

Dear Commandant Vaikšnoras, Officers, Ladies and gentlemen,

This year we celebrate the 15th anniversary of the Baltic Defence College, the 10th anniversary of Baltic membership in NATO and the 65th anniversary of the Alliance. So it is a good time to pay tribute to Baltic military cooperation, which has assisted the three Baltic states' integration into NATO, and is a smart way of pooling and sharing our defence resources.

The Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – are bound together by geography and geostrategic position. We are roughly similar in size. We share much history and also military history. Working together and building our skills in the Baltic Defence College, we have created a pool of qualified officers capable of dealing with that future – with future threats and challenges to our common security environment. Lest anyone thinks that this is a theoretical view, we need to look at last week's news to realise that even in Europe, things are not stable.

Knowledge and competence are key to success in military organisations. An army without educated officers is not an army, it is just a group of armed men.

Looking back at the origins of the decision to set up this defence college, it is important to bear in mind that while it was the defence ministers of the three Baltic states who agreed to cooperate in officer education, this project has been possible only because of the strong involvement of a far wider circle of our international friends - the Nordic countries, Germany, the UK, France and the US. Thanks to their good advice and to their support, the Baltic Defence College has been able to maintain its international spirit. This has been a notable benefit of this defence establishment as officers and civil servants from three countries get a first-hand international working experience.

The joint nature of the Baltic Defence College is a second benefit. Military personnel from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania working together and side-by-side with colleagues from so-called "old" Allied nations (although I'd like to get rid of 'old' in our 10th anniversary in the Alliance), have developed an "interoperability of minds" – the ability to quickly understand each other, make effective common decisions and trust each other. This is relevant for all Allied operations as we've experienced in past ten years in ISAF. But it has been greatly advanced by the creation and development of the Baltic Defence College in particular.

Now that the Baltic Defence College has established its role and value with its 15 years of existence, we can look at how to further to improve its future perspectives.

What can be done even better:

- First - Raise academic expertise and further increase your visibility in this area. You have to learn to better market yourself. To speak up more on regional security issues, especially in academic fore, in conferences where the position of Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian military need be heard the same way that we hear from other militaries. The world needs to hear your views.
- Second - Increase the role of cyber and IT in the military education curriculum. Just recently, the US in its review of threats determined that cyber was the threat number one. The Baltic Defence College upcoming Cyber Conference in April discussing the teaching of cyber to military officers and cyber studies in military officer curriculum is a welcome development in this direction.

The Baltic Defence College is unique in its structure. It is the first combined institution for military education in the Baltic states. And it has become the only modern English language based multinational military educational institution in the region. In fact, I wish it were not so unique. We need more of this kind of institutions.

I would hope that other countries followed the example of joint regional military education, so that Europe, which spends too little on defence anyway, could boast getting greater value for its money by taking fresh approaches and by advancing the regional cooperation all of us in Europe need so much. The skilful fusion of the military and civil component should be the main strength of any common European security policy.

As I said in my Independence Day speech earlier this week –there is always a power struggle going on in the world. A struggle for values, as well as for the definition of human rights and of democracy. As the events in Ukraine demonstrate, the battle is also being waged in Europe. This sends a clear signal to Estonia and to the Baltic region: we must do more in the field of

defence. Maintaining an adequate level of defence spending remains essential for our security – this applies to Estonia as well as Latvia and Lithuania.

As democratic countries, our militaries are of course under strong civilian control. Democracies have elected politicians. Elected politicians say, "Why do we have to spend on defence if our neighbours aren't." That leads to a race to the bottom. I fear it can result in 'reductio ad nihilo'.

NATO's credibility only lasts as long as there are allies who are credible and responsible. The credibility of NATO's collective defence in this region will depend as much on the willingness of other Allies to defend us, as on the efforts of the Baltic states to unite their military preparations and pay for them. If we don't do our share, why should they? This is my main message today. If we are to stand against the uncertainty, we have to pay our share of defence costs. Peace, love and Woodstock haven't arrived to our part of the world yet.

Achieving meaningful defence cooperation of the Baltic states is a long journey. It may often seem that going alone is easier. But doing it together delivers more - greater capability, greater knowledge, greater visibility. The Baltic Defence College is excellent proof of that.

Happy anniversary!