

Key note speech IMAF 2019

Dear commandant of the TMA Generals, dear Chairman of the Implementation Group, dear ladies and gentlemen.

It is as always a pleasure and an honour for me to be here at the Reichenau castle as a guest of one of our most supportive Member States to military Erasmus. 11 years after launching the initiative, it is starting to bear its fruits, with many of the initial goals well achieved or exceeded. When in 2008, I was trying to convince the world of the necessity of the initiative, today, more and more I hear people telling me how important this initiative is, if they know it, or just try to convince me of the necessity of training young people together, if they do not. Actually, the latter is an even better evolution, as it means that the Initiative will carry on without Symeon, Sylvain, Harry, and all the others that have been involved from the beginning. This success is not for a small part to be thanked to the support the initiative has received since more than 5 years now, from the international Military Academic Forum. This as in particular the case when after the approval of the partial SQF in 2014, the iMAF meeting here in Reichenau was dedicated specifically to the further development of new Common Modules.

But I don't want to linger on our achievements. I am convinced that more than ever we need to ask ourselves what we want to achieve with the initiative, beyond the technical and tactical level. We have reached those first objectives, overcame the obstacles we identified in 2008. For those of you who have been with us since the very beginning, well done, we have taken an excellent start. For us to be able to see what we ultimately need to achieve, we must have a look at what is going on around us. What challenges does the EU face in the future and what do future officers need to understand, know, be able to do and how independent must they be able to act.

Let's start with the Union itself. Some say it is at the risk of falling apart and looking at Brexit they may be right. I only know that in my own country and in many other countries that I have visited, the EU still gathers support, although few have more than a very abstract idea of what the Union stands for. We are faced today with an imperfect Union if you want, less than a Federal State, not a confederation and certainly more than just an intergovernmental organisation. One thing is certain, that structure will change over time, as it has been changing since the creation of the Communities in the fifties. Our future officers need to be prepared to work in this context, understand what the values of the Union are and why we hold them so high. Our future officers should be as familiar with the functioning of the Union, as they are today with the functioning of NATO, for those who are member of the Alliance. They should be able to understand and explain that the Union can only be more than the sum of its Member States if we accept at the same time all the elements of the Union and not just cherry-pick the things that your nation likes e.g. to improve its infrastructure at the expense of the other 27. Solidarity, respect for minorities, rule of law, freedom of movement have to be taken at the same time as money from structural funds! If our future officers understand and feel that in their heart, they will be a cornerstone for a better Europe in the service of peace and for the protection of its citizens.

Internal cohesion is certainly not the only challenge the EU is facing today. Some of our traditional allies suddenly seem less reliable than before. We are discovering that from

time to time, they have different interests than we have and that they start openly to act on it. This is the case for US and Turkey. Can you blame them? No, of course not, it is their full right to defend their own interests as best they can, but we should also realise that we as Europeans also have our own interests to defend. And for the foreseeable future, the US and Turkey, as well as the UK will continue to cooperate with the European countries in security and Defence in those cases that our interests overlap. But recent history, from the collapse of former Yugoslavia to the Libya campaign have shown that we should also be able to stand on our own two feet when our interests do not fully coincide. It is no secret that the EU MS today have still a huge gap in their available capabilities and by the way an even larger gap in political will, to be able to do these kinds of operations independently.

To overcome these shortfalls, a number of initiatives have been taken, both by the MS and by the Commission as part of the European Defence Action Plan, set up to implement the Global Strategy. Firstly, under the lead of EDA, a capability development plan has been made, identifying those critical shortfalls that prevent us from achieving strategic autonomy. Secondly, in 2017, 25 Member States have activated art 42 (6) of the TEU, creating a Permanent Structured Cooperation. In doing so, they have made 20 legally binding commitments to create a more effective European Defence, not the least of them to commitment to increase the budget of Defence to 2% of the GDP. In two successive calls, 34 projects have been identified to develop capabilities in groups of MS and new call has just been sent out two weeks ago for a new set of proposals from the MS. In the third place, from the Commission side, for the first time, money has been made available for research in development. 13 Bn Euro in the next financial framework 20-27, to finance up to and including a working prototype. The MS will nevertheless still carry most of the costs, as this money is only topping up the MS efforts. However with that money, the EU suddenly becomes the second largest investor in defence R&D. Fourthly, the CARD closes the circle, establishing what the MS are doing and how they plan to implement the goals set by PESCO.

In my personal assessment, a successful PESCO will in time inevitable lead to a far more integrated European Defence and perhaps even to implementing that other provision in the Treaty, Art 42 (2) the creation of a common European Defence. On the one hand, I wouldn't want to hold my breath until that happens, this will likely be for the next generation of officer. But it is exactly them that we address with our efforts under military Erasmus. It is the responsibility of us, the older generation here represented in this room, to prepare our successors, also present here, to be able to achieve whatever the world will throw at them. We need to prepare them to collect information, analyse it together and act jointly upon it as seamless as if they would at national level at the tactical and later on at operational, military strategic and political level. Most of all, we need to each our future officers to keep an open mind, to place cooperation above competition and to place core values such as human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities at the heart of their personal ethos. These core values are what have made our civilisation great and abandoning them throws us back to the stone age. To throw these values away because they can sometimes seem bothersome, is losing already all that we and our fathers before us have stood for! Educating, training and evaluating our young cadets together, the core business of military Erasmus, is the best guarantee for a successful future and a continued peace on the European continent!

Thank you for your attention