

The European Common Defence and Security Policy and NATO – Better Co-Operation With a View to the New Security Challenges

Speech by Raimonds Vējonis, Minister for Defence of the Republic of Latvia

Distinguished Members of Parliaments,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

2014 has been ‘a wake-up call’ to all European countries. Europe has experienced Russia’s unacceptable and continuous military aggression in Ukraine. This has also shown that we should take more attention to hybrid threats. We have seen dramatic events as the spread of ISIL in the Middle East. The attacks in Paris and in Copenhagen have commanded a reinforced European response to counter terrorism at its source. Illegal migration remains a serious challenge on our southern EU borders.

There is no doubt that we are living in a new security environment. We need to acknowledge it among Europeans and **review our European Security Strategy** accordingly. Latvia’s Presidency of the Council of the EU is committed to support the work of the High Representative and the European External Action Service in this regard.

In light of these new security challenges, the **cooperation with our partners** is paramount. In December 2013, our Heads of States and Governments stressed that NATO is a key partner of the EU. Few months later, the Wales Summit reminded the EU as ‘a unique and essential partner for NATO’. We have to remember that 22 states are members of both organizations, and that they are sharing the same pool of resources, common interests and values.

Our two organisations are different and complementary. One can act in high intensity crisis. The other is able to act throughout the life span of a crisis, both before and after, and with a comprehensive set of tools. For example, our borders are now facing a broad range of challenges including illegal migration and regional conflicts. We have to remember that EU has several tools for **increasing the security of our Eastern and Southern borders**. First of all, the EU should allocate appropriate funding for increasing border security. Secondly, we have to understand that ensuring security to our citizens means to cooperate among different EU institutions and structures not only in the area of CSDP, but also in the area of home affairs. This means that we need to act comprehensively.

Enhancing EU-NATO cooperation is also vital if we want to contribute meaningfully to peace and stability in our neighbourhood and beyond. We must ensure that we draw on the respective strengths of both structures whilst avoiding duplication. The next European Council on defence this June will be an opportunity to assess the progress made in the field of EU-NATO cooperation and to have a strategic discussion on avenues for further improvements.

In the course of 2013 and 2014, we have witnessed an increased dialogue between the two organisations. We have had regular exchanges of views between the High Representative and the NATO Secretary General. Successful cooperation happens also at technical level, but we can go further. We must maintain this momentum and use the European Council next June to give a new dynamic to this essential partnership.

We could indeed do more, particularly in the field of the new security challenges I mentioned.

Firstly, we must pay more attention and further discuss the so called “**hybrid threats**” where states and non-state actors seek to use a mix of conventional, irregular, terrorist, information and cyber means to achieve their goals. Discussions within NATO have formally started in different working groups. I’m happy to see that, two weeks ago in Riga, the topic of hybrid threats was discussed for the first time among EU Ministers of Defence. We should do our best to unpack the concept together and share a common assessment.

Secondly, we should build up our respective **strategic communications capabilities** in order to tackle some of these threats. I can tell you that here in Latvia we have witnessed significant evidence of Russian sponsored propaganda spreading in our media space. One of our major strength - the fact that we promote plurality of opinions - is used against us. It is difficult to counter a lie. Given the range of tools that the EU has at its disposal it is better and more efficient to develop a narrative and share it as widely as possible in a coordinated manner. NATO has already been working on the issue, and notably which hosts the STRATCOM NATO Centre of Excellence. This provides a good opportunity for the EU to build upon informal contacts with NATO and explore how NATO practices could be used in the EU framework.

Let me also highlight some other avenues for cooperation between the EU and NATO, that some could qualify as more conventional, but not less critical.

First, on the **interaction between our armed forces**, we should identify avenues of cooperation between the training and exercise cycles of the two organisations. Synchronizing EU and NATO exercises should be organised on a regular basis. Consultations on training programmes are also a way ahead. We have also seen good examples of cooperation in the field of capabilities, notably the harmonisation of our respective capability development plans last year. We should maintain this level of cooperation.

Second, on **crisis management**, we already witness well-established practices of cooperation at politico-strategic level, such as the reciprocal invitations to high level meetings. These best practices should not be lost. When a crisis erupts, regular exchange of information could happen between the political and security committees from the respective organisations. Ukraine is the prominent example which comes to my mind of course, as it has shown an efficient division of labour between the EU and NATO. Moreover, it is necessary to foster the discussions between EU Defence Ministers on how to rapidly respond to a deteriorating security situation.

Please allow me to also underline the **vital role played by our EU national parliaments** in the field of defence. Since the beginning of the economic crisis, EU defence budgets have drastically decreased. However, given the current security situation, it is essential to stop this trend and to **invest more resources in the development of our capabilities**. Therefore, I would like to ask those parliamentarians who represent states that have not increased or even decreased their defence budgets to use all of your influence to counter such developments.

In conclusion, we should not forget that we are stronger together and that, at the end of the day, only one criteria counts: the security of European citizens and our capacity to defend it.

Thank you very much for your attention.