Message from the Chairman

I hosted the Chiefs of Defence on 19 May in Brussels for the EU Military Committee. CSDP Operations and Missions, partnership, military capabilities, the upcoming EU Council 2015 and the global security situation were discussed.

In this respect, the trained units lack communication equipment, thus hindering command and control. Further, soldiers do not have protective equipment against mines and explosive devices. Other needs and requirements include ambulances, water tanks and fuel trucks to ensure autonomy and the ability to operate independently. Basic essentials, including accommodation, food and medical support are also lacking. Assistance in providing such equipment and support is necessary to ensure that trained battalions do not have to rely on the support of the local population.

In some cases, ad hoc solutions have been found, such as the provision of vehicles by other donors, but this has not been consistent, nor is it a sustainable long-term solution. Where such ad hoc funding has not been possible, no alternative funding sources have been identified to fill the gaps.

Further efforts should aim at better synchronising and coordinating the use of different instruments, fully recognising the nexus between security and development and enhancing our collective ability - the EU and its Member States - not only to train and advise but also to equip partners.

In this light, lessons learnt from military CSDP operations involving security sector capacity building initiatives have demonstrated the need to supply and provide basic military training equipment to partner nations. Such equipment is required to enable the mission/operation perform and achieve objectives efficiently and to enable partner nations to capitalise and build on demonstrated the need to supply and provide basic military training equipment to Partner nations. Such equipment is required to enable the mission/operation perform and achieve objectives efficiently and to enable partner nations to capitalise and build on it.

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Amb. FERNÁNDEZ DE LA PEÑA, could you explain the role of your Department to our readers?

The Department for Europe and Central Asia works towards the further comprehensive deepening of relations, and where applicable integration, between the EU and its immediate neighbours in Europe and to the East, up to Central Asia. The Department covers a broad and diverse geographic area, which includes countries closely aligned with the EU either bilaterally (Switzerland), or within the framework of the European Economic Area (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein), countries with an Enlargement perspective (Turkey, Western Balkans), the countries of the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood (Russia, the Eastern Partnership countries), the countries of Central Asia, but also smaller European states such as Andorra, Monaco and San Marino, as well as Holy See. All of these regions and countries present different challenges that require specific policy responses.

In addition to actively pursuing and developing bilateral relations with individual countries, the Department is responsible for a number of regional policies including the Eastern Partnership (the Eastern dimension of the EU’s Neighbourhood Policy), the Northern Dimension (involving the EU, Russia, Norway and Iceland), the EU’s Policy towards the Arctic region, and cooperation in the Black Sea region. The Department is also responsible for relations with the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In developing and implementing EU policy towards the region, the Department works closely with relevant Commission Services, the Parliament and the Council, as well as the network of EU delegations across the region.

The EU’s neighbourhood is recognised as a priority within the Common Foreign and Security Policy, given its importance in terms of EU security and stability, as well as the economic and trade potential it represents. Countries such as Turkey and Russia are important partners in addressing key foreign policy and global challenges, such as the ongoing crisis in Syria, negotiations on the Iranian nuclear issue, the fight against international terrorism and efforts to tackle climate change.

The neighbourhood is an area where the EU’s ‘comprehensive approach’ has particular relevance, with the full range of EU tools and instruments – diplomatic, economic, development, security - deployed. The region hosts a number of EU CSDP missions, including EUPOL/Althea in Bosnia-Herzegovina, EULEX Kosovo, EUMM Georgia, and – most recently - EUAM Ukraine.

The past year and half has seen a heightened focus on the Eastern Neighbourhood, in light of the crisis in Ukraine, and the deterioration in relations with Russia. At the recent Eastern Partnership (EaP) Summit in Riga, the EU and partner countries reaffirmed their objective to develop strengthened, differentiated relations between the EU and its six sovereign, independent partners. The challenge in the period ahead will be to put the principle of differentiation into practice, and to develop bilateral relations with partner countries on the basis of mutual interests and commitments, while remaining to true to EU values.

The Directorate has recently managed the review of the EU Central Asia Strategy with a view to adopting Conclusions on the Strategy by the June Foreign Affairs Council. The principal aim is to make the Strategy more responsive to the individual interests of Central Asian countries, while also preserving the important aspect of regional cooperation, which the EU has been promoting for almost 10 years since the launch of the Strategy in 2007.

The HRVP’s December 2014 visit to Turkey set the EU’s vision for a broader and more strategic relationship with this EU candidate country and important regional ally. EU Accession negotiations remain the foundation of our partnership, but we are now complementing that with an enhanced foreign policy dialogue, greater cooperation on counter-terrorism and migration, and by pursuing a shared agenda for greater prosperity.

What are your biggest accomplishments?

This has been an important year for the Eastern Partnership. The EU concluded Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in June 2014. The focus for these three countries is now on implementing the substantial reform programmes foreseen under the agreements.

While this has been a challenging year for relations with Russia, the EU has maintained unity in its approach, and has agreed a range of sanctions in response to the illegal annexation of Crimea. EU Member States are united in their view that any relaxation of these measures depends on full implementation of the Minsk agreements.

In the Western Balkans, the 2013 Brussels Agreement on the normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo was the inspiring story of the past two years. The vision and political courage of the two leaderships has served and continues to serve as an example for other countries in the region. The job is not yet finished, there is still much to be done in order to reach a "comprehensive normalisation". Work in the context of the EU facilitated Dialogue is continuing and the Directorate is assisting the HRVP in this endeavour.

Most recently, there have been promising developments in Bih. The renewed approach launched in the autumn 2015 by the EU with strong engagement by HR/VP together with Commissioner Hahn, supported by Member States has changed the dynamics on the ground. BiH political leadership have signed up to a comprehensive Written Commitment on reforms and progress on EU path. This has been reciprocated by the Council concluding of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which will enter into force on 1 June 2015. Further work is needed in Sarajevo, especially on the development and implementation of the reforms agenda. EUSR/HoD Wigemark is leading the efforts on the ground.

The EEA has further developed. We welcomed Croatia as a new EEA member and an agreement to this purpose was signed in April 2014. Additionally, new negotiations have been launched with both Switzerland and the smaller states in view of reframing their institutional relations with the EU.

What was the contribution to the recent crisis?

In response to the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in (Dec 2013), the EU has delivered unprecedented levels of support to Ukraine to assist in reform efforts and contribute to a quick economic recovery in line with the Minsk Agreements. This includes a commitment of €11 billion in financial support from the EU and European Financial Institutions in support of Ukraine’s political, economic and financial stabilisation. Alongside EU financial support, the EU offers expertise and advice, through the EU Delegation and an EU Advisory Mission in Kiev, and a dedicated Support Group based in Brussels. Considerable humanitarian assistance has also been mobilised to assist in alleviating the situation in the country’s troubled Eastern regions. The EU is also actively supporting efforts to arrive at a political solution, including through substantial support to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission including contribution to staff costs, satellite imagery, armoured vehicles, training and other support. The EU has played an active role in facilitating trilateral talks with Ukraine and Russia on implementation of the EU/ Ukraine DCFTA, and on gas supplies to Ukraine.