

Speech by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Alfonso Dastis, at the Security Conference (Munich, 18-02-2017)

European Defence

Dear colleagues, dear Sirs

Why a European defence? For two reasons:

First, because Europe has its own interests, values and principles to promote, to protect and, ultimately, to defend.

Second, because Europe belongs, in fact it gave birth to, to a wider World of shared values we are proud of, and we want to preserve. That wider World includes America from Alaska to Patagonia. We need a European defence for Europe to be a responsible and distinct stakeholder to that common endeavour.

How can we build a European defence?

The way to do it is through strong coordination aimed, ultimately, at integration.

There is a military case for going that way. Militarily, most European countries are simply unable, on an individual basis, to defend themselves. That is in the origin of the NATO Alliance. Their inability to make an impact abroad on defence and security issues is at the root of the EU security and defence policy. But the problem now is that new types of security threats are plaguing Europe. Cyber threats, hybrid war, a new, far more sophisticated global terrorism, and conventional military threats put in question the model of one nation-state, one army. Even in those European countries that have enough size and potential to sustain autonomous armed forces it is doubtful they can sustain national autonomy in the new strategic environment.

The economic case is painfully clear. Europe spent in defence last year 1,4% of its GDP, that is, about 226 billion USD, far more than China or Russia. Only second to the US. Many people and countries around the World seem to fear those three countries I mentioned. Nobody seems to be afraid of the EU. Even if provoking fear is not obviously our objective, that huge amount of money must be badly invested if, at the end of the day, we are considered militarily irrelevant.

Europe has 1.800.000 men and women in uniform. The United States have half million. The EU has 154 different types of weapons systems. The US has 27. Just to put a couple of examples in the air forces, the EU has 12 different tanker aircrafts for air-to-air refuelling and the Americans have 4; Europeans boast on

19 different types of combat aircraft while the US seem to do pretty well with 11. 80% of European military procurement is run on a national basis only. The result is inefficient and costly duplication of capabilities. I am not sure we have to spend substantially more at the aggregate European scale. What I am 100% sure if that we have to spend better.

Financial reasons and better spending tax payers money is important of course. But no responsible government in the World would take long term, strategic decisions on defence just on money saving criteria. The reaction to indiscriminate terror attacks was clear in that respect. Simply put, no leader is going to compromise its citizen security on budgetary reasons.

And here comes the political case for greater coordination and integration in some areas. I am fully aware of political demands for going back to immaculate, sort of, sovereignty and identity politics. But I can assure you that as far security and defence are concerned, that is a dead end. I can give a number of reasons for that. I will refrain to two.

First, security is indivisible. Distinctions between internal and external security are blurring away to an extent that it will not make any sense, any longer, to encapsulate internal security.

Second, there is a growing European citizens' demand for more security. In addition to threats I mentioned before, people are increasingly aware that instability and conflicts in Europe's southern and eastern neighbourhoods are here to stay. And that something has to be done about it. Something that no individual EU Member State can even dream to do alone.

The political case is the most compelling. And it is strengthened by the opportunity element. Now it is the time for the EU to advance its security and defence policy. Now it is the time to be ambitious with the objective of ensuring European strategic autonomy. The European Council has already moved in that direction and it will go further in the future. That will reinforce NATO. A strong European defence means stronger NATO.

To this end, it is urgent to activate the tools and instruments foreseen in the Treaty of Lisbon in order to develop a genuine EU Security and Defence Policy.

In particular, the most immediate steps would be:

- a reform of conflict prevention and crisis management structures, including a permanent capability for planning and conducting military and civilian missions;
- the launching of a permanent, inclusive and open structured cooperation for the participation of all those EU Member States that wish to join in;
- the development of a strong European Defence Technological and Industrial Base and of an internal defence market;

- and the mobilization of sufficient financial resources from the Commission and the Member States through the European Defence Fund.

Those steps go in the direction of equipping Europe with the necessary military and civilian capabilities. The political will for serious coordination is there. This is the most radical change. The strategic case is compelling. I dare to state that we are witnessing how the foundations are laid for a future European Defence.