

Opening Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell to the Tenth EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Conference

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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

[welcome]

It is a pleasure to welcome you, on behalf of the High Representative, to the tenth Annual EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Conference. Let me express my gratitude to the EU Non-proliferation and Disarmament Consortium for organising this event, bringing together a variety of diplomats, academics, civil society representatives and others. The ongoing pandemic once again prevents us from in-person discussions. Luckily, however, we can address a range of challenges in the field of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control in this conference in a virtual setting.

[global landscape]

Europe is in danger. The High Representative shared this conclusion in his foreword to the Strategic Compass. Several developments are at the root of this: the return of power politics and of a zero-sum mind-set. A geopolitical context that is increasingly complex, multipolar and instable. And also, a decreasing respect for the rules-based international order.

We see several regional powers increasingly trying to influence their direct surroundings. These regional powers do not necessarily share the same respect for international law and for the multilateral order as we do. With a variety of means, they try to pursue their direct national interests. While they might start out by using diplomatic means to get things done, they don't shy away from the use of cyber attacks, hybrid warfare, or even military operations or proxy warfare. These developments are taking place around the world, including on the doorstep of Europe. Power politics are back indeed.

What does this dangerous development concretely mean for the area of non-proliferation, disarmament and arms control? Nobody wants to see a new nuclear arms race. Nobody wants sensitive equipment and technology to end up in the hands of terrorists. Nobody wants Artificial Intelligence taking over future warfare. However, these things CAN happen, if the international community does not collectively engage in order to address these challenges. The existing non-proliferation and disarmament multilateral framework has been carefully constructed over the past decades. It is a delicate framework, which requires constant maintenance and nourishment. It requires political trust building. And it requires innovation in order to keep up with new challenges. Without sufficient attention, the risks are tremendous, and they are real.

The EU takes its responsibility seriously and invests political and human capital, as well as actual funding, in maintaining the multilateral framework for non-proliferation and disarmament. In all

relevant meetings of treaty bodies, meetings of the UN disarmament fora, and of other regional security organisations, the EU speaks out in favour of its main principles. These include a multilateralist approach to security, including non-proliferation and disarmament, a strong support for verification and upholding the compliance of treaties, and a commitment to internationally coordinated export controls. The EU collaborates closely with like-minded partners who share these principles.

At the same time, our policy on disarmament does not exist in a vacuum. It is linked to other policies addressing root causes of instability. We need to continue to invest in mediation, in sustainable development, in addressing global inequality, and in respect for human rights, as prerequisites for easing international and regional tensions. Confidence building measures and transparency in armaments can help tremendously in taking away perceived international security threats. When nations know themselves to be in a stable region there is less of a need to arm oneself, there is a diminished risk of security incidents or of misinterpretation of others' motives. Keeping all possible communication channels between rivals open is essential for maintaining peace.

Let me now turn to some of the specific areas of non-proliferation and disarmament, in order to highlight some of the concrete actions of the EU.

[biological]

The ongoing pandemic has shown very concretely how essential non-proliferation of biological weapons is for global peace and security. Biological incidents, whether they are of natural origin or manmade, accidental or deliberate, can completely disrupt our lives and create global havoc. The EU is therefore a long-standing supporter of strengthening biosafety and biosecurity globally through supporting the Biological Weapons Convention, which is the cornerstone of international efforts to prevent disease from ever being used as a weapon. At the upcoming Ninth Review Conference of the BWC, the EU will call for the strengthening of the Convention and its implementation.

[chemical]

It was over 100 years ago that the first major use of chemical weapons took place, on the battlefields of Ypres, not far from Brussels. Today, there is an international norm prohibiting the use of chemicals as a weapon. Still, chemicals continue to be used as a weapon by some. The EU remains one of the strongest supporters of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. The OPCW, as an impartial organisation of professionals, needs to be able to conduct the necessary fact-finding missions and investigations. Politicising the OPCW and its work is in nobody's interest, and in the end, undermines our globally agreed norm. The international community has the responsibility to ensure that justice takes its course, for the sake of the victims, and in order to strengthen global peace and security. Those who still use these horrific weapons must be held accountable.

[nuclear]

Upholding and preserving the Non-Proliferation Treaty remains a key priority of EU foreign policy. The EU strongly supports all three pillars of the Treaty – non-proliferation, nuclear disarmament, and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. We have been a proud supporter of regional conferences in preparation for the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference next January. Through intensive diplomatic engagement backed up by EU funded projects, we are also promoting the various instruments of the NPD architecture. I am pleased that representatives from all P5 Members are present today. I am curious to hear during the first panel discussion how all Permanent Members of the Security Council intend to contribute concretely to all three Treaty pillars. We also encourage P5 members to uphold and engage in substantial discussions on strategic stability and the reduction of existing arsenals. Furthermore, the EU remains fully committed to and continues to support the Iran

nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Efforts must be redoubled to uphold international norms, and to promote transparency and confidence-building measures.

[new tech]

Technological developments, such as the widespread use of Artificial Intelligence, have their impact on military equipment. These developments can have disruptive effects on international peace and security. Autonomous weapon systems might have a lasting impact on warfare as a whole. Discussions and further thought on the impact of new technologies on global peace and security are necessary. This is why the EEAS, together with Member States, has engaged in a series of informal expert meetings on the topic. We will seriously need to consider how disarmament, arms control and export control mechanisms can be utilised to manage ever faster technological changes in the military domain that will affect warfare in the decades to come.

[conventional]

Finally, a word on conventional weapons, often an afterthought when we speak about disarmament and arms control. It is easy to forget that conventional weapons, including small arms and light weapons, account for most victims when compared to weapons of mass destruction: over 500.000 deaths of armed violence occur each year, according to Small Arms Survey. The EU supports efforts to counter the diversion of arms, ensure safe stockpiling, and mainstream gender considerations in the design of new projects relating to the fight against gun violence and SALW control. Moreover, the EU has strict export controls in place. This includes increased transparency measures.

The EU remains a staunch supporter of the UN Programme of Action and its International Tracing Instrument, and the Arms Trade Treaty, and actively promotes its universalisation and effective implementation.

[conclusion]

The EU is multilateral in its essence. It is also multi-stakeholder in its essence. Many of the topics I touched upon are highly technical in nature. Not all diplomats are nuclear or chemical experts. Therefore, particularly in this area of multilateral diplomacy, frequent exchanges of views with academia and think tanks are important. Natural and social scientists can warn us, they can help us identify new challenges, they can also come up with creative new solutions to help protect international peace and security. This is one of the reasons why the EU has supported for the past 10 years the EU Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Consortium, and its Network of currently over 100 associated European think tanks and universities.

When we seek to prevent new arms races – whether they are nuclear, conventional, or involve new technologies – dialogue with our global partners is essential. Building trust is easier when looking each other in the eye directly, in real life. For now, we will have to make do with screens connecting us. The important thing is that we, diplomats from across the globe, experts, academics, researchers, remain connected. It is at meetings such as this one, where we can explore coinciding interests, brainstorm about challenges facing us all, and seek solutions for how to solve those.

I wish you a fruitful and open discussion, with the collective aim to increase international security, ensure non-proliferation, and promote disarmament.