2019 has just opened its doors and we are taking our first steps into a new, promising year for European Security and Defence.

This first semester is marked by the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The Presidency’s motto “Cohesion, a common European value”, clearly underlines a priority for the EU: a deeper unity.

We all wish Romania a successful and rewarding Presidency and, bearing in mind how strong cohesion is key to the Common Security and Defence I guarantee, in my capacity of Chairman of the EU Military Committee, full support in fulfilling the Presidency’s ambitious working programme.

Another relevant date we are looking forward to is the issuing, in the next months, of the Action Plan for the implementation of the new EU Strategic Approach to Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

"...in times where women’s rights and gender equality are ever more questioned in some quarters ..., " as the Secretary-General of European External Action Service (EEAS), Ms Helga Schmid underlined, the EU has adopted a new forward-looking policy on WPS, centred on the importance for women’s leadership, and their balanced and effective participation in all different aspects of peace and security and all areas of policy decision making and programming.

Promoting a systematic integration of gender perspective within CSDP operations and missions, is another face of this collective effort. The first Active Training Project on “Gender”, recently organised by EUNAVFOR MED Sophia with the support of a dedicated “Gender Issues Advisor” unit and the participation of Libyan Navy and Coast Guard personal, stands out as a commendable initiative in this respect. Furthermore, regular exchanges are in place with Ambassador Mara Marinaki, the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender, who I had the pleasure to meet early this month.

Women, Peace and Security is not only a priority for the EU but also for NATO and the UN. In the framework of the informal meeting of the EU Defence Ministers held in January by the Romanian Presidency, Ministers had the precious occasion to exchange views on this issue, in presence of the UN Under Secretary General and the NATO Secretary General.

In conclusion, allow me to sincerely present all of you my best wishes for a successful, prosperous and rewarding 2019.
“EU security cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey: building partnership to address shared challenges”
by Ms Angelina EICHHORST

"We will engage in a practical and principled way, sharing global responsibilities with our partners and contributing to their strengths. We have learnt the lesson: my neighbour’s and my partner’s weaknesses are my own weaknesses”.

These lines from Federica Mogherini’s foreword of the Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy remind us of the importance of building strong and effective partnerships with our neighbours. The threats and challenges we are facing neither start nor stop at our borders - they are shared by our closest neighbours. For this reason, the EU is increasing its engagement with its partners in the Western Balkans and Turkey to address our shared challenges, from security to migration, while promoting the values the Union represents such as multilateralism and common action.

The EU is engaged in the Western Balkans through operations guaranteeing rule of law and security while at the same time building the capacity of domestic structures in this field (e.g. EULEX in Kosovo and EUFOR ALTHEA in Bosnia and Herzegovina). Our Western Balkans partners need to be prepared to assume all the responsibilities of EU membership, which involves common actions in the field of security and defence policy. The EU’s enlargement policy provides a solid framework to enhance the resilience of our Western Balkans partners, trigger positive transformation and to contribute to our regional security.

Sustained EU high-level political engagement in the region was underlined last year by the Commission’s Western Balkans Strategy, the Sofia Summit and high-level visits by EU leaders. The Strategy includes a clear commitment to do more work together on security and migration, which was also taken forward in the Sofia Summit Priority Agenda. We are working to enhance EU-Western Balkans cooperation on security and defence around a number of key priorities: countering terrorism and countering violent extremism, fighting organised crime, countering hybrid threats, contributing to the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), including the participation in missions and operations, capacity building and resilience, addressing the issue of small arms and light weapons, as well as migration management.

Today, our Western Balkans partners are contributing to many of our crisis management missions and operations globally. EU and candidate countries’ personnel serve shoulder to shoulder in the most challenging regions of the world and we greatly value their well-trained military staff. For instance, Montenegro and Serbia have provided staff officers to the European Union Naval Force ATLANTA (EU NAVFOR) to fight piracy in the Horn of Africa (see picture). All our partners are familiar with the Global Strategy, which has even been translated into Serbian by the Belgrade authorities. This means our Western Balkans partners are moving from being “security consumers” to “security providers”. We are currently exploring their further participation in missions and operations, including civilian ones, as well as cooperation with EU Battlegroups.

Turkey, as a candidate country, NATO ally and key partner in fields of strategic importance for the EU, also shows willingness to advance cooperation in security and defence. Since 2003 Turkey has participated in nine EU CSDP operations. EU-Turkey relations are important for our shared interests and the many common issues and regional challenges we face in the Middle East, the wider Mediterranean, and in fields such as counter-terrorism, migration and energy diversification. We discuss these topics with our Turkish partners in regular dialogues on CSDP and counter-terrorism.

