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Address by the Minister of Defence of the Republic of Cyprus

Mr. Demetris Eliades

"Current Foreign and Defence Policy

During the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU"

The assumption of the Presidency of the Council of the EU by Cyprus is an exceptional moment and a major challenge. We are a small country and a new member state. We do not have a great number of experts, technocrats and specialists; neither do we have previous experience. Nevertheless, nothing prevents us from being diligent, serious and responsible; from having ideas, proposals, suggestions; from taking initiatives; from being creative.

The fact that the assumption of the Presidency is taking place at a time when unpredictable and asymmetric challenges take place, makes it necessary to intensify our efforts for further vigilance and readiness and for a comprehensive and efficient handling of the developments.

We function in full cooperation with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Catherine Ashton, the European External Action Service, all our partners, all the accession countries and the organizations with which the EU collaborates. We will function with objectivity, moderation and in the spirit of consensus, so as to serve our Common Security and Defence Policy, for the peace of Europe and its people.

Security has always been and still remains an indivisible privilege and undeniable right. Security constitutes the basic condition for maintaining peace, stability and uninterrupted economic and social growth.

Apart from the promotion of the European agenda, we also have to face critical external challenges: developments in the Middle East, Syria crisis, negotiations between the Union and Iran and last but not least, the wider economic crisis in the Eurozone.

Under these conditions, the first Cyprus Presidency of the EU, having the emblematic target of "a better Europe" and guided by hard work and political will, can leave its own mark in the long and uphill way of the CSDP.

The contribution of the Ministry of Defence, was planned in order to support the High Representative, the EEAS and the Member States in our effort to further boost the current issues of concern. Taking into consideration this conception, the Ministry identified its contribution through the following interrelated levels:

a. Development of the EU Military Capabilities. **b.** Promotion of the International Security with particular emphasis on the Middle East Developments and the Maritime Security. **c.** Promotion of a common culture in the domain of CSDP and **d.** Publication of books related with CSDP.

Our contribution to security and defence issues is also extended to the European Defence Agency's (EDA) field of work through the joint organization of seminars and workshops both in Cyprus and in Brussels.

The Lisbon Treaty has signified the necessity and particularity of the Common Security and Defence Policy which emerges as an intergovernmental policy for the promotion of cooperation and solidarity of Member States and which is governed by the principles of mutual assistance.

The problems in the defence sector with the financial crisis are encountered with wise and flexible initiatives such as those of Gent and Pooling and Sharing.

The collective work and professional support of the EEAS and the EDA, from every point of view, will undoubtedly generate positive results and balance the economic and security factors thus aiming at the effective and productive management of our limited resources.

Regarding the Middle East, we are all witnessing the dramatic changes in the region with great concern and agony. Authoritarian regimes are being overthrown and new forces are emerging to the forefront of internal developments, of political reforms and regional balances.

The crucial question is what will follow the turbulence and the changes that are underway? If the overthrow of authoritarian regimes is followed by the emergence of other authoritarian regimes, then what Arab Spring are we talking about? We will be led from one Arab Winter to another.

The developments in the region concern and involve the EU for many and obvious reasons, whilst our interaction and interest, emanate from our proximity to the countries of the region.

The EU should be in a position to develop multidimensional relations with the peoples of the region; relations of cooperation in politics, economy, energy, growth, security, culture, education and environment. Dialogue, mutual respect and understanding are useful tools in this effort.

The EU can and should support the people of the region in their effort to establish democratic institutions, democratic societies, and democratic states, in the framework of human and political rights, with viable economic prospects. This is the most solid basis for peace, security and stability in the region according to international law.

The EU portrays itself as a calm and trustworthy force with political, cultural and economic initiatives, with a pioneering presence of humanitarian and development assistance and solidarity. Consequently, the EU has the prospects to become a protagonist in the developments for a better future in the Middle East.

In this context, our Presidency has already organized a very successful seminar on the subject, on the 2nd and 3rd of July, 2012. The issue was also discussed during the Informal Meeting of the EU Defence Policy Directors and it is also included in the agenda of the upcoming Informal Meeting of the EU Defence Ministers later this month.

Another global problem of our times is the strategic control of the oceans, and the maritime security. For this, important policies, activities and programmes have been initiated at the EU level, in order to improve maritime security, which is already a significant component of the EU Counterterrorism Strategy. The EU also maintains deployed naval forces as part of its global and comprehensive approach, in an effort to fight piracy in the region of the Horn of Africa.

Within this mind-set, the Ministry of Defence, during the Presidency, will promote issues that concern both maritime security and development of military capabilities in this field. We have already organised, on the 6th of September, in Paris, a successful high level Seminar on Maritime Security in the Mediterranean, in co-operation with the Ministry of Defence of France. The issue of piracy in the waters of Somalia and the recently decided actions regarding the regional maritime capacity in the Horn of Africa, will be examined in detail during another seminar organised by the Cyprus Presidency in co-operation with the European External Action Service in Cyprus on the 8th and 9th November 2012. The seminar will also be attended by a number of officials from the region of the Horn of Africa.

The Presidency will also support the objectives of the European Security and Defence College, especially in the field of a joint military culture by promoting the military Erasmus and by undertaking a pioneering initiative, through the organization of the “1st Common Security and Defence Olympiad”, between cadets of military academies of EU Member States. This proposal submitted by Cyprus, was unanimously adopted by the Board of Directors of the European Security and Defence College. The process has already commenced and the interest of EU cadets to participate is highly evident.

Additionally, the Ministry will proceed with the publication of the studies of the cadets who are participating in the Olympiad, of a textbook titled “Developing Military Capabilities in the context of CSDP” and of a booklet that will include the contribution of the Ministry in the CSDP.

Allow me to conclude by reiterating that the contribution of the Ministry of Defence in the domain of CSDP aims at supporting the efforts of the EU in strengthening international peace, security, stability and growth.

The developments in the neighbouring regions and worldwide have portrayed the significance of the Union’s foreign and security policy and its role in the international front. All the above lead to a common conclusion: the idea and the need of deepening the unity and modernising the Union to face effectively developments in a rapidly changing world. A better Europe is needed for a better world.