

JOINT DECLARATION

OF THE MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION

– VISION FOR THE CEDC AND WAY AHEAD –

Krems, 01 December 2022

We, the Ministers of Defence of the CEDC, are

Warmly welcoming the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Albania, Minister of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Minister of Defence of Montenegro, Minister of Defence of Kosovo¹, Minister of Defence of the Republic of North Macedonia and Minister of Defence of the Republic of Serbia and their commitment towards building a safer and more secure environment in the European Union's neighbourhood;

EMPHASISING the importance of our ongoing defence cooperation in the heart of the European Union which also aims to strengthen bonds with our Western Balkan partners in order to address current and future challenges;

HIGHLIGHTING the CEDC + format, that includes the countries of the Western Balkans and has proven to be a significant instrument in the efforts to ensure that the region becomes an important element of the CEDC;

REAFFIRMING our strong commitment towards building a stable and secure environment in Europe;

SHARING our deep concern about the ongoing war on the European continent and firmly condemning the unprovoked Russian war against Ukraine;

ACKNOWLEDGING global repercussions of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its major geopolitical consequences;

EXPRESSING concern of further destabilization of the security situation in Ukraine and possible destabilization of the security environment in other regions, including in the Western Balkans;

RECOGNIZING the necessity of a stronger political and strategic coordination and a more united and proactive approach of the CEDC at the EU level, especially in times of a radically changed security environment;

CONFIRMING that a peaceful, stable, secure, and prosperous Western Balkans with the European perspective is of strategic interest and therefore also our common strategic priority;

APPRECIATING the progress already achieved by the CEDC as a platform for pursuing common goals, fostering regional stability, sharing our countries' expertise, sharing views on EU defence policies, discussing common security challenges, and developing joint projects;

RECOMMITTING to the established framework of the CEDC's annually rotating presidency with all its obligations, including the continued administration of the website and the liabilities related to it;

DETERMINED to further enhance and strengthen our cooperation by operationalizing the CEDC and increasing its impact, footprint, and visibility, within the EU framework.

¹ 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.

We, the Ministers of Defence of the CEDC, have agreed on the following:

- I. The CEDC stands united and in full solidarity with Ukraine and strongly condemns Russia's brutal and unjustified military aggression. The sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine must be fully restored within its internationally recognized borders. The CEDC will continue to support Ukraine.
- II. The CEDC is an important cooperation instrument that serves as a vector for harmonization and better coordination within the EU, exemplified in our pilot projects. Its aim is to contribute to European security. The strengthening of our own national defence capabilities is a pivotal factor in this regard.

We express our readiness to further discuss and pursue opportunities to enhance cooperation with partner countries that share our values and interests, and enhance operational capabilities through, inter alia, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Defence Fund (EDF) as well as the European Peace Facility (EPF), taking into account the geographical balance and evaluating initiatives on a case-by-case basis.

We welcome the adoption of the EU Strategic Compass and acknowledge the important steps that have been taken towards strengthening our security and defence. Our countries hereby declare their willingness and commitment to the objectives set out in the Strategic Compass and stand ready to do their part in fulfilling its tasks within the implementation.

Based on Defence Investment Gaps Analysis and the European Council's Conclusions, we welcome the on-going process of identification and coordination of very short-term defence procurement needs to support joint procurement in order to replenish stocks.

Therefore, we support the complementary process of establishing the EU Instrument that will provide more incentives for cross-border cooperation, further reinforcement of defence industry manufacturing capacities and transition to Western technology.

Nothing the EU's key role in strengthening European security in a manner that complements NATO's efforts, we express our strong support for the EU-NATO cooperation, calling for greater complementarity and coherence between these two organizations. 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.

- III. Given our vicinity, the CEDC commits to continue its outreach to the Western Balkans in order to foster good neighbourly relations, interoperability, and strategic cooperation on matters of mutual defence and security interest, including but not limited to hybrid challenges, with the aim of strengthening national resilience of the countries in the region. We support the Western Balkans on their path towards EU accession and in implementing the necessary security and defence sector reforms.
- IV. As a means to strengthen the resilience of our partners in the Western Balkans, the CEDC countries propose the establishment of a Western Balkan Defence College in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH), bringing together the Western Balkan countries to enable standardised education based on European values.
- V. COOPSEC has established itself as an integral part of the CEDC, focusing on current crises and the common CEDC military response in coordination with the national civilian authorities. We welcome the continuation of the exercise in the future.
- VI. We entrust the representatives of the CEDC Language Competence Platform with the task of further developing their cooperation. Annual meetings, workshops, and joint projects will strengthen the platform's role in capacity building and training of personnel.

VII. Bound by our determination to strengthen the CEDC, we recall its founding principles and emphasise the long-term character of our cooperation. The sequence for the rotation of the presidency for the next years will be as follows and shall continue in the same order thereafter:

- 2023 Czech Republic
- 2024 Hungary
- 2025 Slovakia
- 2026 Slovenia
- 2027 Croatia
- 2028 Austria

Signed in Krems, on 01 December 2022 in six originals in English.



The Federal Minister of Defence
of the Republic of Austria




The Minister of Defence
of the Republic of Croatia




The Minister of Defence
of the Czech Republic



The Minister of Defence
of Hungary



The Minister of Defence
of the Slovak Republic



The Minister of Defence
of the Republic of Slovenia