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Check against delivery!

[María] Dolores [de Cospedal García, Minister of Defence of Spain],

Generals and Representatives of Member States,

dear friends,

It is really a pleasure to be here for the official opening of the European Tactical Airlift Centre – a very special moment for European defence.

I would like to first thank Dolores and the Spanish Air Force for hosting this event. Gracias. I know we have aircrews from Spain, Poland and Germany with us, graduating from the European Advanced Airlift Tactics Course. Congratulations to all of you: it is an honour to mark this moment with you, in an eventful year and an eventful week for our common European defence.

It is exactly one year since we set out a new level of ambition for the European Union's role in the world on our European defence, with our Global Strategy for foreign and security policy. Then came the European Defence Action Plan, and the EU-NATO Joint Declaration at the Warsaw summit.

And just yesterday, we have officially established the European Defence Fund, which will support military related research and our defence industry.

And just today, as we speak here, in Brussels we launch the first single command centre for our military training and advisory missions.

The inauguration of this European Tactical Airlift Centre is part of this impressive progress, an impressive package although the preparations started well before a year ago. We want a credible European Union of security and defence. We are building all together a credible Union that can truly contribute to the security of European citizens. A Union that is a global security provider, answering to the call that we hear, more and more, from our global partners all around the world.

Airlift makes for a very good example, one that is easy to understand for ordinary citizens outside military circles. We very often hear about the need for air-drops to tackle humanitarian crises, or to reach areas that are under siege. Or think of the evacuation of civilians from a conflict zone.

Only six years ago, European countries that wanted to train their airlift crews, had to send them to the United States.

Since then, the European Defence Agency has worked to develop a European airlift training capacity. And here today we mark one of the largest ever transfers of a project from the EDA to a Member State.

Spain will now take ownership and move this project forward. I am sincerely grateful to Spain for its strong commitment to this project, and its commitment to the European defence.

Because Member States remain the leading actor on European defence. But what

we achieve together, would be impossible for any Member State alone. This is not theory, it's very concrete as we see here today.

Today, we don't need to cross the Atlantic to get the training our air-crews need. You have spent the last two weeks training, planning and flying together. You come from different countries, but with this training you will be able to operate together whenever the need will arise.

And this is increasingly important – for our European military missions, for sure, but also for cooperation among European air-forces inside NATO. And this is why we say that strengthening the European defence also means strengthening NATO.

It is the second time that I attend an EDA joint training exercise. I visited the helicopter crews last year at the Florennes airbase in Belgium, and I heard directly from them how joint training exercises enhance the skills of European air crews, troops and personnel.

To me, this is yet another demonstration that the main pathway towards a stronger European defence runs through stronger European cooperation.

If European countries want to spend better on defence, and I think they all want to, the best and most effective way in which they can do that is through European cooperation.

Because when it comes to working and spending together, the European Union can provide Member States with the incentives to do so – be it on innovation, research or capability development. This is the added value of the European Union: incentives, spending together, investing together, training together.

For instance, last month I chaired the Steering Board of the European Defence Agency, where we agreed to establish a new Cooperative Financial Mechanism.

This Mechanism will allow participating Member States to support one another, and to address budgetary shortfalls when they arise. By doing so, they will be able to overcome budgetary cycle problems, which in the past have been a limit to greater cooperation.

There is another field where our European cooperation will be crucial, essential, and that is research and innovation. I know that in the far corner of this hangar, there is another project led by the European Defence Agency, one we can be proud of, to investigate the impact and feasibility of 3D printing in defence.

It is a first for Europe, and I believe it will be an important step for European defence innovation.

Today, we dare to do things differently from the past. We are making defence cooperation the norm, not the exception. This is the smart and the efficient way to invest in our defence. It is the only way to make the most out of the resources we spend, and also to strengthen our defence industry, all across Europe, the big industries and the small and medium enterprises in all Europe. It is the only way to treasure the great human capital represented by

our men and women in uniform, serving under the European flag.

Step by step, I'm convinced we are finally heading towards a European Union of security and defence.

Thank you.

EU-Central Asia High Level Political and Security Dialogue

The fourth High Level Political and Security Dialogue between the European Union and the countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) took place in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on 8th June 2017 at the invitation of the government of Kyrgyzstan. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was invited as a special guest to the Dialogue.

