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JEVRELL, Hakan (2009) “Swedish Presidency of the European Union: EU’s security policy in the Mediterranean”, en SOLER i LECHA, Eduard y GARCIA, Irene, *VIII Seminario Internacional sobre Seguridad y Defensa en el Mediterráneo. Nuevos escenarios de cooperación*. Barcelona: CIDOB/Ministerio de Defensa, pp. 19-20.

Este artículo es el resultado de la ponencia presentada en el VIII Seminario Internacional sobre Seguridad y Defensa en el Mediterráneo. Nuevos escenarios de cooperación, organizado en Barcelona por CIDOB y el Ministerio de Defensa el día 26 de Octubre de 2009.

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The issues addressed at this seminar – Maritime security, civil protection and crisis management – are all very important issues and of high priority, also to the Swedish Presidency. The focus today is the Mediterranean area, but the challenges are common everywhere.

Let me start with Maritime Security. One of our priorities during the Swedish Presidency is to move forward on maritime surveillance, being one important aspect of maritime security.

Maritime surveillance is an area where an increased cooperation, both between agencies and between Member States really can make a difference and make the most of already existing resources. This is relevant for many areas: trade, law enforcement, border control, disaster response, the protection of the maritime environment and fisheries control. It also has a role to play in security in international crisis management operations.

Before I do that, I would also like to touch upon the two other topics of this seminar, civil protection and crisis management, which are both of high relevance for all of us.

The EU civil protection cooperation has developed over the past years, in many regards as a reaction to several natural disasters both inside and outside the Union. We remember the Tsunami in South-East Asia and the hurricane Katrina, but also the forest fires in the Mediterranean, earthquakes in Italy, storm disasters in Sweden, and flooding in central Europe.

The climate change has given us several new and complex challenges and therefore we need to make the best possible use of the available resources. But we also need to look at ourselves in order to meet the demands of our citizens to respond to the specific needs that we are facing.

Prevention in civil protection is also high on the agenda. We find that the focus for a long time has been on response and preparedness on an EU level. But for responding ably, we also need to develop our national competences. We all know that the support that is closest at hand is the most efficient.

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That is also why regional cooperation in civil protection is becoming increasingly important. Recently the EU has agreed on several regional actions where civil protection is highlighted as one of the priority areas. I look for example at the Eastern partnership cooperation, and at the creation of the Union for the Mediterranean. One important aspect of this is to find synergies and to avoid duplication.

Now let me move on to crisis management, and more specifically the EU Battlegroups. The establishment of the Battlegroups provides the Union with a capability to act swiftly and globally. It gives the ESDP credibility.

The Battlegroup concept also serves as a tool for transformation of our national defences into more mobile and rapidly deployable forces. This is certainly true for my country, where our new Defence Reform to a large extent builds on experiences from the Nordic Battlegroup. However the fact that no Battlegroup has been deployed, despite calls for its use, might put the credibility of this instrument at risk.

We believe that the Battlegroup concept as such is still relevant. The problem does not lie within the concept. The instrument is ready, but are we ready to use it? We have invested resources and tax payers' money to make Battlegroups a reality. This is why The Swedish Presidency has launched a discussion on the usability and flexibility of the EU Battlegroups. The discussions so far have been fruitful and are proceeding well in Brussels.

In crisis management, the EU has a well developed conceptual framework for civil-military coordination. However, there is a general understanding among the EU Member States that more can be done.

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An important starting point for further analysis is experience from missions and operation where we know that there are practical issues where shared civil-military benefits are found. These include training, risk assessment/intelligence/information sharing, evacuation/MEDEVAC, logistics/support and lessons learned.

Returning to the issue of Maritime Surveillance, I would like to point out that in the Baltic Sea region, lessons learned have shown that maritime security and safety in its broadest sense, benefits from cooperation across borders and sectors.

Learning from one another is of course not limited to countries bordering each other, or countries bordering the same area. Sharing experiences between regions are also that important. During our Presidency we use the SUCBAS cooperation in the Baltic Sea as an example, hoping that parts can be relevant for other cooperation in other regions.