



**EUROPEAN COUNCIL  
THE PRESIDENT**



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### **Remarks by President Herman Van Rompuy following the European Council**

A few remarks after the concluding session of the European Council, the last one of the year.

This morning, we had a good discussion on our Common Security and Defence Policy. It's been a while – in fact since 2008 – that this issue has been discussed at our level.

There are several reasons why I wanted to bring it back on our agenda. For one thing, the security challenges that Europe faces have, if anything, increased over the last few years; and our countries are being called upon to assume more responsibility in the maintenance of peace in our neighbourhood and beyond. Also, recent crisis operations, including in Libya, have revealed certain gaps that we need to fill-in. All this of course, while the current economic context makes it even more pressing to develop required capabilities in the most cost-effective way.

Before the summer, I already shared my intention to devote the December 2013 European Council to these questions. The purpose of today's discussion was to set into motion our preparations.

Today, even if obviously we do not yet know the final endpoint in twelve months, we set a direction for our work. We want the security and defence policy as a whole to become more effective. This includes also our civilian capabilities, a very important aspect, as well as a more systematic cooperation among EU Member States on defence capabilities. We also want to see a stronger defence industry in Europe, which will contribute to more innovation and competitiveness, and to more growth and employment across our Union.

# **P R E S S**

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So in practical terms, we have invited the High Representative, as well as the Commission, to develop proposals and report on them at the latest by September 2013. It's very important that Member States feed in ideas and priorities into this process. The External Action Service and the European Defence Agency will obviously play a key role. On the basis of this work, I will then present recommendations, ahead of the December 2013 European Council meeting itself.

I am pleased that we are launching this process on Common Security and Defence Policy. At the beginning of the week, we made clear in Oslo to our partners in the world that the European Union will stand by those who are in pursuit of peace and human dignity. To fulfil our responsibilities, we have to make sure that we have at our disposal all the means that are needed.

We also had a substantial discussion on the increasingly deteriorating situation in Syria, a situation by which we are appalled. We have a moral duty on this issue, where so many innocent lives are being lost. We underlined the gravity of the situation, and the need to support the coalition of Syrian opposition forces in the most effective way. We stressed the need for Assad to leave office, and for a real political process to take place.

The European Council remains actively engaged and tasks the Foreign Affairs Council to look "at all options to support and help the opposition and to enable the greater support for the protection of civilians." We also address our "support to a future that is democratic and inclusive with full support for human rights and the rights of minorities".

We also examined the Annual Growth Survey – a point I am sure President Barroso will say more about in his intervention. It marks the beginning of the 2013 European Semester. The third edition of this essential policy instrument should take place in a better overall economic context, now that we see a prudent return of confidence in the eurozone and beyond.

Finally, I should like to thank President Christofias for the excellent cooperation during the Cyprus Presidency. It was the country's first Presidency since its accession, fully aimed at the Union's common interest. All along we have worked intensively together, also with many members of the government, in particular on the ongoing budget talks. From the summer, the Cyprus Presidency spared no effort in carefully preparing the ground. It was indispensable work, even if we will only reach the final deal early next year.

Another major contribution is the conclusion of the European Patent thanks to the ultimate agreement reached between the Council and the Parliament. It is the happy end to a 40 year-long Odyssey. And if you allow me to continue that image: even if we do not know for sure on which Mediterranean island the historic Odysseus lived, for Europe, in the patent case, our beloved "Ithaca" clearly is Cyprus!.

So, to conclude, this was a very positive European Council meeting, which ended a year where the European Union has covered a lot of ground and which mapped out the way forward for next year