

Lecture delivered by the Acting Head of the European Security and Defence College
– Mr. Fergal O’ Regan - during the opening ceremony of the first edition
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(Authorized version)

It is an honor to have the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I think when we look at the future, it is important that we see where we have come from. There are several, let us call them even symbolic events, which, allow us to have a deeper understanding of where we should be going.

If I go back to 1949 and the Washington Treaty. Within two years of the signing of the Washington Treaty, General Eisenhower, set in place the steps to create the NATO Defense College. Because he understood that education was a necessary building block for NATO.

In and around in the same period, in 1948, we had the Hague Congress, which was the beginning of a process which eventually led to European integration; it gave rise to the creation of the Coal and Steel Community and the EEC, which eventually led to the creation of the EU. In that very same Congress, the idea of a “College of Europe”, where I eventually studied, was put on the table. Within a few short years, we had the first students, many of whom had direct experience of the tragedy of World War II.

Why do I say this?

Because education is a foundation stone for building institutions, for creating the elements, the human elements, needed to make institutions function. When we see all these processes, that have led to huge achievements over the last 75 years for our societies, in all areas we see that education is a bedrock.

This is particularly important when we speak about security and defense – nothing can exist in society unless we have security and defense – economic development, cultural development, social development – they all depend on the existence of security and defense.

Education is, maybe, not the most glamorous area. But it's one of the most important areas. We must be at the forefront of developments. We must be looking to see how we ourselves can improve in order, so that we can deliver on what is essentially an enormously important mission.

Of course, technology plays an important role in this regard. However, as has already been stated, it is how we use the technology, how we integrate it into our processes, how we make ourselves better through technology, how that interface works. It's, of course, enormously difficult to predict. I mean, if you were to ask me a year ago to put forward my vision as regards what would happen in terms of technology, it would be entirely different to what it is now. It's also certain that in a year's time, it will be different again - the steps that we are taking are increasingly rapid and increasingly large, and it is difficult to get a grasp on precisely what is happening. But it is extremely important to understand what is happening and we need to get on board with change.

So, let me make several observations on teaching in the past. If I went back to the time of my parent and grandparents - teaching was one to one – a physical person standing in front of an audience. The communication capacity was, of course limited. We have now communication capacities which are beyond the imagination of our predecessors. We are doing it right now, speaking to each other over a weblink which works irrespective of our physical locations.

We're also able to gather information in a way which is mind boggling. It's, in fact, unlimited, and the only question is whether we ourselves can manage the vast amount of information. And what's important is to know what to pick and how to use it. It's also the speed of the transmission of information. It's almost instant.

And this is very important in the world that we live in, especially around security and defense, because things happen very quickly.

I had the good fortune of traveling to Washington, a few months ago for the NATO Defense College conference, gathering the commandants and commanders of various defense colleges within the NATO family and partners – as you know NATO is a strategic partner of the EU and the ESDC works closely with it. We are associated within the NATO framework. I can also underline that our mission and the mission of NATO are complementary. We work together and to ensure that this mission, this overall mission, is achieved. The week we spent in Washington, we had the opportunity to listen to the commandant of the National Defence University of Ukraine (NDUU), who was, as many of our colleagues and friends in Ukraine, also fighting at the frontline (in Bakhmut).

And he made several very interesting observations about the connection between the front line and education. He underlined that he, as the director of the NDUU, was learning immediately and incorporating into the functioning of the NDUU what was happening at the front. And it's in all areas, of tactics, strategy, technology and so on, which are evolving so quickly. The important thing, as regards education, is the very close connection between what's happening at the front.

The benefits go both ways. The “front line” is also earning very quickly from the education environment.

In the past, there was a period when people studied, and then a period when they weren't studying, when they worked. Education and work now happen together. It's constant. One must keep learning forever. And one must keep up to date. Or one gets left behind. As has been pointed out, one will not be replaced by a machine, one will be replaced by a person who is keeping up.

It's also extremely important that we have, our networks. The European Security and Defence College (ESDC) is a very good example of a network. It was created in that way a bit by accident. If I go back to 2005, Year 2005 – it was even before the creation of the European External Action Service. At that time ESDC was under the responsibility of the Council of the European Union. At that time the College was created, it had no building, it had practically no staff. What it relied upon was the network of already existing training institutes, both civilian and military, at national level. It established a network where the essential value came from the national

institutes and the capacity to connect them via a network – I call the network the beating heart of the ESDC. It's where the action occurs, but it must be linked together. And that's what we do at the ESDC. We are the glue that holds that network together. And an enormous amount of our work, relies on technology - video interfaces and on virtual learning units.

Technology 20 years ago was nothing like today. What we can do now is astounding. For example, using virtual reality and AI We can do texts which can be spoken by an avatar, which can update at any time. We can change the text using AI, you can have your models searching for all updated information and incorporated it into the text, and then have the avatar change what he or she is saying. The materials are thus automatically and immediately updated. You can also use those avatars to speak in any relevant language. Our models use 140 different languages. You can even do it with an Irish accent, if you wish (I am Irish as you might tell from my accent).

What's important is in the observations I'm making is:

- it's much more quicker,
- it's much more complete.
- It has a much better range.
- Its more practical

I mean, if we have demands to translate courses into Ukrainian, we can do that immediately. And, of course, you want to make it as effective and user friendly as possible for them.

And that will bring me to the next point. I think it's been it's already been said - the technology is a tool. It doesn't replace human beings. It doesn't replace judgment. It doesn't replace the human interaction between us, which will always be part of education. It's a relationship between the teachers and the students, and it's an interaction and requires a human element.

But that human element is made stronger, is complemented using technology. It empowers us. The answer is something to be discovered, and rediscovered, and rediscovered and rediscovered. All the time.

Where is the balance? Where's the appropriate intersection between the human participation, which is necessary, and the technology. That will change.

We will have to evolve models. What we are looking at now will obviously change in a very short period. The important thing is the attitude. Be prepared for the change. Go with it. Catch the wave as it goes past. Because if you don't catch it, it's gone. That's what I would encourage you to do.

It's a very exciting time. I mean, we can imagine, possibilities that we would never have imagined in the past. And we have people to guide us. I'm very happy with the strengthening of our relationship with NATO DEEP. Because it's enormously important that we work together on this and that we learn from each other. I am enormously grateful to the colleagues in NATO DEEP who have made major steps in this regard. And we are obviously also anxious from our side to allow our expertise to be used by the NATO DEEP, as a natural member of the same family. As I said, and this reflects

the strategic compass of the EU, it is both EU-NATO and NATO-EU, the relationship and the benefits go both ways.

It is within our strategic compass to ensure that in all levels we work together, we complement each other. And it's especially important as regards education, because we can achieve so much more working together than we can working separately.

I wish you the very best. I'm very impressed by this enormously important development. I appreciate and respect the great vitality and energy that goes with this. And I'm very anxious to learn from you and to follow you on, on this journey.

So, thank you very much. I'm sure this will be a wonderful success.

Fergal O' REGAN