



## **Chairman of the European Union Military Committee**

### **Balkan CHOD's Conference - Intervention**

**Athens, 10 May 2017**

Dear friends,

I want to thank the Chief of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff, Admiral Apostolakis, for his kind invitation to participate in the 11<sup>th</sup> Balkan CHODs Conference, a very important forum for the enhancement of military cooperation in our region. I would also like to thank him for his warm hospitality!

Our world has become a more dangerous place to live in than it as in the past. Global geopolitics are in a transitional phase. Focusing on Europe, two main threats, one from the East and one from the South, are persisting. Transitions always bring about great opportunities but also dangers with them. In our case, these transitions take place at a time when our region, the Balkans and especially its western part, found at last its pace towards a more stable and brighter future, joining the European Union family.

The impressive economical and societal progress of all the Western Balkans is endangered by a growing sense of uncertainty in the world and in our region. Peace itself cannot be taken for granted anymore. Stability today requires a greater investment from all of us. Because without peace, progress in any other field is at risk, first of all in the field of economy.

This region has once been called Europe's powder keg. Countless wars took place in these grounds, some even dragging outside nations into them. The same holds truth in a much larger scale with the rest of Europe. But they, or I should say we, learned from these bloody mistakes. We came together, building on what is shared rather than what is different, building bridges rather than fences and walls, respecting the uniqueness of each other. We built a Union, the European Union. Western Balkans are too on the path to leaving the dreadful past behind and move towards a better future. We are all obliged to work hard in order to achieve this.

The European Union project is far from being concluded. Invitations have been extended to the Western Balkans as well as to other countries in the

region, a region that lies at the very heart of Europe. But staying with the Western Balkans, the European Union will not be complete as long as all the countries in the region are not its part, as our respective futures are linked to each other. Western Balkans on their side will only benefit from what EU holds and provides for its members. Our futures are interconnected and the challenges we face are common. Each of us, separately, cannot address them all. Together we can deliver on many things, more importantly on what is of utmost importance for our citizens; their security. We are bound together. Especially when it comes down to security, we need each another.

Coming together is not something that will happen overnight; we know this very well. It is a long, tenuous, open-ended process. It takes a million small steps to get there. One of them, not a procedural but a very important one indeed, is learning how to work together to face our common challenges, learning to share capabilities and develop a common language in the military domain. I don't believe we are there yet. In the Balkans there is always a good reason for a smaller or bigger crisis to erupt, sometimes a centuries-old reason coming from our troubled past. This reality gives us a lot of things to do, a lot of differences to bridge, a lot of stories from the past to overcome. We should not allow what divided us in the past re-emerge, come to life again. We need to work hard on that direction. And I believe we already do. We, the military leaderships, we certainly do and we will do better as new grounds of common understanding are reached, as bridges instead of fences are built.

Speaking with the hat of the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, I have to acknowledge that until now, Western Balkan nations have generously contributed to four EU-led missions and operations, co-signing a shared vision of a world that is more stable, more secure and more prosperous. We thank you for that. Through these contributions, both parties, you and the EU have greatly benefited. It is a tangible proof of the things we can accomplish together, helping those less fortunate than us and in the process, building confidence among ourselves and learning from each other. To this end, I would like to propose to you, should you consider this appropriate, to invite the European Union to your joint exercise. Having said that, I urge you to continue contributing to our joint endeavours, as we can all only benefit from it. Besides this, we all have to realise that there is no other way because this is the way that leads to peace and prosperity.

Thank you.