Balkan CHOD's Conference - Intervention

Belgrade, 22 May 2018

Dear Colleagues,

I want to thank the Chief of the General Staff, Serbian Armed Forces, General Ljubiša Diković, for his kind invitation to participate in the 12th 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, and the great evening we had yesterday. Thank you for the excellent briefings and the work you have done.

Last month, the High Representative, Madam Mogherini, visited a number of countries of the Western Balkans, Albania, Montenegro, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and of course Serbia. One of the main objectives of this visit was to reiterate the European Union perspective and reaffirm the EU interest for this region. Actually Western Balkans are of her top priorities for 2018.

Some call the future accession of these and other countries of the Western Balkans to the European Union "enlargement". The respective Communication from the Commission of February 2018 is titled "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans". I just call this future accession, "completion". The Western Balkans are part of Europe. No doubt about it. The peoples of the EU and the region have a common heritage and history. They can also have a common future, defined by shared opportunities and challenges. This belief of mine, shared by the peoples of the region and the European Union alike, guides and reinforces the reformation efforts which are paramount for the successful fulfilment of the long accession path.
No matter how long it may take to reach that objective, and what are the conditions, the criteria or the prerequisites that should be met or accomplished, the results of the transformation will become obvious on the way. Together with them there will come **stability, security, prosperity and resilience**. They will bring us closer even **before** the official signing of the accession papers.

Getting closer means being part of something bigger. We, in the military we have already achieved that. Members of the Armed Forces represented here today participate in some of the European Union's military Missions and Operations. Side by side, working for a shared goal. To bring stability, to build capacity, to restore hope.

Your political leaderships, following your solid military advice have agreed to commit valuable resources to our shared vision of the world, as it is described in the EU Global Strategy. A world that is more stable, more secure and more prosperous, in order that **our societies** will also be more stable, more secure and more prosperous. Migration, terrorism, radicalisation, they are all by-products of poor governance, discrimination, lack of justice, unemployment and famine. As long as these conditions persist, their aftermath will continue to put pressure on our societies.

The European Union applies the full spectrum of its tools to change this situation, following an Integrated Approach. Restoring security is a prerequisite for the rest of the efforts to bring fruits. The members of our Missions and Operations work in adverse conditions and are subjected to numerous risks to offer the host nation a dividend of the security and stability our societies enjoy.

At this point, I want to remind you, that although your accession to the EU is not military related all countries in the Balkans, especially the ones that are not NATO or EU Member States, should make an effort together with the NATO Allies and EUMS to align or to raise their standards to the required level of training and professionalism because in our Ops and Missions we all represent Europe and the West and our common set of values and principles. I believe that your participation in EU missions and operations will seriously contribute to this effort.
During their deployment, your men and women are also your ambassadors not only to the host nation, but also to the other participant nations. They create connections and bonds, they influence and get influenced back, they share their expertise and benefit from the others' expertise.

For all these reasons, I thank you for being part of our Missions and Operations. I encourage you to continue doing so in the future. And I am looking forward to the moment that this forum, the Balkan CHODs Conference, will be a mini EU sub Military Committee at CHODs level, a plan that we need to consider for the future.

Thank you.