

Helena Carreiras

Ministra da Defesa Nacional

**Intervenção da Ministra da Defesa Nacional, Helena Carreiras, por ocasião
da inauguração do GEOMETOC**

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It is with great pleasure that I am here today to inaugurate the Maritime Geospatial, Meteorological and Oceanographic Centre of Excellence (GEOMETOC), **the first ever NATO centre of excellence based in Portugal**. As a founding member of the Alliance, we take on this achievement with a particular sense of commitment, but also with a high level of responsibility for the task that is entrusted to us.

The sharing of geographic, meteorological, and oceanographic information at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels has become a priority in the current geostrategic environment. The war raging in Ukraine, following the Russian invasion, has manifested itself in multiple areas, including in the maritime domain, as evidenced by **the need to monitor activities in the Black Sea, including safe-passage agreements brokered by the UN**. Perhaps more importantly, the multiple ramifications of this

conflict have also highlighted the need to reinforce our cohesion and **to quickly fill the existing gaps in our joint planning and capabilities**, as the best way to deal with resurging threats in our borders.

It should also be noted that the Maritime GEOMETOC project was designed and developed, since its conception, as a direct response to **difficulties in sharing information between Allies**. At the time, these challenges stood in the way of more collective capacities in monitoring, researching, and training over maritime operations. In 2019, we deemed it urgent enough to propose a new **network of sites and platforms for data collection, analysis, forecasting and production of maritime services and support products**. **The turn of events in Eastern Europe has only proven us right.**

The process of establishing the centre witnessed a decisive boost with the first Memorandum of Understanding in 2020. On August last year, the North Atlantic Council approved the activation of Maritime GEOMETOC as **the 28th NATO Centre of Excellence** and officially designated Portugal as the Framework Nation. The latest Memorandum that was signed this June concluded the remaining accreditation steps.

Having come so far in this process, I would like to express a special word of appreciation to the three nations that have stood by this project and committed to participate in full: **Romania, Spain and Turkey**, here represented by their Ambassadors. Their **willingness to provide highly qualified know-how and personnel** for the upcoming activities and research is a clear testament of the **confidence displayed in Portugal's ability to lead this initiative**. Together, **I am certain we will make this Centre a very successful project.**

As a multi-national entity, the NATO Maritime GEOMETOC Centre of Excellence will now become a hub for knowledge and state-of-the-art development on maritime information associated with military operations, offering valuable expertise and experience to the benefit of the entire Alliance. **The Hydrographic Institute will provide the institutional basis upon which we want to continue to grow.** Its expertise in the fields of meteo-oceanographic forecasting and monitoring make it a natural fit for the project.

Close collaboration with research centres, universities and the industry will also facilitate the identification of innovative solutions, resilience and adaptation to the evolution of military operations. Likewise, the centre will enable close cooperation between NATO and other organizations, seeking to develop a genuine international collaborative partnership. **We therefore invite all other Allies and Partners to analyse its potential,**

recognize its multiplier role and join us in this collective endeavour.

The Maritime GEOMETOC Centre will also play a key role in contributing to NATO's overall transformation effort, under the umbrella of the Allied Command Transformation (ACT). The multinational and interagency environment in which this work will take pace will certainly provide an additional stimulus to such key pillars as education and training, analysis and lessons learned, concept development and experimentation, as well as doctrine development and standards. **The new Strategic Concept approved in Madrid, last June,** provides clear indications of where we can move the needle in that regard. On this occasion, allow me to highlight two areas in particular.

First, we need to work towards **“identifying and mitigating strategic vulnerabilities and dependencies”**. That can only be achieved by ensuring our collective resilience in all our core tasks, but also by emphasising the importance of technological innovation. Cutting-edge programs such as DIANA or the ones heralded by the future NATO Innovation Fund can unlock our cooperative potential if we work closely with the private sector and academia. But so can the existing network of NATO Centres of Excellence. Their **ability to deliver innovative ideas makes them critical stakeholders in addressing the current and future posture of the Alliance**, and we should be mindful of keeping them front and centre in our prospective planning.

Second, we need to properly acknowledge **“maritime security as a key priority to our peace and prosperity”**. That much is stated in the Strategic Concept itself. Making it come together requires strengthening our posture and situational awareness to better

deter and defend against threats in the maritime domain. It also requires **improving our in-depth knowledge over the oceans, not only to protect our interests, borders, or critical infrastructures, but also to ensure the sustainable use of our maritime resources.**

The 2nd Conference on the Oceans that took place in Lisbon last June, was explicit enough on the advancements that can be made on both fronts to the benefit of all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Portugal's desire to host this NATO Centre of Excellence can be best understood if we frame it as a **natural reflection of our historical interest in maritime issues.** Our recent efforts behind the **edification of the Atlantic Centre** comprise only but the latest representation of that engagement, as we seek to establish new cooperative bridges over a shared oceanic space. The 4th seminar

of the Atlantic Centre that has been taking place over the course of this week, under the broader theme of forecasting Atlantic dynamics, comes across as a timely opportunity to expand the debate on what we expect to witness in this specific regional context.

In the meantime, we will make good use of GEOMETOC capabilities to call for more attention to the maritime component of NATO, as part of our commitment to a **360º understanding of security**. More specifically, we believe it is **our responsibility to contribute to the Alliance's position in the rapidly evolving field of oceanographic knowledge and to ensure that we have the information and skills needed for our core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security**.

At a time when the debate on Allied contributions endures, it is also worth reiterating that **we see contributions to NATO as more than just the percentage of GDP invested in equipment.** The willingness to provide skills, knowledge and other resources should be considered on par with other scaling measures.

For its part, **the Portuguese Government remains committed to assume its responsibility as Framework Nation** and to continue building up NATO's first transformation hub of expertise in Geospatial, Meteorological and Oceanographic capabilities in support of maritime operations. **The real work begins now.** I count on each and every entity and nation here present to make this a successful endeavour, by fostering results-oriented research and applying much-needed lessons learned to our operational conduct. I am confident that, together, we will deliver on the shared vision for this project. Thank you very much.