Ladies and Gentlemen,

Congratulations on your selection to attend the 12th CSDP High Level Course. I find it difficult to think of a more appropriate time for anyone to attend this course, since it is right now that CSDP is in the centre of the discussions, following the presentation of the Global Strategy. During the length of your course, the implementation of this Strategy will also affect the Common Security and Defence Policy. In what ways and to which extent, it remains to be seen.

As you understand, following the media, expectations have been raised. The magnitude of the challenges the EU faces call for immediate action. Our citizens want a stronger Europe, a Europe that will provide them with a level of security and defence as they have been enjoying until recently. The situation calls for a new Level of Ambition that will be pursued by all stakeholders with renewed enthusiasm. It calls for the European Union rebranding itself. The new Level of Ambition will lead us to define a new set of capabilities that we need in order to implement the Global Strategy. Capabilities, supported by the necessary organizational restructure and coupled with the always fundamental political will, this is what it is all about after all. I suppose you will not be shocked if I say that some of these challenges may pose a direct or indirect existential threat to the Union. Agreeing on that entails that we also agree that our responses have to be swift, decisive
and with a view not to today or to tomorrow, but to the future as well. And you would all agree with me that in doing that, we have to be realists, having both feet on the ground.

I will take the opportunity so kindly offered to me by the ESDC, and I thank you for that, to present to you my views on which direction we should take implementing the Global Strategy. My remarks will be focused on the defence side of the dialogue, for obvious reasons. Before I begin, I would like to emphasise that I will offer you my personal views on how I imagine the military instrument of the European Union should develop in the near future, as the agreed position of the Military Committee is in the process of being shaped through our formal procedures.

(On strategic priorities)

The contemporary challenges that Europe faces are all well-known to you and they have been extensively explained and analysed. The EU Global Strategy presented by the High Representative in late June, is adamant in describing the present. It has also set three strategic priorities: to respond to external crises, to build the capacities of partners affected by crises and fragility and to protect Europe. It has to be mentioned that these priorities come in no hierarchical order and that they are intertwined. I am sure that no one objects to these priorities. Especially the first two, "respond to external crises" and "build the capacities of partners affected by crises and fragility", they are not even new. The European Union has already been engaged in them. Today, we run six military Missions and Operations, executive and non-executive, land and maritime alike, building the capacities of our partners, assisting them in addressing the security challenges they face and tackling piracy and the migratory crisis. But the third one, to protect Europe, this is a new and a very ambitious one.
(On protection)

The question that immediately emerges is, "What do we mean by protect?" What will we protect? How, with what instruments will we protect? A lot of eyebrows were raised, leading to numerous discussions, debates and articles about what has been perceived as opening the door to the creation of the European Army. This very issue has constantly been a point of misunderstanding. The creation of the European Army. Let us be clear: there will not be a European Army. This is not foreseen in the Global Strategy, this is not on the horizon.

“Never let a good crisis go to waste”. This quote is attributed to Sir Winston Churchill. And although we will, perhaps, not have his compatriots together with us in this endeavor, let us consider this piece of wisdom as the British contribution to the future of our common project. Because to evolve does not imply to burn the bridges with the past. On the contrary, it means to build on the grand successes and the progress made so far, to learn from the "lesser-than-successes", to exploit the full potential of what is available and to adjust and fine-tune the efforts of everyone engaged. What are these, "building blocks" if you may, that we have to use to build our future? First of all, it is the Treaties that provide us with instruments and with limitations and that remind us of the founding values. CFSP, CSDP and the EEAS structure that have been put to test and have reached a certain level of maturity. Furthermore, common logic has to be used, acknowledging for instance that only after you have described what you want to achieve (the "ends" as Clausewitz would have called them), only then you can identify the capabilities you need to have (the "means" according to the Prussian General).

Ladies and Gentlemen,
(On ownership)

The Global Strategy launched this endeavor. More, lots more have to be done. Its implementation will demonstrate our resolve and commitment to stand up to the expectations of the European citizens. As we speak, in 28 capitals, civilian and military authorities from different strands of the respective governments, prepare their ideas and proposals on the way to implement the Global Strategy, in particular in the areas of security and defence, which is the most sensitive area. And what they are doing is important, because after all, this Strategy and this Plan, they are predominantly for the Member States and for their citizens and only as a result, for the Union.

