



BELGIAN SENATE

6th Conference of the Parliamentary Committees for the Oversight of Intelligence and Security Services of the European Union Member States

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Thursday, October 1st 2010

Dinnerspeech by M. Danny Pieters,
Speaker of the Belgian Senate,
Chairman of the Monitoring Committee of the Standing Committee I

Now that we are about to start dinner, I want to say it is a great idea to close a very fruitful day with a delightful feast of the palate. I sincerely hope you will enjoy it. And if you already started drinking, just carry on with what you're doing. I will join you as soon as I can.

To show my appreciation of your presence today and tomorrow I will not afflict you with many words. It is pleasant to celebrate this conference in this agreeable way, in this old palace of the Nation that was built in 1779 as a residency for the governor of the Southern Netherlands, Charles of Lorraine, brother in law of Maria-Theresia, the empress of the Austrian Empire of which we were once part.

Organising a conference such as this is a very large undertaking. Delivering papers of the quality we have heard today requires a very great deal of time, work and thought. I wish to congratulate all that intervened for their excellent contribution.

It is unfortunate then that having set such commendably high standards I should speak at this dinner. Especially is that so when I am supposed to invite your attention to some questions that lie behind issues of the kind that you have been examining in the Conference. But they are questions which I think are important and which all of us would do well to think about.

The circumstances in which the principles we have been discussing in this Conference find application are changing.

This morning there has been some discussion about the challenges and perspectives on the European level as a whole.

As you may well know the European External Action Service will be launched on the 1st of January next year. It will constitute the foreign affairs department of the European Union and will have its own intelligence service.

On the European level already existed the Joint Situation Centre, SitCen for short. The Situation Centre aims at providing the Council with high quality information on matters of public security, in the form of early warnings, assessment, services in case of emergency, and constitutes a contact between the High Representative and the intelligence community of the countries of the EU.

This Sit Cen will constitute the core of the future European intelligence centre. Until now it depended of the political and security committee of the European Council. From the 1st December onwards, however it will fall under the direct authority of Mrs. Ashton and become a genuine intelligence service.

This extension of the EU intelligence capacity will however be paired with oversight by the European parliament. A select committee, consisting of six members will be entitled to consult the classified intelligence of the European External Action Service.

I think this to be very good news for all of us as it broadens the scope of parliamentary oversight. It also illustrates the incredible fast pace at which the European Union is spreading its wings after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

I would like to congratulate the European parliament with this democratic breakthrough. Henceforth we will be able to invite them as a partner in our conferences and not as a privileged observer.

It is a privilege to host you and I wish to thank you all for your presence.
