

Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland Mr Timo Soini

at the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding establishing the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, Helsinki 11 April 2017

Excellencies, dear guests and representatives of the press,

Finland will be proud to host, here in Helsinki, the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. We are proud, in particular, for two reasons. Firstly, the Centre represents a concrete step in building resilience to hybrid threats in the EU Member States and NATO Allies. Secondly, the Centre is a real boost for the cooperation between the EU and NATO, facing the challenge of hybrid threats hand in hand.

Countering hybrid threats is **a European priority**. Resilience is one of the pillars of the EU's Global Strategy. Since the Joint Framework in 2016, the EU has created an EU Hybrid Fusion Cell to analyze information on hybrid threats. The Union has also taken steps in strategic communication, protection of critical infrastructure, energy security and other fields, relevant to enhancing our resilience. The next step is the establishment of this European Centre of Excellence. It will have a major role in promoting strategic level understanding of hybrid influencing and developing our policies.

Countering hybrid threats is also **a transatlantic priority**, based on shared goals and joint efforts by the EU and NATO. NATO's work, based on its Hybrid strategy and its Commitment to enhance resilience, is important also for the EU. Last December, the

EU and NATO together encouraged their Member States and Allies to participate in the work of the Centre of Excellence that we are now establishing. We are confident that the Centre will provide a valuable forum for the EU–NATO cooperation in this important field.

The Finnish Government has decided to host this Centre of Excellence in Helsinki and to cover a significant part of its expenses. We have invited a broad group of Nations to design and to establish this Centre of Excellence. Why do we attach such importance to the Centre?

Hybrid threats and hybrid tactics have become one of the most prominent security challenges and one of the most important fields of security cooperation in Europe.

Hybrid activities have become a permanent part of the European security environment. Hybrid means have been used as a tool both in power politics and in military conflict in Europe. Coercive and subversive activity to confuse, complicate and hinder decision-making processes has increased. Elections have been interfered with in manners that are not appropriate. During the ongoing migration crisis, we have seen elements of hybrid influencing by both state actors and non-state actors. Steering migration flows can be used as a method in political pressuring; and perpetrators of hybrid acts try to radicalize vulnerable members of society as their proxy actors.

The use of hybrid strategies puts the internal cohesion and resilience of our societies to the test. It seeks to turn our strengths into weaknesses by using as a weapon against us what is best in our societies – democracy, openness, the free flow of

information and freedom of speech, and economic freedom. What is needed in response is not only state, but societal resilience, a comprehensive approach to security. Countering hybrid threats is largely a matter of national competence. Vulnerabilities to hybrid threats, however, do not limit themselves to national boundaries. We believe that hybrid threats need a coordinated response also at EU and NATO levels. Cooperation based on lessons learned and sharing expertise will contribute to aligning national policies, doctrines and concepts.

We believe that Finland has something to offer in this multinational cooperation to counter hybrid threats and to develop resilience. Finland, too, is a target for hybrid influencing. For example, we are constantly dealing with information campaigns and malicious activities in the cyber domain. Our vulnerabilities are being tested. Even the very establishment of this hybrid centre has already attracted attempts to muddy the waters and create confusion.

In dealing with this challenge, we rely on our national strength: the Finnish model of comprehensive security, which is a whole-of-government approach. Our preparedness is based on inter-agency cooperation, and on co-operation between the government, the business community and the civil society. We continue to build on a model that has been developed ever since the Second World War. Resilience is at the heart of our national approach in safeguarding functions that are vital to our society in all situations.

Now we are about to establish the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, which is open to EU Members States and NATO Allies. This Centre of Excellence will serve as a hub of subject matter expertise. It will contribute to a

better understanding of hybrid threats and societies' vulnerabilities by analysis and studies. It will also support us to develop preparedness and civil-military capabilities to counter hybrid threats.

The Centre will engage in strategic-level analysis, consulting and training, and promote cross-sectoral cooperation within thematical networks. The Centre could also serve as a platform for common tabletop exercises of the EU and NATO. The Centre will also have a role to play in bringing practitioners and researchers together to develop a clear conceptual framework for hybrid threats. We hope that this Centre will closely cooperate with other Centres of Excellence relevant to countering hybrid threats, in particular with NATO Centres of Excellence in the Baltic countries.

Finland would like to thank Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, which have decided to take the lead and to send their delegation here today to sign the Memorandum of Understanding. We are confident that other EU Member States and NATO Allies will follow your example. However, this is a wonderful group of countries, representing a wealth of complementary experience and expertise in countering hybrid threats. There are countries from the Arctic North as well as from the Mediterranean South. There are countries from both sides of the Atlantic. The way these countries have committed to preparations of this unique cooperation platform gives me confidence that ownership of participating countries will continue to be strong.

We hope and trust that the EU institutions as well as the NATO Secretariat will take actively part in activities of the Centre. The intention of participating countries of the Centre is to provide a common platform for closer EU–NATO cooperation. In

countering hybrid threats, the EU and NATO need each other. Our unity and our success is interlinked.

Thank you for your attention.