

# EUROPEAN DEFENCE MATTERS

Annual Conference  
of the European Defence Agency

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Opening remarks

by the Minister of the Hellenic National Defence

Mr. Dimitris Avramopoulos

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High Representative,  
Chief Executive,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure and honor for me to participate in this very important Annual Conference of the European Defence Agency.

I couldn't agree more with the topic.

Indeed. European Defence matters!

It matters for the political stability and the security of our continent.

It matters for the security of our citizens.

It matters for the jobs, the cutting edge technologies and the growth of EU member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, allow me to share with you some thoughts on the importance of European defence collaboration.

For decades, Europe pursued the path of integration through function.

It is about time, to have a look around us, to see the geopolitical landscape of our time and to strive for the only realistic choice in front us.

That choice calls for political vision and political will.

If we do not manage to provide a common European answer to the critical security questions, then we will soon realize that our shared economic interests will be undermined as well.

But let's indeed have a closer look to the geopolitical realities that shape our time, our region, our world.

First and foremost, Europe as continent, as a Union, as a common market, needs to return to sustainable growth.

Europe cannot afford any more the continuation of an economic stalemate that threatens our societies, our democracies.

In order to return to growth, we need security in our borders, security in our societies.

Now, if we take a look at the neighboring regional reality, we will clearly see an arch of instability stretching from the Ukraine to the northern shores of Africa.

An arch of instability that undermines trade and exports, threatens critical energy routes, scares tourist markets and can fuel even further the wave of illegal immigration targeting Europe.

The second crucial geopolitical development that calls for the deepening of our defence and security cooperation, is the fact that we live in a world that has new protagonists with new global perspectives.

The United States are looking for a strategic disengagement from the overstretching of commitments and defence spending.

Resurgent Russia seems to have a clear strategic positioning about the future of Eurasia.

China is fast developing its security and defence capability claiming in this way, a leading role in the developments shaping the Asia-Pacific Rim.

The third defining factor of contemporary geopolitics, is the relentless competition for energy resources.

A competition that to a large extent, shapes the system of international relations in our time.

Global security cannot be served if there is a void of security and defence policy in Europe.

The growth of our economies will stumble, if we do not respond together in the crisis enveloping in our immediate neighborhood.

The sovereignty of our nation states will suffer, if we do not empower the sovereignty of Europe as a force to be reckoned with.

Europe needs for internal as well as for external reasons to develop a clear geopolitical perspective for its position in our contemporary world.

A geopolitical perspective that will be supported by a truly common foreign, defence and security policy.

We must realize that in our world, European cooperation in the field of defence and security, is not just another European project.

It has become one of the most critical pillars for European democracy, integration, cohesion and growth.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times of crisis European Union should enhance its role as a provider of political stability, prosperity and security not limited in a regional but in a wider global scale.

Security and defence policy is a safe path to tackle the security challenges and dilemmas we face: by doing more together and doing it better; by learning to stand as one.

My strong believe is that European Union should reinforce its situational awareness and preparedness in both political and operational terms.

Never forget that when the means are limited, political will is crucial.

The European Council of December 2013 confirmed the renewed interest of Europe in promoting defence and security cooperation.

It would indeed be essential to make the European Council of December 2013 a point of departure -rather than a point of arrival- for the establishment of a comprehensive political framework dealing with European military and defence-related matters.

European Council is not the end of the “defence journey” but the beginning of a new European Defence future;

and the EDA’s bright future remains on the hands of the participating member states.

Despite the concerns about the possible loss of national sovereignty that managing and developing military capabilities *together* may entail, I fully agree that Europeans are already losing sovereignty by *not* consolidating, *not* optimizing, *not* innovating, *not* regionalizing and *not* integrating their military capabilities.

Without these joint developments, they risk losing their “strategic autonomy”.

Both action and determination are required in order to create the appropriate enabling mechanisms to combat this eventuality.

Distinguished guests,

Greece has always put emphasis on the historic necessity and the political importance of the European cooperation in the field of defence, as a key political priority for the future of Europe and its perspectives.

It is not a matter of coincidence that, the last time that Europe focused on defence issues, was ten years ago, when again Greece held the Presidency of the European Council.

Despite the current financial constraints, it is of my profound belief that we are standing in front of a great opportunity, stemming from our solid intention to work closely in order to develop a healthy and competitive defence industry sector.

It is time to perceive the emerging changes and overcome any identified institutional or entrepreneurial malaises to schedule our further actions and to launch a new strategic era between policy and defence industry support.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is a lot we can do together to avoid duplication of capabilities, to overcome the current fragmentation of the European defence market, to achieve greater cost-effectiveness and ultimately to enable Europe to maintain a competitive defence industrial and technological base.

It is also very important to continue work on the cooperative capability projects agreed in December, where the European Defence Agency plays undoubtedly a key role.

The EDA projects, activities and mechanisms in the Research & Development area, offer an excellent opportunity for the European defence industry.

The European Defence Agency has been playing a very important role in the improvement of European capabilities for the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The Lisbon Treaty has reinforced the Agency's central role in this mission.

It is my belief that the challenges of this Conference are significant and I am confident that we can achieve our objectives if we advance towards the creation of an integrated European Defence system, which is today more important than ever.

Dear friends,

The quest for European Defence is today more topical than ever.

The main question is whether Europe as an entity relinquishes its right to Defence, or not: if really not, we should examine this issue all along and on a new basis. We should examine this with the experience gained in recent years.

An experience of economic crisis of incapacity to clearly express a common coherent and comprehensive political stance.

An efficient European integration requires the main components of a state: economy and defence. Hence, we should move forward to economic integration and to common political governance. Common economic and political governance are preconditions for a competent common European Defence Policy.

We should never forget that the process of European integration started from the defence sector.

The first European organization established in the aftermath of World War II was purely defensive; the Western European Union.

However, it lacked political will and economic foundations; that is why it had not fulfilled its purposes.

Today we have both; I could even say, all three constituent parts: politics, economics, defence.

Let's move together towards the transformation of the European Defence Agency to a European Defence Organization, being of equal standing with all the other institutions of the European Union.

This is the only way to establish a real political Europe; a real European political governance.

It is my believe that such initiatives contribute to further developing the cooperation among our countries in the area of Defence strategy and Defence industry to the benefit of regional stability and world peace.

A cette égard, j' aimerais féliciter Madame Claude-France Arnould, qui dirige l' agence Européenne de Décence, avec compétence et autorité, mais aussi ses collaboratrices et collaborateurs et de la rassurer que la Grece, en tant qu' Etat membre, sera toujours a ces cotes, afin de parvenir, ce que tous nous ici souhaitons:

Une Europe de Défence unie, forte, acteur principale dans la precessus de la prevention contre toute menace a la paix et a la sécurité Européenne et internationale.

I wish you productive discussions and successful results.

Thank you.