



## **JOINT DECLARATION OF THE MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION**

**15 DECEMBER 2021**

**Zagreb, The Republic of Croatia (via videoconference)**

*Recognizing our steadfast political relations as member states of the European Union, and with the aim of further advancing defence cooperation amongst our countries in the framework of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC), we, the Ministers of Defence of CEDC:*

- I. Convened on 15 December 2021, determined to continue fostering our security and defence ties in order to promote enduring security, stability and progress in Central Europe, reaffirming the important role of the CEDC in meeting common security and defence objectives;
- II. Warmly welcomed the presence of H.E. Niko Peleshi, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Albania, H.E. Sifet Podžić, Minister of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, represented by Mr Mirko Okolić, Deputy Minister of Defence, H.E. Olivera Injac, Minister of Defence of Montenegro, H.E. Armend Mehaj, Minister of Defence of Kosovo\*<sup>1</sup>, H.E. Radmila Shekerinska Jankovska, Minister of Defence of the Republic of North Macedonia and H.E. Nebojša Stefanović, Minister of Defence of the Republic of Serbia and their commitment toward building a safer and more secure environment in the European Union's neighbourhood;
- III. Expressed our deepest sympathies and condolences to all those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We also expressed our gratitude to the members of our Armed Forces for their contribution in pandemic response;
- IV. Recognized that effective regional as well as a common EU approach in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences will play a crucial role in facilitating recovery. We expressed our determination to continue sharing lessons learned from the engagement of our military assets and capabilities in support of civilian authorities' response to the pandemic in order to further support the effective implementation of policies and strategies in preparing and responding to possible future health-related security challenges and increasing resilience in the face of such challenges;
- V. Appreciated the progress achieved in the CEDC over the past years, advancing this format into an important platform for shaping views on EU defence policies, discussing

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<sup>1</sup> \* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

common security challenges, and developing joint projects. Acknowledging the increasingly complex and challenging nature of our security environment, we agreed to support further development of our defence capabilities, especially taking into account the European Defence Fund, with the aim to explore new avenues regarding possible future joint CEDC projects that could be eligible for the EDF funding;

- VI. We welcomed the successful development of the Austrian-led PESCO project “CBRN Surveillance as a Service”, supported by contributions of CEDC nations and expressed our determination to maintain the momentum of cooperation in order to meet our ambitions to finalize the project and contribute to national and European CBRN capabilities;
- VII. Following the establishment of European Peace Facility (EPF), we welcomed the recent Council Decision on an Assistance Measure under the EPF to support capacity building of the Armed Forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina (AFBiH). We expressed our readiness to further discuss and pursue opportunities to enhance operational capabilities of our partners through this financial instrument, taking into account geographical balance and on case by case approach;
- VIII. Recognised the necessity of stronger political and strategic coordination and more united and proactive approach at the EU level in order to further improve the effectiveness of the Common Security and Defence Policy. We welcomed the UN Security Council Resolution 2604 (2021) on extending the mandate of EUFOR-ALTHEA which remains crucial for supporting a safe and secure environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a prerequisite for moving the country forward on the Euro-Atlantic integration course;
- IX. Welcomed the progress in developing the Strategic Compass which is expected to be adopted in the first quarter of next year. Recalling that the Strategic Compass is member-states driven, we emphasize the necessity, amongst others, to consider options to fasten our response, while acknowledging consensual decision-making as a sign of our credibility, solidarity and strength; development of EU Rapid Reaction Capacity, building on the existing EU Battle Groups as a baseline; enhancing the ability to counter hybrid threats by preparing the EU Hybrid Toolbox; embedding EU security and defence initiatives into national defence planning process and ensuring complementarity with NATO processes;
- X. Expressed our strong support for the EU-NATO cooperation, calling for greater complementarity and coherence between these two organizations. We acknowledged that the EU-NATO partnership, in line with joint EU-NATO declarations, will remain of strategic importance to address current and future security challenges. In this regard, we encourage the signing of the new EU-NATO Joint Declaration as soon as possible, which would provide additional political momentum for enhancing cooperation;
- XI. Acknowledged that a peaceful, stable, secure and prosperous Western Balkans is our common strategic priority. In the regional dimension, we expressed our determination to advance strategic cooperation with the Western Balkans and nurture dialogue on matters of mutual security interest, including but not limited to illegal mass migration and

hybrid challenges, along with disinformation and foreign interference, in order to enhance the overall security of our region. We supported free and democratic choices of the Western Balkans in the domain of Euro-Atlantic integration and expressed our willingness to support them in implementing necessary security and defence reforms;

- XII. Appreciated the efforts of this year's Croatian CEDC Presidency to strengthen the scope of our cooperation in order to meet the demands of our security environment. In this context, we acknowledged the outcomes of expert-level meetings and events, in particular the CEDC Combating Fake News and Disinformation Campaigns Workshop, Military Mobility Workshop and "COOPSEC 21" Tabletop Exercise focusing on crisis and disaster preparedness. We shall continue sharing and communicating the results of our work with a wider audience by using the CEDC web-page;
- XIII. Recalled the founding principles of CEDC, and emphasized the long-term character of our cooperation, including our willingness to explore other areas for making further contribution to Europe's security and stability. We will continue using CEDC for exchanging views on current regional and EU issues, capacity building, and promoting common interests, while pursuing the goal of proactively contributing to European and global peace and security.