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**Written message to the Expert talk on the
“Strategic Compass”**

**European Security and Defence Policy: Where
does the Strategic Compass guide us?**

Brussels, 1 June 2022

I am really sorry I cannot join United Europe, the Würth-Group and many distinguished speakers today for this important event on European security and defence.

History proceeds by slow evolution and sudden accelerations. This is also true for European defence. Our cooperation on defence matters has intensified – slowly but steadily – for several years now. The Strategic Compass was conceived as a step in that process. The Compass identified new threats against Europe, new answers to those threats, and concrete actions with clear deadlines to measure progress. Then, by the time the Compass was finalised, the pace of history had suddenly speeded up.

Putin's aggression against Ukraine confirmed the need for and the timeliness of the Strategic Compass. Since the end of February, several Member States have announced new and substantive investments in defence. Leaders have committed to devote an additional 200 billion euros to defence capabilities over the coming years. This is good and long overdue news. Europe's defence budgets were cut drastically at the start of the great financial crisis. These cuts have led to an under-investment of 160 billion euros, compared to pre-2008 levels. All of this, while Russia and China ramped up massively their defence budgets. It is sad that it took a new war in our continent for Europe to see our defence needs with crystal clarity. Now that the investment is coming, we should focus on making the most out of it.

Europe needs not only to spend more on its defence, but also to spend better and together. Not only through joint research and development for defence, but also through joint procurement. Interoperability among our national armies is crucial for effectiveness, whatever the mission. Fragmentation and duplication are the enemy within. Investments worth 200 billion euros can unlock new economies of scale for our defence industry, leading to lower costs, more focused investments and greater capacity to meet rising demand. This is why we have just presented an assessment of European defence investment gaps. We have identified three urgent tasks: we must replenish stockpiles, replace Soviet-era legacy systems, and reinforce air and missile defence systems, while we keep investing in the medium term in the strategic capabilities we still lack. More than ever before, the defence of Europe requires the Member States of our Union to act together, with coordination and joint procurement. This will also make Europe a stronger pillar in NATO. And this is how we can shape history, instead of watching it unfold.

Thank you for your invitation. Let me wish you a very fruitful conference.