Thank you Nathalie [Tocci, Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali]. First of all, it is a pleasure to share the stage with you. I think it is only the second time - and maybe not even - that we share the stage together.

It is a pleasure for me also to take the floor in the same session as Jens [Stoltenberg, Secretary-General of NATO] and Heiko [Maas, Foreign Minister of Germany]. And let me stress one specific thing that Jens [Stoltenberg] has mentioned: it was a pleasure for me to be at the NATO Defence Ministers meeting yesterday in Brussels, because we have increased EU-NATO cooperation and partnership as it was never done before. Let me also say on a personal, but also institutional and political note: I was happy to be there when for the first time the Defence Minister of North Macedonia [Radmila Šekerinska] was sitting next to me. And I would like to congratulate here the leadership and the people of North Macedonia and of Greece for a remarkable achievement that I think inspires us all.

You know, this is also working on security, I believe, because as the Munich Security Report that was presented ahead of this conference and also our Global Strategy says: “We are living in complex times”. I was surprised to see that the Munich Security Report uses a famous quote by Antonio Gramsci [Italian philosopher] saying that “the old is dying and the new cannot be born.” It could not be more appropriate to describe our times.

The nature of the security threats that we all face is completely different today from even a few years ago: proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, new arms races, terrorist fighters, but also the impact of climate change, or the challenges posed by the use of new technologies, for instance artificial intelligence. These are all security issues, probably the most pressing ones of our times. And yet, they all go beyond the traditional domains of security and defence policy.

The same is true if you look at the conflicts, starting from those in our region, in Libya, in the east of
Ukraine, in Syria, in Yemen. Solving them might require a traditional security component, but most of all it requires diplomacy and mediation, the economic capacity to engage in the reconstruction and to transform a war economy and a war society into a peace economy and a peace society, readiness to rebuild institutions – all of them -, train the local security forces, which requires humanitarian aid and private investment, and the list would be long.

None of the security challenges our world faces today can be effectively addressed with a purely military approach. And I know it sounds surreal to say this at the Munich Security Conference, but I will then come to the defence part of my speech. I think it is important to recognise that we feel today - not only as Europeans, but I believe all around the world – the sense of frustration sometimes in front of the security challenges that we are facing. And I believe we feel the need for a sort of ‘creative mix’ of tools that can – and sometimes does and sometimes has to - include the military one, but always requires also much more: economic support, protection and promotion of human rights, empowerment of young people and women, reconciliation, climate action and here again the list continues.

And I believe this is why it is today, contrary to the past, that the European Union has become a real security provider. Because we can be - and sometimes more than others - a security provider ‘at large’. I am using this expression to refer to ambassadors at large that we have around the world who cover non-traditional fields of competence. It is because we are facing different kinds of threats in the world that we need different kinds of security providers with different kinds of tools than the ones we had in the past. Using different tools, mixing them depending on the time – I would say even depending on the phase of the conflict - the place, the region and the players involved. And last but not least, mobilising resources like, including financial resources, like no one else in the world can do and is willing to do.

Because let us be clear: today the money invested into humanitarian aid, sustainable development, climate action, protection and promotion of human rights and even sometimes the money mobilised by our trade agreements, this is all also an investment in security and peace in the world of today. It is, I believe, sustainable security and peace. Because to face the security threats of today’s world, investing in education and job creation might sometimes be more effective than having a tank in a battlefield.

We can say this, today, as Europeans, because we have finally overcome the ideological debate – I would say the dilemma - on whether we come from Venus or Mars. Today, I believe, Europe knows that military means are sometimes necessary and there is no ambiguity about that, we know that, we have lived through that time. We also know that military means are never sufficient alone. And this is why we have, in these last two years, built - at last - the European defence. A dream that our founding fathers and mothers always dreamt of, but never managed to accomplish. Now it is done.

Without losing our trade mark, which is soft power, but finally adding to that a credible hard power component. And doing it as the European Union. And doing it our own way, which is the European way – a cooperative way -, investing in partnerships and in multilateralism. We believe that the security threats we face can only be tackled through cooperation and in the multilateral framework. I think Heiko [Maas] was defining it perfectly well.

I know that many people here are worried about a tendency towards a "great power competition" in global politics, and rightly so. We Europeans have something totally different in mind, also given our history. We are a cooperative power by definition. We actually became a power in the moment when we understood that cooperating was much more convenient than fighting each other. We know that the logic of spheres of influence and zero-sum games does not work and that it only leads to more tensions, more instability and more violence.
The European Union is one of the main global powers of today's world – the largest market in the world, the second largest economy in the world, the first trade partner for most countries in the world. We invest, as the European Union, more in development cooperation and humanitarian aid than the rest of the world combined. And we have - this is a figure that we sometimes tend to forget - united, as European Union, the second largest defence budget in the world. And we are determined to put this strength at the service of international cooperation, multilateralism, peace and security globally.

