

Forsvarsministerens innlegg til NATO PA 61st session, Oct 2015

Good morning! I enjoyed meeting the members of the Subcommittee on Transatlantic Defense and Security Cooperation in April, and I hope you have enjoyed visiting Norway and the Northern part of the country. It's good to see many of you again. We also had a good seminar in Oslo in September.

Dear colleagues, we are faced with a fundamentally changed security environment, with long-term consequences for Euro-Atlantic stability and security. There is an arc of uncertainty and instability over NATO's immediate neighbourhood. The challenges to our security are diverse and multi-dimensional, and the need for a strong NATO and a reinforced transatlantic bond is greater than ever. As an alliance, we are measured on our ability to stand together in these uncertain times.

And these are uncertain times. Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, called 2014 a dark year for European security. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine to the East, and the threat from ISIL, extremism and failed states to the South have caused the most serious security situation in Europe since the Cold War. Russia's recent military actions in Syria only add to this complex picture.

Europe is changing

Friends, Europe is changing. This is perhaps best illustrated by an issue that we all as European policymakers are now facing. An issue that demands our attention here and now.

We are now facing the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. The sheer scale and scope of the crisis is staggering. Millions of men, women and children are fleeing their homes to escape violence, armed conflict and extremism in Syria, Libya and other parts of the Middle East and North Africa. Many are in dire need of protection. Others may be driven by economic hardship and a legitimate wish for a better future.

In Europe we have so far not been able to address this crisis in a coherent way. Several countries have made exemptions to immigration laws. But we have also witnessed the opposite: Fences have been erected to keep refugees out and border control has been re-established within Schengen. If not handled correctly the refugee crisis could lead to further fragmentation in Europe.

Let me be clear: I do in no way consider people escaping hardship and war a threat to European security. But unfortunately, the refugee crisis seems to serve as a catalyst for a political polarity that could damage European cohesion and our ability to act together. This is a development with potentially detrimental consequences for our cooperation and decision making ability also in other areas, including security policy. An increasingly polarized and fragmented Europe could damage or undermine European cohesion and transatlantic unity. At this time of crisis, unity is more important than ever.

The importance of standing together

If we turn to the security challenges of today, I think there are many parallels to how we handle the refugee crisis. We do not seem to agree on the precise nature of the challenges, their implications for our continent and least of all, how to address them. In some cases, the differences of opinion and focus may be drawn between regions or nation states as a matter of geography. The complexity of these issues – the security landscape combined with the refugee crisis – demands a coherent, consistent and comprehensive approach. But rarely has the saying “where you stand depends on where you sit” been more fitting. The threat from ISIL, or Russia’s aggressions in the East, as well as the influx of refugees are felt quite differently across Europe. I have become increasingly worried about the European political climate. The more complex and multifaceted the world around us is, the more polarized public debates tend to become. Diversification of society does not seem to differentiate political and public discourse. We see many examples of the opposite happening. Europe is multifaceted and vivid. But we can’t appreciate that if we see things in black and white. I believe we need to focus on what brings us together, that which unites us: Our common values.

The transatlantic ties must be developed and preserved. The Euro-Atlantic community must work together. United we must stand when faced with challenges and threats. The EU’s restrictive measures against Russia, which Norway has fully adopted and implemented, serve as a good example. Perhaps as important as the specific measures themselves, is the fact that we stand firmly together behind them. This sends a strong and important signal: You cannot bully your way to influence or power. We stand for democracy, individual freedom and the rule of law. Might over right is unacceptable. That is the fundamental principle of international law. It is the foundation of the European Union and the main pillar of NATO and transatlantic security.

Security challenges

And when we look around us, we see a security environment that has changed fundamentally in a relatively short time. To the east, Russia is upgrading its military capabilities significantly, and they have demonstrated both willingness and ability to use force to achieve their strategic goals. The Russian annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine violates international law – the very foundation of the security structure that was built on the ruins of two devastating world wars. While we do not see a military threat against Norway at this point in time, the situation is uncertain and unpredictable in the High North. This is an area where NATO and Russian interests meet, with consequences for Norway and the Norwegian Armed Forces.