(On Situational Awareness/Strategic Foresight)

The first priority identified in the Global Strategy is to be able to respond to external crises. Not everywhere in the world, but our neighbourhood and the regions adjacent to them, they matter to us. It would be unwise to passively watch the situation in the areas of our geostrategic interest deteriorate and wait for the consequences to reach our external borders before we react. In the contemporary world, security at home is tightly connected to security abroad. Being able to respond along the full conflict cycle is of great importance. Assisting in efforts to tackle crises at their early stages will help contain them before they escalate and get out of control. Situational awareness will allow for the timely identification of troubling signs that will lead to tensions, upheaval or conflict. It would enable the EU to reach out and apply its integrated approach, addressing all the aspects of the situation before this reaches the threshold of explosion and violence. The situational awareness should derive from the access to EU- and EU Member States-owned assets.
And yet, this is not enough. The European Union has to switch mode. It has to become a proactive force rather than a reactive one. A transformative force. To achieve that, it needs to be prepared for the future, to be in a position to effectively shape it, not letting it be overtaken by the developments. A concrete Situational Awareness mapping the present needs to be complemented by a Strategic Foresight, monitoring developing trends for the foreseeable future.

(On Rapid Response Forces-BGs)

Timely information and clear view of the developing situations should lead to timely action, if it is to be of any value. The European Union has to have its rapid reaction forces available. Available not only in the sense of being present, but also being tested, certified and deployable. Being able to operate as a single unit. Otherwise it will not be but just a “paper-army”.

The 1st January 2017, almost 100 days from now, will mark the 10 years since the Battlegroup concept’s reaching Full Operational Capacity. This concept requires our revisiting, to examine how relevant it remains today. What is missing from the Battlegroups in order to be used as appropriate is the political will and the proper financial arrangements that would allow overcome national financial constraints. We need to find answers to these problems if we intend to use the Battlegroups. Regarding the Battlegroups themselves, we need to examine ways to transform them in a way that they will serve our contemporary needs and to adjust them accordingly. The training, evaluation and certification and deployability issues are among those that require our attention, in order for them to be able to effectively perform their rapid response role.

Going beyond the land domain, I believe that it is now time to expand the Battlegroup concept to the maritime domain as well. The
creation of maritime Battlegroups will allow the European Union to promote its interests in the respective domain. Two out of three operations we currently run are in this domain. The EU Maritime Security Strategy and the protection of the Sea Lines of Communication are of great importance for the EU. Considering the level of EU dependence on the maritime domain, I would argue that this is a development that should have taken place a long time ago. My proposal is not to duplicate NATO Standing Naval Forces, but to create a rapid response maritime force that will be available if and when the next crisis erupts.

Ladies and gentlemen,

(On PESCO)

I previously referred to the need for cooperation. Cooperation is difficult to quantify; it is its quality that can make a difference. On the other hand, it is hard not to admit that we can -and we must- do more. The challenges we collectively face can only be effectively addressed in this particular manner: collectively. The Treaties have foreseen this need; the provisions are there allowing us to push forward structured defense cooperation, through flexible and open schemes, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation. Especially nowadays when the national militaries face severe budget restraints and Research and Development for future capabilities struggles to get adequate funding, structured cooperation is one of the ways to maintain already present capabilities and start building the future ones. I believe that the situation has matured enough and that we need to see this issue in this light. Permanent Structured Cooperation could be the vehicle that will advance this much needed cooperation.
When discussing about the protection of Europe, the first thing that comes to one's mind is the Alliance. NATO has been guaranteeing the territorial defense of Europe since its creation and will continue to do so in the future. Its importance and its relevance for today's Europe are unquestioned. Considering that 22 EU Member States are members of the Alliance as well, the calls for more compatibility between EU and NATO are more than justified. The Joint Declaration signed in Warsaw, lists a number of areas where cooperation is regarded as a strategic priority and calls for speedy implementation. Today, I can assure you that both organizations, in cooperation and coordination, they are working towards identifying specific actions that will result in the foreseen deepening of our relations.

At the same time, it is time for us to give a forthright answer to the question, "Do we want Europe to be a driver or a free-rider when it comes to its defence?" Our transatlantic partner, the United States, a global actor as we are, has repeatedly called us to assume our fair share of the security burden. The United states have declared that a stronger Europe is a stronger NATO. In this respect, strengthening NATO's European pillar is neither a threat nor a challenge to the Alliance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The unescapable truth is that, as any living organization, the European Union needs to evolve. It needs to adapt to the ever-changing environment in which we live. It is definitely preferable if we can influence and shape this environment to suit our interests. But this is seldom the case. So, we have to evolve. Or perish. The choice is ours to make. But the time to make this choice is now.
The European Union should be able to protect and promote its interests in cooperation with other international or regional organizations or like-minded nations. It should nonetheless be able to do so autonomously if this is what the occasion calls for. This entails acquiring the required capabilities that will provide it with credibility. It also entails working closely, civilian and military, Member States and the EU, as a team, as a Union.

The European Union has been notorious for its lack of urgency type of decision making. Today, time is a luxury we cannot afford. We have to switch gears. We have to take action. There is no time for business as usual, if we are serious about preserving what has been achieved so far the last 60 years. And a lot has been achieved. Things that may be part of our daily routine, taken as a given. These things would seem inconceivable 60 years ago. It is time to start building for the next 60 years. This is our chance. And there is no room for failure.

Thank you.