

Key note

Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

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Towards December European Council on Defence

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Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour to be here today, and to speak to such a distinguished audience. It is a particular privilege for me to address the inter-Parliamentary conference, which is becoming an important platform to debate EU foreign, security and defence issues.

Lithuania is committed to further development of the Common security and defence policy (CSDP).

Our practical engagement within the CSDP framework has recently become very intense. Our troops are currently on stand-by in the UK-led Battle group. In our first ever engagements in Africa, we are contributing to the EU training mission in Mali and anti-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia.

It is no coincidence that the second half of 2013 will be the most active period in terms of Lithuania's participation in EU operations. Security and defence issues are among our Presidency priorities.

Lithuania is an active Presidency. We have circulated number of Food for Thought papers and hosted number of meetings. Through events like this one Lithuania is ready to create opportunities for in-depth discussions and facilitate debate leading to the December European Council.

The December European Council on Defence is a rare opportunity to have a strategic and forward looking discussion on the CSDP and European defence integration.

Such a discussion is very timely and much needed.

If the EU wants to become a real security provider it has to not shy away from strategic debates and to take defence issues seriously.

Over the last ten years EU security and defence policy has matured. Progress has been fast - we have deployed 29 missions and operations. However, if you put that into the context of global politics, the EU is still a very modest crisis management actor.

With the decreasing level of defence spending, Europe's role could become smaller still. I hope that the European Council in December will be ready to address this challenge in a comprehensive manner.

Many say that European leaders have not discussed defence and security issues for five years. But I would argue that they do it regularly - both nationally and in NATO. What we are lacking is a political vision on further European defence integration. We look to Heads of State and Government in December to provide the leadership and guidelines we all need in our daily work.

Last year's European Council conclusions on the CSDP provided a comprehensive set of questions related to further CSDP development.

But what big ideas and concrete deliverables should we all expect from the Heads of State and Government in December?

The recent interim report on CSDP from the High Representative gives some ideas on the possible way forward. I would like to pick up on some of the emerging elements.

First, the European Council should address the issue of CSDP visibility as well as the importance of security and defence issues in general.

There is no better way to ensure visibility than troops on the ground. However, we should use the December Council meeting to communicate to the wider public that "defence matters". It matters for the sake of our security and economic prosperity.

Let me mention a few things which could support our goal of promoting defence issues. First of all, Heads of State and Government could commit to discussing security and defence issues regularly. In addition, we should once again consider the idea of setting up a Defence formation of the Council of the EU.

Second, the European Council should have a strategic debate on the state of defence in Europe as well as the EU's role as a security provider.

This debate includes such questions as defence spending, further defence cooperation in Europe, and defining what the main EU security interests are. The debate should lead to the setting of strategic priorities and possibly mandating the update of the European Security Strategy.

The 10-year old Strategy and its 5-year old implementation report provide a list of security challenges and threats that EU is facing. However, the Strategy does not provide the best guidance in a rapidly changing environment.

As I often say, it is like going somewhere in a car which has a GPS which has not been updated. It takes longer to navigate with an old map.

I know that for some it is a question of timing and the ability of the EU to produce an ambitious document. But for me, it is a question of the EU's ability to reflect on the shifting strategic environment and our ability to find a common position. The process of preparing such an important document is as valuable as the outcome itself.

Third, the European Council should have a debate on how to make the best use of partnership instruments, including relations with neighbourhood countries, strategic partners and international organisations.

I believe that Heads of State and Government should express a clear political commitment that the EU will undertake responsibility as a security provider in its neighbourhood. Through regular security dialogue and defence cooperation the EU will enable our partners to provide for their own security and to contribute to regional stability. Development of security partnerships is particularly urgent issue following the recent developments in the Southern neighbourhood.

Furthermore, strengthening of CSDP Partnerships is a sound investment in times of austerity. A number of partners are keen to support us in our operations, thereby reducing the burden of the EU member states.

I would like to highlight the enthusiasm of the Eastern partners in this regard. Ukraine is already taking part in ATALANTA operation, while Georgia and Moldova have recently pledged their contributions. The EU should actively encourage such contributions from the partners and provide their military with a possibility to serve under the EU flag be it in operations or battle groups.

The more active role could be also played by Member states. For example, Lithuania and Poland engaged Ukraine in creating trilateral brigade LITPOLUKRBRIG, which could be used as a part of EU battle group or NATO NRF force.

Attention should also be given to the issue of EU cooperation with the US and NATO. Strong transatlantic partnership remains essential for Europe in terms of security and defence. The need for closer cooperation between EU and NATO has been articulated a number of times. We need to make it happen, by ensuring active security dialogue as well as further strengthening coordination in capability building and operational activities.

Fourth, the European Council should discuss the EU's response to emerging threats in order to further enhance our ability to respond to cyber, energy and maritime security challenges.

Energy security is one of Lithuania's Presidency priorities. Within defence, we put a particular emphasis on military energy efficiency.

Our armed forces are among the largest energy consumers in Europe. The combined electricity demand of the armed forces of Member States is equal to that of a medium sized EU country. In addition, energy supply is an Achilles heel of military operations.

Therefore, we should look at the impact of energy consumption on defence budgets and military effectiveness and develop a comprehensive energy efficiency strategy for our armed forces.

We need solid political guidance which is consistent with and complementary to both the EU energy objectives and the ongoing discussion of the role of foreign policy in supporting EU energy policy.

Fifth, the European Council should have a debate on the EU's ability to deploy rapidly. At the heart of this discussion I see the question of how to increase usability and efficiency of the EU Battle groups.

We need a strong political message in December, recalling the current level of ambition and committing to use Battle groups. This should be supported by some practical decisions to further develop the modular approach, improve advance planning, and enhance training and certification. Discussion on more equal burden sharing is also a part of that complex issue.

Where the EU can add greatest value is in its ability to take comprehensive action. However, being not willing or ready to rapidly project military capabilities, the EU will be missing a very important element for a truly comprehensive response.

Sixth, the December European Council is an opportunity for us to really commit to the development of European defence capabilities. By committing to a number of European Flagship projects, such as Air-to-Air refueling, Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, satellite communications and cyber defence. As well as by giving a political impetus to further develop defence cooperation within the EU.

Heads of the State should encourage further work on identifying the incentives for closer European defence cooperation in the long run, including the fiscal stimulus.

Last but not least, the overview on the preparation for December European Council would not be complete without specifically mentioning the growing role of the European Commission in the defence field.

With its recent communication on the defence industry, the European Commission is consolidating its role in creating a competitive and efficient European defence market. In addition it is also becoming a very important player in ensuring comprehensive EU action in such domains as energy, cyber and space, and by possibly facilitating multilateral defence cooperation. This is a shift which could have major implications for European defence. We very much welcome the added value the European Commission brings to the defence sector.

This is not an exhaustive list of issues to be discussed in December, and we continue to work on defining the key deliverables for the December European Council.

I hope that informal discussions in Vilnius will help to shape the common understanding what is achievable by the end of the year. December deliverables are very much in our hands.

I wish all of us very fruitful discussions today and in the coming months.