



MINISTÈRE DES ARMÉES

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« European Defence : an overview of the French priorities »

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– Seul le prononcé fait foi –

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope you are all well and I would like to thank you warmly for giving me the opportunity to discuss with you, even though the sanitary situation imposes us a virtual format. It is always a pleasure to be able to explain our vision of European defence, especially when it comes to strengthening our relationship with Germany, our very first European partner.

Before going over the French priorities for European defence and entering more specifically into the subject of Franco-German cooperation, **the first question I will answer is: Why do we need European defence?**

Our continent has been at peace for more than 70 years. But today more than ever, we cannot make the mistake of taking peace for granted. A few days ago, we published an update of the French strategic review and I am glad that it would contribute to ongoing reflections within the EU (with the Strategic compass) or NATO. This work shows, on the one hand, that current security trends make up a gloomy picture of our international environment. But, on the other hand, it confirms that there are leverages that France and Europe can mobilize to address this situation.

The Covid-19 pandemic, in particular, has magnified underlying divisions and power relationships, creating new tensions over resources and, above all, catalysing threats we face. We face growing threats that affect us regardless of our nationality: some of which we face as Europeans, some of which we would be better able to fight together, as Europeans.

I am thinking of terrorism, of new, rising threats in space and in the cyber and digital world, but also of some regional powers pursuing aggressive actions to push their own strategic agenda.

Of course, we cannot turn our back on these multiples challenges: it is the very security of our citizens, which is at stake. And this is where European defence comes into play.

In this respect, we have achieved some successes in 2020, not the least thanks to the German Presidency, which ended last December: we have launched the Strategic Compass, as I have said before – and for the first time – the EU budget includes headings aimed at fostering innovation, consolidating our defence industrial base and encouraging the development of European defence capabilities. In the same vein, we have reached an agreement on the European Defence Fund and on third States' participation to PESCO projects.

We will ensure the continuity and coherence between the German and French presidencies next year, in close coordination with our Portuguese and Slovenian partners.

So, the second question I will then answer is: What is European defence? Our French vision on European defence took a major turn in 2017. President Macron announced in a speech at the university Sorbonne that he wanted “a Europe that protects”. What does it mean?

This means that from now on, we would put our energy a little less into endless and probably useless theological reflexions, and more into concrete projects that would work. We have moved away from remote ideas into more action. And this is why we launched the European Intervention Initiative, so-called EI2, this is also why we initiated an ambitious industrial cooperation or why we created the Takuba Taskforce in Sahel. We have moved away from abstract debate to pragmatism. Even if I must concede, one does not prevent the other.

Protecting our citizens, playing a role in protecting global interests, defending free access to global common goods and showing solidarity is pragmatism.

In this perspective, the completion and implementation of the Strategic Compass, encompassing four crucial dimensions (resilience, capabilities, crisis management and partnerships), will be one of our prime objective. I am glad to say that we will work together, with Germany, with Portugal and with Slovenia towards this ambitious goal, which must enable a shared European input to fuel NATO's Strategic Concept. If the Allies agree to revise NATO's Strategic Concept, we will then be able to bring together a strong and deeply rooted contribution.

Because, I will now clear the air: of course, NATO is and will remain the cornerstone of the collective defence of the European continent. France attaches great importance to the Alliance **and it is in our interest to make NATO fit for purpose.** That requires to keep strengthening its political and military cohesion. That also involves that the Europeans are ready to do more by themselves in the field of defence. The United States themselves have been urging for years Europeans to take a better share of the burden. I do not know yet what exactly will be our relations with the new American administration. But there are two things I am ready to bet on: First, that we will have a great opportunity to build a stronger, mutually beneficial relation. Second, that the US will go on urging us to take more responsibility in our collective defence. And here is something I am absolutely certain about: both depend on our commitment, solidarity and awareness that we do share strong common interests.

But as things stand, we have to be realistic: we are not fully prepared to meet all challenges.

First, we need to maintain and even increase our defence budgetary efforts, despite a difficult economic context. Only four European countries currently make it to the world's top fifteen defence budgets.

The gap is widening with other major powers such as China or Russia, but also with our Ally, the United States. NATO has regularly pointed this out.

Second, we need more interoperability between our armed forces and tightened cooperation between our defence industries. It sometimes even looks as if we were in a competition to develop separate capabilities, rather than actually cooperating. For instance, we have 17 different kinds of battle tanks and 20 different types of helicopters. This leads to costly and unnecessary duplication. And this is why I am convinced that the future combat air system program is the program of the century – I will get back to that point with more details later on.

