THE MODERNISATION PLAN 2000 – 2015 OF THE BELGIAN ARMED FORCES.

The Belgian context

- Belgium, yesterday a unitary country today a federal one, is composed of different linguistic communities and is characterised by institutions of great complexity in order to increase the autonomy of the different consisting regions. Confronted with never ending arbitration, it has cultivated the art of compromising up to excess.
- For a long time Belgium has cherished a neutral policy, but in spite of its doing so it has been involved in the two major conflicts of this century and has made, by necessity, the realistic and pragmatic choice of enlisting in the defensive alliances (NATO, WEU).
  From this moment on Belgium has always been a precursor in the Europeanization of defence and security matters.
- A part of our armed forces lived in Germany for almost fifty years and few are the cities in Belgium that have lived in the wake of military activity.
- and finally, Belgium is a small country
  - better than big countries do, it spontaneously acknowledges its own limitations and feels the need of co-operation and anchorage in a more vast entity;
  - it realises that even if big countries have more impact on international organisations it is better to be part of these and be entitled to give its opinion;
  - it is easier for Belgium to take radical decisions. It sometimes behaves as a forerunner in certain matters, adopting a more flexible and trend setting approach. To give you some examples: the decision taken in 1992 to suspend the conscription and turning the armed forces into an all-volunteer force, or the voting of the law prohibiting antipersonnel mines in 1996.

The preceding reform phases: why did we restructure in the past?

We did so for different reasons.

- First of all there are the geopolitical and geo-strategic reasons : the dramatic changes in the geopolitical environment since the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991 : the end of the cold war, the changes in types of threats and the redefinition by international organisations of new concepts as to security and defence, the multiplication of operations abroad in the framework of regional conflicts are certainly some major reasons why Belgium has restructured its armed forces thoroughly, reducing it and transforming it.

- There are a series of other reasons of course, of a more general nature, but some are inherent to Belgium :

  1. technological : the never ceasing improvements in armament systems and information and communication systems ;
  2. sociological : the evolution in opinions with the disappearing prospect of immediate war and putting into question the size and the role of the armed forces ; the negative perception of military conscript service seen as a discriminatory system (young girls not being involved as well as half of young males), the impression wasting precious time while being enlisted;
  3. budgetary : the need to save and to participate in the national effort to reorganise and rehabilitate the federal State finances in order to satisfy the convergence criteria for the creation of the monetary union imposed by the treaty of Maastricht;
  4. military : many doubted on the usefulness and efficiency of the military service ;
  5. political, at the federal and regional level : it is rewarding to cash the peace "dividends" from an electoral point of view, especially by suspending conscription.

How did we proceed in the past, before the present reform?

In three different phases :

In 1988 and 1990 the first two phases essentially consisted of a ***reduction in scale*** : a 20 % reduction of the volume of the armed forces and the presence of Belgian troops in Germany (proportionally it was the largest one of all allied countries) has been reduced from 23.000 to 4.000 military.

The third phase, has been elaborated in 1992 and decided to in 1993 by the Government; it had to be implemented by 1998. It encompassed ***a real strategic reorientation***. It took into account such factors as the budgetary constraints and the international commitments (NATO, WEU, Eurocorps, ..) our country had to live up to.

More specifically, at that time the following adaptations and measures have been decided on with an implementation deadline of 1998:

1. *reduction of military manpower to half*, from 80.000 to 42.500 military (5.000 officers, 15.000 non-commissioned officers or NCO's, 20.000 volunteers, 2.500 aspirants or cadets and 5000 civilians) and a corresponding reduction of equipment ; these measures had to be implemented without dismissals and at the same time measures were to be found to release excess personnel in an acceptable way;

2. *suspension of conscript system* (which can be re-established in case of adverse geo-strategic changes);

3. *reorganisation of the forces* : while maintaining the army, the air force and the navy, an inter-service territorial command had to be created; a larger number of posts to be attributed to civilians, so as to free up more military personnel for operational tasks;

