring parties had become more difficult, and therefore required even greater effort by the international community, especially the European Union. With UN Security Council Resolution 2174 of 27 August 2014 and the joint statement of the governments of France, Italy, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States for the immediate cessation of hostilities serving as a legal framework, action by the international community was, he argued, of the essence if there was to be any hope of success. He concluded with the observation that the stabilisation of the political situation in Libya was an absolute priority for Europe, just as peace and security in Libya were a prerequisite for the stability of North Africa and the Mediterranean.

In the discussions that followed, eight MPs took the floor. They concurred on the need for a greater presence of the European Union in Libya to find a solution that should not be military but, rather, based on political and economic pressure (through, for example, measures to limit oil revenues). Calls were also made for increased cooperation with the countries of North Africa.

Breakout Sessions

The first breakout session on "**Parliamentary perspectives on the future of European Battlegroups**" was moderated by the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence of the European Parliament, **Anna FOTYGA**.

The Deputy Chairperson of the Defence Committee of the Chamber of Deputies, **Massimo ARTINI**, served as the rapporteur.

The panellists were **Juan Francisco MARTÍNEZ NÚÑEZ**, Director General of Defence Policy at the Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Spain, **Wolfgang WOSOLSOBE**, Director General of the European Union Military Staff, and **Nicoletta PIROZZI**, Senior Fellow in European Affairs at Italy's International Affairs Institute (IAI).

In the course of his speech, MARTÍNEZ NÚÑEZ explained that battlegroups were a mechanism for the prompt, efficient and consistent deployment of forces and constituted a tool that could be used in all crisis-management operations demanding rapid response. He pointed out, however, that battlegroups are formed by infantry battalions, and that the greater modularity called for by so many parties, might preclude their use, since modularity required time and more complex decision-making procedures. He approved of the proposal to use one of the two battalions on standby for training purposes on the grounds that it might increase the use of the same. On the question of funding, he felt the Athena mechanism was unfit for the purpose, and called for a revision of the decision-making process, which drew too sharp a distinction between civil and military mission funding. As for the "political will" for the deployment of battlegroups, he was hopeful that what he referred to as "Afghan fatigue" and the subsequent political unwillingness to commit "boots on the ground", especially for operations not regarded as vital for European interests, could be superseded. He was cautiously optimistic about the change of perception that could be brought about once the European Union had shown its capacity to deploy successfully and effectively military missions to crisis areas.

In the address that followed, Wolfgang WOSOLSOBE focused on the broader concept of the rapid response mechanism and the time required for the marshalling of forces. He noted that battlegroups are currently the only available facility for rapid response and that they had to be endowed with greater capabilities to achieve an adequate level of modularity and flexibility. After explaining the decision-making process for military operations, he cited the EUFOR-RCA mission as a good example of how the European Union could make an assessment and come to a rapid decision. In conclusion, he agreed with the usefulness of extending the capabilities of the battlegroups through training.

In her speech, Nicoletta PIROZZI spoke of the close parallel between the evolution of the battlegroups, small military units with fast intervention times, and the

development of an overall CSDP. Noting that articles 41, 44 and 46 of the Lisbon Treaty provided an appropriate legal framework for the development of an EU defence policy, he recalled that the concept of battlegroups had arisen from the commitment made at the Anglo-French Summit of Saint Malo in December 1998 to develop an independent response capability based on credible military forces in order to respond to international crises. Even so, every year since 2007 when the battlegroups acquired full operational capability, the European Union had come face to face with international crises without ever being able to find the necessary consensus to use them: Chad in 2007; the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2008; South Sudan in 2010; Libya in 2011; Mali in 2012; and the Central African Republic in 2013. He argued that the battlegroups were particularly suited to dealing with the current crises, being deployable both as a single force for small-scale operations and as an advance force for particular tasks (conflict prevention, stabilisation, humanitarian assistance, etc.). Their use, he maintained, required a radical revision of cost-sharing arrangements for military missions and a strategic reflection by Member States on their common foreign, security and defence policy goals.

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The second breakout session focused on "**Strengthening EU-Africa relations**".

The moderator was the Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of Latvia, Ojars Ēriks Kalnins.

The rapporteur was **Dimitrios SALTOUROS**, member of the Greek Parliament's National Defence and Foreign Affairs Committee.

The panellists were **Giovanni CARBONE**, associate professor at the University of Milan and researcher at ISPI, and **Koen VERVAEKE**, director and senior coordinator for the Great Lakes Region of the European External Action Service (EEAS).

