

Annual Conference of the European Defence Agency

28 November 2019

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to speak today at the Annual Conference of the European Defence Agency.

Dear Jorge, you know that I follow the Agency very closely.

I actually participated in the Intergovernmental Conference of 2003 that gave support to the project of the Agency.

Since then, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the Agency on many occasions.

- From 2010 to 2014, when I was Commissioner for the Internal Market, we worked together to implement the ‘Defence Package’ – a first step towards opening up security and defence procurement markets in the EU.
- In 2016, when I was adviser to President Juncker on security issues, we started work on the European Defence Fund.
- In my role as the Union’s negotiator for Brexit, we have worked closely with Federica Mogherini and with you, Jorge. And I will continue working very closely with the upcoming Head of the Agency – my friend Josep Borrell.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Brexit is an immense challenge.

It will affect the lives of many of us.

It will have consequences for our businesses – including our defence industry.

This will not be business as usual.

I do not need to repeat how much I regret Brexit.

But this is the sovereign decision of a nation. We must respect this choice. And we do so.

Since June 2016, I have worked day in and day out to organise the orderly withdrawal of the United Kingdom.

In October, we reached an agreement with the United Kingdom on a Withdrawal Agreement, which :

- Preserves peace and stability on the island of Ireland ;
- Protects the Single Market;
- Protects the rights of EU citizens in the United Kingdom and of UK citizens in the EU.

But managing the divorce cannot be the end of the journey.

We must now look forward. As soon as the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified, we must turn to the next chapter: our future relationship.

This is why I was mandated by the incoming European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, to reorganise my team – now the UK Task Force. We will work with and for the new College that was confirmed yesterday by the European Parliament with a large majority.

We are ready and fully operational for the next steps following the General elections in the United Kingdom on 12 December.

Once we have clarity on the new government and the ratification process, the EU will engage in the negotiation of the future relationship in a coordinated and consistent manner.

In doing this, we must take into account the bigger picture.

The international context is more challenging than ever. Unpredictability and instability are the new normal.

- Russia continues to assert its influence in the region and beyond, sometimes in contradiction with international law.
- China is engaging in strategic competition and promoting its alternative economic model around the world.
- The United States increasingly chooses the path of unilateralism to defend its interests.
- Trade tensions and technological competition are new drivers of international relations.
- Not to mention the spread of terrorism and global instability.

This global picture has informed our approach to Brexit since the very beginning.

In the current volatile geopolitical context, we need to focus on:

- The unity of the EU27.
- The solidarity between Member States. In the European Union, no Member State walks alone.
- The protection of our most valuable asset, the single market.
- A positive agenda for the future of Europe.
- And last but not least, an ambitious partnership with the United Kingdom.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a world that sees the return of great-power competition and the erosion of multilateralism, Europe cannot remain a spectator.

As stressed by President von der Leyen in her speech to the European Parliament yesterday: Europe must be the shaper of a better global order.

We need to reinvent ourselves and upgrade our cooperation if we are to uphold our values. *Let me pay tribute to the 13 soldiers that tragically lost their lives in Mali while defending our values against the spread of terrorism.*

We have made a lot of progress over the last 5 years, but it needs to continue.

President von der Leyen has called for a European Defence Union in the next five years, also stressing that NATO remains the cornerstone of Europe's collective defence.

This is also the ambition of the Strategic Agenda agreed by the European Council. Leaders want a Union that does more for its own security and defence.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is obviously a strong Brexit dimension to this debate.

Brexit means Brexit – also when it comes to security and defence.

Once the United Kingdom has left the Union, it will be a third country. It wants and will pursue a foreign policy based on its own national interests.

In the future, the EU and the United Kingdom will cooperate on different terms than today.

But let me stress: The United Kingdom leaves the Union. It does not leave Europe.

We are bound by values, history and geography.

We will continue to face major common challenges.

In the face of threats to our shared security, we must continue to show unity and strategic solidarity. As European leaders did after the attack in Salisbury in 2018.

We must be strategic about our future cooperation on defence and security.

Already in April 2017, Member States expressed their readiness to establish a close partnership with the United Kingdom in foreign, security and defence policy.

This is what we agreed with the United Kingdom in the Political Declaration of October 2019.

A relationship that is ambitious, flexible and scalable.

And we want the closest possible partnership.

We want to be:

- Partners in *foreign policy* to promote rules-based multilateralism and project shared values in the rest of the world ;
- Partners in *sanctions* to facilitate consultation and mutually reinforcing restrictive measures when foreign policy objectives are aligned;
- Partners on *intelligence* to fight terrorism and better anticipate emerging threats to Europe's security;
- Partners on *defence policy* to ensure the stability of our neighbourhood; and in *defence programmes* to build cutting-edge equipment and facilitate interoperability of our armed forces;
- Partners in *cyber-security* to exchange information, promote global standards and combine expertise.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Cooperation is Europe's DNA.

We want the United Kingdom to be our closest and most strategic partner.

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

As a major NATO ally.

As a member of the European family in security and defence.

In the future, we should seek to make intelligent use of existing rules for the association of third countries:

- By working together in the UN, G20 and G7 to defend our shared vision of the global order: one of rules-based multilateralism.
- By joining forces in EU-led stabilisation operations in Europe's neighbourhood, as we have done already with more than 25 partners.
- By engaging together on the ground to deliver external action and manage global challenges in a coherent manner.
- And of course, by cooperating on defence technologies and equipment. Through an administrative arrangement with the European Defence Agency, as we do with four international partners today; or through the European Defence Fund.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Security challenges are pressing on all fronts.

There is no time to waste.

We need to be able to join forces rapidly when required.

As mentioned, together with the United Kingdom government, we have defined the framework of *what* we want to achieve in the field of foreign policy, security and defence.

Once the Withdrawal Agreement is ratified, we have 11 months to deliver the priorities of the trade and security partnership.

This will be an enormous challenge. It will require political will and realistic expectations.

Together with the new High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission Josep Borrell -, and with the European External Action Service, we are ready to work hard on the EU side to advance as rapidly and efficiently as possible on this new security partnership.

An ambitious, close and lasting cooperation between the EU and the United Kingdom on external action, security and defence will be essential for both parties.

To cope with new existential security threats.

To prevent conflicts.

And to strengthen international peace and security.

It is a priority. It will benefit our citizens' security. It will benefit our continent.

Thank you very much for your attention.