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Intervenção da Ministra da Defesa Nacional, Helena Carreiras, por ocasião da sessão de encerramento do III Curso de Segurança Marítima do Centro do Atlântico

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It is with great joy that I am back in Terceira to take part in the **closing ceremony of the third Course on Maritime Security of the Atlantic Centre**, following four days of intense lectures and activities, including practical exercises and demonstrations.

I would like to begin by thanking everyone for their presence here today, and **to salute the Regional Government of the Azores** as well as all the institutional partners that took part in this initiative. That includes **the Air Force for hosting us once more at Lajes airbase**, but also **those that collaborated in making this a truly collaborative Atlantic partnership**: the Nacional Defence Institute, the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Institute, the Institute for Security Studies, the Policy Centre for the New South, and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

I would also like to offer a special word of appreciation to **the recently appointed Coordinator of the Atlantic Centre, Rear Admiral Noronha de Bragança**, who has led the organization of this course, and who, I am certain, will achieve the important mission of consolidating the Atlantic Centre as a relevant actor in the broader framework of this common ocean space.

Allow me to express another word of gratitude to all the partner countries and institutions involved and committed to this project. The pace of activities of the Atlantic Centre has significantly increased over the last two years, and this event is further proof of how far we have come. But **we also know there would be no Atlantic Centre without your participation and active engagement**. Thank you for your continuing support.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in uncertain and unpredictable times, marked by significant transformations at a global scale. One such transformation has been the subject of considerable focus during the course that took place throughout this week, namely the growth of **digital and technological challenges in the maritime sector**.

Indeed, new technologies – such as artificial intelligence, autonomous vehicles, big data, robotics, digital security, 3D printing, among others – have been emerging at an alarming pace, often carrying **significant disruptive potential** and with profound consequences for all areas of human activity.

This is particularly evident in maritime contexts, with the fast-expanding digitization of services and other activities in this

sector. We need only to remember that nearly 90% of global trade is carried out by sea, or that most global data flows currently go through undersea cables. But important opportunities can also emerge in this context, such as the use of space-based capabilities for maritime surveillance and information exchange. In other words, **we need to be ready to account for both the risks and the possibilities that this new era might entail.**

Several international organizations have already adjusted their course of action to these changes. The European Union has just reviewed its Maritime Security Strategy and Action Plan, attributing considerable priority to how new technological advancements might affect its influence at sea. NATO has also continued to implement its longstanding Maritime Strategy through the reinforcement of the Alliance's Maritime Posture.

For its part, **Portugal has not been idle**. Our defence sector, in particular, stands at the forefront of important developments in this domain. **In Tróia, for instance, the Free Technology Zone** provides a unique interface between the Armed Forces, industry, and academia, while offering the necessary conditions for the testing and experimentation of innovative technologies, products, services, and processes. Even here, in the Azores, the continuing **development of the Space Surveillance Tracking project** harbours considerable potential for expanded surveillance and security of our national waters.

These different efforts now need to be properly incorporated in our own strategic thinking. That includes **guaranteeing emerging and disruptive technologies figure high in the ongoing revision of the National Defence Strategic Concept**. It also means considering a more sectorial view, when deemed more appropriate or necessary. The underlining goal is clear: **we must**

work towards ensuring that the connective maritime domain is properly secured, while at the same time making the most of the fast-changing technologies at our disposal.

In this context, **the Atlantic Ocean stands out as unique ecosystem.** Indeed, digital and technological developments in the maritime domain are a key area to cooperate with partners from all over the Atlantic, as these developments are fundamental for trade, information, energy flows, for maritime situational awareness, and for identifying growing challenges that we must deal with.

As the primary linking hub for North and South America, Europe, and Africa, this space has often called in the past for alternative venues of cooperation, which could overcome previous lines of division. **That is precisely where the Atlantic Centre comes in.**

Based on a holistic and integrated vision of the common security challenges of the Atlantic Ocean as a whole, Portugal has led this initiative for the last few years, steadily building support from the ground-up and presenting a varied range of activities. At its core, **the Atlantic Centre is a dynamic and flexible project that has regularly adapted itself to the different needs and specificities the Atlantic Ocean**, while building connections between different stakeholders.

One of the most obvious advantages of this initiative is that it brings to the same table countries and organisations from the North and the South Atlantic. This is a feature that was lacking and that can greatly contribute to boost relations between every invested part in the security and stability of this shared ocean.

The relevance of the efforts behind this project is also particularly evident when considering the ongoing conflict in Eastern Europe, which has generated profound consequences at different levels, namely, human security, food security, energy security, or in the questioning of the rules-based international order. **All these consequences have begun to reach the shores of the Atlantic Ocean.**

We are also currently dealing with new and old threats in the Atlantic Ocean. These consist primarily of piracy, armed robbery, transnational terrorism, smuggling and human trafficking, illegal fishing, and climate change. We need to be able to tackle all these challenges decisively. That is why the exercise that took place this morning is especially relevant. And **that is why initiatives like the Atlantic Centre constitute privileged forums to propose sustainable solutions** to these many issues.

We are facing a more volatile international system, and increasingly complex theatres of operations and cross-cutting risks. **We cannot fail to be ambitious in our efforts to invest in projects such as the Atlantic Centre and in synergies with other complementary initiatives.**

Investing in the Atlantic Centre is investing in solutions that serve us all. Together we can go further, do more and ensure an effective participation from across the Atlantic.

Thank you.