

Ana Isabel Xavier

Secretária de Estado da Defesa Nacional

Keynote lecture da Secretária de Estado da Defesa Nacional, Ana Isabel Xavier, por ocasião do curso *EU history and core values*, organizado pelo *European Security and Defence College*

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General Eduardo Mendes Ferrão, Chief of Staff of the Portuguese Army,

Lieutenant-General Francisco Xavier de Sousa, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Portuguese Army,

Major-General José Feliciano, Director of the Portuguese Army Education,

Colonel Jorge Manuel dos Reis Gamito Torres, Director Commander of the Military College,

Simone Coccia, Strategic Advisor to the head of the European Security and Defence College and Training manager, Course Director,

Maria do Rosário Penedos, Policy Officer and Training manager of the European Security and Defence College,

Distinguished officials,

Dear participants,

It is, for me, an honour to take part in this course on “EU history and core values” organized by the European Security and Defence College and to witness the valuable diversity of our European military education community.

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to Ms. Maria do Rosário Penedos and to Mr. Simone Coccia for their work in bringing together this timely and unique initiative, with which I am proud to say I have been involved since the beginning. I also would like to congratulate Colonel Jorge Gamito Torres for hosting this initiative and for making it so successful for the second year in a row.

I strongly encourage the Military College and the European Security and Defence College to deepen and broaden this

cooperation in the years to come. And, of course, a warm welcome to our participants, from Belgium, Latvia, Romania, and Portugal, both from the Colégio Militar and Pupilos do Exército, wishing you all a fruitful and inspiring course.

This year I am here before you as Secretary of State for National Defence. I have been asked to prepare a lecture on the topic of the European Union as a global strategic player. As I was reflecting and organizing my ideas about this subject, a word kept emerging in my mind: **inevitable**.

It is no secret that the world is changing. Following a long period of global peace, under the aegis of a rules-based multilateral order centred around the United Nations, conflicts are now proliferating all over the world. And that's

not all. During the past decade the EU has been dealing with several challenges that have affected its members' perception of the role it should play in international security.

From a series of terrorist attacks in EU countries to the Russian occupation of Crimea, from Brexit to the emergence of nationalist populist movements all over Europe, the EU's security and defence policy has changed considerably.

Add to this the challenges brought on by the 'refugee crisis' in the Mediterranean, the US pivot to the Indo-Pacific region, the profound effects of a global pandemic, and, more recently, the outbreak of war in Ukraine following Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion.

It's easy to understand how these changes in the EU's outlook on security were **inevitable**.

In this past decade, in the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU acquired an extensive measure of legal personality and established a new diplomatic service. And this period of significant changes also gave way to the 2016 EU Global Strategy and to the improvement of Common Security and Defence Policy missions and to the creation of a myriad of new defence initiatives. These include the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in 2017, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) and the European Defence Fund (EDF) in the following year, and the European Peace Facility (EPF) in 2021.

This unprecedented strategic document is quite different from the 2003 Security Strategy. Considering all these crises I mentioned, the 2016 Global Strategy emphasised, above all, the need to strengthen the EU's resilience. It also highlighted the need – or the **inevitability** – to build up the EU's capacity to deal with crises and conflicts, based on a principled pragmatism, without deviating from its core principles and values.

And not only that. In addition to determining the EU's level of ambition concerning its ability to respond to external conflicts and crises and to increase the capacity building of partners, the Global Strategy also established as one of its main objectives for security and defence, for the first time ever, the protection of EU citizens.

This is especially relevant because, although the EU has had a security pillar under the Common Foreign and Security Policy since its inception, the CSDP has focused essentially on expeditionary crisis management, rather than a more territorial type of defence.

This doesn't mean that the EU's security and defence missions have changed dramatically since the Global Strategy, but rather that there is an awareness of the **inevitability** for the EU to be ready and capable to defend itself, or, as the French like to call it, to acquire strategic autonomy.

This means the ability for the EU to autonomously develop the full spectrum of defence capabilities needed to be able to take military action whenever needed to defend its values and interests, either together with partners, such as NATO, or separately, if required. Strategic autonomy will result in the EU taking more responsibility for its own security and defence, ultimately leading to a stronger Euro-Atlantic space.

This awareness was further reinforced with the joint threat analysis carried out in 2020, which then led to the adoption of the Strategic Compass after two years of intense negotiations and adaptations imposed by the crisis resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The Strategic Compass is not necessarily a substitute for the Global Strategy, but rather a complement that seeks to operationalize the EU's level of ambition through new tools, such as a Rapid Deployment Capacity, as well as specific targets and milestones for progress.

Why is all this important, you ask?

I recently read an article by Irish journalist and international relations researcher Judy Dempsey published by Carnegie Europe where she stated that “The EU is a big fish in the proverbial pond. But it is a big fish swimming among other bigger and more aggressive fish.” What this means is that the EU already has a lot of potential and actual tools – especially soft power tools – to make a difference in the

world. And the efforts to reinforce its security and defence policy will only make it a stronger actor. In fact, the progress made in these past five to ten or so years considerably surpasses the previous two decades.

However, there are also “other bigger and more aggressive fish” in the pond. And this translates not just in terms of military power, but also in normative terms. While the EU upholds its core values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights, other actors in the international system are seeking to assert other types of revisionist worldviews, geared towards authoritarianism and repression.

The EU is unquestionably a global strategic actor in areas such as trade, development, norms diffusion, or climate

change, and it is working its way towards becoming more secure and more ready to tackle conflicts and crises. But ultimately the EU isn't a global strategic player simply because it can, but because this is **inevitable**, if we want to safeguard the European way of life.

Security is no longer just physical, but also ontological. It is about protecting both our territory as well as our values and ideals. And this is why so many new tools and instruments have been put forth in recent years. The EU was already a global strategic actor in many areas, but it is **inevitable** that it becomes one also in the field of security and defence – since it is **inevitable** that challenges will arise.

As you know, we are two days away from Europe Day and about a month away from the European Parliament elections. I am aware that you don't vote yet, but your relatives and friends do... and the awareness of your belonging to the European project is fundamental for you to become well-rounded active citizens. It is up to you to reflect on what future you want, because that is the future where you will be living in.

Thank you.