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Intervenção do Ministro da Defesa Nacional, João Gomes Cravinho, por ocasião da primeira conferência de estabelecimento do *NATO Maritime GEOMETOC Centre of Excellence*

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Vocativos

I am extremely pleased that this morning we are hosting so many friends and allies in Lisbon, for the First Establishment Conference of what we expect to become NATO's Maritime GEOMETOC Centre of Excellence. Your presence is evidence of the widespread interest generated by this initiative across the Alliance. I am confident that over the next two days of work your contributions to the conceptual framework of the Centre will assist Portugal in developing a product that responds effectively to the Alliance's increasing maritime challenges.

This Portuguese initiative of establishing a NATO Centre of Excellence focusing on Maritime GEOMETOC results from two important aspects. The first is the long and internationally recognised expertise held here at the Portuguese Hydrographic Institute in areas that are critical for maritime operations,

including Meteorology, Oceanography and Geospatial referencing. This Centre of Excellence provides us with a clear idea of what it can offer the Alliance, but most importantly, it builds on a well-established operational capability, which Portugal is willing to share with its NATO Allies and Partners. In my international contacts and in previous visits to the Hydrographic Institute our partners, including NATO staff, have clearly expressed their acknowledgement of Portugal's leading expertise in this field. It is a capability we are very proud of, naturally, but it is also a stimulus to take it further.

And this leads me to the second reason why the application seems particularly timely and relevant for the Alliance. This proposal responds to NATO's current and future needs of reaffirming its maritime posture and of allocating more resources to the core of

the Alliance's strategic interests, vital communication lines and original political *raison d'être* – the Atlantic Ocean.

Let me say a couple more words on why, in our view, the Atlantic is such a critical space for the Alliance and, I would say, for the future of Euro-Atlantic relations. As you are no doubt aware, Portugal has actively argued in favour of strengthening the Alliance's attention to the Atlantic and strengthening NATO's maritime capabilities. The Maritime GEOMETOC Centre of Excellence is coherent with this approach.

Moreover, Portugal remains fully engaged in other initiatives that aim to keeping the Atlantic a space of dialogue, freedom and security, and to maintaining strong ties among all Atlantic countries. As an example, Portugal is leading the establishment of

an Atlantic Centre for Defence Capacity Building that can reinforce the ability of Atlantic countries to respond to maritime threats, and to strengthening common responses to extremism and violence, extreme weather events and the necessary humanitarian responses, or the fight against illicit activities at sea that feed conflict inland, among many others. We will also host the United Nations Ocean Conference, in 2020, and the upcoming Portuguese Presidency of the European Union, in 2021, has elected Africa-EU relations as a priority, creating new momentum for action in addressing sources of insecurity, including at sea.

We are motivated by the enthusiasm and support from other partners and allies in these efforts and I am certain that this new Centre of Excellence will help in positioning the Alliance for a stronger response to a changing international context. This is also

carefully aligned with the commitment to making an active contribution to NATO, which we all assumed at Wales. Together with the important steps being taken in European Defence, the decision to pledge 2% of our GDP in NATO capabilities is being actively sought by many members of the Alliance, including Portugal. But contributions cannot be measured in percentage of GDP alone. Actually, at a time when the international context is increasingly volatile, when knowledge and technology provide leverage and are a source of strategic superiority, NATO Allies' commitment to the Alliance's operations and their commitment to transforming the Alliance at the speed of relevance must be valued. And this is exactly what this Centre aims to do.

By contributing to improving the Alliance's knowledge of the Atlantic and other maritime spaces, by combining our shared

information and resources on this strategic environment, and making it available not only to the Alliance but also to each of its members and partners, we are responding to the call for more contributions and to closing the gaps in the Alliance's capabilities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The transformation of the Alliance, constantly improving its relevance for its members and for international peace and security, is a fundamental challenge of our time. Transformation must start in the minds of people and be sustained by concrete commitments. This Maritime GEOMETOC Centre of Excellence has the vision of becoming a hub of expertise in this field, sustaining an international collaborative partnership in an area where there has in the past been a reluctance to share scarce knowledge. We

must change our attitudes towards maritime knowledge and create the necessary conditions to making it available for partners and allies and this is exactly what we are proposing.

Teaming up with academia and industry, seeking new capabilities including on Data Science, Technology and Space Weather and looking for synergies with the European Union, whenever relevant, will make this Centre a crucial reference for years to come.

Allow me to give a special word of appreciation to NATO commanders at the Allied Command Transformation, whose enthusiasm with this proposal has been a catalyst for this Centre to become a reality soon. I am certain that those of you here

today, as well as other partners who have expressed their interest, will join in this enthusiasm.

I wish you fruitful days of work and we very much look forward to your contributions in order to make the concept of the Centre ever more targeted to the Alliance's needs.

Thank you very much!