

Toespraak bij integratieceremonie 13 Lichte Brigade en 10. Panzerdivision, door de Minister van Defensie, drs. K.H. Ollongren op donderdag 30 maart 2023 te Veitshöchheim

Remark: Only the spoken word is valid

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Sehr geehrter Herr Bundesminister,
Soldatinnen und Soldaten der Panzerdivision,
Generals,
Mannen en vrouwen van 13 Lichte Brigade,
Dear guests,

Today marks a new milestone in our close and unique military cooperation.
The integration of a third Dutch Army brigade into a German division.
Last Monday, the Netherlands Prime Minister received the Bundeskanzler for government consultations.

They praised the military cooperation between our countries.

Yet again, our German-Dutch army cooperation will be raised to a new level.

This type of military cooperation is unique within Europe.

And serves as an example within the EU and NATO.

It strengthens our combat power and our capacity to act together.

International cooperation is paramount for the quality and effectiveness of our armed forces.

Cooperation with like-minded nations makes us stronger.

It strengthens both the EU *and* NATO.

The fact that we are literally at the centre of Europe here in Veitshöchheim today is as significant as it is symbolic.

We are living at a defining moment in history when it comes to the security of Europe.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has catapulted us into a new era of collective European defence.

We need to keep strengthening our posture to ensure the credibility of our deterrence.

Strong and credible deterrence needs to be backed up by substantial armed forces at high readiness.

This is now even more important since we are facing a long term deteriorated security environment.

More European defence cooperation is therefore not a choice, but a necessity.

With the integration of 13 Light Armoured Brigade into *10. Panzerdivision*, we are taking a new step together.

A step that follows the earlier integration of our 11 Airmobile Brigade into the *Division Schnelle Kräfte* in 2014 and our 43 Mechanised Brigade into *1. Panzerdivision* in 2016

We took our first steps on this road almost thirty years ago - with the establishment of the first German-Dutch Army Corps

During those years, we have worked together in many different missions and operations, for example in Lithuania as part of the enhanced Forward Presence.

After the Russian invasion, we quickly joined forces in the joint Patriot mission in Slovakia.

And we stand shoulder to shoulder in our support of Ukraine, through the delivery of military capabilities and through the provision of military training.

The Netherlands sent already 230 troops to Germany to train Ukrainian battalions and brigade staffs. Later on, another 60 soldiers will deploy.

The armies of Germany and the Netherlands complement each other.

We respect and appreciate each other's qualities.

Research has revealed that soldiers of both armies are generally positive about their contacts with the soldiers of the other nation.

They recognize the match between the Dutch and German armies.

In the end, there are more similarities than differences.

Together they fight for freedom.

They experience a comradeship that only exists among soldiers.

And they go the extra mile when necessary.

Yes, there are differences.

But ultimately, it's all about understanding and respecting each other's background.

It's about building upon each other's strengths.

Interoperability is not only about acquiring the same systems, but also about accepting the strengths of each other's culture.

It's about strength through diversity.

About cooperation across borders.

Today marks the starting point of the race to be ready for deployment in January 2025.

To achieve that, we will train together.

We will jointly develop army doctrines.

And we will act together in developing joint capabilities.

So that we move beyond interoperability towards interchangeability.

For example, we are now in the tendering process for an airmobile vehicle with the same requirements for both our countries.

This should produce a vehicle that is 100% interchangeable.

And our radios and software should also be more compatible.

This is the path we want and need to take.

We are becoming more similar.

We are going to apply the same standards.

We need to remove practical hurdles so that our people can work together in the best possible way.

The fact that both the army units integrating today work with the Boxer as the main platform is a major and essential step.

Furthermore, these units have already gained the necessary experience of working with each other in joint exercises.

And they are currently on stand-by for the NATO Response Force, which was preceded by an intensive exercise programme.

So, I am confident in your ability to succeed.

This is the way forward.

This is what the future of defence cooperation should be.

We have to move beyond national interests and jointly develop our capabilities, procure materiel, and train to be combat ready.

It will bring us a stronger EU and a stronger NATO.

So let this day be an inspiration for many more projects to come.

One thing is certain: I am proud of the servicemen and -women of the 13 Light Armoured Brigade who are now officially part of *10. Panzerdivision*.

Thank you.

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