Dear Charlie (Major General Charles STICKLAND, Operation Commander of the EU Naval Force - Somalia),

- Let me first thank you for your kind introduction and for setting the scene giving me the opportunity to address this distinguished audience.

Dear Nick (General Sir Nicholas CARTER, UK Chief of Defence),

Distinguished guests,

Fellow Officers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am honoured to be with you here today in my capacity as Chairman of the European Union Military Committee and as the primary point of contact in the EU for the Operation Commander of Operation ATALANTA.

- You will be aware that I am not only responsible for the conduct of the Military Committee business, but I also act as the spokesperson of all the Chiefs of Defence and I act as the Military Advisor to the High Representative.

- Madame MOGHERINI has stressed on many occasions how proud she is of the achievements of Operation ATALANTA and she has been kept abreast of the smooth transition of Command from Northwood to Rota and Brest, she sends her congratulations to all involved in this evolution.

(1. State of play of EU-led military missions and operations, and focus on Atalanta)

- As we are all aware, significant efforts are put in place in order to implement the provisions of the EU Global Strategy.

- On the military side, this is mostly done through the on-going EU-led military Operations and non-executive training missions, which are, of course, a core activity of the CSDP and are carried out thanks to the contributions of Member States and in close cooperation with the CSDP civilian missions in some of the most complex and dangerous areas of the world.
• Accordingly, many soldiers from EU Member States are actively engaged in our near neighbourhood, such as the Balkans and also further away in Somalia, Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR) as well as the vessels and aircraft deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

• OP ATALANTA is part of a CSDP "family" effort in the Horn of Africa. On a broader perspective, the African continent is where the EU is focusing its main effort, as the root causes of many existing challenges lie there and this calls for the EU to act consistently with its primary interest, the security and prosperity of Europe, by promoting welfare and security at source.

• In this regard, Operation ATALANTA in the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean definitely represents a landmark for the excellent operational results it has achieved over the 10 years of its existence.

• On a regular basis your ships and assets have provided direct support to the sister missions of EUTM Somalia and EUCAP Somalia, facilitating interaction with local authorities. For this we are also grateful as ATALANTA plays its part in the overarching EU strategy in the region.

• For those achievements, I would first like to express my gratitude both to all the personnel involved and to the UK for the overall commitment and leadership shown.

• As clearly highlighted by General STICKLAND, they range from the continuous operational commitment to repress piracy at sea off the coast of Somalia and in the Western Indian Ocean, to the protection of World Food Programme transports and other vulnerable shipping.

• Not least, it is worth recalling that Op ATALANTA has also been acting as an important platform for cooperation with Third States.

• For example, South Korea is regularly participating with a frigate and the operation is coordinating activities at sea with China and the United States, and not forgetting that India have expressed their interest in contributing to the protection of the World Food Programme, a legacy that shall be followed up by Admiral MARTORELL in due course.

• I would like to focus on the aspect of Partnership, as I deem it of the utmost importance to better explain the contribution of Operation ATALANTA in the wider context of military diplomacy.
• Over the past years, considerable efforts have been made in promoting high-level military-to-military contacts with Third States.

• In this regard, I stand ready to ensure continuity with the work of my predecessors, I am increasingly called on by the High Representative and the External Action Service of the EU to initiate dialogue as having a military background often makes it easier to connect and initiate a dialogue in countries where the Military have an especially prominent role, often on difficult and sensitive subjects.

• It has to be said that a successful story like Operation ATALANTA is the best business card to attract potential partners and to establish fruitful relations through their offer to initiate or continue their contributions to our CSDP military missions and operations, which is the best way to promote the growing credibility of the EU as a global actor and the effectiveness of the Global Strategy as its main driving factor.

• Therefore, I would like to thank you, Charlie, for your steady and resolute leadership, without neglecting the outstanding and absolute dedication of the men and women of Operation ATALANTA under your command.

• The impending closure of the Northwood HQ has never dimmed your enthusiasm and the professionalism of you and your team, while conducting the first ever handover of an OHQ from one EU Member State to another, has been consummate.

• I mentioned your innovation because that is exactly what you have shown while dealing with challenging conditions and a reduced force flow. The excellence of the relationships built up with Industry, which is reflected in the guest list for this event, has maintained the confidence that industry has in the Operation and has enhanced the reputation of the EU as a security provider.

• I must also thank you for your contribution to the launch and thus shaping of the EU Naval Force concept at the military strategic level, a further legacy to build upon and evidence of your great professionalism and of the dedication of your team.

(2. The EU Strategic Autonomy and its complementarity with NATO)

• As we perhaps reach the beginning of the end for the UK in the EU, but not in Europe, let me also take this opportunity to focus on the notion of Strategic Autonomy stemming from the EU Global Strategy and its links with the on-going developments and initiatives into the framework of CSDP.
• Despite possible appearances on the surface, Strategic Autonomy is not meant to trigger a competition with NATO, that wouldn't make sense as the two Organisations share basic values and interests, but rather to seek for complementarity with it.

• This is not a zero-sum game, where putting more resources to develop the security and defence dimension within the EU means to take them away from NATO, it is definitely a win-win situation for both Organisations.

• Since strengthening the European pillar is also a clear strategic goal for NATO itself and a long-lasting demand by the US, it is clear that the EU defence initiatives are not undermining NATO, but rather reinforcing it.

• To act consistently with the commitments stemming from the Global Strategy the EU has to take more responsibility and therefore it needs to have greater autonomous capacity to conduct a wide range of military operations, with partners whenever and wherever possible but also alone when necessary.

(4. Conclusions on BREXIT's military impact and the hope of future partnership)

• Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude by saying a few words on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union, that will take place soon, and on which I will confine my comments to the purely military aspects.

• BREXIT, as in many other areas, will not only directly affect the manning of CSDP Military Missions and Operations, compelling the other EU Member States to fill the gaps, but will also have a significant impact on the overall available military expertise with the loss of highly qualified staff in Brussels, due to the departure of several excellent military Officers and civil servants.

• Nevertheless, I would like to express my hope that in the near future there will be room to start the negotiation of an ambitious partnership that will allow the UK to remain close to the EU in the military domain.

• Concluding my address, I thank you once again for your achievements and I hand the floor to General CARTER for his intervention.