

**JOINT DECLARATION OF THE MINISTERS OF DEFENCE OF THE
CENTRAL EUROPEAN DEFENCE COOPERATION
16 DECEMBER 2020**

POSTOJNA, REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

Recognizing our strong political and economic relations as member states of the European Union, and with the aim of further developing defence cooperation amongst our countries in the framework of the Central European Defence Cooperation (CEDC), we, the Ministers of Defence of CEDC:

- I. Express our deepest sympathies and condolences to all those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This unprecedented global health crisis has evolved into an economic and social crisis, thus demanding a whole-of-government response. We thank the members of our Armed Forces for their hard work in curbing the pandemic;
- II. Recognise the fact that, besides effective national solutions, a common EU approach in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences will play a crucial role in facilitating recovery, as well as increasing resilience to similar future crises;
- III. Acknowledge the importance of sharing experiences from the COVID-19 pandemic, with the view to identify lessons learned and close the identified gaps. To this end, a discussion on cooperation on the EU level in certain areas, such as capability development, MEDEVAC/STRATEVAC, and military mobility, would be supportive. Additionally, we encourage further cooperation, based on the lessons learned and recommendations adopted today;
- IV. Appreciate the progress achieved in CEDC over the past years, advancing this format into an important forum for shaping views on EU policies, discussing common security threats, and developing joint projects. We support further development of our defence capabilities, especially taking into account the European Defence Fund, and its perspective for participation and cooperation of defence industries and Small and Medium-size Enterprises, as well as establishment of European Peace Facility;
- V. Recognise the important role that EU CSDP plays in strengthening peace and security, increasing resilience of EU partners, and promoting stability. With the aim of strengthening the EU security and defence cooperation we are also facilitating a constructive dialogue, promoting pooling of resources, ensuring a coherent development and use of available capabilities and implementing joint projects;
- VI. Welcome progress in developing the Strategic Compass and finalising the PESCO Strategic Review. We advocate for a constructive approach towards these work strands, in order to create meaningful and operational tools in line with the Member States' inputs. We welcome the recent adoption of the Council Decision establishing general conditions under which third States could be invited to participate in individual PESCO projects. In this regard, we particularly value the outcomes of the Austrian-led PESCO project

“CBRN Surveillance as a Service”, supported by contributions of CEDC nations, and the CEDC international military exercise “Cooperative Security”;

- VII. Express our strong support for EU-NATO cooperation, especially in the fields of missions and operations, military mobility, addressing malign hybrid, cyber and disinformation campaigns, as well as capacity-building efforts in the Western Balkan region;
- VIII. Welcome the participation of Western Balkan partners at today’s CEDC Ministerial Meeting, as a means of operationalising the CEDC’s commitment to keep the region high on the EU’s agenda. We further appreciate the input provided by the partners and express our intent to continue inter-regional cooperation regarding common security challenges and threats;
- IX. Will continue to closely cooperate with the Western Balkans region and maintain a proactive approach towards it, including through bilateral and multilateral efforts, inclusive participation in CSDP and other international missions and operations, and encouraging a continued engagement of the EU in the region;
- X. Will continue working together to ensure security and stability of the Western Balkans region in the long term. In line with this, we welcome the European Council’s decision to open European Union accession negotiations with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, and we support them in implementing all necessary reforms;
- XI. Appreciate the efforts of this year’s Slovenian CEDC Presidency to extend our defence cooperation into new areas. In this context, we took note of the outcomes of expert-level meetings in the fields of Women, Peace and Security Agenda, Civil-Military Cooperation in Cases of Natural and Other Man-Made Disasters, and Military Mobility. Furthermore, we acknowledged and adopted the report of CEDC Working Group on COVID-19 lessons learned, focusing on Strategic Communications and legal aspects. Additionally, we launched a CEDC web-page, with the intent to increase visibility of the initiative and enhance communication with our partners;
- XII. Recall the founding principles of CEDC, and emphasize the long-term character of our cooperation, including our willingness to explore other areas for making further contribution to Europe’s security and stability. We will continue using CEDC for exchanging views on current regional and EU issues, capacity building, and promoting common interests, while pursuing the goal of proactively contributing to European and global peace and security.