Third, we need to move towards greater sovereignty for our operations. In the Sahel, we must strengthen our capacity for action. Many of us are making this effort today, for the benefit of European security. We must not slacken our effort. On the contrary, we must show that Europeans are continually mobilised and that we are working together with our African partners to fight terrorism.

German involvement, through an increased participation in EUTM Mali, the deployment of the Gazelle Mission to Niger and the construction of the new training camp in Sévaré plays a valuable role in achieving our objectives.

Last but not least, we need to strengthen the European capacity to act freely in contested spaces. I am thinking in particular of the maritime, space and cyber domains.

These spaces have become a key issue, given the wishes and the accomplished facts of certain powers such as China, Russia, but also Turkey, to restrict or prohibit access to them. Because of its global geographical scope and its economic and security ramifications, the maritime domain has a particular strategic dimension for Europe. We launched several initiatives that we need to continue to build on. I am

thinking in particular of the coordinated military presence in the Gulf of Guinea or the European Mission for Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH).

We need to look at how we can strengthen its capabilities in our immediate environment - the Mediterranean sea, where security challenges are multiplying - but also in more distant, perhaps less obvious, but equally strategic areas: I am thinking in particular of the Indo-Pacific area, where some Europeans, including France, are already strongly committed.

In the space field too, security issues are increasingly important. One of the challenges of our strategic autonomy is, I am convinced, to maintain freedom of access to and use of space for the benefit of European nations.

Lastly, cyber security is one of the pillars of the Union's digital sovereignty, to improve our solidarity and our ability to respond to attacks, which as we know, will multiply. In particular, we will support the access of all European institutions to secure communication networks, whose cruel absence has been highlighted by the Covid-crisis.

I strongly believe that building Europe's strategic autonomy is the answer we need to meet the challenges of the day. Developing such strategic autonomy does not mean doing it alone. On the contrary. By having more capabilities, by being more able and willing, we Europeans will be better Allies.

And I would like to stress that point: we are not building this autonomy in opposition to our main Allies – and I am obviously thinking of the United States – but on the contrary, in full sync with them; one of the key objectives is being to be able to act alongside with them. In this regard, the new American administration represents a great opportunity for Europe and the United States to rebuild a rich

transatlantic relationship. France and Germany will have a key role to play.

And now I would like to come to Franco-German relations, on which the solidity and credibility of European defence is directly dependent. At last week's Franco-German Defence and Security Council, we reaffirmed our belief in an agenda of European sovereignty in which France and Germany will be at the very heart from an industrial, geopolitical and strategic point of view. Both Annegret and I are fully committed to promoting an ambitious agenda for Europe's security.

Even if we share a common analysis of the security challenges and common objectives, it sometimes takes long efforts to find a common path.

I would like to recall that in 2017 President Emmanuel Macron and the German Chancellor Merkel set up a very ambitious agenda in armaments programs, to foster our strategic autonomy. We have committed to long-term structural projects such as Eurodrone, Tiger Mark III, FCAS and MGCS. Spain and Italy are also committed with us to make some of these projects a reality. The one we are talking a lot about right now, FCAS or NGWS, is not only an incredibly ambitious technological project, which will contribute for its next phase to create 7000 jobs in both our countries and ensuring our industries' place in the global competition.

This very weapon system is going to enable us to face the threats that we will face in the future, to defend against enemies as we do today with our Rafale in our fight against Daech, to deter the ones who would otherwise attack us, without needing permission or the help of anyone to do so. Not only is it highly strategic, but it is also living proof of our trust in Europe, and more particularly in the strength of the French-German relationship. It is something that you can only do with true friends, the ones who stand by their word, who are well aware that our

national destinies go hand in hand with our European identity and commitment.

Obviously, a lot of nations and people are hoping we will fail. Some may try to add conditions or constraints to prevent the projects to move forward. It is my conviction that, at the end of the day, reason will prevail, for the mutual benefit of everyone. Other choices could have been made. In the past, Germany sided with the UK, while France went on its own, for combat aircrafts. But, in 2017, we made a historic choice, a European choice. This choice was not made in order to satisfy our sole national interest, but to drive Europe to make an irreversible step towards a true European defence. I still think it is the right choice and I can assure you that I will weigh in with all my strength to make this happen.

You know, I think that between France and Germany, between us there is a profound and enduring story. A story with its ups and downs, but, I hope, with an ever-renewed common will to do great things, together.

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Thank you very much for your attention. I warmly thank the DGAP to be such an active partner, by hosting today's event. And I look forward to continuing the discussion on this so important issue.