



Rasa Jukneviene  
President, NATO Parliamentary Assembly  
**64th Annual Session**  
Monday 19 November 2018  
Halifax, Canada

Minister Sajjan,  
Speaker Xhaferi,  
Madam Deputy Secretary General,  
Dear colleagues,

It is an honour and a privilege for me to address you today as President of the Assembly. Over the past two months, I have done my best to represent you and support the Assembly's priorities.

At the top of my list was the transatlantic relationship. On my first day as President, I went to Brussels to meet with the NATO Deputy Secretary General and other NATO officials. And I also met the US Ambassador to stress the Assembly's essential role in keeping the transatlantic bond strong. Just before coming to Halifax, I travelled to Washington to meet our American delegation, as well as officials at the State Department and the Pentagon.

All of them reaffirmed the United States' firm commitment to NATO, to Article 5 and to European security. The clearest demonstration of this commitment is the presence of US forces as part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, and the 4.7 billion US dollars committed to the European Deterrence Initiative in 2018 and 6.5 billion in 2019.

All of those I met in Washington recognised that real progress has been made towards fairer burden sharing within NATO. However, as our Assembly has also stated, more needs to be done.

Why? Because we face an unprecedented set of challenges which concerns us all. Therefore, the 2% target is first and foremost a priority for *each* country to protect its own people.

Of course, as Allies and members of NATO, we must also each contribute our fair share. We cannot afford gaps or weak links in our defence.

First, we face the resurgence of traditional state power. Russia had long made clear its ambitions, but since 2014, they have become plain for everyone to see. Russia is expanding its military presence and flexing its capabilities to convince others that no major international issue can be resolved without Russia. It is creating chaos and division wherever it can to



maximize its own influence. And it is using every opportunity to test our unity and resolve to defend the rules-based international system.

Russia's violation of the INF Treaty is only the latest example of this strategy. It is a way for Russia to test the United States' reaction and to test the strength of Allied unity on a fundamental pillar of strategic stability. I personally welcome the United States' and Allies' firm response. And I am convinced that our approach to arms control must take into account developments in other parts of the world, particularly China.

Russia is also using hybrid tactics and disinformation to undermine our democratic institutions from within. Many of the countries represented in this room have suffered such hybrid and disinformation attacks. As a result, the role of parliaments as guardians of our democracies has become even more important.

In other words, parliaments and elections are the new frontlines of our security. And the NATO PA has a key role to play in helping strengthen the resilience of our democratic institutions.

This is why I chose to lead our Assembly's election observation missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Georgia last month. We will likely see more and more sophisticated attempts to interfere with elections. We must be prepared.

Of course, we face many other challenges as well. In a globalised world, our security is directly affected by instability outside our borders. And unfortunately, in many countries across North Africa and the Middle East, instability has created a favourable environment for terrorists and traffickers of all kinds. At the same time, ongoing wars have caused humanitarian disasters of massive proportions, and led millions to seek refuge elsewhere.

Allies have sought to help address some of the causes of instability. Our countries are supporting the global coalition against Daesh, helping train Afghan, Iraqi, Jordanian and Tunisian forces, and cooperating with the European Union in managing refugee flows. And we have seen some encouraging developments.

Daesh has been effectively defeated in Iraq and Syria, and, your Excellency, Deputy Speaker Al-Haddad, Iraq is experiencing positive political, economic and security momentum.

Afghanistan continues to face serious challenges in all these spheres, but it was able to hold its first parliamentary elections in eight years.

We must remain committed to assisting our partners in these regions. Because again, what happens there affects us as well.

This is all the more true of our direct neighbourhood in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. We must finally get rid of the remaining "grey zones" in Europe and implement the vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace. This project has been my priority as President of our Assembly.

During my visit to Montenegro, all of the country's highest officials stressed the immediate and direct benefits which have resulted from NATO membership. At the same time, Montenegro is taking on its fair share of the burden for our shared security. It will spend 2%



GDP for defence by 2024, and in addition to its contribution to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, it has agreed to send personnel as part of KFOR in Kosovo and of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in Latvia and Poland.

Montenegro's membership in NATO serves as a positive model for the region.

Speaker Xhaferi, I sincerely hope that your country will be next to join NATO as a full member. National procedures are ongoing in both countries and it is of course for them to decide. But I would like to salute the political courage that authorities in Athens and Skopje have already shown in addressing the sensitive name issue.

The Western Balkans region is at a decisive crossroads. Positive momentum is essential for the other countries of the region who also aspire to join NATO or the EU: Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Serbia and Kosovo.

Our Europe whole, free, and at peace must also include Eastern Europe. During my meetings with leaders in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, I have stressed the need to carry on with essential reforms. First and foremost for themselves, for their own country and their own people.

At the same time, it is important to remember where these countries come from, to understand the legacy of their communist past. And to understand the challenges they face today. Both Georgia and Ukraine are countries under occupation. I grew up in an occupied country, and I know what this means. This is also why I accepted Ukrainian President Poroshenko's invitation to travel to Eastern Ukraine. I wanted to thank the Ukrainian soldiers fighting there that we understand that they are defending our freedom as well.

Today, Georgia and Ukraine have made clear that they see their future as part of our Euro-Atlantic and European family. It is my strong belief that we must make a firm political commitment to ensure their transformation into fully fledged members of our community. We have all the resources and experience needed to do this.

I am also convinced that the success of these countries would send a strong signal to the people of Russia that, for them as well, a European future is a feasible option.

This should be part of our common long-term strategy for Russia. We need to think beyond President Putin's Russia, beyond the current period of tensions, to the relationship we want with Russia in 20 or 30 years. Some of you will be surprised to hear me say this, but I am convinced that Russia can be a democracy. However, for this, we must engage with the Russian people, not with the regime, and we must show them the benefits of democracy.

Dear colleagues,

Next year, NATO will celebrate its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The Summit of NATO Heads of State and Government held in Brussels in July has set a clear path to ensure that NATO is fit for purpose for the challenges of today and tomorrow. Many of these measures require us, parliamentarians, to give our governments the means to implement these decisions.



Over the past two months, I have witnessed the important role that parliamentary diplomacy can play. I am confident that the next President, who we will elect this afternoon, will continue to make our voice heard at NATO and in our relations with our many partners.

Growing up in occupied Lithuania, I would never have imagined that I would one day become the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. For me, as the grand-daughter of victims of the Stalin gulags, it was an honour and a privilege to be able to serve in this capacity.

Thank you again for your confidence. And thank you for your attention.