

## **EUROPEAN DEFENCE CONGRESS**

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Whatever your nationality, I imagine that there will be those amongst you who have thought at least once in your lives that really, the military are always one war behind... It is something I have often heard ; sometimes, I admit, justifiably so, at least for the simple reason that military equipment cannot adjust to the reality of a threat as fast as the threat itself is developing. And so there is a need to plan ahead, to try not to lag too far behind requirements when the equipment ordered is – at last! – delivered to its users. This is a thorny problem which, like all my fellow soldiers, I have been faced with throughout my military career. But there is one area where I feel, if not exactly ahead of the game, at least in step with the reality of the threat. I say this because the concept and the implementation of battle groups, which I am going to talk to you about, is undoubtedly a highly appropriate response to some of the hazards and threats produced by the uncertain world in which the European Union wants to play a major stabilising role.

The idea was born in autumn 2003, when the European Union had just finished the first operation that it had conducted without outside help. I would just like to remind you of the general background. At the request of the UN, the Union intervened in the Bunia (Ituri) region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to create a secure environment in which the UN troops present in Congo could be reinforced as efficiently as possible. The operation, named Artemis, lasted three months, and the European Union drew, at the outset, on the planning work done by France as part of a projected national operation. A contingent of approximately 2000 European troops (IEMF: Interim Emergency Multinational Force) constituted the Artemis force, commanded locally from an FHQ based in Uganda, in Entebbe, and strategic military command exercised at a French multinationalized OHQ.

Apart from the military success of the operation, the major feature of this first European operational engagement in Africa was the very short deadline for implementation and deployment. The UN Resolution authorising the deployment of an interim international force was dated 30 May 2003. On 12 June the European Council approved the operations plan and took the decision to launch Artemis; the first element of the force was actually deployed on 6 July.

Obviously this rapid reaction experience lays at the heart of the proposal in the final communiqué of the Franco-British summit in London in November 2003, the specified aim being to enhance the EU's ability to support the UN in the field, answering temporary, urgent needs.

You know what followed: the Franco-British proposal was fleshed out by the two countries, joined by Germany, and on 14 June 2004, one year after the launch of operation Artemis, the Military Committee approved the EU Battle-Group concept developed by the European Union military staff. On 1 January this year the concept reached full operational capability and the Union now has two rapid-reaction Battle Groups on call, ready for deployment within 15 days on missions ranging from a minimum 30 days up to 120 days.

What does this really involve?

To reply to this question, I will need to enter into some details to give you a proper idea of what a BG can do and the range of missions it can undertake.

The official definition of a BG is the following one : the minimum militarily effective, credible, rapidly deployable, coherent force package capable of stand-alone operations, or for the initial phase of larger operations. In other words, it is the minimum force package that can be deployed on its own for a small-scale operation or that can contribute to an initial force.

In practical terms, a BG is made up, generically, of a command company, three combat companies, which may be fully or partly mechanised, direct combat support units from, for example, artillery, engineers and air defence, and combat service units, such as medical or logistic support, etc. Each contributing Member State or group of Member States forms the BG with its own resources and thus, in the final analysis, remains in control of how it is made up.

Obviously, the composition of the BG must enable it to respond to the tasks it may be ordered to perform. Referring to scenarios set out in the catalogues of the EU Capability Development Mechanism and bearing in mind that they are to be small-scale rapid intervention operations, five types of BG mission spring to mind: securing a key area (separating parties by force), preventive or deterrent deployment (conflict prevention), initial operations (stabilisation, reconstruction, etc.), the evacuation of nationals and support for humanitarian operations.

Because it has to be in a position to perform these tasks, a BG is more than just an intellectual construct or a juxtaposition of multinational units. To make sure of this, the Military Committee has approved a certification and training process which includes certification standards and criteria applicable to the BG as a whole. They are divided into nine categories which correspond to the political and military uses of the BG:

1. Availability
2. flexibility
3. employability
4. deployability
5. level of and time required to attain readiness
6. connectivity
7. sustainability
8. medical force protection and
- and 9. interoperability.

In areas where Member States might find these standards and criteria are not precise enough to be applied effectively, the EU had a choice of three options: referring to current national or international practice (principally NATO), developing a catalogue of purely European standards and criteria or giving each contributing State or group of States full responsibility for certifying its own BG. In reality, experience and a pragmatic approach have led us to take what is best from each option. The third option remains the basic principle, but it often refers to the other two. The

operational and tactical standards are mainly from NATO, which avoids unnecessary duplication, but EU concepts are observed to the letter. My current concern is to guarantee the Union a basis for operational qualification common to all the BGs. In this respect, the certification exercises carried out for the BG conducted by Germany (*European Endeavour*) in 2006, for the BG conducted by Greece (*Evropi 1 and 2*) and for the Nordic BG (*Illuminated Summer '07*) in 2007 seem to me to be examples worth following. We should also definitely explore more thoroughly the use of *Civilian Response Teams* and *Integrated Police Units* in exercises involving BGs.

