

Preamble by the Government

Defence is an essential mission of the public authority. Investing in Defence both today and in the future is investing in the security of our society, and in the freedom, well-being and prosperity of all citizens.

As stated in the Government agreement, this government gives Defence back the means to execute its tasks properly. During the last three decades Defence has continuously contributed to the rehabilitation of our public finances by reducing the defence budget. The strategic vision that follows gives new breathing space to Defence in order to ensure our population that the armed forces will be able to contribute significantly to the security of our society in the years and decades to come.

Deployments of our Defence usually take place in cooperation with other countries within the multilateral framework of NATO, EU and UN. Our Euro-Atlantic partners expect us to make a solidary contribution to the NATO and EU efforts to maintain peace and security in Europe. In addition, we also have to be a solidary partner for the (civil-)military engagements of EU, NATO and UN, which safeguard our security and our common interests by promoting peace and stability at the borders of Europe and in the world.

That is why we as a government give a positive answer to the request of our partners to stabilize our defence effort (defence budget and pensions) in the short term, and why we foresee an increase in our defence effort by 2030. This effort will be situated between the current average of the European NATO member states without the nuclear powers and the general average of the European NATO member states. After all, a continued solidary multilateral burden and risk sharing is only possible when we invest sufficiently in our Defence. Our country occupies an important position within NATO and EU, as host country of their main institutions, among other things. We want to consolidate this position by making a contribution for defence capabilities at an appropriate level. A sufficient international operational burden sharing for Defence reinforces the credibility of our international policy, and contributes to the safeguarding of our worldwide interests.

With this strategic vision the government provides proper direction for the long term, which allows Defence to respond to the security challenges of tomorrow. Our security environment is constantly evolving and thus uncertain. It is the will of the government to maintain a broadly deployable national Defence, since this offers the best possible flexibility to deal with these security challenges. This will only be practically possible when we organize our Defence even more structurally together with our closest partners. This is also a contribution to a more European defence, which is necessary to be able to continue to safeguard the European security and interests in a more multipolar world. This government makes a strong commitment to a more European defence by a bottom-up European anchoring of the capabilities of our Defence.

This strategic long-term vision is necessary because of Defence's intergenerational nature. This government has to take decisions on investments in defence equipment that will only effectively be used by our servicemen within several years from now.

In accordance with the guidelines of the restricted cabinet of 22 December 2015 several important investment projects will be launched in the short term, such as the future fighter planes, the frigates, the mine countermeasures vessels, the drones, and the combat vehicles for the land forces. The investments in Defence equipment require a broad political consensus, for as a government we are aware of the significant efforts these investments demand. The government needs to make a clear and

transparent commitment in order to be able to inform our population, our partners, and the industry in the best way possible.

This government also provides the appropriate guidelines for the future of the personnel and the functioning of Defence. Despite the fact that half of our servicemen will go into retirement in the next 10 years, our operational commitment needs to remain at the appropriate level. An important additional recruitment effort will ensure that Defence maintains 25,000 full-time equivalents (consisting of about 24,000 military and 1,000 civilian staff members). Our personnel policy will aim at young people and technological profiles to a maximum extent. Defence will use civilian services through sourcing as much as possible, allowing the servicemen to focus on the operational commitments, insofar as this results in a cost reduction. Sufficient operating resources will be provided to make an appropriate operational level of ambition and preparedness possible. In the next 15 years Defence will rationalize and modernize fundamentally, in terms of processes as well as structures. In this respect, efficiency and focus on the key tasks are guiding principles.

In brief, this strategic vision sets the course for an evolution towards a structurally sound Defence with the proper balance between investments, and personnel and operating expenses.

Taking into account the above-mentioned intergenerational nature this government will not be able to bear all the efforts to get Defence on track for the future. The next governments will also need to continue to support the progressive development of a balanced Defence based on multilateral solidarity with a European anchoring.

Nevertheless, as a government we already take our responsibility to put Defence on the right track. In addition to the decisions for future investments (2020-2030) 200 million euros will be reserved during this term to invest in equipment in the short term. These funds are necessary to start resolving the shortages in individual equipment and combat vehicles for the land forces, to continue to ensure the operational readiness of our fighter planes, and to design the future of our frigates. The first major sourcing initiatives will also be launched in the short term, in order to make the transition to a Defence of 25,000 full-time equivalents feasible without having to compromise on operational capability. During the remaining three years of this term Defence will also recruit a sufficient number of young and technically skilled personnel.

This strategic long-term vision indicates the general direction for Defence until 2030. During this term and the ones to come this document will be translated into separate implementation projects that should be the building blocks for the Defence of the future. It is up to this government to point the way ahead, and up to future governments to adjust this vision in order to provide the best possible response to the security challenges of the future.

As a government, we are in any case convinced that this vision and the initial impetus that we can give during this term are a positive turning point for our Defence. They open up a new perspective on growth for a Defence that safeguards our security, freedom, well-being and prosperity on all fronts today, and they will make it possible for Defence to continue to execute its tasks in the future.