

GREECE/EU/NATO: EVANGELOS VENIZELOS FEELS NATO IS AN AGEING ORGANISATION THAT NEEDS RENEWAL, WHILE CSDP, AN EMBRYONIC ORGANISATION, MUST GROW

Thessaloniki, 03/11/2010 (EDD) – On the sidelines of the International Defence and Security Fair, Defensys 2010, in Thessaloniki, the Greek Minister of Defence has granted EDD an interview. Evangelos Venizelos speaks to us of the role of the European Defence Agency (EDA) and the Commission, of solidarity and implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, NATO renewal and missile defence.

EDD: *To sum up the content of the conference that has just been held in Thessaloniki, the cuts in defence budgets mean an effort must be made for cooperation and all ministers seem to agree on this ...*

Evangelos Venizelos: Politically speaking. Rhetorically, yes.

EDD: *Of course, this must be translated into concrete terms ...*

E.V.: It all depends on national priorities but also on the European Defence Agency which can play a determining role, although it does not yet have institutional and operational autonomy, which is very necessary if it is indeed to play this role. That is a problem for Baroness Ashton, who must play a more energetic role as the head of the defence agency.

EDD: *In the draft decision on the EDA's status, seat and rules of functioning, a mechanism has been reintroduced allowing a single state to block decisions. What do you think of this?*

E.V.: This is a more general institutional problem at European level which arises from the fact that the principle of majority rule is not the only method of democratic expression. That is why we are still seeking consensus. In my view, there is no real problem regarding the decision-making mechanism.

EDD: *Let us take the respective roles of the Commission and the European Defence Agency ...*

E.V.: About one year ago, I asked for a working paper to be drafted on the role of the defence agency after entry into force of the new directive on public defence procurement. That was because implementation of the directive can give rise to contradiction. There must therefore be a bridge between the defence agency and the Commission.

EDD: *One of the problems which lies at the heart of this relationship is, precisely, the harmonisation of market rules.*

E.V.: Because, for the Commission, the top priority is competitiveness whereas, for the agency, the priority is cooperation even at intergovernmental level.

EDD: *Where possible, the Commission would like to put an end to offsets and reduce application of the "fair return" principle. Do you agree with that?*

E.V.: We are undergoing earnest discussion with the Commission regarding transposition of the directive into the Greek body of law. We are being assisted by Commission services in preparing our draft law for application of this directive. What is more, during the meeting of defence ministers at the EDA Steering Board, we called for dialogue between the agency and the Commission, between the high representative and the competition commissioner in order to find a solution that is acceptable to all parties concerned. (...)

EDD: *There are also many new tools down on paper in the Lisbon Treaty ...*

E.V.: And not only there. There is a structure that already exists, the EDA, and we must now adapt that structure to the reality of the Lisbon Treaty and to the reality of this new directive which can play a vital role in the creation of the European defence market. And then there are relations with third countries, an American presence that we cannot neglect, and a Russian presence in a number of national markets. There are many parameters to be taken into account.

EDD: *Coming back to the instruments of the Treaty that have not yet been implemented – permanent structured cooperation, the solidarity clauses and mutual assistance, and European capabilities and armaments policy, etc. ...*

E.V. Just a moment. What is the real situation? According to our very long experience in the history of the South East Europe region, with regards the solidarity clause ... A similar clause also exists in the Washington Treaty, within the NATO framework. It is very difficult to apply that clause. Every country knows that, in times of crisis, it is on its own. In a crisis situation, there are real allies and purely theoretical allies. That is the reality – and it is for that we insist on implementing the clause, because we have a dramatic history behind us when it comes to solidarity. For us, there is a very real feeling of threat weighing upon us in the region. It is very important for us to overcome this feeling of threat and that is why our priority is still to organise an operational relationship between Greece and Turkey. That is why