Besides proper preparation of a BG, another challenge which has to be met is that of the deployment itself. You are aware, as I am, of Member States' capabilities in the field of strategic transport. As a measure of what is involved, the *Artemis* operation required the equivalent of 200 sorties by C-130s<sup>1</sup> to deploy the force to Entebbe in Uganda. There were then 276 additional sorties to bring personnel to the actual area of operations in Bunia in Congo. Of course, chartering Antonov 124s or C-17s might help by reducing the number of sorties, but it has the disadvantage that long runways then have to be found at the disembarkation point. Such runways are rare in Africa, for example. The arrival of the A 440 M, of which 180 have been ordered by six Member States and Turkey, will rejuvenate the military air transport fleet, and offer the advantages of a tactical aircraft which can land on very short airfields with heavy soil, and which has a maximum payload which is 50 % greater than the C-130. But it has its drawbacks too: the manufacturer's delivery period is significant, and the fully-loaded range is a little over 3 000 km.

I am also expecting the action taken by some Member States through the future Strategic Air Lift Coordination Centre in Eindhoven to contribute to keeping the availability of these aircraft at the best possible level for the Union.

Finally, the other component of strategic transport, namely the maritime component, should not be forgotten, given its particularly attractive cost, and the possibility of mixed use with the airlift component. Of course, the time involved (between 7 and 13 days for 4 000 km) and the disadvantages in having to disembark in a port (security measures, over-extension) generally mean that it cannot be favoured as a method of rapid deployment.

There is another challenge which has to be met when setting up a BG, which is a structural issue to do with the concept itself, namely speed of execution. As you know, a BG should be able to act in the area of operations within 10 days following the Council's decision to launch an operation. Organisationally, this is extremely demanding in terms of planning, and is complicated by the geographical separation of the planners at different levels. The Council Secretariat, with DG E and the EUMS, are responsible for politico-military planning. But operational planning is provided by the OHQ at strategic and operational levels and by the FHQ at tactical level. Currently the first two of these, namely the Secretariat and OHQ, are not co-located. At best, for an operation under Berlin Plus arrangements, the OHQ would be a few dozen kilometres from Brussels, but that is already a handicap. The EU operations

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<sup>1</sup> 50 sorties by An-124s, 20 sorties by A 300s and 72 sorties by C-130s.

centre could provide a suitable answer to this problem, but as you know the conditions for its use are restricted: it can only be used as a third possibility if no national OHQ or SHAPE is available, and only for an operation of a civilian-military nature. To be quite frank, although it reached full operational capacity on 1 January 2007, I would not advise now for it to assume the role of OHQ for the deployment of a BG, both because of its limited human resources and because of the impact of its activation on the day-to-day work load of the Military Staff.

However, I do not want to end this brief presentation on a pessimistic note, since that is not at all how I feel about the concept of Battle Groups. In reality, there are two major points which justify all the effort which the Union's Military Committee and Military Staff have devoted to bringing this concept to life.

The first point is the surprising support of all Member States for the concept, right from the start. I say surprising because, in 2003, the number of European armies capable of responding to a request for rapid military reaction in a distant theatre was limited. A number of them are still more or less structured to meet the needs of the Cold War and are thus essentially focused on territorial defence. We still have many forces short on flexibility and unused to the culture of intervening in non-European areas of operations. However, at the first BG Coordination Conference, which aimed to assess the adhesion of the Member States to the concept, they have committed themselves to a significant contribution: more than 20 were planning either to provide a national BG or to participate in a multinational BG. This showed a real willingness to participate in what was the first concrete expression of European defence. This

enthusiasm, which was marked by a strong desire amongst political leaders to endorse concrete action under the ESDP, was supported unreservedly by the Chiefs of Defence Staff (CHODs), despite their awareness of the scale of the reforms they would have to undertake for their armed forces to be able to live up to their commitments.

The second point is a consequence of the first. The first effect of the BG concept will have been to kick off the adaptation of European armies to the demands of this century. The reforms made in most Member States' defence mechanisms have been profound. I would like to single the Swedish armed forces, which have largely been transformed and reorganised around the BG concept. Thanks to this economic, military and human effort, they form the backbone of the Nordic BG which will be on standby from 1 January 2008 and which, by its very existence, reflects the profound culture change in the armies of northern Europe.

Remember too that the recent operation in Kinshasa was led by Germany, and that even if it was not linked with the rapid reaction concept, it deployed a force which more or less matched the format of a BG. This too was a demonstration of the ability of one of the most influential Member States to adapt its command structures to the current needs of the European Union.

The aim set for 2010 of deployable, flexible forces will thus be achieved thanks to the total commitment of the Member States involved in fulfilling what was initially only a theoretical outline. That is undisputedly the major success of the Battle Group concept. Now, as you must know, we are refining and widening our concept by preparing Air and Maritime rapid reaction capacities. By the end of 2008, we should be able to train and deploy a joint, interservices, rapid response force.

Of course, for the media and for European public opinion, nothing will have the demonstrative power of the deployment of one or two standby BGs under 10 days, to respond to some emerging crisis. It is clear that such an operational deployment will give confidence to Member States, by showing that the European Union is ready to act quickly and effectively in urgent situations. We are currently able to deploy one BG, far away from our continent within 15 days. This simple fact should be recognized at political level. I am, of course, making every effort to encourage such awareness, but I also know that the support of public opinion for what is nowadays the EU's most visible military capability requires the support of the European Union's parliamentarians. That is why I have particularly appreciated this opportunity to talk to you today, and I am ready to answer any questions you may have.