Our Western Balkans and Turkey partners’ commitments to CSDP and in particular to CSDP operations are clear sign of their engagement towards the EU. With their increasing support, the EU makes a significant contribution to international peace and stability, and work with our Western Balkans and Turkey partners is increasingly part of this. As we focus more strongly on developing the EU’s security and defence capacity, it is very timely and in our clear shared interest to continue strengthening our security cooperation and synergies with our partners.
News from our Operations & Missions

EU NAVFOR ATALANTA
India is a key partner who has been working alongside EU NAVFOR to continue to counter piracy and recently conducted World Food Programme (WFP) escort duties (on 24-25 December 2018), as well as a Passex in 2017.

On January the 24th, a high level EU Military delegation visited Mumbai to continue discussions with Indian authorities and mark the importance of this relationship. In the framework of France’s bi-lateral cooperation with India, the EU delegation on board of the French destroyer FS CASSARD, was able to meet with Chief of Staff of Indian Western Naval Command, Vice Admiral Ajendra Bahadur Singh.

EUFOR ALTHEA
On 31st January, COMEUFOR, Major General Martin Dorfer, welcomed the new Austrian Ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Her Excellency Ulrike Hartmann, in the occasion of her first official visit to Camp Butmir, in Sarajevo.

During the visit COMEUFOR briefed Her Excellency Hartmann on the EUFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the contribution of the Austrian contingent.

Her Excellency Ulrike Hartmann took over from the previous Austrian Ambassador, His Excellency Martin Pammer, in January 2019.

EU NAVFORMED Sophia
On January the 23rd and 24th, the 7th edition of Shared Awareness and De-confliction for the Mediterranean Sea (SHADE MED) was held in Rome in the Francesco Baracca Airbase.

The forum was opened by Rear Admiral (UH) Enrico Credendino, Operation SOPHIA Commander, who welcomed an outstanding participation of 189 attendees, from 37 different countries and 121 organizations who took part in this first SHADE MED event of 2019.
News from our Operations & Missions

EUTM Mali
On 18th January, Brigadier General Mirow, Mission Force Commander of the EUTM Mali, handed over to General Coulibaly, Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Malian Armed Forces, the new doctrine manuals. This is a tangible sign of the excellent cooperation between the EUTM and the Joint Doctrine Centre (JDC) which, established in January 2016, has been carrying out significant work in collaboration with EUTM, with the aim of contributing towards the development and promulgation of doctrines and manuals adapted to Malian requirements.

EUTM Somalia
On January the 15th, a Medals Parade, chaired by Director of the European Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and EUTM-S Mission Commander, Lt Gen Esa Pulkkinen, was held in the European Union Training Mission Somalia (EUTM-S) compound, in Mogadishu. On the occasion, also EUTM-S, EUCAP and EUNAVFOR “Atalanta” members were awarded with the Common Security and Defense Policy Service Medal (CSDP), and Lt Gen Pulkkinen seized the opportunity to award, on behalf of the Chairman of the European Union Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano, two EUTM-S members with Certificates of Commendation for their exceptional performance during and in the aftermaths of the 1st October 2018 terrorist attack.

EUTM RCA
On January the 18th, an end of training course ceremony took place in the camp of military training camp, in Kassaï. At the end of a four months training course, 28 soldiers received the Elementary Technical Certificate-Employment of social networks. They were trained by their peers who had previously completed a Training Course on Troop-Troop Information and Communication Systems (OFFSIC-CT), also provided by EUTM-RCA.
News from the Committee

Military Opening Reception Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU

On January the 9th, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano attended, in Brussels, the Military Opening Reception on the occasion of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The EU is currently going through a decisive stage in the process of adapting its structures and strategies to the existing challenges, which deeply involves the military element. In his remarks General Graziano stressed “I hope that the New Year will allow us to harvest the fruits of our efforts so far and those that we will make in the near future.”

Meeting with the Commander of the G5 Sahel Joint Force

On January the 14th, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano met in Brussels, with the Commander of the G5 Sahel Joint Force. “Pleased to receive Major Generale Hanana Ould Sidi.” General Graziano stressed, “We discussed the security situation in the Region, the strategic importance of G5 Sahel and the cooperation with the EU”.