Located as we are on NATO's northern flank, Norway puts special emphasis on the need for predictability and stability in our relations with Russia. We have a common interest in keeping the High North peaceful. While we have suspended our bilateral military cooperation, we continue to work together in certain areas such as search and rescue, border control and coastguard collaboration. And we are maintaining our direct line between the Norwegian Joint Headquarters and the Russian Northern Fleet. This is especially important to avoid misunderstandings and miscalculations in tense times.

But the Russian combination of military *capability* and a demonstrated political *will* to use military force, is a concern. Our allied partners in Eastern Europe are witnessing increased military activity along their borders and around the Baltic Sea. Russian flights across the Baltic Sea increased threefold in 2014 compared to 2013. Allied and non-allied countries alike have experienced border violations.

To the south of NATO, unstable states and ongoing conflicts have created fertile ground for the brutal extremist rampage of ISIL in Iraq and Syria. This is not only a threat to the region, but to international and European security and stability. These past few weeks, developments have taken yet another turn, adding to the complexity. There is a high risk that Russia's military actions in Syria will further escalate the conflict in Syria. The international fight against extremism is also potentially undermined. Military support to Assad can reduce his appetite for a political solution even further. Moreover, Russian aircraft have violated Turkish airspace, making it clear that this has direct consequences for NATO. NATO has called on

Russia to immediately cease its attacks on the Syrian opposition and civilians, to focus its efforts on fighting ISIL, and to promote a solution to the conflict through a political transition.

Meeting the challenges

At the summit in Wales we agreed to important steps of reassurance to our Eastern allies, and remain committed to strengthening NATO's collective defense and the transatlantic security community. While the US will remain the indisputably largest military contributor to the alliance, it is clear that we – the European allies – must take a larger part of the responsibility for the future security of Europe. US leadership in Europe and NATO is needed – and wanted. But European nations must be willing to invest in developing relevant military capabilities. The implementation of NATO's Readiness Action Plan is a crucial part of this. We need to invest, and we need to build our capabilities.

For our part, it is clear that while the Norwegian Armed Forces hold a high standard, the current structure was designed for a different security situation than what we have today. It was not designed for the demands to response time and endurance needed to meet this era of complex threats, unpredictability, short to no warning time, and long-term uncertainty. There will be changes, and a need to increase our defence budgets.

On Wednesday this week, the Norwegian government presented our annual budget to parliament, and we suggest a 9.8 % increase in our 2016 defence budget. In real terms, this represents 4.3 billion NOK, or close to 500 million Euros. The share of the budget allocated for investments is 26.2 %, well above NATO's target 20 %. Our focus is on high end capability investments, especially the F-35 and the Joint Strike Missile, as well as a considerable strengthening of our intelligence service and increased naval and air presence in the High North.

Next year the Norwegian Government will present a new Long Term Plan for the defence sector, where adaptation to the new situation is a part of the plan. My job is to ensure that our Armed Forces are able to defend our people and our interests and actively contribute to NATO's collective defence. I have emphasized the need for openness and transparency about our own Armed Forces and the entire defence sector. Such transparency promotes debate, increases the public's knowledge and sets focus on defence related matters.

Indeed, openness in matters where criticism is valid enhances our credibility when we communicate the substantial and excellent work that our men and women in uniform provide every day.

One aspect of such openness is to release assessments of the Norwegian Armed Forces provided by NATO. Norway has in the last couple of years provided the Parliament and the public with the Input & output matrix together with NATO's own overall assessment of the Norwegian Defence sector. It is listed in the current budget proposition presented this Wednesday.

A few other Allies have also chosen to make their own data public, and I encourage other nations to do the same. Not only because of transparency, but also as a tool to promote a more balanced burden sharing within the Alliance.

