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President, NATO Parliamentary Assembly
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Colleagues,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A year ago in Istanbul, you elected me to represent you as your President. Since then, I have worked to ensure that our Assembly's voice is heard on all the key issues on our Alliance's agenda. I have travelled to twelve of our capitals, and to six of our partners – from the Western Balkans to Ukraine and Georgia, and from the Middle East to Korea – to get a better sense of these countries' priorities and perspectives on the multitude of challenges confronting us. I met with NATO's top Commanders: SACEUR General Scaparrotti, SACT General Mercier, the Chairman of the Military Committee General Pavel, the Commander of Joint Forces Command Brunssum General Farina, and the Commander of Joint Forces Command Naples Admiral Howard. I participated in the special meeting of Allied Heads of State and Government in Brussels in May, and attended the flag-raising ceremony for the accession of Montenegro to NATO in June. I want to take this opportunity to congratulate our Montenegrin friends once again, and welcome them formally as full members of our Assembly.

On all these occasions, I witnessed the importance of parliamentary diplomacy as an essential complement to governmental diplomacy. And our meetings this weekend have shown once again the great value that our Assembly brings to discussions on Euro-Atlantic and global security.

Our spring session in Georgia and this annual session in Romania have allowed us to focus first on developments in this strategically important region of the Black Sea.

Just north of Romania's shores, in Ukraine, Russia continues its illegal occupation of Crimea and support to armed militants in Donbas in violation of the Minsk agreements. In the Republic of Moldova, Russia sustains the breakaway region of Transnistria and blocks the resolution of the conflict. And on the opposite shore of the Black Sea, it still occupies Georgian territory. These blatant violations of international law concern us all and are unacceptable. Supporting Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia, is defending the whole of Europe as well.

But Russia's strategy is not limited to this region. Moscow seeks to consolidate its presence and influence from the High North to the Middle East, and from Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans to Asia. It is also seeking to penetrate the political and media spheres in our countries in order to influence our public opinions. We must remain alert and vigilant, without escalating but also without compromising on our interests and values.

At the same time, we continue to face a constellation of challenges on our southern borders. Instability in our neighbourhood, from Libya to Iraq and Syria, breeds a persistent terrorist threat which has affected too many of our cities already, and continues to inspire some of our citizens to turn against their own.

This will be a long struggle. It will require a comprehensive effort, at home and abroad, to address the root causes of instability and radicalisation, and to prevent the emergence of new terrorist havens or the re-emergence of old ones. As importantly, we must tackle the humanitarian consequences of

instability and poverty in our neighbourhood, and dismantle the trafficking networks which prosper on human misery.

NATO's new Strategic Direction South and Hub for the South in Naples provide important political signals of NATO's renewed commitment to stability in this region. The Hub – which I visited this June – will help us better understand and anticipate the whole range of challenges in our southern neighbourhood. It also serves as a valuable link to our partners in the region. In this comprehensive, long-term effort to promote stability in the South, we must work in close partnership with all willing countries and institutions in Africa and the Middle East. This is why I will be travelling to Cairo at the end of the month to explore with the Secretary General of the Arab League ways in which we can enhance our cooperation.

It is one of the key lessons of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan that creating the conditions for long-term stability takes time, and can only be achieved by helping local institutions develop the tools necessary to guarantee their citizens' security. We are called upon today to keep up the effort we all engaged in the aftermath of 9/11.

We also have a special responsibility to continue to encourage the Western Balkans on their path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO has supported stability and reconciliation in the region for over 20 years now. With Montenegro's accession, there are now three countries of the former Yugoslavia – plus Albania – which are contributing to our common security as NATO members. Bosnia-Herzegovina and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have made clear that their ambition is to follow suit, and NATO has repeated time and again that its door is open. I regret that political obstacles have slowed down Sarajevo and Skopje's progress. All countries of the region also aspire to join the European Union, and we must keep this prospect open for them all. Europe will not be complete without the full integration of the Western Balkans.

Dear colleagues,

The challenges that our nations face are complex and multi-faceted, and our security is interconnected. No country today can claim that it is immune to the risks of homegrown or imported terrorism, to the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea, or to the impact of climate change.

The threats we face also evolve at what seems to be an increasingly fast pace.

We must therefore constantly strive to improve our ability to anticipate future crises. And we must invest in the future generations who will be called upon to take responsibility for our nations' security. I am delighted that we have now established a Working Group on Education and Communication about NATO, and I would like to pay tribute to the leadership of its chairman, our former President, Karl Lamers.

With your support, I look forward to continuing to carry our Assembly's voice everywhere where it can add value, and support our common priorities and shared values. Thank you again for the privilege to serve as your President and for your ongoing trust.