4. *introduction of a recruiting policy* facing the need for younger people, in order to correct the age pyramid. We had to set up a legal basis in order to create attractive military careers for volunteers, based on a short term commitment (2 to 5 years);

5. *almost complete withdrawal of troops from Germany*

6. confirmation of a limited budget, restricted to a nominal 98 billion BF until 1999; this means without a yearly adaptation to inflation;

7. *constitution of a new reserve force by 2005*

On the whole , most of the reforms and planned measures of this third phase have been executed

The fourth phase: the 2000-2015 reform plan

A STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE MODERNISATION OF THE BELGIAN ARMED FORCES 2000-2015

The necessity to continue the adaptation process

As described, in the past years, our Armed Forces have already gone through a profound restructuring. The third phase of the restructuring, with the suspension of the military service and a very substantial reduction of the strength of the Armed Forces, has been done in the context of a frozen budget and without changing the scope of the existing missions. That structure, however, still remained a replica of the past and relied still too much on the Cold War context, with its rather static and territorial wars and with defence plans for the most part prepared and trained beforehand.

The changed and **changing geo-strategic environment**, the **multinational and multi-institutional** approach needed to solve crises and the **international obligations** of our country that flow from it, needed a further adaptation of our Forces. Belgium will continue to align its foreign and security policy on its membership to NATO, the European Union, the UN and the OSCE. It is therefore important that the Belgian Armed Forces continue to be able to fulfil their role and missions – in co-operation with their Allies – in the great diversity of possible scenarios.

The principles guiding the current long term reform plan.

The following political **principles** determine the organisation of the future Belgian Armed Forces:

- The organisation and equipment of the Armed Forces must be tailored to the **future threats and security risks**.

- Considering the diversity of risks and threats, our country must be ready and be in a position to **contribute to the various operations for the protection of our Allies' territory, to crisis response operations and to the evacuation operations of nationals** (Non Combatant Evacuation Operations - NEO).

- With the exception of the NEO, which in the past were decided upon at a purely national level and which, up to a certain scale, can be carried out autonomously, Belgian Armed Forces **interventions abroad will almost always occur in an international framework**.
  In other words, Belgium is not obliged to have Armed Forces capable of carrying out all conceivable military operations, that is: our operational capability should constitute a **credible and coherent contribution** to the alliances to which we are a party and should be consistent with the latter. This means that we must be prepared to take a **fair share of the risks, of the responsibilities and of the burdens.**

- The decision of the Helsinki European Summit and the future development of the **European Defence** will direct the reform of our Armed Forces, but to the same extent will NATO's **DCI** (Defence Capabilities Initiative) have an influence. Both being in our view mutually reinforcing. Within this framework it is also useful to stress that the various **"lessons learned"** by our own Armed Forces from the numerous international operations are now systematically put into practice.

- In principle, it should be possible to employ all available Belgian units in peace operations, crisis management operations or any other international operation. It is therefore necessary to organise the future force structure into a **modular** pattern. The different services should be capable of quickly and efficiently composing formations, based on highly interoperable modules. Such a Belgian formation or battle group should be able in turn to rapidly integrate into larger international entities.