Giovanni CARBONE provided an analysis of the sustained economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa, especially Nigeria. He noted, however, that economic growth had had limited success in reducing the poverty of ordinary citizens. The new economic partners in the region, he explained, had often followed a "country-continent conference" approach in which politics and trade with Africa were determined only by ad-hoc multilateral meetings. In this regard, he said, Europe needed to restructure its relations with an emergent Africa, whose importance is recognised by European and national leaders. He spoke of the coming massive population surge as being the result of high fertility rates that were falling only gradually, and longer life expectancy, and warned it might lead to conflict over access to resources, massive urbanization and migration. He acknowledged that in the medium term there had been gradual political

stabilisation in the continent, although some areas remained in crisis. He identified the geopolitical "arc of instability" as running from most of the Sahel to Somalia, and therefore encompassing the Central African Republic, and extending into the eastern Congo. He advised that the problems were attributable to the political fragility of the relevant countries, and therefore needed to be dealt with by means of specific strategies, while also keeping in mind that economic growth may help strengthen states.

Koen VERVAEKE illustrated the collaboration between the two continents, focusing not so much on development aid as on political cooperation, and referred in this respect to the Europe-Africa Joint Strategy and the summit held in Brussels in 2014. He spoke of the economic opportunities afforded by some African countries, but also of the risks for businesses operating locally caused by the political fragility of the countries in question. He disclosed that Europe remained the leading economic partner of Africa and that trade was continuing to grow. He gave a detailed account of the first economic partnership agreements between the EU and Africa. The high quality of the negotiations leading up to the agreements boded well, he suggested, for their future application within the framework of a balanced relationship between equals. The question of development, he argued, was less important than economy and governance. He then mentioned specific areas of collaboration: rule of law and democratisation, in regard to which the EU is working alongside the African Union; security, an area in which events in Africa have such significance for the EU that they might well qualify for treatment as part of an "almost neighbourhood" policy; and migration, on which Africa and Europe are developing a common agenda. Finally, he offered a review of the many important military operations the European Union is carrying out on the African continent.

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The third breakout session, on "**Regional Stability and enlargement to the Western Balkans**", was moderated by **Giorgio TONINI**, member of the Foreign Affairs and Emigration Committee of the Senate.

The rapporteur was **Afzanl KHAN**, member of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament.

The presentations were by **Fernando GENTILINI**, Director for the Western Balkans of the European External Action Service (EEAS), **Tsrdjan MAJSTOROVIĆ**, Deputy Director of the Office for European Integration of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, and **Gerald KNAUS**, Chairman of the European Stability Initiative (ESI).

In his presentation, Fernando GENTILINI gave prominence to the connection between the process of enlargement towards the Western Balkans and the European Union's foreign policy. He pointed out that since the break-up of Yugoslavia, the European Union had progressed from the deploying defence and policing to providing instruments for the enlargement. He noted that in the Western Balkans all available enlargement instruments had been used, and invoked the need for more cooperation at

regional level so that relations might be established not just between the EU and individual countries, but also among the countries of the region themselves in accordance with the principle that “integration begins at home”. Entering into the particulars, he illustrated the situation of each country in relation to its progress on the path to reform. He focused on Bosnia, whose progress is currently stalled, and praised the progress made by Serbia and Kosovo, as well as Albania. Whereas the new European Commission had declared its intention not to proceed with any further enlargement over the next five years, this period, he argued, should be used by applicant countries to make headway towards their goals. He then justified the European Commission’s revised approach to enlargement, explaining that whereas in the previous enlargement rounds, countries had been allowed to “adjust” even after joining the European Union, this leeway was no longer allowed, with the result that applicants must now comply in full with all the criteria and bring the necessary reforms to completion if they want to gain access. Finally, he highlighted the importance of inter-parliamentary exchanges as a way of ensuring that all available tools are used in support of enlargement.

Tsrdjan MAJSTOROVIĆ focused on two important issues for the stability of the Western Balkans. The first concerned the coming into office of the new European Commission and its decision not to proceed with any enlargement over the next five years. While he agreed that this approach was realistic, he felt that it also sent a negative message to the people of the western Balkans where public support is vital to the arduous process of reform. The second question concerned the new rules of EU accession, which place greater emphasis on the rule of law, economic governance and reform of the public administration. These rules, he observed, created additional challenges that the western Balkans would have to face together. Even so, he remarked, accession to the EU was now the common goal of these countries, though success depended on “more Europe”. He suggested that reforms had to be associated with enlargement, as this would oblige the leadership of the countries of the region to assume responsibility for them, and lend legitimacy to the process as a whole. Europe would also have to think “out of the box” and introduce new initiatives, such as the bilateral process promoted by Germany and the United Kingdom for Bosnia and Hercegovina. Finally, recalling the Enlargement Strategy of 2005 that was based on the three “C’s”, namely Consolidation of the Union, Conditions for accession and the Communication of the benefits of enlargement, he proposed that this last point had not been successful. He concluded by saying that what was needed for the enlargement process was a fourth “C”: Credibility.

