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Ministro da Defesa Nacional

**Intervenção do Ministro da Defesa Nacional, João Gomes Cravinho, por ocasião da  
*Pitch Day* do *NATO Innovation Challenge 2021*.**

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First, let me congratulate the ten finalists in this competition and wish you the best of luck for today's pitch of your project to NATO. Reaching this stage of the competition already testifies to the quality and relevance of your ideas to NATO.

For the Portuguese Ministry of Defence and for the Portuguese Armed Forces, collaboration with the 2021 NATO Spring Innovation Challenge is a great opportunity. Not only to engage with this stimulating community of experts, but also to showcase what Portugal is doing to promote innovation in defence.

Innovation, of course, may come through technology and equipment, but it can, and should, come through the development of new procedures and new ways of working. Innovation in perspectives and processes is as important as innovation in technology. Open environments, which promote strong civilian and military cooperation will remain critical for this endeavour.

NATO's commitment to innovation is not new. In fact, the secret of the success and resilience of the Atlantic Alliance over these more than seven decades largely lies in its culture of innovation that has allowed it to adapt successfully to new challenges and threats.

This culture of innovation had its most significant institutional expression in the creation in 2003 of NATO's Allied Command Transformation, mandated to lead the development of military structures, forces, capabilities and doctrines, and enabling NATO to meet its level of ambition and core missions in a rapidly changing global defence and security landscape.

As was underlined in the latest NATO Summit communiqué, Allies are committed to fostering technological cooperation in NATO, and to investing accordingly. This is key for the Alliance to remain a credible deterrent against strategic competitors. This is also key for effective interoperability between allies. The establishment of a NATO Innovation Fund, conceived to support the development of dual-use emerging and disruptive technologies in key areas to Allied security, is further proof that innovation will continue to be a key driver of change in international security.

Portugal is committed to this culture of innovation, and so we are taking important steps in this direction, stimulating dynamic ecosystems that gather industry, scientific and technological knowledge and military experience in several key areas. In order to transform defence organisations into active agents of innovation, fully integrated into the knowledge society, we must be committed to this inclusive approach. This is what we are promoting through our holding company, idD Portugal Defence, and this is also what we aim at with the establishment of the Department for Innovation and Transformation at the General-Staff of the Armed Forces, among other examples.

But keeping NATO's innovation edge can only be done by tapping into the world's best talents. Therefore, creating an open and large community of experts, scientists, students, etc., from all over the world, to deliver innovative solutions to specific needs, is a formidable way to get this vital job of transformation done.

This contest focused on Space domain awareness, so allow me to say a few words on the topic.

The combination of new perspectives and technological development has become the basis for what has been called the “New Space”. Imagining new possibilities in space and creating the necessary technological solutions to make these possibilities a reality has pushed space exploration further.

Space competition was a permanent feature of the Cold War, and this required significant investments, but also the adoption of common rules to ensure that this global common was not used for malicious purposes.

The last decades have seen an increased interest in space development. This has largely been driven by private investments and has led to new possibilities in the use of space for the development of our societies. Today, large segments of the world economy rely on space-based technology, namely communications and transportation. Other areas, including military operations, also rely heavily on space-based technology and will increase this dependence in the future.

At the EU level, space has assumed strategic importance, leading to the establishment of DG Defence Industry and Space. Investment in this sector has been reinforced, tapping into the new resources made available with the development of the EU’s defence policy, including PESCO projects. It is of vital importance to address vulnerabilities in European value chains and existing dependencies on non-European technologies and components. The future of our resilience, both in the civilian sectors and in military operations, will largely depend on this.

This reality is also relevant for NATO, and this was clearly stated in NATO summit communiqué, earlier this month. As we head towards the development of a new strategic concept for the Alliance, the role of space in NATO's warfare development needs to be fully recognised and considered.

Space has been identified as a key variable in the security and prosperity of our nations and for NATO's deterrence and defence. NATO committed to accelerating work to deepen and expand our use of space as an operational domain, in full respect for international law and through the promotion of responsible international behaviour in space. Allies also agreed and stated publicly that attacks to, from, or in space could justify resorting to Article 5.

But for this commitment to be a credible deterrent, innovation needs to continue as we update our capabilities and our approaches. Therefore, each of today's contenders should pride him and herself and their teams for contributing to making this Alliance of democracies more robust, more committed to peace and security and more capable of delivering also in space.

Portugal remains committed to these developments, both by developing our national industrial and technological ecosystems in articulation with our European and allied partners, namely with the establishment of the Portuguese Space Agency and the adoption of a national space strategy. But also, by developing our strategic needs for security and defence, by adopting a Defence Strategy for Space, invested in Earth Observation, as our participation in the Space Surveillance and Tracking project of the EU illustrates.

Similar to other major topics in NATO, space is a significant area of cooperation with the EU, under a win-win logic, reinforcing the commitment of Allies and EU Member States around a “transatlantic bond for the future”, which has at its core the security and prosperity of the Atlantic ocean.

I would like to end by thanking the teams at the Portuguese MoD and the Armed Forces for their work, and particularly to the University Military Institute for hosting us, as well as to NATO’s Allied Command Transformation for, once more, recognizing Portugal’s ability to deliver and be a reliable partner also in this kind of initiatives. I wish Canada a great deal of success, as the next organiser of the innovation challenge.

And I wish you all the best of luck and enjoy your days in Lisbon.

Thank you very much.