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AN EU ROLE IN DISARMAMENT VERIFICATION

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Before I begin, I wish to thank Harald Müller and Giorgio Franceschini for inviting me to this meeting. Let me also say that it is good to sit beside my old friend and colleague Ole Reistad. We have known each other for many years, and his work symbolises how the union can be involved in a practical sense.

The organisers have asked a very simple question: can the European Union play a role in nuclear disarmament verification? I will give the short answer first: of course it can.

I want to start by taking you on a 65-year journey back in time, to the spring and summer of 1950. The weather was unusually warm this particular year, almost as warm as it has been this summer. Temperatures in the United Kingdom would climb to 31 degrees in June, and people were complaining about the heat. The similarities to our summer do not end there.

1950, much like 2015, was a year of international unrest. The Korean War began in Asia. This conflict would claim over one million lives. At home, Europe was still recovering from the brutality of the Second World War. Our continent was still in ruin.

However, 1950 would be a turning point for us in Europe. On Tuesday, the 9th of May, French Foreign Minister Robert Schuman published a simple proposal with great ramifications. “World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it,” he wrote, introducing the idea that would later become the European Coal and Steel Community.

To control the production of coal and steel—essential materials for the production of munitions—would “make it plain that any war between France and Germany becomes not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible.” The first cornerstone of what would become our union was laid that day. I think it is worth remembering that it was based on an arms control agreement.

Mr Schuman died in 1963, but the Nobel Peace Prize awarded to the Union almost three years ago would no doubt have delighted him. Europe received it for—and I quote—“the successful struggle for peace and reconciliation and for democracy and human rights.” The Committee wrote that in the year since Robert Schuman’s proposal, our continent has been transformed from—and I quote again—a “continent of war to a continent of peace.”

That is Mr Schuman’s enduring legacy. A heritage we Europeans are duty-bound never to forget. We owe Mr Schuman to take his vision forward. We also owe it to future generations and ourselves to build on and expand on his creative power.



I have no doubt that Mr Schuman's idea applies to nuclear disarmament. It too cannot be propelled without creative efforts proportionate to the challenge of getting to zero. To control the production and use of uranium and plutonium—like coal and steel before it—would indeed make nuclear warfare not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible. This is the ideological link between the image of a united Europe and the thought that implements of war need to be brought under international control.

Last year, the United Nations' Secretary General remarked that all nuclear material in weapons programmes must be subject one day to binding international verification. He called on all member states to begin the process to elaborate what he called effective arrangements.

I believe it to be Europe's responsibility to answer the Secretary General's call, and to do so convincingly. The EU would be joining forces with the United States, which has already announced an International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification.

Some of you may be thinking that the European Union cannot afford to be involved. To those, I simply say that the resources are there. The EU budget stands at 142 billion Euros. Yet, a minuscule amount of that wealth trickles down to our field. The issue is not resources, but the political will to apply them.

The union tend to be selective in its approach and implementation of arms control. While there are Joint Actions on the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Biological Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, the union has yet to muster up one on nuclear disarmament—despite this being a pronounced aspiration of many of our union's member states.

Some of you will say that this is not without cause. After all, two of the union's member states possess nuclear weapons. Why would they support an EU action ultimately aimed at abolishing weapons they deem essential for their national security? This is a good point, but I would note that both France and the United Kingdom have subscribed to the long-term vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. A creative effort, based on a clear vision, is what is needed today.

France believes that disarmament cannot be divorced “from collective security and the strategic context.” It is difficult to disagree with that. However, it is not an argument against starting preparatory work. Preparing for future verification challenges is a worthwhile and creative effort, and I hope that both France and the United Kingdom would agree with that.

Some of you will say that there is not enough capacity in Europe to start a worthwhile effort. I would agree, but simply note that the entire point of Europe engaging fully is to acquire the capacity we are lacking. I think Norway has led by example. The country had a scant capacity to engage with the British when the UK-Norway Initiative started. Today, it has a vibrant non-proliferation and disarmament community. While the British—by being a nuclear weapon state—had some capacity to begin with, it has strengthened significantly in the last ten years. Moreover, let us draw on existing institutions, such as the Joint Research Centre. We have more capacity that you would believe, and we can make it stronger.

I am certain that none of you will say that building a disarmament verification capacity is something we need to do urgently. The political will to embark on deep cuts have not yet materialised. The strategic situation facing Europe is more complicated today than it was ten, even twenty years ago. This is not a challenge, but an advantage. Many technical verification issues remain unexplored, and we need time to

explore them properly. When the conditions are right, we will then have properly considered—validated—proposals on the shelf, ready to be deployed.

Imagine where we would be fifteen years from now if Europe decides to invest seriously in arms control verification. Our union would be able to sit at the table of major arms reduction talks, not as dependants but as equals, as true partners. This would enable us to better protect our interests and espouse our values.

I have one recommendation to make, and that is that the union considers adopting a joint action on nuclear disarmament verification. This funding—available to all member states—would ensure that we build capacity, that we maintain and nurture it, and that we realise the vision that once laid the cornerstone of our union. After all, as Robert Schuman said 65 years ago, world peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. It is as true today as it was then.

I thank you for your kind attention.