180th NATO Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session

On January the 15th and 16th, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano, attended in Brussels, the 180th NATO Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session. General Graziano participated with NATO Chiefs of Defence for important discussions on current and future strategic challenges as well as Military Strategy, and Defence Posture. Among other relevant topics, the debate touched the regional security situation in Afghanistan, the Western Balkans and the NATO Kosovo Force Mission.
Meeting with the Italian Chief of Defence and the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan

On 14th and 15th January respectively, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano met, in Brussels, with the Italian Chief of Defence, General Enzo Vecciarelli, and the Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan, General Zubair Mahmood Hayat. The meeting with General Vecciarelli was a precious occasion to discuss about the Italian commitment to the EU CSDP Missions and Operations and, during the meeting with General Zubair Mahmood Hayat, General Graziano stressed how the “EU welcomes Pakistan’s continued interest in the EU common security and defence policy.”.

Meeting with the EU NAVFORMED and EU NAVFOR Operation Commanders

On 15th and 16th January respectively, the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano, met in Brussels the EU NAVFORMED SOPHIA Operation Commander, Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino, and the EU NAVFOR ATALANTA Operation Commander, Major General Charlie Stickland. General Graziano had the excellent opportunity to discussed “the role of Operation SOPHIA and the importance of EUNAVFORMED for the security of both the Mediterranean Sea and of the Europe as a whole” with Admiral Credendino, and Operation ATALANTA “with over 10 years success and lessons on counterpiracy operations” with Major General Charlie Stickland.

Meeting with the Chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Defence Forces and the Chief of the General Staff of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

On 16th January the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano met in Brussels, the Chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Defence Forces, Major General Vladimir Chachibaia and the Chief of the General Staff of Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Major General Vasko Gjurchinovski. “The possibility of military cooperation aiming at bringing Georgia closer to the EU” was discussed with Major General Vladimir Chachibaia, whereas General Graziano and Major General Gjurchinovski “agreed that the positive developments in Prespa Agreements will contribute to increase stability in the entire Region.”.
News from the Committee

Meeting with NATO KFOR Commander

On 23rd January in Brussels, the Chairman of the European Union Military Committee (CEUMC), General Claudio Graziano, met with the NATO KFOR Commander, Major General Lorenzo D’Addario, on Wednesday.

The meeting was a good occasion to exchange views on issues of common interest, and General Graziano underlined how "The Western Balkans remains a region of strategic importance, where both the EU and NATO share the common objective of promoting stability, security and reform."

Meeting with EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender

On 25th January in Brussels, the Chairman of the European Union Military Committee (CEUMC), General Claudio Graziano, met with Ambassador Mara Marinaki, the EEAS Principal Advisor on Gender.

Recently, the EU has adopted a new strategic approach on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), centered on the importance "for women's leadership and meaningful and equitable participation of women in all aspects of peace and security and in all areas of policy decision-making and programming." as the EEAS Secretary General Helga Schmid stated. Promoting a systematic integration of gender perspective within CSDP operations and missions, is another face of this collective effort.

"It was a great opportunity to receive an update on the latest developments in the field of Women, Peace and Security and gender equality" General Graziano underlined, "I ensure all the support of the Military Committee in this domain."
News from the Committee

Meeting with a delegation of the Standing Committee on Defence of the Dutch House of Representatives

On 28th January, the Chairman of the European Union Military Committee (CEUMC), General Claudio Graziano, welcomed in Brussels, a delegation of the Standing Committee on Defence of the Dutch House of Representatives.

The members of the Standing Committee were updated on the latest developments in the domain of the EU Security and Defence, as well as on CSDP Operations and Missions.

General Graziano said that "... the EU, being a multidimensional entity, possesses a wide array of tools at its disposal, in the areas of diplomacy, security, defence, finance, trade, development, and humanitarian aid." and underlined how "... the EUMC offers and will always provide its most unfettered contribution to the political decision-making of the EU, while synergistically collaborating with the other relevant actors within the Union, such as the European Defence Agency, as well as the EU Member States."

Informal meeting of the EU Ministers of Defence

On 30th and 31st January, the Chairman of the European Union Military Committee, General Claudio Graziano, attended the informal meeting of the 28 EU Ministers of Defence, held in Bucharest by the Romanian Presidency and chaired by the High Representative, Madame Federica Mogherini.

Discussions focused on relevant topics, namely women, peace and security (WPS), on which the EU is engaged in close coordination with United Nations (UN) and NATO, and the way ahead on European defence, taking stock of the most relevant issues, with the view to further consolidating and bringing forward the existing EU defence initiatives like PESCO and EDF.