The meeting was held at the level of Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, hosted by the First Deputy Foreign Minister of Kyrgyzstan Ms Dinara Kemelova and chaired by Mr Jean-Christophe Belliard, Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs of the European External Action Service.

The Dialogue is an opportunity to address political and security issues of shared concern. The participants exchanged views on a number of key issues, including counter-terrorism and violent extremism, drug trafficking and border management, and reviewed possibilities for reinforced cooperation in these areas. The stability of the wider region, including Afghanistan, was also considered. Finally, regional and international issues were discussed over lunch. It was agreed to intensify common efforts between the EU and Central Asian states in all these areas.

The High Level Political and Security Dialogue reflects a shared interest of the European Union and of the Central Asian countries to strengthen dialogue and cooperation on security issues. It also builds on the intensified levels of cooperation developed through the EU – Central Asia Strategy and the substantial EU cooperation programmes in the region.

The European Union has a record of long-standing security cooperation with both the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan, notably through border management programmes BOMCA for Central Asia and BOMNAF for Afghanistan, which focus on integrated border management, cross border cooperation and trade facilitation in the region. The EU also supports Central Asian partners in the fight against drugs through a regional Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP) and a trans-regional programme EU Action against Drugs and Organised Crime (EU-ACT).

The High Level Political and Security Dialogue is held regularly; the first Dialogue took place in 2013 in Brussels. The next round will be held in 2018.

EU defence cooperation: Council establishes a Military Planning

On 8 June, the Council adopted the decision **establishing of the military planning and conduct capability** (MPCC) within the EU military staff (EUMS). The terms of reference of the EUMS, which is part of the EEAS, have also been amended and approved.

“The establishment of the MPCC is a very important operational decision to strengthen European defence. It will contribute to make the non-executive European missions more effective and to improve the training of soldiers of partner countries, to guarantee peace and security. This is important not just for our partners, but also for the European Union’s security”, said the High Representative Federica Mogherini.

The MPCC will assume command of EU non-executive military missions, currently: EU Training Mission (EUTM) Somalia, EUTM République Centrale Africaine (RCA) and EUTM Mali. The MPCC will be the **static, out-of-area command and control structure at the military strategic level**, responsible for the operational planning and conduct of non-executive missions, including the building up, launching, sustaining and recovery of European Union forces. This will allow the mission staff in the field to concentrate on the specific activities of their mission, with **better support provided from Brussels**.

The MPCC improves the **crisis management structures of the EU**. It will work under the political control and strategic guidance of the Political and Security Committee (PSC), which is composed of EU member states’ ambassadors and is based in Brussels.

The MPCC will be composed initially of up to 25 staff but will also benefit from the support of other departments of the EUMS. The Director General of the EU Military Staff will also be the director of the MPCC. He will exercise command and control over the current three training missions and other possible future non-executive military missions. He will also exercise the responsibilities related to deployment and recovery of the missions as well as overall budgeting, auditing and reporting.

The MPCC will work closely with its existing civilian counterpart, the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) through a joint support coordination cell. This cell will be able to share expertise, knowledge and best practices on issues relevant to both military and civilian missions, as well as capabilities when civilian and military missions are simultaneously deployed in the same area, including medical support or protective measures.

The decision will be published in the Official Journal of 9 June.

Process

On 6 March 2017, the Council adopted conclusions on progress in implementing the EU Global Strategy in the area of security and defence, endorsing a concept note for the operational planning and conduct of CSDP missions and operation. In its conclusions of 18 May 2017, the Council decided to establish the MPCC, pending a formal legal decision. Today this formal legal decision has been adopted by the Council.

On 14 November 2016, the Council adopted conclusions on **implementing the EU global strategy in the area of security and defence**. These conclusions set out the level of ambition in the form of the main goals the EU and its member states will aim to achieve in the area of security and defence, with three strategic priorities: responding to external conflicts and crises, building the capacities of partners, and protecting the European Union and its citizens. On 15 December 2016, the European Council reaffirmed the need to **improve EU's capacity to react** in a faster, more effective and more seamless manner, as part of an **EU comprehensive approach**.

About the three EU Training Missions

EUTM Somalia was launched in 2010 and ever since it has contributed to strengthening the Transitional Federal Government and the institutions of Somalia.

EUTM Mali was launched in 2013 to support the rebuilding of the Malian armed forces and to meet their operational needs.

EUTM RCA was launched in 2016 and it supports the Central African Republic government in the implementation of security sector reform in the country.