***“Setting the military mobility scene”***

**Key note address of the Minister of Defence of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Ms. Ank Bijleveld, on the occasion of the Deploy Symposium “Military mobility – Key to European security”
at Egmont Palace in Brussels, on the 7th of June 2018**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When we Europeans go on holiday in Europe, we usually don’t need to apply for a visa.

We usually don’t even have to go through passport control.

We just pack our bags, jump on a plane, or a train, and go.

But if the military wants to move personnel, ammunition or equipment through Europe… it’s almost impossible.

There are numerous obstacles, in the form of laws, regulations, procedures and infrastructural standards.

Crossing European borders in a military truck can take several weeks.

If the US wants to send military transports from Rotterdam to Poland, for instance, they have to fill in thousands (!) of forms.

That leaves us with the bizarre situation that it’s easier for a tourist to travel through Europe than it is for our soldiers.

But how can it be that those who protect our freedom are themselves not allowed to move freely..?!

Ladies and gentlemen, this has to change!

We seem to have lost an ability that is becoming more and more important by the day.

[…]

After the end of the Cold War, we lost our enemy.

We became used to peace.

And the need for being able to rapidly move military personnel and materiel across Europe fell off the political agenda.

But today, the world is a different place.

We are faced with both a ring of instability around Europe and a more assertive Russia.

This means that keeping Europe and the Allied territory safe demands a higher level of readiness.

Not meeting this demand would be irresponsible.

We have to ensure that we are able to get the right forces, to the right place, at the right time.

And we should do so in peacetime, so that we are fully prepared when a conflict or crisis arises.

This will enable us to better protect our citizens and to better project stability abroad.

Because more military mobility, means more deterrence.

The security situation around Europe demands it of us.

And our transatlantic friends ask it of us.

So, what can we do? How do we create a European space in which military personnel, ammunition and equipment can move smoothly and swiftly?

First and foremost: We need everybody to make military mobility a success!

Although the initiative to improve military mobility may have started out as a defence issue, it is very much a civilian issue too.

When working on military mobility, *“civ-mil”* and *“dual-use”* should always be at the back of our minds!

This is why we need a decision on a common set of military requirements as soon as possible.

I really hope we can settle this by the end of June.

I - and I expect many of my colleagues here today - need this decision so that we can provide our fellow ministers of Infrastructure with more clarity on what we are doing on the defence side of this issue.

Clarity is key.

And if we want to achieve our long term ambition, next to the ministries of Defense and Infrastructure, we also need to involve the ministries of Foreign affairs, Finance, Home Affairs, Security, Justice and Healthcare.

We need to involve our members of parliament, senators, mayors, regional and local governments.

We need to involve our water boards, rail companies, sea ports, airports and customs agencies.

And we need to involve our citizens.

 […]

Second, to create this European space, we need to remove as much red tape as possible.

We need to avoid lengthy or even unnecessary procedures.

Together, we should work towards a single set of standardized and harmonized forms, norms and agreements for customs, legal, and infrastructural issues.

We need to look at the transport of dangerous goods, at Value Added Tax, at diplomatic clearances and at cross-border movement permissions.

And lastly, we need infrastructure that is accessible to the military throughout Europe.

 […]

The good news is that over the last year, much important work has been done.

The European Defence Agency has delivered a roadmap.

The Commission and High Representative have presented an Action Plan.

And NATO has its Enablement Plan of SACEUR’s Area of Responsibility, which also addresses military mobility.

In the meantime, 12 countries are working together on military mobility in the context of the Northern Group. We met yesterday in The Hague.

24 countries are working together on military mobility in the framework of PESCO.

And 33 countries, both EU Member States and NATO Allies, are working together towards the adoption of a military mobility pledge at the European Council at the end of June and at the NATO Summit in July.

I have faith in this multi-track approach. But I think we can do more.

The message that the EU and NATO are both working on military mobility is positive.

The message that the EU and NATO are working hand in hand on this topic would, however, be much stronger.

More concretely, I believe we should take a close look at the EU Action Plan and NATO Enablement Plan and examine to what extent the two plans coincide, overlap and complement each other.

Because 22 countries, that are both EU and NATO members, need clear guidance for the national implementation of military mobility initiatives.

Whilst I am fully aware of the sensitivities, I believe that we can find a way to make it work.

And I hope that the Brussels Joint Declaration can push this issue further.

 […]

Furthermore, to really help speed things along, we need support at the highest political level.

This is why we are striving for a military mobility pledge to be endorsed by the heads of state and governments during the European Council meeting in June and the NATO Summit in July.

We aim to overcome obstacles that hamper military mobility and to simplify and standardise relevant rules, regulations and procedures as soon as possible, but no later than 2024.

By the end of 2019, we aim for all EU Member States and NATO Allies:

* to develop national plans for military mobility that are based on existing NATO and EU work strands;
* to shorten border crossing times;
* to appoint a Single National Point of Contact;
* and to practice military mobility more regularly.

It is crucial that we implement these deliverables at home within this timeframe.

And at the same time, let us also keep looking for additional ways we can address practical problems at home.

I would urge all of my colleagues here today to identify quick wins for their own countries.

 […]

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Military mobility is the flagship project of EU-NATO cooperation.
It’s time we make sure our flagship catches the wind in its sails.

We need to be ambitious.
We need a real common effort.

And we need real results.

I am glad that military mobility is back on the political agenda.

Because as former President General Eisenhower said: “*Battles, campaigns and even wars have been won primarily because of logistics…*”

Or as the American lieutenant-general Franks said more recently (and to the point): “*Forget logistics, you lose.*”

Together, we have to make sure that the servicemen and women who protect our freedom are themselves allowed to move freely.

It is a crucial step towards keeping our countries and our people safe.

And I hope we will all work together on that!

Thank you.

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