The new European architecture for security and defence, priorities and lacks

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Following a lively debate, the committee adopted the own-initiative report by Philippe MORILLON (EPP-ED, F) on the new European security and defence architecture. The central message of the report was that the EU's military capability must be strengthened if Europe wished to become a credible actor on the international stage and a free partner of the United States, prepared to share the burden of defence. Faced with a world characterised by new threats and growing insecurity, MEPs proposed the construction of a new European defence architecture, and expressed deep regret at the current split between the Member States on key foreign policy issues. As regards military operations, the committee wanted the EU to have, with effect from 2004, a 5000-strong force kept in a state of permanent readiness for humanitarian and rescue operations. By 2009 this force should be capable of carrying out operations autonomously. The committee also expressed support for the EU's decision to take over NATO's "Allied Harmony" operation in Macedonia and its intention to take on the SFOR command in Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, it stressed that the Council should inform Parliament about such missions "after each General Affairs Council meeting, especially with regard to the mandate, the capabilities needed (including possible access to NATO structures) and the financial implications". The report suggested a collective defence clause similar to that of NATO, which would apply to all Member States wishing to take part. The committee emphasised that NATO remained the indispensable bond between the US and Europe and highlighted the importance of clarifying relations between the two military structures. A "solidarity clause" should, it said, be introduced into the Treaty to enable Member States to mobilise all the necessary military and civilian instruments to combat terrorism. On the financial front, MEPs proposed that the common costs of military operations under the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) be covered through the Community budget. This would require an amendment to Article 28 of the Treaty on European Union. With the European Convention's deliberations in mind, the report included a reference to the EU's institutional set-up. MEPs supported an enhanced role for the High Representative, who should have the right of initiative in crisis management matters. Elsewhere the committee suggested that an Armaments and Research Agency and also a European Institute of Advanced Defence Studies be set up, the aim of the latter being "to sow the requisite seeds within both the armed forces and the civilian population to ensure the emergence of a common defence culture".