

Address by Ināra Mūrniece, Speaker of the Saeima, at the EU Speakers' Conference "Security and Defence", Tallinn, 24.04.2018

Dear Mr Nestor, dear colleagues,

I want to thank the Estonian Parliament for the excellent organisation of the EU Speakers' Conference this year. It is a privilege for me to speak about the EU's security and defence. Tallinn is the perfect place to discuss this topical issue. Under the Estonian EU Presidency, we made significant progress in creating European defence architecture.

It is undeniable that we need a new level of ambition in security and defence. The crises at Europe's borders force us to act, to protect our open societies. Our citizens see the harm done by terrorism and the migration crisis, the various kinds of damage created by Russia, its hybrid and information warfare. Today, our citizens define security as their main priority in the EU.

Now we have found a way forward. Latvia welcomes the deepening of the EU defence cooperation and launching of the Permanent Structured Cooperation, **PESCO**. It was made possible thanks to the German-French leadership and the determination, unity and courage of the Member States.

Let us be clear, in the modern battlefield no country can act alone. We need allies. There is no question that to keep Europe safe we need **NATO** – our Transatlantic Alliance. After the events in Georgia and later Ukraine, this has become crystal clear.

After Ukraine, Latvia recognised that it was wrong to assume that military aggression could never return to Europe. Today, Latvia as well as the other Baltic countries spend at least **2% of GDP** on defence and regret the time when we did not. We all should invest adequately.

Today, we increasingly look not only to NATO, but also to the EU for defence cooperation. NATO and the EU each have their strengths and specific roles to play. The EU can best help in the fields where civilian and military efforts converge. EU defence initiatives can strengthen NATO by increasing collective capabilities. Also, better-developed EU defence will also deepen the EU–NATO cooperation.

PESCO is a major step forward. What is needed now, after the enthusiastic beginning, is practical results. We want to make use of the **PESCO joint projects**. Our projects should be meaningful and representative to gain the public support.

Within PESCO, we see a particular value in **military mobility** projects. The EU can help simplify the cross-border procedures to enhance the speed of movement of military forces across Europe. Of course, this is not an easy task – many stakeholders are involved, ranging from the EU institutions to local authorities. But we really hope to see the first practical results soon.

We also see the benefits of closer EU cooperation in **defence industry**. The European defence sector needs to overcome

overlapping and fragmentation. The European Defence Fund would help to improve the competitiveness of the vast European defence industry. Here, we should not overlook **small and medium enterprises**.

PESCO can use the strengths of each Member State, especially the niche capabilities of smaller states. For instance, the **Baltic States** are leading in information technology, digitisation and research on cyber security.

Speaking about cyber-defence and hybrid threats, I am glad that the **EU–NATO practical cooperation** is progressing. The Helsinki Centre of Countering Hybrid Threats is another great example. We should continue strengthening the EU–NATO cybersecurity cooperation to adapt in today’s digital age, the world that is rapidly evolving. Following the Salisbury attack, we have agreed to bolster capabilities to address hybrid threats, including in the cyber and strategic communication. These issues must be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Moving on to more strategic level – we still have an intense debate ahead on the **future of EU defence policy**. For instance, how to agree on the funding for security and defence within the next Multi-Annual **Financial** Framework? How do we plan our future engagement with the United Kingdom? Our priority is to keep the **UK** as close to Europe as possible. The involvement of **partner countries** is also extremely important.

One more thing – we must not forget that the defence begins with the minds of people. We need to strengthen our minds to be able to protect our democratic values. The Kremlin in its information war employs a wide range of weapons, including TV stations and internet trolls. People sometimes do not know whom to believe. To face this, knowledge and critical thinking are the best medicine. To succeed, the only way is “being strategic” in our political communication. I am proud of our NATO Stratcom Centre in Latvia which contributes to these efforts. The EU StratCom Task Force should be strengthened. More needs to be done in strategic communication, in telling our own story.

Today we have a good story to tell. PESCO is a major chapter in the EU narrative. PESCO is not only a framework, it is a process of the EU **acting together**, continuing with the European integration, communicating to citizens the idea of a united and strong Europe. It means meeting the citizens face-to-face. We, the national parliaments, have a special role in communicating the EU policies to our people.

Right now, there is a strong support among European citizens for EU defence cooperation. What we need is further practical work to rebuild our defences. It is about sharing responsibilities and a common political will. It is also about the strength of the Transatlantic bond and our ability to invest more in our capabilities. And again, it is about communicating to our citizens.

Thank you!