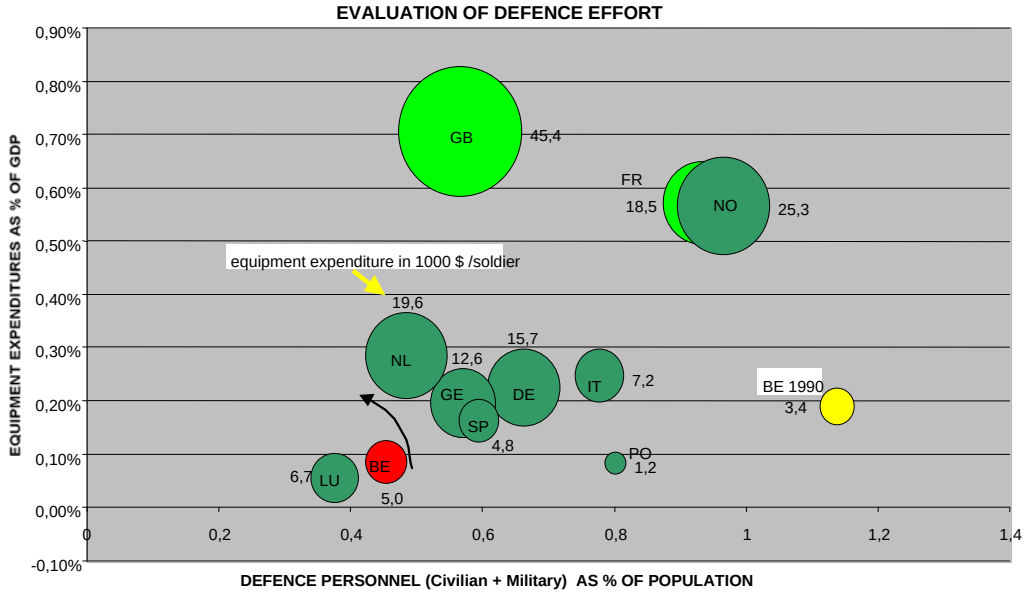
- Belgium has to continue its pioneering work in the field of **far-reaching co-operation** with the Armed Forces of other European countries.

In short, the Armed forces will adapt to the new situation in the coming 15 years based on the following summarised principles:

- firstly : the Belgian Armed Forces must be able to do their proportional part of the multinational land-, air-, and naval operations based on an equitable risk, responsibility and burden sharing;
- secondly : the adaptation must be based on a long term vision which is resolutely in line with the emerging European Defence (Helsinki's headline goal) and coherent with DCI;
- and finally, "jointness" is the rule, "combined" solutions will be pursued whenever possible and civil-military co-operation is the third high priority.

The basic convergence philosophy underpinning the plan.

The European Defence development will sooner or later probably lead to the alignment of the defence efforts made by the EU member states. It is possible in the longer term that a minimum defence expenditure level - expressed for example in relation to GDP (Gross Domestic Product) - will progressively be attained in order to achieve an equitable intra-European burden sharing agreed by everyone. The pressure to reach an equitable burden sharing will be higher - given the increased mutual dependence - since a further task sharing or an enhanced complementarity among Europeans is and will remain on the agenda. In this perspective, it is useful to put Belgium's defence effort within the European context. This effort can be visualised on the following graph, which takes into account a certain number of political significant parameters.

