

Speech by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogher

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.