

Address by Ambassador Jean-Jacques de Dardel, Head of the Swiss Mission to NATO, on the occasion of the GCSP's study trip to Brussels on March 19, 2009



Partnership for Peace: Do we still need it ?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear friends and colleagues,

To be sure, we are all polite and well behaved, and you expect me to be so. And with a tasty meal before us, there should be nothing wrong with yet another insipid speech to munch away by. Then again, I trust that since we are among GCSP alumni, you all know better than to think that because we are here under a Swiss helm, we should all be neutral about things and beware of being too opinionated.

In other words, it should not surprise you if at the outset, I dare question the stamina of the Partnership for Peace. PfP: do we still need it? Is the question that comes to mind when we face reality: the Partnership for Peace nowadays does not seem to be a priority for NATO-Allies, to say the least. Efforts of some Partner countries, such as my own, to revitalize an institution for which they have developed a sense of ownership, have not changed this situation a great deal. Furthermore, when some Allies talk about “partners”, they don’t necessarily refer to members of the Partnership Council. In Vice President Joe Biden’s speech at the Munich Conference, “partners”, it seems, basically referred to contributors to NATO operations, especially in Afghanistan, be they Japan, Columbia or even Pakistan.

Why is that? How far are we from those 90's when the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), then the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and eventually, in 1997, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) were created? Are the reasons that led to the inspiring idea of this institutionalised partnership still valid?

You are all sitting at a luncheon table, so you will have no difficulty with a presentation divided into three courses: as entrée, I intend to briefly address the question of why PfP and the EAPC were created. Then, as a pièce de résistance, I will attempt to analyze why the Partnership is neglected at a time when NATO is preparing its 60th Anniversary Summit. And as a dessert, I will look at the prospects for PfP in the future and add a little cream in the way of the role that Switzerland could play in the process.

PfP, a tailor-made solution

The Partnership, I believe, came as a **pragmatic response** to two main challenges that NATO faced at the end of the Cold War: on the one hand, the Alliance needed to revamp its mission and reassert its purpose. What better way to head for a new future than to expand its following? On the other hand, NATO felt the need to have a framework for its diplomatic ties with the former members of the Warsaw Pact, so as to intensify military contacts and practical cooperation at various levels.

It all started in 1991, with the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). But that forum for dialogue was not enough to enable a more substantial rapprochement. This led to the *brilliant invention* of the Partnership for Peace that was launched at the NATO Summit meeting, here in Brussels in 1994.

PfP allows à la carte cooperation between NATO and its partners, which translates into comfortable and creative self-differentiation, instead of squabbling over the dos and don'ts of partnership. Because of this, PfP attracted not only the born again Eastern European countries, including Russia, but also the **Western European neutral and non-allied**. Even the staunchly neutral Switzerland entered PfP in 1996 (If you think turning the Soviet Union into Russia was the biggest feat of the century, think again!). And of course, PfP quickly revealed

itself as a the perfect antechamber for countries wishing to ultimately join the Alliance (which is not the case of the genetically neutral and staunchly non aligned Switzerland...)

But however efficient the practical cooperation, the Partnership would not have been sustainable in the long run without a **political framework**. That was made evident by the need for political coordination that the NATO-led peacekeeping operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina required since its inception in December 1995. This situation led quite naturally to the creation of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997.

The Ups and Downs of EAPC

Ladies and Gentlemen, let us focus on the **merits of these institutions** created in the long gone 90's. Their main virtue, surely, lies in the **commonality of values** shared by the countries of the Euro-Atlantic Community. What goes without saying in writing is often written off in everyday reality, unless there is a constant animation of virtuous thoughts. PfP and EAPC are, as such, instruments to promote these values as well as confidence between all countries of this community. The EAPC validates at the political and diplomatic level the activities and the work done under PfP. Furthermore, it involves political leaders of our countries, and thus impacts on national decision making processes (and this, in my opinion, is more important and substantive than meets the eye at first). It also adds a useful, aye, sometimes crucial varnish of equality in a process otherwise tainted by imbalances of strength and power wielding.

And on hard-security issues, I'll bluntly note that the EAPC is clearly better suited than the OSCE, because members of the Alliance will always rely on NATO first when lives are at stake.

So why is it, 15 years after the creation of PfP and on the eve of NATO's 60th Anniversary, that one can feel a **certain fatigue** towards the role of the EAPC, a fatigue illustrated by the fact that there will be no EAPC Summit in Strasbourg-Kehl at the beginning of April. Yes, the birthday party will be for the next of kin only: no distant cousins, no friends...

I can see three main reasons for this rather surprising state of affairs: **Firstly**, it seems obvious that with a change in the US administration, a new French attitude towards the Alliance and a

perceived necessity for a new strategic concept, all of this against the backdrop of worsened relations with Russia since the outbreak of the Georgian crisis, NATO countries feel that they have more than the usual on their hands. Hence their wish to keep their discussions to a close family circle. Indeed, viewed from their immediate perspective, there seems to be too much hardcore topics and problems on the plate for NATO to spend time on side dishes – or wider bones of contention, for that matter. Added to this, in line with announcements made by Mr Obama well before his election, NATO is concentrating its energy on its main operation in **Afghanistan**, where its credibility is at stake and where things are not going too well at the moment – as we hear from different sources. This is why, even though NATO has decided not to have an EAPC-Summit in April, it remains possible that NATO will eventually convene a meeting with ISAF (International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan) participants.

