Main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security policy CFSP, financial consequences for the EC budget

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Elmar BROK (EPP-ED, D) in response to the annual Council report on the main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the financial implications for the EU budget. The committee repeated its insistence that the costs of European security and defence operations should be financed through the Community budget and that Parliament should be consulted in advance on decisions on such missions. MEPs expressed their dissatisfaction with the Council's report which, they said, was totally unsuitable as a basis for a dialogue between Council and Parliament, as it was insufficiently clear on priorities or on the financial implications. MEPs said that the EU's security interests were best served by identifying tensions, preventing potential crises if possible and resolving conflicts in good time beyond its immediate external borders. Thus, the EU's main interests lay with the Western Balkans, Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, the Southern Caucasus, the Southern Mediterranean and West Africa, and the Middle East. For the enlarged EU's new neighbours, new options for partial integration should be developed. The committee called for a study to be carried out into a rapid response budgetary mechanism and, ultimately, the creation of a Community defence budget. Meanwhile, Parliament should at least receive an overall estimation of how much CFSP spending goes to a particular region or conflict. MEPs called for the EU to increase its defence capacities by having a 5,000-man force permanently available for rescue and humanitarian operations from 2004, and by developing a capability within Europe for conducting operations on a scale such as during the Kosovo conflict by 2009. They restated their view that the UN Charter is the "decisive political and legal basis" for international relations and the guarantee of peace and international security. They also stressed that the UN system should be radically reformed, pointing out that the EU and its present and future Member States were the largest financial contributor. However, the committee added that the international system was also crucially dependent on the quality and reciprocity of relations between the EU and the US as equal partners, which should therefore be strengthened as well as rethought. The strategic debate between the US and Europe should be reinvigorated, with special attention to questions of how the reconstruction of Iraq should proceed and how the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can best be prevented, arms exports and the proliferation of conventional arms be controlled, the issue of impunity be addressed (by the International Criminal Court, for example), and repressive dictatorial regimes and dysfunctional states be dealt with. MEPs welcomed the measures taken by the EU in the international fight against terrorism, but called on all bodies involved to uphold civil rights and freedoms and to treat personal data responsibly. The report also said that a future European Foreign Minister should be a Vice-President of the Commission and that the administrative departments within the Council and the Commission should merge into a single foreign office within the Commission. MEPs criticised the proposed retention of the right of veto in foreign and security policy.