

## **“The impact of changes in the global environment to the European defence and opportunities for the June 2015 European Council”**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am most delighted and honoured to welcome you here at the Latvian War Museum for the first Seminar in the Latvian Ministry of Defence's Presidency Programme. The rich exhibitions of this museum are an important reminder that we, Latvians, know too well how terrible and destroying war can be. Our history teaches us how important it is to fight for our values. It also shows us of the need to take all necessary measures to prevent war before it causes untold damage to the lives of innocent people. In light of the current security situation, I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for all of us to remember these lessons from history. We must not shy away from the difficult decisions which will be necessary to guarantee our security and prosperity.

During the last year alone we have seen dramatic shifts within the global security environment. These shifts represent a stark reminder that providing for our defence and security is not optional. Europe will need to stand up for its interests. It has demonstrated that we cannot afford to ignore hostile acts. If we are to preserve the international system on which our society is built, we have to recognise the reality of these threats and adapt to meet them. No state, however, can meet these challenges alone. Only by working together can we hope to address them. So, how has the security landscape changed?

First of all, the situation in Ukraine has given us clear insight in how much hybrid threats can endanger stability and sovereignty of independent countries. In Crimea we saw how Russia was able to draw from multiple levers of power to manipulate and influence the local population of a sovereign state. This was further highlighted with the spread of aggression in the East of Ukraine. By taking these actions, Russia demonstrated its willingness to break with international norms, treaties and conventions. Russia proved that in its pursuit of geo-political objectives, it is willing to utilise military means and sponsor terrorist proxies. If the international community wanes in its robust response to such actions, we cannot be sure that they will not be repeated in the future.

In the Middle East and Africa, we have also seen dramatic events. We have witnessed the rise of ISIL which has spread its influence across traditional state boundaries. We have seen the security situation in Libya remain fragile as the process of building a democratic state continues. In Western Africa, the Ebola crisis is not yet over and highlights yet another type of challenge which requires a comprehensive international response. For Europe, such instability has led to an enhanced risk of terrorism and increased migration flows. In the case of ISIL, it can undermine the very essence of our values and principles. The attacks in Paris represented a reminder of need to tackle such dangerous threats at source and the consequences that we risk if we do not do so.

Finally, on the nature of these threats and challenges - we have seen the lines between peace and conflict continue to blur in the context of 'hybrid threats'. Such threats mark the start of a trend where states and non-state actors seek to use a mix of conventional, irregular, terrorist, information and cyber means to achieve their goals. In Latvia, we have already seen significant evidence of this within the audiovisual space. Russian sponsored propaganda actively targets our society. It

spreads false information and an anti-Western narrative, in support of Russia's foreign policy goals. Russia's disregard for the truth in the information space is particularly worrying and their actions are likely to present significant challenges when it comes to future confidence building measures. In this environment, the EU's comprehensive approach has never been more important as such threats can only be met through a cross-sectoral response.

So, we have a lot of work to do to tackle these threats and challenges. This year's European Council in June represents a significant opportunity for us to do so. Where challenges remain, we should not dwell on what has not been achieved, but focus on the lessons of why. For Latvia, we have a number of priorities which we believe the Council should address.

First of all – a **review of our strategic documents**, particularly the European Security Strategy is long overdue. I would like to remind you all that the first sentence of the European Security Strategy states that “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free.” Such words which held true in 2003, when the strategy was drafted, are increasingly at odds with today's reality. We must therefore accept the need to review the strategy to take account of the changes to the global security environment. I hope that the European Council will give a clear tasking in this regard.

Next comes **cooperation and coordination**. For the EU to maintain its global role, it is absolutely necessary to enhance cooperation within the EU and with our partners in the area of CSDP. On capabilities, we already have some excellent examples of success when it comes to EU cooperation. Air-to-Air refuelling, Satellite Communications, Cyber Defence, and Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems all come to mind. In Latvia, for example, we have worked with our friends from Estonia and Lithuania, with the facilitation of the EDA, to procure specialist ammunition and take advantage of enhanced economies of scale. However, we need to sustain momentum in this area. In an era of constrained defence resources, greater value for money and better burden sharing of our capabilities will be crucial.

On **partners**, NATO remains perhaps the most essential partner for the EU. 22 member states are part of both organizations. We often share the same pool of resources, common interests and values. Whilst progress has been made, more can be done to consolidate this relationship. Improving information sharing, coordinating capability development plans and expanding cooperation in military training and exercises are only a few avenues which should be explored. Once again in the context of Ukraine, we must also sustain momentum on the Eastern Partnership and continue to explore ways where cooperation within the framework of CSDP can play a part. Ukraine has also proven an excellent case study which shows us the benefits of combining the EU's soft power tools with NATO's hard power influence.

Turning once again to **hybrid threats**, we must look to bolster the comprehensive approach by improving cooperation across EU institutions and between civilian and military actors. As this concept of hybrid action continues to evolve, we must continue to share experiences and best practices in countering this dynamic. We must also recognise that there is now a security aspect to many domains which we may not have considered in the past. Many of these areas fall under the responsibility of other Commissioners, so working closely together with

them will be paramount. It is important to remember that the EU has a set of civilian tools that can also be used to support military led challenges often without considerable financial implications. We just need to understand how to better use these existing tools. We need to take into account the military needs when we are acquiring new civilian capabilities. Improving border security, for example, may be one such area which particularly benefits from enhancing effort in this way. Although mainly considered a civilian related task, increasing military cooperation and coordination across agencies and institutions could bring significant rewards. With poor border management often acting as a catalyst for instability, we are keen to explore ways where CSDP can play a greater role. In the Latvian case, we also stand ready to share our own experiences relating to the hybrid challenges of the audio-visual environment. We will aim to facilitate discussions on this topic during our Presidency.

Moving to **Cyber** - By recognizing cyberspace as the fifth military operational domain, we have to adequately address the essential role of cyber defence policy. Cyber too is likely to form a critical part of hybrid future threats. In this regard, I welcome the recently adopted EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework. This framework will act as an important guide for the development of cyber defence capabilities in the context of CSDP. We must now take up the challenge of its practical implementation.

Finally, we also see the **EU's maritime security** as an important issue. It is clear that the approved EU's Maritime Security Strategy will give enhanced opportunities for the EU to assert its role as a global maritime actor. Therefore, full implementation of recently approved Maritime Security Strategy Action Plan is necessary to achieve our aims. We hope to facilitate this during our Presidency.

In conclusion, threats to our security continue to adapt and remain numerous, but through cooperation we have the tools to address these challenges. We cannot afford to stand idle. If we are to maximise the EU's potential to address these challenges, there is still much to be done. There is a Latvian saying which comes to mind in this regard – '*Jākaļ dzelzs, kamēr tā karsta*'. 'Strike whilst the iron is hot.' By sustaining the momentum of action and improving cooperation, we have a real chance to enhance our security and therefore our prosperity. The June European Council on defence remains an essential pillar in this regard. I hope we can take full advantage of today's seminar to build consensus and share ideas ahead of June.

In the end I would like to wish you great seminar and invite you to enjoy the hospitality of Latvia.