

Speech by Paolo Alli
President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
at
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President Iohannis,
President Popescu-Tariceanu,
Distinguished Speakers and Fellow Parliamentarians

It is a real pleasure to be back in Bucharest just a few months after the Romanian Parliament's hosting of the NATO PA's 63rd annual session last October. It was on that occasion that President Popescu-Tariceanu mentioned to me his plan to convene the first B9 parliamentary summit, and I am delighted to be able to convey in person the NATO PA's support for this important initiative.

I am also glad to share this stage this morning with Marshal Karczewski, who co-sponsored this initiative, and who, together with the Marshal of the Sejm of Poland, will host the NATO PA's spring session in just a few weeks' time.

The success of the B9 format since its establishment in 2015 lies, I believe, in the specific perspective and experience that B9 countries can bring to discussions of today's multifaceted threat environment which can only be addressed properly by the complementary capabilities of NATO and the European Union.

Citizens and decision-makers in the older member states of NATO and the European Union sometimes take for granted many aspects of our security and democratic societies. And sometimes, they also fail to understand and appreciate the contributions that countries in Central and Eastern Europe, in the Baltic and Black Sea regions, make to our common security.

I always tell my countrymen that if we want Italy's borders to be recognised by other European countries as the southern borders of Europe, we in Italy must also recognise that Lithuania's borders or Romania's borders are the Eastern borders of Europe. Which is why I strongly support Italy's contribution to NATO's enhanced forward presence in Latvia. NATO's enhanced forward presence is not just about protecting the Baltic States, Poland, Romania or Bulgaria. It is about affirming our unity, our resolve and our values in the face of a resurgent and revisionist Russia. In turn, your countries contribute actively to our common response to the range of other threats confronting us, from terrorism to hybrid and cyber warfare, from Kosovo to

Iraq and Afghanistan. It is this unity of effort, this clear demonstration that our security is one and indivisible, which make us a unique community of nations.

That community of nations is not yet complete. We must continue our efforts to ensure that our friends in the Balkans are fully integrated into our community.

We must also be aware that the distinction between regional and global security is disappearing. The use of chemical weapons in Syria threaten to remove a global taboo which has been in place for almost a century. And North Korean missiles will soon have a global reach which we ignore at our peril.

The upcoming Summit of Allied Heads of State and Government in Brussels in July will be an important opportunity for our nations to reaffirm our unity, resolve and commitment to each other and to our common values. This is the key message in the draft declaration for the NATO Summit which the NATO PA's Standing Committee discussed in Vilnius last month and which I hope we will adopt at our meeting in Warsaw in May. I will be honoured to present the Assembly's recommendations at the Brussels Summit.

The address which NATO PA Presidents give at NATO Summits is one of the high points and most visible expressions of our Assembly's role as the parliamentary pillar of the transatlantic Alliance. However, our role and contribution extend far beyond, to other less visible but equally important dimensions of parliamentary diplomacy.

First, as parliamentarians involved in security and defence, one of our key responsibilities is to explain to our citizens why the multiple and complex threats that we face require us to invest in our defence. I was struck by how little security and defence featured in the recent campaign for the elections in my country, and I did my utmost, throughout the campaign, to bring these issues into the discussion. I did this because I am convinced that this active effort to inform our people is indispensable if we want them to support the sometimes difficult decisions which the defence of our nations entail.

Each member of the NATO PA contributes to this important task, and I have also pressed for the establishment of a specific Working Group on Education and Communication about NATO. The Working Group's main task is to develop new ways to reach out to our young people in particular. It is working hand-in-hand with NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and with our Ministries of Education in this project.

The second and equally important role which our Assembly plays is to help keep our transatlantic community strong and united. As parliamentarians, we are sometimes

better able to address frankly and openly those issues which can create internal tensions within our community of nations. The issue of burden sharing in NATO is an excellent example. Because we bring together parliamentarians with direct responsibility over defence budgets, our Assembly has a key role in building consensus around a fairer sharing of the burden for our common defence. Long before the election of Donald Trump, members of the US delegation to the NATO PA alerted us to the growing disquiet in the US Congress at the deepening transatlantic gap in defence spending and capabilities. Thanks to the leadership of my predecessor, Congressman Mike Turner, we reached out actively to key decision-makers and shapers in the US Congress. At the same time, I made it one of my priorities to put burden sharing on the agenda of each of our meetings. This has helped us dispel some of the misunderstandings surrounding discussions on burden sharing, and build consensus around the notion that fairer burden sharing must be assessed not just in terms of the 2% but in terms of cash, capabilities and contributions.

Thirdly, besides its important role in strengthening the Alliance's internal cohesion, our Assembly complements and amplifies NATO's outreach to partners. For the past 16 months, I have witnessed first-hand how parliamentary diplomacy can help extend the reach of governmental diplomacy. I have been invited to speak about NATO to audiences which NATO itself struggles to reach – from the Arab world to Central Asia. Through our own outreach and support to parliaments, we also complement NATO's support to Georgia, Ukraine, the Western Balkans and our many partners.

This is why I am delighted that President Popescu-Tariceanu and Marshal Karczewski took the initiative to add a parliamentary dimension to the B9 format. The roles I have just mentioned are as relevant for your group of nations as they are for our transatlantic community as a whole. I have no doubt therefore that the cooperation you are launching today between your parliaments will play an essential role in complementing, strengthening and amplifying the goals set for the B9 format.

And seeing many of my friends here from the NATO Parliamentary Assembly around this table, I am convinced that the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the Bucharest Format Assembly should work together as closely as possible.

On behalf of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I would like to wish you every success in this valuable endeavour. The NATO PA stands ready to support your efforts in any way we can.

Thank you