

Address by Netherlands Minister of Defence, J.A. Hennis-Plasschaert, on the occasion of the seminar “Europe’s security and Defence; what next?”, Friday 11 march 2016, Paris

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today it is exactly twelve years ago that almost 200 people lost their lives due to terrorist attacks in Madrid. Over 1800 people got injured. It was one of the worst terrorist attacks on European soil.

Twelve years later, terrorism has grown into one of the biggest threats to a stable, democratic and free Europe. People here in Paris know everything about it. The horrific acts last year, the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in January and the attacks near the *Stade de France*, in the Bataclan theatre and in the 10th arrondissement in November, are still very fresh in our memory.

These attacks, *and others which have occurred on European soil*, have shown us that our internal and external security are increasingly interwoven. Internal and external security can no longer be kept separate. We should focus on both simultaneously. An integrated approach is needed.

We face severe internal threats, which are closely linked to the situation in the Middle East and large parts of Africa. And I am afraid that we have not seen the end of it yet. As French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, recently said at the Munich Security Conference: *We have entered into an era characterized by the lasting presence of “hyper-terrorism”*.

The fight against ISIL has entered a new phase. There is military progress to report, but we also know that ISIL continues to adapt its barbaric methods. It is still capable of moving explosives, weapons, money and personnel from Syria into Iraq and to other countries like Libya.

ISIL undermines not only the security in the region, but also in our own cities. It is an affront to humanity, religion, and the free society we stand for. Europe therefore needs to demonstrate strength, unity and tenacity in its response. We need to protect our homelands from attacks by ISIL and its affiliates. So, we have no option but to see this fight through to the bitter end. ISIL must and will be defeated. And their defeat must be a collective accomplishment in which allies stand united. This is why - for example - the Netherlands, together with France and the other coalition members, is now also focusing on eastern Syria, ISIL’s heartland.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is a lot at stake here. The various threats and challenges have resulted in a toxic mix, painting a dim perspective for future peace, prosperity and stability across the globe.

And what is Europe's answer to all this? Is Europe stepping up to the plate?

The honest answer is that we can and must do better. Our way of dealing with the various crises too often seems to be splitting us apart instead of uniting us. But unity is exactly what we need right now.

We need unity because migrants are likely to keep knocking on our doors in the years to come. We need unity because the geopolitical tensions and the conflicts surrounding Europe will continue and possibly even multiply. We need unity to tackle hybrid threats. We need unity because terrorists will not hesitate to strike at us again.

Moreover if, *in this increasingly complex and contested world*, we do not take the initiative, others will decide the course of events for us.

As the European Union, we therefore must get our act together. When it comes to our Common Security and Defence Policy, we have to make it work in the interest of maintaining the zone of peace and stability which we have so carefully built over the decades.

As Nicolas Gros-Verheyde, a French journalist and famous Brussels blogger recently wrote: *"L'Europe en matière de défense est un enfant qui suce son pouce et veut rester dans sa poussette alors qu'il devrait être adulte!"*

How right he is! Europe has to "grow up" and must do so, as soon as possible.

The current security situation not only requires us to have a new Global Strategy, but to have the tools, and especially the commitment to see it through!

So, ladies and gentlemen, to come to the topic of today's seminar *Europe's security and Defence; what next?*

I see three areas for action.

First, we need to have the EU Global Strategy as soon as possible, in June at the latest. We need a Global Strategy in which we clearly describe *how* we are going to deal with this more connected, contested and complex world.

A new attitude towards the EU's responsibility as a security provider is needed. We will have to show that the EU can be a credible, effective and efficient security actor in its immediate region and beyond. We will have to better link internal and external security. And we will have to be able to act more independently to defend the EU's interests and to protect our core values and guiding principles. We will have to reaffirm the trans-Atlantic partnership and work together with NATO, the UN and others in functional partnerships. We have to stand strong together, both at home and abroad.

The Global Strategy will have to set a clear level of ambition in which these notions are reflected.

But what is the purpose of a strategy and a new level of ambition if we do not have sufficient means to execute it?! A new strategy should immediately be translated into actionable proposals to strengthen European defence cooperation.

A 'White Book like document' should describe the CSDP-related tasks and means we need to execute the Global Strategy. It should give us a clear picture of which military capabilities we need the most.

