



EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY

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PRESS RELEASE

MINISTERS WELCOME EDA PROPOSALS TO BOOST DEFENCE R&T COOPERATION (INNSBRUCK, AUSTRIA, 7 March, 2006)

European Union Defence Ministers today welcomed new ideas for boosting EU joint spending on defence Research & Technology and asked the European Defence Agency to prepare detailed proposals for their meeting in May on a joint programme of investment in R&T, and funding arrangements to support it.

Meeting as the EDA Steering Board in Innsbruck, Austria, the Ministers also called for a pilot R&T programme using a new approach which could serve as a model for turning military capability objectives into specific technology priorities.

“Everybody accepts that Europe has to raise its game on defence as a whole and on pursuing the new technologies which will give us the capabilities we need in the future and strengthen our industries and research institutions,” said Javier Solana, the Head of the Agency, who chaired the meeting.

“Today’s discussions have helped to establish a framework for identifying the most important objectives and the right funding mechanisms to ensure that we spend more, spend more together and spend more effectively in this crucial area,” he added.

The discussion at the Steering Board, the principal decision-making body of the EDA on which the 24 participating Member States and the European Commission are represented, was the latest stage of work on the agenda to bolster the EU’s defence capabilities and improve its R&T performance, following up the Hampton Court Summit of EU Heads of State and Government summit last year.

The Ministers were able to review the results of an EDA Conference on defence R&T in February, at which representatives of governments, industry and research bodies discussed how to achieve a breakthrough in European multinational and national efforts in this area.

The Ministers reviewed three possible approaches to increasing spending and collaboration on defence R&T: more ad-hoc projects between groups of EU countries; increasing the EDA’s own budget for R&T spend on behalf of Member States; and establishing a special EDA programme of joint R&T investment, with an associated budget provided by a coalition of contributors.

Ministers asked for detailed proposals on the third option for their meeting in May, ahead of the next Summit of EU leaders in June.

At its meeting in May, the Steering Board will also review plans to develop an overall European Defence R&T (EDRT) strategy, which will combine this initiative with the results of a wide consultation aimed at identifying key emerging technologies worth backing because of military needs and their economic importance for Europe.

“The ideas discussed today are central to the Hampton Court agenda of taking urgent action to support the defence technological base in Europe and improve the EU’s military capabilities. We will be working flat out to prepare for decisions in May,” said EDA Chief Executive Nick Witney.

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- Background information -

The European Defence Agency (EDA) was established by the Council on 12 July 2004. It is designed "to support the Council and the Member States in their effort to improve European defence capabilities in the field of crisis management and to sustain the ESDP as it stands now and develops in the future". More specifically, the Agency is ascribed four functions, relating to:

- a) defence capabilities development;
- b) armaments cooperation;
- c) the European defence technological and industrial base and defence equipment market;
- d) research and technology.

These functions all relate to improving Europe's defence performance, by promoting coherence in place of fragmentation.

The EDA is an Agency of the European Union. High Representative Solana is Head of the Agency, chairman of the Steering Board, which acts under the Council's authority and within the framework of guidelines issued by the Council.

The Joint Action 2004/551/CFSP establishing the EDA states that the Agency "shall enhance the effectiveness of European defence R&T". Article 5 para 3.4. of the JA (Annex 2) describes the main functions and tasks of the Agency in the field of R&T to achieve that objective. Furthermore, according to the EDA 2005 work programme, the Agency has to establish comprehensive and systematic business management processes for the establishment of R&T priorities at European level.

The major aims of the Agency R&T activity may be summarised as:

- to catalyse more European R&T collaborations, focussed on improving defence capabilities;
- to develop policies and strategies to strengthen defence technology in Europe.