

7th Forum Commanders of European Land Forces

11 Nov 21

Minister of National Defence,

Dear Commanders of European Land Forces,

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning!

It is my great pleasure to welcome you all in Greece, on the occasion of the 7th Forum of Commanders of the European Land Forces.

Forums like this offer an excellent opportunity to exchange views about important issues of mutual interest. They are also great events for networking, and increasing the friendship and ties between participants.

The theme of this year's forum is "the challenges of the European Armies and the cooperative opportunities to address them".

The key word in the theme is "cooperative", and I will explain why shortly.

Dear all, we all know very well that the global security environment is complex and fast evolving. Europe as a whole, and the European countries individually, face a wide range of threats and challenges.

Some countries of course face more challenges than others, but there are many of them, like for example climate change and pandemics, where we all find ourselves on the same boat.

We have a lot to think about, and unfortunately, a lot to be troubled with. Cyber threats are an almost everyday reality; local conflict and crises are still lingering; failed states are a source of instability; revisionism threatens peace and stability; violent extremism is manifested with acts of terrorism not only in our periphery but also in our continent; economic instability affects all our societies in more ways than ever, while the effects of climate change disrupt our lives frequently.

On top of these, we experience increased migration and refugee flows both in the South and in the East. And, since we didn't have enough on our plate, the COVID-19 pandemic, as a "strategic shock", added another factor to an already difficult puzzle.

Moreover, the emergence of new operational domains, like space, space and the information environment, coupled with the easier access to technology by state and non-state actors, complicate the situation even further. And this is where cooperation comes into play, to make sure the armed forces role, relevance and added value remain extant.

Dear friends, I strongly believe that we need cooperation, synergies, and also solidarity, now more than ever. As I noted, there are challenges, such as, climate change, pandemics, mass migration, and more, which no single country can address on its own.

Such a noble cause can only bear fruit if it is guided by a common rule-book and our shared values and principles as Europeans and NATO Allies of modern, democratic origin.

And the only rule-book available is that of International Law, and the United Nations Charter. With this rule-book as our true north, all disputes, all threats and challenges no matter how complex or longstanding, they can all be resolved. And this is the only way to truly safeguard peace and promote stability, security and prosperity in Europe and our periphery.

Greece, has always been committed to the rules and principles of International Law and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

We are strong supporters of a multilateral, cooperative approach to the complex challenges of today. In this regard, Greece and the Hellenic Armed Forces maintain excellent relations at a bilateral and multilateral level with almost all countries in Europe, in our periphery, and beyond.

We have excellent relations and close cooperation with most Arab Countries. We also maintain several bilateral, trilateral and multilateral cooperation schemes in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans, as a mechanism of productive and sincere dialogue aiming at safeguarding peace and stability in our wider neighbourhood.

In short, dear guests, we make use of our defense diplomacy as a vehicle to bridge gaps and bring countries together. We reach out and embrace those who share our view to promote the consolidation of peace and stability.

I am confident you all agree that cooperation with this mindset is the best approach in solving the problems of today. Actually, I believe this is the mindset of all European countries, and we should all be proud of that.

Coming now to the role relevance and added value of our Armed Forces and specifically of our Land Forces, in the complex global security environment.

Distinguished guests,

Our armed forces are more relevant today than they were yesterday. Besides our core mission, which is for most countries the same, we do much more.

You name it, we do it; we provide assistance in natural or other disasters; we provide search and rescue and MEDEVAC services; we support law enforcement; we even organise and operate vaccination centres.

I am sure most of you have done all that, and I am certain that most, if not all of you, have provided invaluable support in your countries' fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

We can do everything and even more, because we are structured, organized, and standardized. We think and react quickly, and we are able to deploy under short notice and any conditions. For all these reasons we are relevant and we have great added value.

And, we must make sure we remain relevant tomorrow too. And the best way to achieve this is once again through cooperation. This is why close cooperation of our Armed Forces and our Land Forces, be it in the framework of NATO, the European Union, and the United Nations, or any other framework, is something we should all strive for.

We all know the importance of exercising and training together, for increasing our interoperability and common understanding.

Equally important is exchanging our lessons learned and sharing the best strategies to overcome common threats and challenges.

We chose the sub-themes of the Forum having exactly this in mind; and I am certain they provide enough food-for-thought as they deal with issues that concern us all, as military leaders.

Dear guests, thank you for taking part in this forum. We are delighted to have you with us, and I hope you enjoy your stay in Athens.

I would also like to congratulate the Chief of the Hellenic Army General Staff, General Lalousis, and his staff for organising and hosting this important Forum in such an excellent manner.

Thank you very much