A few examples:

We will have to consider a more adequate early-warning system. The Arab Spring, the Ukraine crisis, the fight against ISIL, millions of refugees. Did we really see it coming? Did we have sufficient warning in advance? Too often we are in a reactive mode, trying to fix problems without having the time to fully understand them.

We therefore need to invest in indicators and early warning mechanisms, in sharing intelligence, in Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities, as well as in cyber capabilities.

The White Book like document will have to make the case for a better equipped civil and military toolbox - which right now we simply do not have. It should possibly also lead to an expansion or

review of the so-called Petersberg tasks, which encompass the classical tasks of crisis management like peacekeeping, peace-making or humanitarian relief outside European borders. Such a review should ensure that we are well prepared for the current and future security challenges outside and within Europe. One could think of additional tasks, such as:

- Tasks to detect, deter and respond in case of a hybrid threat; or
- Homeland defence tasks whereby the EU – upon the request of a Member State – can assist in addressing security threats on the internal – external security nexus, related to for instance terrorism, extremism, cyber or even migration.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Strategic documents is one thing, but without a significantly higher level of cooperation among European nations, we cannot hope to ward off the dangers from the East and South. This brings me to my second point: enhancing our defence cooperation in Europe.

We need to re-invest in our security, as part of a step-by-step approach in a clear long-term perspective.

Strengthening the CSDP combined with greater European Defence cooperation is the way to go. In other words, top-down has to find bottom-up.

There are already a number of good examples of bottom-up cooperation.

- The Netherlands – for example – is integrating a German tank battalion into a Dutch mechanized brigade, which itself will become part of a German armoured Division. This allows us to maintain our ability to fight with and against tank units, since we do not have that capability ourselves;
- We are pooling and sharing our scarce strategic enablers, such as air transport, in the European Air Transport Command;
- We are working side-by-side with four European nations in the procurement of Multi-Role Tanker Transport Aircraft;
- We are developing arrangements with Belgium and Luxembourg to protect our combined national airspaces.

These kinds of cooperation allow us to keep our ambitions. For us the question is not whether to take part in international military cooperation, but how to do it smartly.

And yes, I'm also thinking of the strong bilateral cooperation between France and the Netherlands or other regional cooperation initiatives such as the Benelux, Visegrad and Baltic Defence Cooperation.

We need to stimulate these kind of cooperation initiatives. But it is time we shift our focus from low-hanging fruit, like joint training and combined exercises, to smarter defence.

This also, or should I say especially, applies to joint capability development. We should be able to exploit economy of scale in operational and financial terms. We should seek more coherence of national defence planning and acquisition programmes. And we should really take planning for requirements in the EU to the next level.

And if we want the best equipment for the best price we should work towards an open, transparent and competitive defence market. We need a market in which all sorts of companies, small or big, have cross-border access. We need a market that leads in terms of quality and value for money. This would serve our armed forces AND it would serve our security needs. This is also why the Defence Action Plan of the Commission, which aims at strengthening the European defence market and industry, will be so important.

Ladies and gentlemen,

A new Global Strategy and more defence cooperation are important, but we all know that in the end it comes down to having the political will to act and the ability to take swift political decisions. Which brings me to my third and final point.

Political will is crucial, and will be even more so in the years to come, as Europe will be increasingly forced to respond rapidly to the challenges the global environment presents.

National sovereignty concerns can no longer be used to hide behind as it undermines our collective ability to act. We will all have to take our responsibility.

When my French colleague, Jean-Yves LeDrian, invoked article 42.7 a week after the terrorists attacks here in Paris, 27 countries stood united behind France.

Most of us have shown solidarity not only by words but also with acts. Either by taking over military tasks from France in Africa. Or by standing side by side with France in fighting ISIL in Iraq and Syria.

The Netherlands works closely together with France in Mali under UN-flag, but also in the fight against ISIL.

It is this type of unity and common action we need. It is unfortunate that we need such horrific events to make us realize that the only way forward is a way in which we take our responsibility. Together. United. And with sufficient means. Let us not forget that the crises are in OUR OWN neighbourhood! We cannot keep relying on others to deal with the problems on our behalf.

Like our former Special Envoy of the United Nations to Syria, Marcel Kurpershoek, recently said: *'If Europe doesn't invest in security, than it's like a tree that will fall over when the first storm comes up'*. How right he is.

Ladies and gentlemen, dark clouds are gathering on the horizon. So, let us shore up that tree before the storm really hits us.

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