Secondly, in order to adapt to new circumstances, NATO has launched in these past years **new partnerships** with the Mediterranean and the Gulf countries. It has also institutionalized special relationships with certain contact countries like Australia, Japan or Afghanistan. In other words, NATO has gone on reaching out to a motley and open ended group of countries, viewed as possible assets in some specific situations, as a result of a utilitarian approach of the notion of partnership. This is understandable and there is nothing wrong with that, per se. But as a whole, the full number of partner countries seems to already be too large to allow for meaningful plenary exchanges. In addition, each new form of partnership needs considerable work on institution building. And so it is that if necessary precautions are not taken, a first side effect of such an expansion is to weaken other existing bonds and rock cohesion. Indeed, one cannot but note that this trend has put an extra burden on the NATO Secretariat, and has distracted attention from the main EAPC partnership.

Thirdly, it appears that the difficult relationship between **Russia** and NATO – already a problem in the lead up to the Bucharest Summit, further hampered by recent tensions in the Caucasus – has considerably reduced some Allies' appetite for sharing information with partners and debating issues in the context of the EAPC.

There is a fourth reason, the official one, I am told, explaining why EAPC partner countries are not invited to Strasbourg and Kehl: there **would not be enough room** in the local facilities for an EAPC Summit. But no one is really buying into this explanation as the main reason for the “members only” sign hanging on the closed door to the old boys Club...

Dear alumnis - I'm sure that the C in GCSP stands for Chatham House Rules. So I'll allow myself to voice a meaningful sigh: **NATO, beware not to lose sight of the lasting added value of the EAPC** because of short term considerations. Afghanistan, for instance, is indeed an enormously important operation, but it is not an operation that can be won in months or even in a few years through military means alone. Afghanistan also needs considerable involvement of nations well beyond large military contingents. At another level, the coming NATO summit will also have **several other important issues to discuss**: basic assessments of the directions taken, including the place that collective defence and out-of-area operations will have in the future, new issues, and a New Strategic Concept, or at least its first outline.

In view of these substantive questions of relevance to Allies and Partners alike, **what if the same spirit that partners shared in the 90's is not felt anymore?** Will that not influence their contributions to PFP? And what if mistrust is revived between some Caucasian or Central Asian Partners and NATO because of the lack of consultation opportunities? In the end, for countries with no intention to join the Alliance, we run the risk that cooperation could make some real steps backwards.

Opportunities for the future and the role of Switzerland

As a strong believer in the capacity of the Alliance to adapt and in the intrinsic qualities of the Partnership, I would like to conclude on a more positive note by identifying opportunities in the fields of political dialogue and enhanced practical cooperation.

Once the 2009 Summit will be over and discussions on the **new Strategic Concept** will mount, I sense that NATO will increasingly feel that **new issues** like energy security, cyber defence or the comprehensive approach will need more involvement of the partners. Think for example about the expertise of the Ukraine or countries of the Caucasus, or even Russia, on energy security. Think also about the added value of non-Allied Nordic Countries and Switzerland on the comprehensive approach, especially on relations between NATO and humanitarian actors.

Switzerland, together with the other Western European Neutral and Non-Aligned countries, will continue to insist on having these issues on the EAPC agenda. We will also highlight

some dimensions relevant to the overall security framework, such as the promotion of international humanitarian law, transparency and democratic control of armed forces, as well as the destruction of weapons, ammunition and mines.

At another level, let there be no mistake about my own stance on some harder aspects of security. I have long been a committed proponent of my country's participation in international peacekeeping operations, and I favour a mounting contribution of Swiss troops and equipment. As you know, Switzerland does contribute armed personnel – over 200 officers and soldiers to KFOR, for instance, as well as helicopters and armoured units in the Balkans.

But, as I have hinted before, my opinion is that **troop contribution shouldn't be the only defining element of a relationship with NATO**. If NATO wants to deal with overall security matters – and not only military operations – then a number of issues crucial to security and stability, conflict resolution and post conflict reconstruction are also to be addressed seriously. In this respect, I will recall that Switzerland is committed to PfP goals by contributing actively to Trust Funds as well as through the courses and training materials it makes available to partners. These contributions are, by the way, widely recognized by Nations and NATO International Staff.

Many of these are areas where the **GCSP brings and can even bring more**: its courses on international security develop new ways of thinking about solving problems and create informal networks of the quality illustrated by your presence today. It's a great asset for the Partnership, I believe, and Switzerland will of course continue its privileged and supportive relationship with the GCSP.

A privileged and supportive relationship... isn't that also what relations between NATO and the EAPC are supposed to be? Indeed, PfP and the EAPC are solid institutional constructions fathered by NATO and made to last. However, their relationship, now, is more akin to that of an old couple: if it is to last meaningfully, it must be nurtured. And the prospects of short term gains through ever newer partnerships, however attractive given circumstances, should not distract from the fact that PfP and EAPC is the main successfully tried and tested mechanism enabling NATO to reach out to other countries in its main area of concern.