

Opening Ceremony IAMD CoE

Ομιλία Α/ΓΕΕΘΑ - 19 Οκτ 21

I would like to welcome you all in beautiful Crete, especially those who travelled from far away to be with us today for this important event.

General Ruggiero, your presence here with us is a great honor both for the Hellenic Armed Forces and me personally. Thank you for travelling all the way from the States here in Souda Bay.

Dear all, we are gathered to celebrate the official inauguration of the Integrated Air and Missile Defense Center of Excellence, which is only temporarily located right in front of you, in the premises of 115 Combat Wing and NATO Missile Firing Installation.

As you know, the Center is the latest offer of Greece and its Armed Forces to the Alliance and the family of NATO's accredited Centers of Excellence, and this gives us great pride, as the new Center is indicative of Greece's and her Armed Forces' contributions to the Alliance.

Let me tell you that we carefully considered the foundation of AMD COE, before our offer was officially submitted to NATO.

We examined all relevant developments in the Alliance, including the work of other allied entities on this vast operational domain, and we concluded that

there were specific aspects of Air and Missile Defense, where this new Center Of Excellence could add real value.

Naturally, we took the decision to establish the Center in Crete, because it is the ideal place, with so many important military installations and other allied entities, along with a strategic significance which is widely recognized by Allies and partners alike.

Apart from that, Crete is in the heart of the Mediterranean Sea, a longtime bridge between diverse cultures, a common ground for Allies and partners, and in the middle of quite a few primary international shipping lanes, which makes Crete's strategic importance undeniable.

Of course, there were long constructive discussions with Allied Command Transformation on the Center's mission statement and tasks, so that there would be no duplication of effort with other NATO entities.

And then we put a tremendous effort, always hand in hand with ACT, to have the Center officially evaluated and accredited; and as you are aware, the Center received its final NATO accreditation on 25 January 2021, and it is now up and running at full speed.

Dear friends, it is more than obvious that our initial efforts were more than successful. And I say initial, because most of the work lies ahead of us, and ahead of the Center.

I want to particularly thank our team in the Defense General Staff for their dedication and hard work, who run the project from start to finish. Within a short period of time, they successfully established a whole new entity in Crete and its accreditation process at all levels.

I also commend the Commanding Officer and his Command Group for their excellent work in integrating this new entity in the Alliance's core business. I also want to thank all the Center's personnel, national and allied, who are making their best in satisfying NATO's priorities in the Center's Program of Work. The aim is to progressively build a robust reputation for the quality and output of the Center's work; a work which will be credible, timely and in line with current developments in the academia and defense industry.

Allow me also to especially thank the previous Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General LANATA, and you General RUGGIERO as the Center of Excellences' Champion, for all the hard work and dedication, and for sharing and supporting our vision, by facilitating the dialogue with other allied entities, to reach a common understanding of how the Center could work and accomplish its mission.

And of course, the fact that in the middle of the pandemic and international travelling set to a minimum, ACT decided to visit Europe in September 2020 only for the accreditation process in Souda Bay, was highly appreciated.

In the same context, I want to thank the participating nations for deciding to actively support this new project with their resources and personnel. We highly appreciate their contribution, and we are looking forward to more allied nations

joining us; and we know in fact that there are other allies also, who have already decided their participation with full membership, for example France.

The Hellenic Armed Forces have provided Host Nation Support and the manning with the necessary Subject Matter Experts. But rest assured, we will keep standing by your efforts, and we will do everything in our capacity to promote your work and your added value on this particular field of expertise.

Dear guests, the IAMD COE, here in Crete along with NATO Maritime Interdiction Operational Training Center, NATO Missile Firing Installation (NAMFI), Souda Naval Base being also a NATO Forward Logistic Site, NATO Naval Forces Sensors and Weapons Accuracy Check Site, and 115 Combat Wing, are all a token of our determination to contribute to the security and stability of NATO's periphery, especially in the volatile area of Eastern Mediterranean.

This was a message which I clearly conveyed during the recent Military Committee Conference 2021 in Athens, and put across when the Chair of the Military Committee Admiral Rob BAUER and I visited all these installations just a month ago.

In a complex and fast evolving security environment, Greece and her Armed Forces stand as a pillar of stability and a significant security actor in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans. We have been very active over the recent years in facilitating regional synergies and collaborations, which only support cooperation, peace and stability.

In that context, we have established productive relations on a bilateral and multilateral level, with important partners in the Middle East and North Africa on a pragmatic basis, which I trust serve also the Alliance's security interests.

Furthermore, and regardless of the issues which have kept the Hellenic Armed Forces very busy in the Aegean and the East Mediterranean especially during 2020, the Hellenic National Defense General Staff has found both the time and the resources to support the establishment of this Center at full throttle, not only for NATO's benefit but for the benefit also of our friends, partners and allies in the region and beyond.

Closing, let me add that a dedicated new building for the IAMD COE is underway, and I am hopeful that we will be able to visit it soon. Until then, I call its leadership and personnel to devote themselves in providing NATO with added value work, which must become a reference point in NATO's effort to maintain its technological edge on missile defense, and to cope with emerging threats and challenges.

On our part, I promise ACT and the NATO leadership that we will do everything necessary to ensure the Center's smooth function and productive work.

Thank you.