This is why in these last two years, for the first time ever, we have also started to invest seriously in our collective hard power – the Europe of defence. As our security environment continues to change, we want to help, to accompany our Member States, and also our partners because we know that security in our region is strictly connected with our security. We want to accompany and help our Member States respond to the challenges in the best possible way.

The Munich Security Report talks about European countries as “middle powers”. I think that this is even generous. I would even say that, individually, our countries are small. I often say that our Member States are not small nor big ones; we have Member States that have not yet realised that they are small. But together, joining forces, we are definitely a super-power – economically and also in security terms. Joining forces, as Heiko [Maas, Foreign Minister of Germany] was saying before me, is a strategic interest of all European states - no one excluded.

Our defence industry and our research labs are among the best in the world. But we will not be able to cover the full range of capabilities we need, if we do not synchronize our national defence programmes, and this is exactly what we are helping Member States to do. When a new capability is needed – maybe high-tech or particularly complex – joining forces inside the European Union is the natural starting point, the natural choice and also the most effective one.

This is a big part of our work on the Europe of defence, to incentivise Member States, to plan together their defence spending, to invest together, to research together, but also to train their troops together, and to act together on the ground. This is, in very concrete terms, what our Permanent Structured Cooperation [PESCO] is all about: concrete projects to have European Union Member States cooperating in all these fields.

We are investing, for the first time ever, resources from the European Union budget for this to happen. It is the first time this happens. The European Defence Industrial Development Programme supports capability development in all fields - from the space, to air, to the sea, the land and the cyber-space. From 2020 the European Defence Fund will bring the EU budget funding to support capability development to €13 billion over seven years.

Overall, we have proposed €30 billion in common funding for defence-related initiatives during the next seven-year budget cycle. We had zero investment on defence from the EU budget until just a few years ago. This gives you the idea of how far we have gone, without losing the nature of our approach to security, which is one that always knows that hard-power might be needed but it is never sufficient alone, and without giving up our own trade mark, our own approach to security which is always a cooperative one.

I am proud that, as we strengthened the Europe of the defence, we have also strengthened our cooperation with NATO like never before, as Jens [Stoltenberg, Secretary-General of NATO] just said a few minutes ago. Cooperation with NATO is for the European Union the natural choice. NATO is the pillar of Europe's collective defence; it is even mentioned in the European Union treaties.

You all know that the large majority of EU Member States are NATO allies, the large majority of NATO allies are EU Member States. This is why building the Europe of defence is also a way to strengthen
NATO, to help the Europeans allies have the resources to invest in strengthening NATO. No duplication, no competition and when we refer to strategic autonomy – which we do inside the European Union – it is very clear to us what we mean.

For us Europeans, strategic autonomy and cooperation with our partners are two sides of the same coin. We have chosen the path – if you allow me to use a new expression – of cooperative autonomy. Cooperation with NATO, but not only. I want to mention here our partnership, including in the field of security and peace, with the United Nations but also with our other partners.

I want to particularly stress the work we do with the United Nations from Mali to Somalia and in particular our work with the G5 Sahel. We are showing as Europeans that we are ready to take responsibility for our common security and for peace globally. The Europe of defence is in our own interest, I believe it is also in the interests of our friends, partners and allies, and this is why I believe we should keep investing in it.

In the months ahead, I would like to consolidate the work we have done so far. A collective work that in just a couple of years has built something that was considered simply impossible, and I quote what we have heard from many of our friends so many times: "Simply impossible". But [Nelson] Mandela has taught us that everything seems impossible until it is done – also in the Balkans, by the way.

Thanks – and I would like to pay tribute here – to an excellent work the European institutions – all of them – have managed to do in these last two years. All our Member States, the European Commission, the European Parliament, we have worked to do this as one. I would like to thank all the different institutions in the European Union, all the Member States for the excellent work they have done. Because it is thanks to the determination and the dedication to the European approach to defence that we have managed to do this after sixty years of attempted steps that never managed to reach a goal.

I am determined first of all to use the next seven months, from now to the end of my mandate, to consolidate this achievement. I am confident that the next High Representative and the next Commission will continue on the path of European defence integration, strategic autonomy, and cooperation with our partners.

Because whatever will happen next inside the European Union, I am sure that the Europe of defence is no longer the impossible dream of our founders. It is today already contributing to our common security, and its contribution will become even more evident in the coming years. The Europe of defence is now a reality with solid foundations and this is our contribution, the contribution of the European Union to the security of our citizens first and foremost, but it is also our commitment to a more cooperative, multilateral new world order.

Thank you very much.

Link to the video:

Press contacts

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