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**Keeping the peace**

By Bernard Kouchner

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For months, for years, we have been deeply distressed, yet powerless, with respect to the tragedy in Darfur. Two weeks ago, despite the troubles in Chad, Europe gave itself the means to protect the victims and to rebuild their villages in eastern Chad. At the behest of France, and thanks to the efforts of our European partners, the European Union - implementing a unanimous UN Security Council resolution - launched its Eufor operation.

There will finally be help and comfort for women - who up to now were raped or killed as soon as they left their camps - and for hungry children.

This is no small achievement. I've just returned from Goz Beida in eastern Chad, and I will never forget the enthusiastic welcome the European soldiers received from displaced persons and refugees.

The launch of an autonomous EU operation in Africa, led by an Irish general with a Polish deputy and bringing together troops from some 15 countries, illustrates how far we have come in building a European defense. It is now desired and supported by nations that until very recently remained skeptical.

We have been working to build a European defense since the 1990s. The Europeans needed military means commensurate with their political ambitions. How could we hope to influence a crisis or negotiations without the means to back up our words?

"The Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and a readiness to do so, in order to respond to international crises," concluded the Franco-British Saint-Malo Summit in 1998. The European Security and Defense Policy inscribed in the Lisbon Treaty is finally allowing us to meet this need. In the future, if we wish to do so, the EU will be able to fully assume its role on the international scene.

No one can deny that this is a major asset for peace in the world. The approximately 15 civilian and military operations that Europe has already conducted since 2003 in the Balkans, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Afghanistan and as far away as Indonesia, largely attest to this.

In each of them, the EU was guided by a single ideal: to save lives, to avert war, and to work for reconstruction and reconciliation when the international community had been unable to prevent conflict. Each time we did so with a concern for effectiveness and pragmatism, with or without direct support from the Americans.

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Our vision of relations between the EU and NATO is that they should be founded on this same pragmatism. In some cases, the EU has used its own military means, as it did in Congo in the past and is doing in Chad and the Central African Republic today. In other situations - Bosnia, for example - the EU benefited from NATO support. Now, in a growing number of crises, the EU and NATO are deployed together on the ground.

That is sufficient to show that there is not competition but rather complementarity between the two organizations. How could it be otherwise when 21 of the 26 NATO allies are members of the EU, and 21 of the 27 EU partners are members of NATO?

Moreover, it is these individual nations that decide on a case-by-case basis what is the most appropriate framework for their actions. And it is they who supply troops and equipment - there is no EU army, just as there is no NATO army. And all the parties remain free.

This very simple truth means that European defense relies on the commitment of each state and that all may do their share. It presumes that all European countries make the effort to ensure that the security of all is no longer guaranteed or financed by only a few.

As France is one of the largest contributors to both EU and NATO operations, it is in our interest, even more than in that of others, for the two organizations to work more effectively together. The positions expressed by President Nicolas Sarkozy last fall are clear: A tireless promoter of European defense, France is at the same time a key member of NATO, whose forces it has commanded on several occasions, particularly in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Our new approach to NATO is not an alignment but rather a strengthened European dynamic.

Some claim that the United States remains opposed to a European defense, as it would weaken NATO. This claim no longer appears to be true. Recent statements by high-ranking U.S. officials in Paris and London indicate that Washington - aware of the challenges we must face together - acknowledges the necessary complementarity of the two organizations.

Trust is built over time and through reciprocity: Our openness to the United States and American support for the EU autonomously assuming its responsibilities shall advance hand in hand.

European defense and Europe's anchorage in the Atlantic alliance are two facets of the same defense and security policy, pursued in the name of the values we share.

The EU presidency, which France will assume on July 1, must allow us to open new perspectives in the field of security and defense, to fight against terrorism and proliferation more effectively, to reinforce our energy security, and to prepare the implementation of permanent structured cooperation open to all 27 member states, as made possible by the new

treaty. We will resolutely strive toward that aim. We are already preparing ourselves under the presidency of our Slovenian friends. This progress will give full meaning to the renewal of our relationship with NATO.

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