



GRAND-DUCHÉ DE LUXEMBOURG  
Représentation permanente auprès  
de l'Union européenne

Représentation au Comité politique  
et de sécurité

Bruxelles, le 15 novembre 2013

Madame la Haute Représentante,

Je vous prie de bien vouloir trouver en annexe une lettre des Ministres de la  
Défense du Benelux relative au Conseil européen des 19 et 20 décembre 2013.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Madame la Haute Représentante, l'assurance de ma très  
haute considération.

Stephan Müller

Ambassadeur, Représentant au COPS

Son Excellence Madame Catherine Ashton  
Haute Représentante de l'Union Européenne  
Service Européen d'Action Extérieure  
rue de la Loi, 242  
1046 Bruxelles

Luxembourg, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Dear High Representative,

The European Heads of State and Government cannot miss the opportunity to send a strong message at December's European Council meeting. Europe must assume greater responsibility in order to become a capable provider of security, in its immediate region and beyond. Critical capability gaps still remain in Europe. New security challenges, a shifting balance of power and declining budgets force us — more than ever before — to be more coherent and efficient. The BENELUX countries are convinced that closer cooperation, especially with regard to capability development, should be the centrepiece of our efforts.

In April 2012, the BENELUX countries adopted a Declaration to boost defence cooperation even further, and thus our ability to act. Defence cooperation between the BENELUX countries so far has been the successful outcome of a pragmatic and result-oriented approach, pooling and sharing resources in various domains. The most advanced field in this respect is the integrated Belgian-Netherlands naval cooperation, ranging from the educational, personnel and materiel domains to the actual operating of the two navies, while respecting the sovereign right to deploy assets and personnel. Our countries also exchange personnel, including staff officers, and plan to run integrated modules in our high-level staff courses. Integrated training and education serve to transcend cultural and linguistic boundaries and create a common mindset.

A crucial aspect of closer European cooperation is the understanding that such cooperation can only be effective if partner nations can rely on one another when it comes to delivering. At the same time, closer military cooperation is still perceived by many as a constraint or an infringement on sovereignty. We believe, however, that deepening international defence cooperation is not a constraint but rather an enhancement of our sovereignty and security, as it enhances our ability to act.

That is why, on top of the results we have achieved so far:

- Luxembourg and Belgium will integrate their A400M fleets in a joint unit located in Melsbroek (Belgium) and will cooperate more closely with the Netherlands on air transport in the framework of the EATC.

- The Netherlands and Belgium have the intention to achieve synergy and integration in the area of air policing, including Quick Reaction Alert and national 'Renegade' tasks.
- The three countries have the intention to develop a more structured cooperation with regard to contributions to the EU Battle Groups and to establish a BENELUX-led EU Battle Group in 2018.

It is obvious that political engagement, including from the national parliaments, is a prerequisite to achieve the level of integration that is aspired to.

If Europe is serious about facing current and emerging security challenges together, member states need to share and harmonise their capability plans. A strong Europe will benefit NATO and reinforce the transatlantic bond. That is why EU and NATO need to ensure complementarity, cooperation and coordination with regard to their defence planning processes, while at the same time recognising the differences between both organisations.

Optimal efficiency can be achieved by procuring, sustaining and operating future capabilities together. Member States should therefore act in line with the EU Capability Development Plan and the Code of Conduct on Pooling & Sharing and commit themselves to the delivery of key capabilities through major cooperative projects in fields such as Air-to-Air Refuelling, Governmental Satellite Communications, Cyber Defence and Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems. Setting common targets and timelines is inherent to more systematic and long-term defence cooperation.

Europe's military shortfalls – identified by NATO as well as the EU – can only be remedied if we develop joint approaches and align our collective requirements and national priorities. Striving for pooled procurement, standardisation and interoperability is an important first step. In that context, the BENELUX countries have launched various explorative studies regarding the definition of common functional requirements and the harmonisation of procurement programmes, such as the Soldier Modernisation Programme and the Wideband Global SATCOM programme, with the aim of developing a joint purchasing policy as a longer-term opportunity.

It is high time that Europe becomes a credible provider of security and defence. The enhancement of capability development should be a key outcome of the European Council in December. So let us act accordingly and arrive at

some clear conclusions during December's Council meeting. We hope that the BENELUX framework will inspire other member states to undertake similar initiatives as a stepping stone for more cooperation at the European level. We would like to conclude by providing the assurance that the BENELUX cooperation is not based on a closed-door policy. Our three countries will continue to work with different partners in different formats and clusters. The annex to this letter outlines in more detail the exact nature of our cooperation as well as the results we have achieved so far.

