

Sikkerhetsforum Sør: Styrket sikkerhet og beredskap i det Nordisk-Baltiske området og Sør-Norge

Første visepresident Svein Harberg, Stortinget

Tid: 28. mai 2025 kl. 10.00-16.00

80 years ago, the Second World War ended in Norway and the rest of Europe. Many made huge sacrifices in the war, including their own lives. It left ruins, scars and traumas. But it also left a strong wish to ensure that war in Europe should never happen again. Partnership and dialogue should replace confrontation and destruction.

While the Cold War and the Berlin Wall divided Europe, we did not experience war in Europe for many years. Sadly, war in the Balkans and later Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine are a brutal reminder that peace can never be taken for granted.

In ways that would have been impossible to predict only a few years ago, this has also had a huge impact on how we talk about preparedness, security and defence. Defence budgets are rising all over Europe. Our friends in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania once again fear a threat to their very existence from their neighbour to the East. Finland and Sweden have joined NATO.

Russia's war against Ukraine is a threat to international peace and security, and represents a turning point for Europe. Europe's response has been more comprehensive and united than many would have predicted. European countries both inside and outside the EU have provided Ukraine with military, economic, humanitarian and political support.

Norway has committed itself to the long-term support of Ukraine. From 2022 to 2025 Norway will assist Ukraine and other countries affected by Russia's invasion with around 12 billion Euros in total under the Nansen programme. All political parties in the Norwegian Parliament stand united behind this programme. It means Norway's commitment goes beyond the parliamentary election in September.

Political consensus was also shown when the Parliament adopted the recent long-term defence plan last June. This plan proposes major investments in defence, preparedness, and security. It is historic that all parties stand united in the agreement. This was based on a common understanding that we must be able to defend ourselves if crisis and war occur. A stronger national defence will help to deter those who might wish to threaten our sovereignty.

Norwegian security is dependent on NATO and our close allies. Greater capability to receive allied reinforcements throughout the Nordic region, and the ability to operate together with allied forces, including Sweden and Finland, is crucial.

75 years in the world's strongest military and political alliance has secured peace and provided Norway's security guarantee. Finnish and Swedish NATO membership is a boost to security in our region, but also a new obligation to Norway.

We must make a rapid transformation. From not just a country that receives allied reinforcements, but also a transit ally which contributes to the defence and security of the entire Nordic and Baltic region.

Nordic NATO-membership allows for expanded defence cooperation. Norway will play a prominent role in the defence of Finland and Sweden, and Finnish and Swedish territory can be used by allied forces in the defence of Norway. Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish territory and infrastructure now plays a greater role in the defence of Northern Europe, and forms the basis for increased training among allies.

Norway and the EU already work together closely in many security policy areas. In fact, Norway and the EU signed an agreement on defence and security policy cooperation in May last year.

Europe must invest more in defence, strengthen capabilities, and take a proactive approach to security. Norway shares this ambition and welcomes the new White Paper on the Future of European Defence, "Readiness 2030."

Norway is a full partner in EU defence programmes through its contribution to the EU budget. The recently launched Security and Defence Partnership provides a comprehensive and structured political framework for strengthening further dialogue and cooperation.

The Norwegian defence industry plays a key role in the supply chain of the European defence industry. We believe that our competitive industry and defence research communities can bring valuable contributions to the table.

We also welcome the initiatives for closer cooperation between the EU and NATO. This is crucial to avoid unnecessary duplication and dividing lines at a time when transatlantic unity is being tested.

The organizations are different, but compatible and mutually reinforcing: NATO is responsible for collective defence and deterrence. The EU can play a key role in enabling greater defence investments, common procurements and production.

We are determined to aid the scaling up of the European defence technological and industrial base, and closing European capability gaps.

European values are at stake in Ukraine. But fundamental values are also under pressure in many other European countries as well as in the United States. We see restrictions on academic freedom and free speech. Journalists are harassed, jailed and sometimes even killed. The independence of courts cannot be taken for granted, and NGOs are classified as foreign agents.

I am very pleased that democracy is one of three priorities for this period of the EEA and Norway Grants. The other priorities are green transition and social resilience. The Grants also include a special fund of 300 million Euros put aside to support organisations who work to promote democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in Europe.

From 2021 to 2028, Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein are providing a total of 3.3 billion Euros to the EU's fifteen least wealthy states. Aimed at cutting social and economic differences in Europe, the Grants also help to build cooperation between the donor states and the recipient states.

We have parliamentary elections in Norway in September. Free and fair elections are the cornerstones of our democracies. This also means elections free from foreign intervention and

fake news. This is no hypothetical threat. In recent years, the Norwegian Parliament has been subject to two cyber-attacks attributed to China and Russia respectively.

Artificial Intelligence may also pose a threat to democracy if used to discredit politicians or politics. I very much welcome an agreement signed last year by all nine parties in the Storting where they agreed not to use deepfakes and disinformation in this year's election campaign.

We are currently at a crossroads of security politics. We are facing increased unpredictability, uncertainty and instability. And this situation is likely to remain for the foreseeable future. In addition, we are facing a growing will and ability to use military force in pursuit of political objectives.

The conference today is therefore very timely. I hope the rest of the day will allow for further discussions and perspectives on many of the challenges we face.

Thank you so much for your attention.