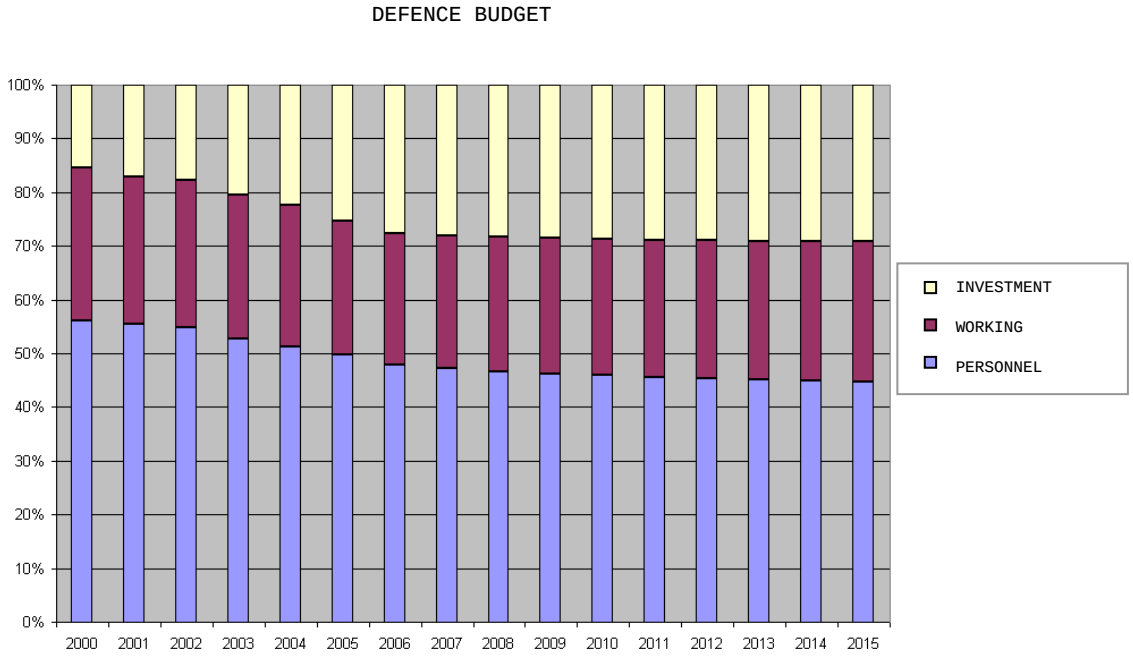


The horizontal axis shows the total defence personnel (civilian + military) as % of the total population, whereas equipment investment expenditure as % of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is shown on the vertical axis. A number of

European countries are represented on the graph, the size of the circle reflecting the proportion of investment expenditure per serviceman. It is essentially this last parameter which gives intuitively some indication of the qualitative level and of the degree of protection and safety under which the Armed Forces' troops concerned may be committed.
In the long run, the current divergent position of Belgium is not in accordance with the basic principles of a European defence based on an equitable sharing of responsibilities, burdens and risks. A progressive convergence towards a conglomerate of comparable countries is therefore the underpinning basic philosophy shaping the structure of defence effort.

Such a long term objective requires stable budgetary planning assumptions in order to be able to establish the necessary long term investment plan. The Government decided to adapt the defence budget to inflation in the coming 15 years. For the Armed Forces in the next decade this is all the more essential, since this decision has been taken after a seven-year freezing of the defence budget which has resulted in an investment postponement.

An agreed long term investment plan 2000-2015, called “Defence and Security Investment Goal” and from which a 5-year procurement plan named “Defence and Security Investment Plan”, is distilled annually, constitutes the tool for achieving the adaptation objective
Finally it is important to stress that the “Defence and Security Investment Goal” is financially feasible and that within a period of 6 to 7 years, the 3 components of the budget (personnel, investment and O&M) will be in balance again, allowing for an investment level of about 25%.



The credibility of the new investment plan has been illustrated already in the past year, by three important acquisition decision by the Government. The participation in the military Airbus project has been decided with the firm commitment to acquire 8 aircraft in co-operation with Luxemburg, who will

procure and operate one of the eight. The Governments of Belgium and Luxemburg also decided recently to commonly acquire a strategic transport ship in the very near future, the tenders are expected soon. And finally, Belgium will participate in the HELIOS II satellite program.
The scope of those programs also illustrate our country's determination to effectively contribute to finding solutions to the capability shortfalls identified in the framework of the Helsinki Headline Goal.

Future force characteristics.

The operational characteristics of the new Force structure will be those of DCI : **more readily available, flexible, modular, sustainable, deployable, effective and fully equipped and manned units**.

- The **land component** – the term "component" is used in order to stress the jointness in the future – will have 2 core capacities :
  - a mechanised capacity with wheeled armoured vehicles, consisting of 2 fully equipped and manned brigades;
  - an air transportable infantry capacity with transport helicopters, consisting of the transformed airborne para-commando brigade.

  As a result, the gradual adaptation of the equipment and weapon systems of the land component will encompass the modernisation of the transport means, the improvement of the anti-tank capacity, the introduction of new jeeps with a better protection, the acquisition of deployable temporary or semi-permanent infrastructure for PSO-contingent, the acquisition of medium transport helicopters, the replacement of the different types of tracked vehicles by wheeled vehicles, the digitalisation of the land operations.