In his speech, Gerald KNAUS looked at why the public was opposed to enlargement. In the first place, he surmised, the enlargement process suffered from a perception problem. The criteria adopted by the European Union were not perceived as merit-based or fair and, at the same time, were regarded as not stringent enough.

Further, the process is difficult to understand, does not seem to lead to real changes, and entails lengthy and complicated procedures. For instance, decisions need to be unanimous, so that the veto of a single country is all it takes to block the whole process. Mr Knaus submitted that to overcome the credibility gap, more substance needed to be given to the enlargement process. He proposed an alternative method, according to which the Commission should prepare a roadmap of all the technical objectives, specify what an applicant country needed to do in order to achieve them, and set a given number of reform goals. In the monitoring phase, very clear language should be used when assessing results. He recommended a restructuring of the progress reports, so that the results achieved by each country might be more easily comprehended, and suggested applicant countries should be compared with each other with a view to making it easier to see what progress had been made by each and encouraging the process of reform. The annual progress reports should therefore aim to achieve the following: measure progress, highlight what remains to be done, motivate government employees, educate the public, and be credible to all those Member States that question the veracity of the transformation brought about by enlargement.

CLOSING SESSION

At the closing session, the rapporteurs acquainted the Conference with the discussions of the breakout sessions whose findings were in line with its Conclusions.

For the first breakout session, **"Parliamentary perspectives on the future of European Battlegroups"**, the rapporteur was Massimo ARTINI. After giving account of the debate on battlegroups undertaken in the context of the "European parliamentary system" (a network made up of the European Parliament, the fora of inter-parliamentary cooperation and the parliaments of Member States), the rapporteur presented the discussions held in the breakout group, whose participants had registered a keen interest in seeing further exploration of the links between EU and NATO forces, with particular reference to rapid response mechanisms, also as a way of improving interoperability among Member States. A broad consensus also emerged on the need to encourage strong political will for the effective use of battlegroups and the other instruments envisaged in the Treaty of Lisbon (in particular, the cooperation referred to in article 44 of the TEU). Questions were raised about the effective and rapid deployability of battlegroups, their use for crisis prevention, the civil dimension of their use, the possibility of changing their name, the revision of the Athena mechanism, and the possible extension of their scope of operation to include training and supervision. Winding up his report, Mr ARTINI reiterated that the battlegroups were an indispensable means for responding promptly to crises, and expressed the wish that they be developed for integrated civil and military purposes.

For breakout session two, "**Strengthening EU-Africa relations**", the rapporteur was Dimitrios SALTOUROS, who reaffirmed his conviction that the future belongs to

Africa and focused his report on conflict prevention, crisis management, and the positive aspects of legal immigration. He hoped that cooperation between the two continents would be both total and effective. He then summarised the main themes dealt with at the breakout session, which included the phenomenon of corruption in many African countries, the values embodied by Europe, migration, the need to ensure citizens in Africa to benefit from the economic growth of the continent, and the need to fine-tune European policy on Africa and the South.

In reporting on the work of the third session "**Regional stability and enlargement to the western Balkans,**" the rapporteur Afzanl KHAN gave an account of the themes that emerged during the discussions. First, in spite of the European Commission's decision not to proceed with further enlargement, it was important, he said, for the countries of the western Balkans to step up their efforts at giving effect to the reforms they have undertaken, and for the EU to maintain its focus on the region. Second, the discussions had revealed that Europe needed to adopt measures that would allow the governments of the region to comprehend the political, economic and social strength that enlargement will bring, spur them on the path to reform, and ensure that they are not left feeling as if their membership is forever being deferred. He also highlighted the importance of not leaving candidates and potential candidates behind lest this further divide the region, and declared that responsibility in this matter lay not only with the Balkan countries but also with the European Union. Finally, he reported that his session had resolved that there was a need for greater regional cooperation through neighbourly relations, which are the cornerstone of European integration. This latter objective could be achieved, he argued, only if all the reforms were perceived by the countries of the European Union and by the countries of the western Balkans as elements of social and economic progress.

The Conference approved the amendments to its **Rules of Procedure** and **Best Practices**, as set forth in the white paper prepared by the working group that met in Athens.

Finally, the Conference approved the **Conclusions**, adopting a text that included the amendments submitted by delegations during the meeting. The Austrian delegation did not take part in the vote, having protested in writing at the working methods of the Conference and declaring its preference for far briefer Conclusions that refer only to such matters as emerged during the sessions. The German delegation, taking note of the complete opposition of the United Kingdom delegation, withdrew its amendment for the creation of a permanent European Union military headquarters, while at the same time expressing the hope, endorsed by the Presidency, that the matter might be discussed in depth at the next meeting of the Conference.