NATO is the foundation of Norwegian security policy. And while some of our immediate neighbours are not part of the Alliance, they are partners and friends. We meet regularly to address common security issues as well as areas of military cooperation. NORDEFECO is short for Nordic Defence Cooperation. It is not an alliance. It is not an organization. It is a framework for cooperation between the Nordic countries. Our cooperation facilitates a close dialogue on security policy, and developments in our region and internationally. In light of the new security situation in Europe, the importance of this dialogue has increased. It is one of the few arenas where non-NATO and NATO members and non-EU and EU members can conduct this dialogue. We share the same values and have similar challenges; it makes sense to cooperate. We have done so in international operations, we do so in certain areas of capability development, logistics and armament, and perhaps more notably, on training and exercise. I would especially like to highlight this year's *Arctic Challenge Exercise*. The exercise is based on the very successful Cross Border Training between Norway, Sweden and Finland. This year, more than one hundred jets from a number of allies and partners trained in the vast Nordic airspace. We believe this is an exercise with a high value and a significant potential, also for other allies and partners.

The Nordic cooperation is flexible and pragmatic. It serves our common interests. But again, it is no alliance. Norway's commitment to NATO stands firm. And at the NATO Summit in Warsaw next year we must take new concrete steps to further advance the long-term adaptation of our Alliance.

Norway's role in new NATO initiatives

As a founding member of NATO, strengthening our Alliance's deterrence and collective defense capability is a key priority for us. We will continue our active endeavours to reinforce defense capabilities as well as working to ensure that NATO remains a strong and relevant political arena for transatlantic security policy.

We are contributing substantially to the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), especially through our contribution to the VJTF this year. Together with Germany and the Netherlands we took the lead in establishing the VJTF. We have decided to contribute troops also to the VJTF both in 2016 and 2017 and we are considering contributing in 2019.

In the time leading up to the next summit, Norway will concentrate its efforts on several specific areas of importance. I would like to mention three of them here:

Firstly, the maritime domain. The introduction of Russian new high-end maritime capabilities, both surface and sub-surface with high-precision long-range strike capabilities puts NATO's maritime strategy on the agenda for Warsaw. Given the strategic importance of Russian capabilities in the High North, this area will be highly relevant in any potential crisis or conflict involving Russia. As a result of these developments we could *potentially* face a resurrected threat to the sea lines of communication across the Atlantic. Therefore this challenge is not limited to the North Atlantic, but concerns all of Europe and the North America.

We need to bolster capacities in the maritime domain: I firmly believe we need to secure NATO's freedom of movement and operation in this area of crucial importance for Allied reinforcement of Europe.

Secondly, the strengthening of NATO's command structure: Our ability to act quickly and operate efficiently depends on it.

And thirdly, more strategically focused Allied training and exercises: We need to train smart together within the alliance and prioritize exercises of strategic relevance.

NATO must be able to meet the threats to allied security wherever they may arise. We will continue to provide a 360 degree approach to deter potential aggressors and reassure our allied friends that the Article V commitment is unwavering.

And in the public debate about NATO's role in European security we must not forget that the strength of NATO and the transatlantic partnership is not just of military nature. NATO is first and foremost a political alliance. We need to straighten our backs and be the community of shared values that we are. As we are facing various threats now, and in the time to come, I believe it is of paramount importance that we, NATO-members and European allies, stand together. Ensuring a strong and complementary relationship between NATO and the EU is crucial for our ability to do so.

We must do what we can to identify, understand, prioritize and meet common challenges *together*. Because NATO *is* only as strong and capable as we make it. This is especially important to remember in a time where different forces and domestic developments are pulling us apart.

I am an advocate of dialogue and partnership. I am a firm believer in our combined strength as a united Euro-Atlantic community – the custodians of the idea of a Europe whole, free and at peace. But as with any relationship, we cannot take it for granted: it requires mutual commitment.

And going forward in these challenging times we will have to make some difficult choices. So let us make sure we choose wisely. Because the choices we make today will have consequences not just for us, but for the generations to come.

Thank you.