



EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY

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PRESS RELEASE

EUROPEAN DEFENCE AGENCY STEERING BOARD AGREES TRANSFER OF WEAG/WEAO ACTIVITIES TO EDA (BRUSSELS, 22 APRIL 2005)

The Steering Board of the European Defence Agency agreed today on the aim that the Agency should gradually take over the activities, in particular those covering Research & Technology, of the Western European Armaments Group (WEAG) and the Western European Armaments Organisation (WEAO).

The Steering Board, the principal decision-making body of the EDA on which the 24 participating member states are represented, was meeting for the first time in the formation of Research & Technology Directors. The meeting, the fourth Steering Board session since the Agency was created, was chaired by Mr Dirk Ellinger, R&T Director in the German Defence Ministry, on behalf of Javier Solana, Head of the Agency.

“We intend to preserve the valuable content and features of existing defence R&T cooperation,” Ellinger said. “But we believe that by bringing these activities under the new EDA framework, we can make collaboration in research and technology more cost-effective and tie it more closely to the capabilities needed to implement the European Security and Defence Policy.”

WEAG, established in 1993 as the successor to the Independent European Programme Group, and WEAO, created in 1996 as an executive body to manage joint research projects, have until now been the main focus for defence research and technology co-operation in Europe. Member States have already agreed to close WEAG from next month and the Steering Board agreed on the need for early complementary legal decisions within WEAO by the Member States concerned to allow the transfer of its functions to the EDA.

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The Steering Board decided that the EDA should aim to take over the relevant activities of WEAG and WEAO progressively during 2005 and the first quarter of 2006, when additional resources should be available to EDA to handle transferred contracts.

“Absorbing the work of WEAG and WEAO into the EDA will give R&T collaboration a much stronger political impulse,” said EDA Chief Executive Nick Witney.

The Steering Board also approved a set of principles governing the Agency’s Research & Technology functions, including plans to establish networks of experts from governments, research centres, industry and international bodies to collaborate in specific areas.

The “operational concept” for R&T defines the operating principles and internal organisation which will allow the Agency to absorb existing valuable activities such as those from WEAG and WEAO, manage future collaborative projects, put R&T contracts to industry, monitor progress and allow the Steering Board to define and oversee a European defence R&T strategy.

“The R&T Directors emphasized their commitment to supporting the work of the Agency in this field and intend to remain closely involved in it,” Ellinger said.

The Steering Board also reviewed the Agency’s work to date on the technology required for Long Endurance Unmanned Air Vehicles for intelligence and surveillance, one of the Agency’s four flagship projects for 2005. The aim is to encourage collaboration within the European industry to demonstrate the technologies required for such UAVs.

“There are three major and at least five smaller national programmes under way in this area within the EU,” said Witney. “By studying some of the critical technology elements for UAVs together at a European level, we can ensure that research money is spent in the most effective way – one of the central aims of the Agency.”

The Steering Board also heard a presentation from the European Commission on the European security research programme, part of the 7th Framework Research Programme. The EDA will be represented on the European Security Research Advisory Board to identify synergies between the defence R&T work of the Agency and the civilian-oriented security research programme.

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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 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.

Nick Witney was appointed EDA Chief Executive on 30 July 2004. The first EDA Steering Board meeting was held on 17 September 2004.

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.

For more information about WEAG and WEAO, please see <http://www.weu.int/weag/>

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