European Council

Zurich, 04 April 2019

Conclusions on European Defense Policy

CHAPTER I: MOTIVATION

Our community of sovereign democracies is facing unprecedented challenges. At the same time, the security environment surrounding our EU remains very volatile. From the South to the East, Europe is surrounded by threats and must become an island of stability in this global sea of chaos.

In the South, terrorist and criminal organizations are proliferating as instability is spreading largely because of failed or fragile states leading to ungoverned spaces. In the East, Russia's war against Ukraine continues, as well as their illegal annexation of Crimea. Hybrid tactics, including cyber terrorism and information warfare and energy policy, are destabilizing our Eastern Partnership countries as well as Western democracies. Tensions in the Western Balkans are rising.

The migration crisis at the southern and south-eastern borders poses dramatic challenges to the EU and its Member States, including security concerns, and must be addressed in a collective effort. The external and internal security threats are strongly intertwined regarding this issue.

Brexit and the uncertainties created by the new US administration further complicate the global security landscape. We stand firmly committed to the trans-Atlantic community of common values and interests, which shall remain the most important instrument for maintaining European security for the foreseeable future. Increased EU cooperation and coordination in the area of security and defense will not happen at the expense of NATO, but will complement and strengthen it and considerably raise the efficiency of trans-Atlantic cooperation. Peace and security can no longer be taken for granted.

According to latest data provided by the European Defense Agency for 2015 (estimate), Member States' armed forces account for 1.4 million soldiers, more than in the United States.

Member States' defense spending amounts to about $266 billion, a number which would make our military the second largest if we were to combine our forces, second only to the United States. However, the effectiveness of our military spending is considerably lower than it is across the Atlantic. The lack of cooperation, coordination and synergy as well as severe duplication and fragmentation contribute to that fact. As a result, our current national forces are arguably a waste of taxpayers' money and weaken our efforts in the area of common defense.

All across our great continent citizens feel increasingly concerned about security and look to the Union for protection. It is therefore high time for the EU to take more responsibility for its own security.

We recognize that Member States have different positions on security and defense policy for historical reasons and that nationalist sentiments in some countries prove a hindrance to further military integration. However, while it is necessary to recognize that reality, we must also keep in mind the very reason for the existence of this EU and consciously work to overcome such obstacles.

CHAPTER II: POLICY

1. The European Council calls upon the EU legislative bodies to implement a common budget for defense spending and a mechanism to adjust budget goals depending on the expected threat level. Further, a framework to coordinate spending among EU member states to increase cooperation and take advantage of synergy effects, seems advisable.

2. The European Council calls upon individual member states to increase cyber defense cooperation. The respective structures should be tasked with the protection of all EU member states and pools together all of the member's cyber defense forces in a centralized fashion in order to cooperate on all matters in cyber defense, to ensure a more efficient use of the member states' resources and technology on the subject.

3. The European Council directs the Commission to extend the mandate of the European Defence Agency to include doctrine and research planning.

4. The Council calls upon EU institutions to adopt, while moving towards the establishment of a European Army, mechanisms for the opt-out of individual member states making it possible for them to compensate their military commitment through financial commitment. No such requirement shall be imposed if the member in question is a country which is officially declared neutral. Any force created in such a way shall be under the authority of the Council of Ministers.

5. The European council decides to stay seized on the matter.

CHAPTER III: FINAL CONCLUSION

European defense can no longer be the weakest link in the EU integration process. We Europeans need to take our destiny into our own hands once more and strengthen Europe's defense, especially since - according to the Eurobarometer study of June 2016 - half of EU citizens consider EU action insufficient, and two thirds of them would like to see greater EU engagement in matters of security and defense policy.

In the current complex security environment, this EU cannot afford to be a bystander. Recent global events have shown us that the peace, which we have grown accustomed to, can be taken for granted no longer. Our values and interests are being challenged and it is time to set a higher level of ambition for ourselves. Our Union is uniquely positioned to take an active role on the global stage, in areas both civilian and military. Yet, to secure our place in the world we need to be ready to act swiftly, decisively and with determination.