

Officers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me welcome you all in Estonia. Hosting Steadfast Juncture in Estonia and contributing to the NATO Response Force is, as you can imagine, rather important for us. NATO is not something that we take for granted. Rather, we see it as a vital element of security in an unsecure world. We highly appreciate NATO's presence here. This exercise raises NATO's visibility both for people living here and for those not living here; it makes NATO less an abstraction and reinforces the commitment we share in the Alliance.

NATO's new Strategic Concept highlights collective defence as one of the three core tasks for the Alliance. However, so far most of the real term efforts and energy has been invested into Afghanistan - NATO's largest and longest combat operation ever. 2014 will mark the end of that operation. Yet, it will not mark the end of operations as such. We live in an unpredictable world.

The crucial question we face is about laying out how NATO can maintain its ability to respond to crises and preserve its current operational readiness. How to maintain the experience our militaries have collectively gathered in Afghanistan – be it from the war fighting aspect or the security sector reform perspective – in the post-Afghanistan environment. How to maintain interoperability standards, the logistics, medical and intelligence cooperation accumulated over the past decade of our involvement there. The list goes on and on.

We have worked hard to get this far. The wars we have fought have helped us to get this far. Two things that we do well we must continue:

First, military planning. The NATO Command Structure is well in place. It should continue to be active post-Afghanistan as well. And it should plan for the likely, as well as the worst case scenarios.

Second, multinational exercises. These reinforce success. We should not change the course in

this, but continue on for that is how we maintain the genuine interoperability between our soldiers.

We are not at a crossroad. We are on the right track. We need to keep going on this track. Steadfast Juncture is clear proof to the people of the region – and beyond – that NATO really is here, that military capabilities matter and that collective defence matters. Thank you.