- The **air component** will continue to consist of multi-role combat aircraft and transport airplanes. There is no change in the assignment of 72 mid life updated F-16's to NATO. After 2015, the F-16 will be replaced by new combat aircraft. The C-130's will be replaced by more capable A 400-M.

- The **naval component** will be see the replacement of its frigates by multi-role escort ships, the upgrade of its mine hunters and the introduction of a strategic transport ship.

- A special effort will be done in the CIS-field.

- As far as the personnel is concerned, the total strength of defence personnel will be reduced to 39.500, from the actual 44.000, by 2015. At the same time the distorted age pyramid will be improved in order to reduce the average age from 36.4 to 33 years. For this a special budget of 5,6 billion BEF, on top of the normal defence budget has been approved for the coming 4 years.

How did we proceed for the fourth phase?

The reform plan is actually based on a strategic reflection called VISION 2015, that was initiated in 1997. This VISION 2015 project was spread over a period of almost 3 years, closely involving all 4 services, and aimed at jointly determining the best force structure for the Belgian Armed Forces for the year 2015. The changed and changing geo-strategic situation and the Belgian context had to been taken into account. The long and frequent debates between senior officers of the services on the future joint configuration of Belgian's military instrument contributed to a better mutual understanding and constituted the best therapy for creating the adequate jointness state of mind in order to find and accept the necessary compromises.
This academic exercise was the major contribution to the strategic modernisation plan 2000-2015 , that was approved by the Government in May 2000.
As from that point in time, the necessary implementation studies in the different fields had to be initiated in order to obtain elaborate detailed implementation plans for the following two main objectives:
First, the creation of one unified (single) joint staff to be operational on 1st January 2002, by integrating certain functions of the currently existing staffs of the different services and by re-engineering other functions.
Second, the transition to the new force structure, spread over 15 years, taking account of the following directives:

- The gradual reduction of the total personnel strength from the actual 44.000 to 39.500 by the year 2015;
- The reversal of the current core (combat) to corporate (support) ratio, which today is characterised by core: 46% and corporate: 54%;
- The re-engineering of the units;

By the middle of this year, the studies were finalised and the real preparations for the introduction of the new unified joint staff are now going on. The method that was used and the architecture of balanced working groups that was set up during the study phase was rather original and ensured a close political control from the Minister of Defence and a strategic direction from the Chiefs of Staff. Thirteen working groups were created involving some 500 officers and civilians. Each working group was co-chaired by a senior person coming from the cabinet of the Minister and one coming from the existing staff structures, our so called "administration".

The new unified (single) joint staff.

While the resulting new structure of the land-, air-, navy- and medical components have been explained to you in an earlier part, let us now expand on the unified (single) joint staff structure.
The slide shows the actual complex staff structure with a general staff and the 5 independent service staffs. Personnel strength for this configuration is about 3800 people. The actual staff structure can also be represented by visualising the functional responsibility fields of each separate staff; the fields being: personnel, operations and materiel.

The rationale for reconfiguring into one unique joint staff is based on the following principles:

- Regrouping into joint entities responsible for one functional field;
- Empowerment by centralised control and decentralised execution of tasks with an evaluation at every level;
- Radical simplification of the administrative procedures by decreasing the number of advisory levels;
- Increased computerised actions;

The following slide shows the skeleton of the future staff, represented by functional field.
And finally this is the detailed staff structure. We can see that two Directors General report directly to the Minister: the DG Education (Training) and the DG Image and Public Relations.
The CHOD (Chief of Defence) is assisted by one Vice CHOD, 5 Assistant Chiefs of Staff and 4 Directors General. The responsibility field of each of the 5 ACOS is:

- Operations and Training;
- Defence policy, international relations, strategic studies and plans;
- Evaluation;
- Intelligence and security;
- Well Being (Health matters, Environment, Quality of Life);

The 4 Directors general have the following horizontal responsibilities:

- Human resources;
- Materiel resources;
- Budget and finance;
- Legal matters and mediation;

The 4 components (land-, air-, navy-, medical) have a small headquarters at their disposal and are mainly responsible for the operations. The component commanders report to the CHOD through the ACOS Operations and Training.

