

CATHERINE ASHTON

HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

B-1046 BRUSSELS
+32-2-298 85 90

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Ares(2013)3381766

H.E. Mr Herman Van Rompuy
President of the European Council

Dear Mr President, Dear Herman,

Over the last decade the EU has launched many successful CSDP missions and operations around the world. They have changed the fates of people and countries and have protected and promoted European interests and values.

The European Council of December 2012 invited me to develop proposals and actions to further strengthen the CSDP. In July, I presented an interim report that was discussed with Member States during the informal meetings of EU Defence and Foreign Affairs ministers in Vilnius in early September. The attached final report, which includes a range of proposals and actions in line with the 2012 mandate, was developed further on the basis of those discussions.

The forthcoming debate among Heads of State and Government on security and defence is very timely. The changing geostrategic context, increasing security challenges, and the continued restrictions of national defence budgets – in the context of increased spending in others parts of the world – indicate the need for a strategic debate at the highest political level. European interdependence increasingly becomes a reality, and our policies now need to account for this fact.

While the report takes stock of a number of ongoing initiatives within the three clusters of the December 2012 tasking by the European Council, such an exercise cannot be a substitute for a debate defining the strategic objectives that guide the further development of the CSDP.

Such a debate should also address the crucial question of political will with regard to developing and deploying capabilities, as well as the levels of defence spending of the Member States. Clearly, it will also identify a number of opportunities: the area of security and defence provides scope for further developing and enhancing cooperation and common approaches among the Member States. In addition, the defence industry is a driver for jobs, growth and innovation.

Accordingly, the report considers what the Union needs to do in order to protect its interests and promote its values. We must be able to act, through the CSDP, as a security provider in the neighbourhood and at the international level. To be credible, capabilities and the commitment of Member States are required. A strong, innovative and sustainable industrial base is needed to provide such capabilities. This has to be clearly communicated to citizens.

I am presenting this report to the President of the European Council in my capacity as High Representative and Head of the European Defence Agency. It should be read in parallel with the Commission Communication "Towards a more competitive and efficient defence and security sector", adopted on 24 July 2013, with a view to a fully joined-up and coherent effort.

As we approach the December meeting, the readiness of Member States to make concrete commitments to cooperative projects will be a critical success factor. The upcoming Council meetings in November and the EDA Steering Board at ministerial level should focus on such concrete deliverables.

Finally, there is widespread agreement among Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs that a robust follow-up process to the European Council will be required, and that it would be appropriate for the European Council to regularly address security and defence issues in order to monitor progress, sustain the momentum and provide renewed impetus.

Most sincerely



Catherine Ashton