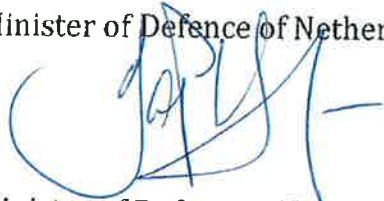
Copies of this letter will be sent to our colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

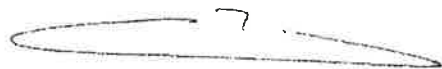
Minister of Defence of Belgium



Minister of Defence of Netherlands



Minister of Defence of Luxembourg



## **FACT SHEET: THE BENELUX DEFENCE COOPERATION**

### **THE AGREEMENT**

In 1987, Luxembourg joined the existing Dutch-Belgian military agreement of 1948, thus making it a BENELUX military agreement. The BENELUX Declaration of April 2012 gave new political impetus to the process and defined specific areas of cooperation:

- Logistics and maintenance;
- Education and training;
- The execution of military tasks;
- The procurement of equipment.

The basic principles are the preservation of autonomy to achieve the national level of ambition and the realisation of a favourable cost-benefit ratio. The common goal is to enhance military effectiveness by bringing our armed forces closer together, sharing costs where possible and increasing output for the benefit of our operational capabilities. Partners also agreed on striving for common positions with regard to initiatives at the multilateral levels, in NATO or the EU, and to inform each other at an early stage when considering operational engagements. This cooperation is not exclusive; thus the three BENELUX associates remain open for cooperation with other partners.

### **THE STRUCTURE**

In order to implement our cooperation, a light non-permanent structure has been established at the politico-military level - a BENELUX steering group mandated by the Ministers of Defence - and at the military level - five Service or functionally oriented BENELUX Sub-Steering Groups. Working groups conduct various project studies, aimed at maximising efficiency, optimising experience, and minimising duplication in various lines of development, taking into account the national and international benefits and administrative and legal aspects. They identify cooperation opportunities in their area of interest and present them to the steering group for approval.

### **THE PROJECTS**

After one year of work, several encouraging initial results are visible:

- The decision has been taken to establish an integrated BENELUX paratrooper training centre in Schaffen. Schaffen is a Belgian barracks which currently houses the Training Centre for Paratroopers of the Belgian Para Commandos. Combined jumpmaster courses will start in January 2014, while static-line courses for Dutch paratroopers will start in the second semester of 2014. Full operating capacity is expected by the beginning of 2015, with all personnel responsible for the integrated organisation of paratrooper training stationed permanently in Schaffen.
- The BENELUX countries have a long-standing history of cooperation between their three national arms control agencies, responsible for implementing the OSCE treaties on confidence and security building measures. The decision has been taken to further extend this cooperation by merging the three national agencies into one BENELUX Arms Control Agency under unified command, located in Peutie near Brussels. This merger will be implemented in December 2013.
- As a first step towards a Combined Joint Helicopter Command, a dedicated coordination cell will coordinate Belgian and Dutch helicopter training and operations as of mid-2014.

- In the domain of Air Policing (QRA and Renegade), the Netherlands and Belgium have the intention to achieve synergy and integration.
- Combined education and training efforts have been set up in various land, air and medical domains.
- The Belgian - Netherlands naval cooperation (BENESAM) is a very close cooperation between the Belgian and the Dutch navies, involving integration of the two navies in the operational, educational, personnel and logistics domains, but maintaining the right to decide autonomously on national deployments. Since both navies use the same types of assets as the core of their fleets, the lead-nation principle has been adopted on the basis of a balanced exchange of services: the Netherlands having the lead for the frigates while Belgium has the lead for the Mine Countermeasures (MCM) vessels. This results in substantial economies of scale in all domains and a tangible increase in cost efficiency. In addition, since 2008, Dutch naval officers have made use of the opportunity to obtain a master's degree in Engineering at the Belgian Royal Military Academy.
- After signing a Memorandum of Understanding on the exchange of personnel, staff officers will be exchanged at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels, in order to enhance desired military cooperation in selected areas, and support and consolidate the BENELUX cooperation.
- In order to enhance cooperation in the field of advanced officer education, the Belgian and Netherlands military academies will be running integrated modules for their high-level staff courses as of next year, with Luxembourg and other international students attending.
- Cooperation within the BENELUX has not led to integrated operational units so far, but combined deployment is increasingly becoming the norm, as can be seen from our deployments in the operational theatres in Croatia, Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. The operational advantage for the three countries in this respect lies in greater sustainability, more efficient use of assets, improved training and exercise opportunities, and a continuous exchange of operational experience while retaining scarce expertise in specific areas. The EU Battle Group 2014-2, led by Belgium and with major Dutch and Luxembourg contributions, is another step in this direction.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

### ***Defence planning***

Within BENELUX, bilateral meetings and exchanges between defence materiel organisations are common practice. In the longer term, the BENELUX defence cooperation will minimise the duplication of BENELUX assets through the coordination and harmonisation of national defence planning in support of NATO's and EU's defence planning.

### ***Combined procurement***

As the BENELUX cooperation is moving forward, combined procurement is also being considered, with the aim of matching the needs of the three nations. In that context, various studies have been launched regarding the definition of common functional requirements and the harmonisation of procurement programmes, with the development of a common purchasing policy as a longer-term opportunity.

***A BENELUX-led Battle Group***

**The three BENELUX partners are considering the possibility of a BENELUX-led EUBG in 2018, which would intensify the BENELUX cooperation and constitute an innovative initiative.**

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