

**JOINT DECLARATION OF THE MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE
CENTRAL EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION
28 MARCH 2018**

BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Recognizing the strong political and economic relations among us as member states of the European Union, as well as our shared history and the vibrant cultural ties among our Nations, in order to further develop defence cooperation in the framework of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC), we, the Ministers of Defence of CEDC:

- I. Recognize that regional defence cooperation in the framework of EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has an important role to play in developing and delivering effective responses to challenges affecting European security;
- II. Welcome progress in executing the European Global Strategy Implementation Plan on Security and Defence, and emphasize that Europe needs to have the appropriate military crisis management tools at its disposal to act in its own neighbourhood. In particular, the launching of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was a historic step. We welcome further efforts to identify common areas of interest including the idea of "CBRN Surveillance as a Service", with the aim of developing a potential CEDC project in the framework of PESCO and task our Defence Policy Directors and relevant experts to continue work to this effect;
- III. Remain concerned about the manifold challenges to regional security and stability in the Western Balkans, and express strong support for the efforts of the Bulgarian EU Presidency, as well as the incoming Austrian EU Presidency to promote the region's Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and economic development. We support examining the possibilities to mobilize alternative EU financing options to meet the capacity building needs of our Western Balkan partners to address security challenges that are not purely internal or external in nature;
- IV. Remain active in the CEDC framework as well in contributing to these efforts, *inter alia* by high level dialogue. We task our Defence Policy Directors to explore further practical steps to this effect for our consideration;
- V. Recognize the important role that CSDP and other operations play in maintaining regional security, and reaffirm our willingness to deploy troops and otherwise support them as long as the security conditions demand, with special regard to maintaining the executive mandate of EUFOR Althea. We thank our servicemen and women for the sacrifices they make for our common security in these deployments;
- VI. Express our strong support for the further deepening of EU-NATO cooperation, with special regard to operations and capacity-building efforts in the Western Balkans;
- VII. Remain concerned about potential new waves of illegal mass migration that could again heavily affect regional and European security. We express our appreciation for the work by the previous Czech and Austrian CEDC Presidencies in this area, in particular the completion of the Joint Action Plan (JAP), a common situational awareness and coordination mechanism that includes our first responders, the Ministries of the Interior;
- VIII. Emphasize the need to continue these efforts in light of the complexity of the challenge and a rapidly evolving security environment. The JAP and lessons learned from the regional border management exercise Cooperative Security, held in Austria in September 2017 (COOPSEC17) constitute a solid basis for this work. We welcome the initiative by Hungary to host the next such regional exercise in 2019, where South East European partners will also be invited and task our Chiefs of Defence to commence preparations without delay;

- IX. Reaffirm that a common EU approach in protecting the external borders of the EU is the *sine qua non* of handling the migration crisis. We express our conviction that the JAP could be useful model in solidifying such an approach. Furthermore, we are convinced that tackling the root causes of migration in the countries of origin must remain at the top of our agendas in the EU and other cooperation formats. Supporting the countries of origin and transit is an indispensable element of an effective long term solution to this complex issue;
- X. Recall the founding principles of CEDC, and emphasize the long-term character of our cooperation, in particular our willingness to explore other areas for making further contributions to Europe's defence, security and stability.