

European Defence Summit Brussels
Opening Remarks by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger,
Chairman of the Munich Security Conference
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“Welcome! I believe we can, and should, play our part on the world stage; not for our own vanity, but because we have something to offer. We can show the world the strength that comes from uniting and the strategic interest in acting together. **There has never been a more urgent and compelling time to do so. [...] we will need more Europe and more Union in our foreign policy.**”

Some of you will have read or heard this last week. It's from Jean-Claude Juncker's "State of the European Union" speech. I could not agree more with him. And I would add: This is particularly true for security and defense. The refugee crisis is not only a humanitarian challenge, it tears at the fabric of the Union. This is why it is part of a responsible strategy to examine all options including military ones which would require a mandate under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. Maybe no-fly zones or protection zones or air attacks against ISIS are not good options, but declaring military options a taboo is – in my view – not a responsible strategic approach.

How to achieve more Europe and more Union in order to improve Europe's security and defense capabilities – that is the key question in front of us today at the Munich Security Conference's European Defence Summit.

Since its inception over 50 years ago, the MSC has served as a venue to exchange ideas about the current state and the future of European security and defense. Of course, this will remain a central issue at our annual flagship conference. But we have also found it useful to develop a few additional events, including this conference, to create space for vigorous debate. Thus, we have organized small European Defence Roundtables since 2013, and held a first European Defence Summit in Berlin in April 2013.

I don't have to explain to anyone here why today's rising global disorder and chaos is very different than it was two years ago. Both for military planners and for strategists, prioritizing challenges and estimating necessary capabilities has become a growing challenge.

I would like to highlight a few issues and sore spots to kick things off.

A number of official declarations – Franco-German ones from both 2012 and 2013, for instance – say exactly the right thing when it comes to European defense: we need courage, a willingness to make the hard decisions etc. Have the steps been taken? If the current crisis is indeed the worst security crisis on the continent since the end of the Cold War, what are we waiting for? When, if not now, is the right time to take long steps toward European defense integration?

Why are we still so far, far away from actual Europeanized capability and procurement planning? The fragmentation of our defense arrangements is irresponsible in terms of budgets, in terms of capabilities and in terms of interoperability. One budgetary example:

A study conducted by our knowledge partner McKinsey for the Munich Security Conference calculated that European countries could save up to 30 percent per year – that is 13 billion euros per year – if they worked more closely together in weapons procurement.

How can we continue to fail our soldiers in the ways that we do? They have been deployed in joint operations, they know how essential interoperability is. Yet often small-state mentality still reigns supreme – and makes the jobs of our militaries more difficult than it should be. Why haven't defense ministers agreed on a "European semester" during which states have to be transparent about their budgets and their planned investments? If the finance ministers can do it, you can too!

Another important question, exactly one year after the Wales summit: In terms of NATO's response to Russian aggressive behavior in Ukraine, is there a risk of a summit of disunity in Warsaw next summer? Disunity between those who think there is more reassurance to be done and those who think there has already been too much?

We have to take a long, hard look in the mirror when it comes to our broader strategy. The last European Security Strategy of 2003 stated, "our task is to promote a ring of well governed countries to the East of the EU and on the borders of the Mediterranean". Why has Europe failed so totally to do so? This question, of course, has recently become even more pressing in light of the so-called "refugee crisis".

Of course, European integration in security and defense matters is hard to achieve. Political, military and industry interests intersect here. Moreover, this touches the core of national sovereignty. But what is the worth of sovereignty, as traditionally understood, if hardly any European state can really act on its own in security matters anymore?

Because that's what is happening. In fact, sooner or later, European defense integration will be a reality – whether by conscious decision or not. After all, slowly but surely, our militaries are getting more and more dependent on one another, more connected and even integrated. The question is: does this happen haphazardly, by default, and in a chaotic manner – or do we do it with a political plan?

These are just a few of the critical questions and issues that will preoccupy us during the day.

Finally, let me conclude by thanking the Bavarian government, and the State Minister Beate Merk, for their hospitality and their support; and the German EU and NATO ambassadors for hosting last night's reception.