

January 28, 2021

EU2021PP: Dialogue and action in the priorities for European Defence

João Gomes Cravinho today defended the importance of dialogue, coherence and action for the implementation of a more effective and cohesive European defence policy.

The Minister of National Defence spoke this morning to members of the European Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence on the Portuguese priorities for the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

Starting by ensuring the continuation of the work it "inherits" from its predecessors, Gomes Cravinho prioritized the deepening of European integration in the field of security and defence "in line with what are the expectations of citizens" and in "close coordination" with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the High Representative.

Through the "articulation and crystallization" of the necessary dialogue between Member States, the minister hopes to be able to adopt conclusions on the Strategic Compass as early as May, so that in 2022 there will be "conditions of approval" of that document which will be "a practical tool for our action in the world" and will consolidate a "European strategic culture".

EU – Africa Relations

Explaining to the members of the parliamentary subcommittee that the Portuguese working objectives meet "what Portugal can best match" in terms of knowledge and working capacity, the Portuguese Minister said that one of the main priorities is to ensure political dialogue and closer relations between the European Union and Africa, in order to strengthen support for the consolidation of peace and security on that continent.

The historical relations between Portugal and Africa, especially with Mozambique, which is currently experiencing a crisis caused by international terrorism, create "exceptional conditions" for the promotion of a "dialogue" and closer intergovernmental and international relations, also in the maritime field.

EU's Maritime Security

João Gomes Cravinho stressed the importance of maritime security – another priority of the PPEU – especially in the Atlantic, "a space of increasing geopolitical competition". He considered therefore "mandatory" the inclusion of a maritime dimension of "greater visibility and presence" in the construction of a European Defence Identity.

A EU coordinated maritime presence and the creation of a "convergent" centre such as the Atlantic Centre (a national initiative), which aims not only to promote political debate and strategic thinking in "all quarters of the Atlantic" but also to empower the nations around it, were some of the ideas pointed out in this area.

Transatlantic relations and EU-NATO cooperation

With the Atlantic at the centre of priorities, relations with transatlantic allies and partners, notably the United States of America, should commit to "dialogue and clarification" on Europe's strategic autonomy. They also demand for "coordinated responses" to complex emergencies or in areas such as cyber-trade or combating disinformation.

All this, the Minister of Defence said, "should be done in an articulated way" with NATO, "in a parallel strategic reflection of the two organizations", adding that the Portuguese presidency will be a "bridge" in the development and review of EU and NATO strategic initiatives.

A strong and dynamic European Defence Economy

A "strong and dynamic" European Defence Economy, the balance of the European Defence Fund (EDF) and the promotion of a European Defence Technology and Industrial Base are, according to João Gomes Cravinho, "essential" to strengthening the EU's technological and industrial leadership, as well as to strengthen economic recovery and the creation of skilled jobs.

The minister also said it was very important to ensure, not only in the European Union, but "nationally" and in each of the Member States, "the full use of the PESCO for the development of missing capabilities" in the EU.

Strengthening the EU's responsiveness

The importance of "strengthening the Resilience of the Union and its capacity to respond to emergencies such as the one we live in in the current pandemic" is the last of the objectives that João Gomes Cravinho has listed for the EU to "make better use of the capabilities of the Common Security and Defence Policy" and to which the Portuguese presidency will be able to contribute. The commitment of the armed forces of the various Member States to respond to complex crises such as that resulting from COVID-19, the minister assures, is an "insurance against all kinds of risks". It is therefore important to promote joint work to address "challenges that are collective".

Portugal took over the Presidency of the Council of the European Union on January 1st, succeeding Germany. Under the motto "Time to act: for a fair, green and digital recovery", the Portuguese presidency will continue until June, when Slovenia, the last Member State of this trio of presidencies, assumes the continuity of the work.