An Example: the re-engineering of the materiel resources organisation.

Before concluding, it might be interesting to give an example and to dwell on the fundamental restructuring of the logistic side of the whole of our Armed Forces. The so called “materiel resources” pillar of the new structure encompasses the entirety of the weapon systems, communication and information equipment and all infrastructure. In this “materiel resources” field, the objective has been to fundamentally review the management and maintenance philosophy and to re-engineer the organisation. The new approach aims at preserving a judicious balance between performant mission execution, optimal use of resources, job satisfaction and preparation of the future. Three axes are pursued:

- to concentrate into one single integrated organisation the total management of all materiel resources, being dispersed today at the different services and at multiple levels;
- to rationalise the support activities in the units;

- to renew working processes and materiel management methods throughout the whole organisation.

This re-engineering has been using methods pertaining to the total quality philosophy. Joint Critical Process Teams have been established for the different fields, composed of mainly junior and intermediate level officers. Those are actually the people that in the longer term will benefit from the new organisation which they helped designing. At this stage of the reform, the Critical Process Teams completed their studies and a number of Implementation Teams are now in charge of transforming the theoretical conclusions of the CPT's into workable structures and procedures.
The result of the re-engineering effort is worth mentioning: personnel strength will be reduced with 33%, from 8426 to 5588 persons. This reduction contributes greatly to the objective of reversing the core to corporate proportion from the actual 46/54% to 54/46%.
And finally to conclude,

Did we encounter any difficulties so far?

First of all, a maximum of precautionary measures were build in from the beginning to avoid unnecessary resistance:

- the re-organisation, the re-engineering and the spread of reductions were not imposed but mainly obtained through joint negotiations in a concerted manner;
- the implementation of the modernisation plan will be spread over 15 years, except for the introduction of the new single joint staff and the disappearance of the service staffs. This "big bang" will occur on 1st January of next year and preparations are well under way;
- a 4-year temporary special budget of 35 million Euro per year has been reserved for the rejuvenation of the Armed Forces and for the improvement of the attractiveness of the military profession;
- older flag and general officers have the possibility of leaving anticipatively the Armed Forces, if they do not wish to continue their career in the new joint structure;
- there will be no forced departures or dismissals;
- consultations will be organised for the personnel of the units and barracks that will be closed in order to accommodate them to the maximum extent;

So far the negative effects of possible pitfalls could be avoided or overcome:

- an important number (some thirty) of base closures will have to be carried out in the coming 15 years. The announcement of this decision had to prepared with great care, because it is politically very sensitive especially in a country like Belgium with its complex balance between communities, regions and linguistic entities. An accord at the political level has been reached in the beginning of September 2001, after months of preparations. The end state solution is a good compromise, integrating social and political realities, and it is not deviating too far from the initially proposed ideal solution, elaborated purely on a cost-effectiveness rationale;
- a number of external, incontrollable factors have already endangered the faithful execution of the modernisation plan and more specifically the investment part of it. To give a few examples: the cost of the dollar and thus of the fuel prices had a negative impact on the O&M budget. This had to be compensated within the

capped total budget, resulting in a slight reduction in procurement funds. Another factor is the augmentation at the federal level of the wage scales for the civil servants and of the police. In order to remain competitive and not to endanger the recruitment for the military careers, an upward adaptation of the lowest military wages had to be carried out. This in turn had to be compensated within the existing total budget at the detriment of the investment plan to a certain extent.

So far the plan is nevertheless still on track. It requires however a very close follow-up and pro-active anticipation of the possible negative effects of external disturbing factors.