‘’Your Excellency, the Minister of National Defence,

Your Excellency, the Secretary General for National Security and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Hellenic Republic,

Distinguished Deputy Chief of the Hellenic National Defence General Staff,

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,

Distinguished Defence Attachés,

Representatives of Diplomatic Missions,

Senior Military Officers,

Distinguished Speakers and Panellists,

Distinguished Academics, Experts and Analysts,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we conclude this conference, allow me to express my sincere appreciation to the Minister of National Defence and the National Security Adviser for their presence. I would also like to thank all Ambassadors, Defence Attachés, senior military officers, experts and analysts for their participation, and our moderators, speakers and organisers, particularly the personnel of the General Directorate of National Defence Policy and International Relations, for their excellent work.

I would also like to acknowledge the quality of the contributions and the constructive exchange of views that have characterised our discussions throughout the day.

Our discussions have reinforced a fundamental understanding: the future of the Western Balkans and the future of European security are closely interconnected. The question before us, therefore, is not simply how we respond to the challenges facing the region today. It is how we

shape the conditions for a more secure, resilient and integrated region tomorrow.

This is the perspective from which I would like to address the way ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, we must place the Western Balkans firmly within the strategic vision of Europe's future security architecture.

The region cannot be treated as Europe's periphery, nor can its stability be considered separately from the security of the European continent. In an increasingly contested international environment, unresolved disputes, institutional weaknesses and security gaps can have consequences far beyond national borders.

Our policy objective should be clear: to support a Western Balkans that is stable, sovereign, institutionally resilient and increasingly integrated into the European and Euro-Atlantic security environment.

This requires sustained political engagement, respect for international law, implementation of existing agreements and the strengthening of good-neighbourly relations. It also requires regional leaders to assume ownership of this process. Lasting stability cannot be imposed from outside; it must be built through political responsibility, mutual trust and consistent cooperation.

Second, we must move from crisis management towards a culture of prevention, preparedness and collective resilience.

The security environment is evolving rapidly. Conventional military risks coexist with hybrid threats, cyberattacks, disinformation, foreign interference and attempts to exploit institutional or societal vulnerabilities.

Third, the European integration of the Western Balkans must be treated as a strategic investment, and translated into tangible progress.

The European perspective should remain credible, predictable and firmly anchored in the principle of merit. Enlargement is not simply an institutional process. It is an investment in the security, stability and prosperity of the wider European continent.

We should therefore connect the accession process more effectively with practical integration: gradual access to the European Single Market, stronger regional economic cooperation, investment, infrastructure development and the implementation of reforms.

At the same time, progress must be accompanied by respect for the rule of law, international law, good-neighbourly relations and the commitments already undertaken.

The objective should be to make European integration a process that delivers visible benefits to citizens and businesses, strengthens institutions and reinforces the region's sense of belonging to the European project.

Fourth, we must recognise strategic connectivity as a core dimension of European security.

Looking ahead, the emerging European security architecture will be shaped not only by military capabilities and political alliances, but also by the strength, reliability and resilience of the networks connecting our countries.

Energy corridors, transport infrastructure, digital networks, military mobility and secure supply chains are becoming increasingly important determinants of geopolitical influence and strategic security.

In this evolving environment, the Western Balkans have the potential to become much more than a geographical crossroads. They can develop into a strategic platform for European energy diversification, connectivity, economic integration and security cooperation.

This requires a forward-looking approach: one that connects enlargement with investment, energy security with infrastructure resilience, and defence cooperation with technological development.

Ultimately, our objective should be to transform geographical proximity into strategic interdependence, and strategic interdependence into a lasting foundation for peace, stability and shared prosperity.

Fifth, we must strengthen the complementarity between the European Union and NATO, while encouraging greater regional responsibility.

The two organisations have distinct mandates and instruments, but their efforts are mutually reinforcing. Their cooperation should contribute to stronger defence capabilities, military mobility, cybersecurity, infrastructure protection and preparedness against hybrid threats.

We should seek greater coherence between political engagement, economic instruments and security cooperation, avoiding duplication and ensuring that regional partners are actively involved in shaping the responses that affect them. The Western Balkans should not be merely recipients of international security assistance. They should increasingly become contributors to regional and wider European security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These strategic priorities also define Greece's role and responsibilities.

As the longest-standing EU and NATO member in the region, Greece has a longstanding strategic interest in the stability and European integration of the Western Balkans. Our commitment is rooted in the Thessaloniki Declaration of 2003 and remains relevant to the security realities of today.

Greece is well placed to serve as a bridge connecting the Western Balkans with the Eastern Mediterranean and the wider European space. Through our geographical position, infrastructure, energy

networks, diplomatic engagement and defence cooperation, we can contribute to stronger regional connectivity and resilience.

As the Minister of National Defence, Mr Nikos Dendias, has underlined, Greece's role in the Western Balkans is one that must be assumed now — not tomorrow. This calls for sustained engagement and practical initiatives, in close cooperation with our partners and allies.

For our part, we should continue to promote political dialogue, support European integration, encourage cross-border cooperation and advance initiatives that strengthen the region's contribution to European security.

Let me conclude by highlighting three priorities for the period ahead:

- **Political commitment:** maintaining a credible European perspective and supporting the reforms, agreements and political choices necessary for lasting regional stability.
- **Collective resilience:** strengthening institutions, defence cooperation, preparedness and the protection of critical infrastructure against conventional and hybrid threats.
- **Strategic connectivity:** investing in energy, transport and digital networks, military mobility and secure supply chains, so that the Western Balkans become an integral part of Europe's strategic infrastructure.

These priorities require more than declarations. They require political will, sustained investment, institutional continuity and measurable progress. Above all, they require a shared recognition that the security of each country is increasingly connected to the security of the region as a whole.

The international environment will continue to change. New technologies, geopolitical competition, evolving forms of warfare and the transformation of energy markets will create new challenges, but also new opportunities. We must therefore anticipate developments, rather than simply react to them.

The new European security architecture cannot be built through declarations alone. It requires strategic foresight, credible capabilities and sustained cooperation.

Most importantly, it must be developed with the Western Balkans as active partners, not merely as recipients of security and stability. The countries of the region should be increasingly involved in shaping regional security priorities, contributing to common European and Euro-Atlantic initiatives, and strengthening their capacity to address shared challenges.

Their contribution should be measured not only by their geographical position or by the challenges they face, but also by their capacity to strengthen the resilience, connectivity and stability of the wider European continent.

Ultimately, the Western Balkans must become not only an integral part of Europe's security environment, but also increasingly active contributors to its security and resilience.

This is both a strategic opportunity and a shared responsibility. A stronger European Union, a coherent Euro-Atlantic security environment and a more closely integrated Western Balkans are mutually reinforcing elements of a common European future.

Thank you.’’