

NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Bratislava

3 June 2019

Ladies and gentlemen, may I first offer the apologies of Secretary General Stoltenberg, who is unable to be with you today.

But may I also say how honored I am to speak in such an occasion.

And how delighted I am to be in Slovakia, a highly valued Ally that makes a real contribution to international security.

Thank you, President Moon. It is great to see you again. And a word of sincere thanks also for you -- the members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

I want to thank you for the job that you do. In any democracy, politics is a very tough job. Political life always ends with a defeat. But shaping policy based on sound principles, holding your governments to account for their decisions – that kind of constant scrutiny makes your governments' decisions better. It therefore makes NATO stronger, and it makes all our people free and safer. It's the highest of duties.

So thank you for everything that you do. You are the essential link between NATO and the almost one billion people that **you** have agreed we must protect.

As the elected representatives of those people, you embody our core values – democracy, liberty, and the rule of law.

Values that represent the foundations of our responsibility; values that our armed forces recognize as their main purpose, and values that constitute a way of living: our way of living. They define what we are.

And that is why we have decided to defend them. And by making our readiness clear, it is peace that benefits. There is nothing new under the sun: “si vis pacem, para bellum”. Strong deterrence based on strong defence.

Especially today, at a time when our democratic institutions are being challenged in a way we never saw before.

To some of our adversaries it is not our armed forces that they would like to defeat, but our democratic model.

They know NATO is a defensive alliance. That we will react only if attacked. Their concern is that freedom and the prosperity it brings could be tempting for their own citizens. And the will of those citizens could be bad news for them...

2019 is the 70th anniversary of the 1949 signing of the Washington Treaty.

For that generation, NATO and the EU were a path away from the devastation of war and towards a sustainable peace. A generation that had experienced the carnage of two World Wars, and knew a third was a possibility. A generation which realized a new world war could be fought with nuclear weapons, and that it could then be the last. They wanted peace, but in no way giving up what we are, our way of life, freedom, democracy...

It took the combined power of the NATO Alliance to stop the Soviet Union, and bring stability to our continent.

That nightmare is past. It's gone long ago. But we should not forget the lessons from history.

Recent history has seen further challenges, like the brutal wars in the Balkans, that led NATO to intervene beyond its borders.

Or the 9/11 terrorist attacks, after which NATO Allies invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty for the first time. And which led to NATO's biggest and longest operation, in Afghanistan.

Today, Afghanistan is no longer a safe haven for terrorists.

And there have been many other positive changes. In education, health, freedom of information, and the rights of women and girls. It's also the only example I know of a war that has actually increased the life expectancy of people.

But there are still big problems.
And the security situation is not easy.

NATO supports efforts to achieve a political settlement. We continue to help the Afghan security forces create the conditions for a peaceful solution that should guarantee the rights of all, and in particular of girls and women.

In recent years, the world has changed once more.

Instability in the Middle East, North Africa and the Sahel, has fueled terrorist organizations such as ISIS.

The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, of which NATO is a member, has made great progress.

ISIS no longer controls any territory, but it remains a real threat.

In 2014, the same year that ISIS first rose to prominence, Russia illegally annexed Crimea.

This was not a one off event, but part of a pattern of aggressive behavior that has seen our relationship with Russia deteriorate significantly.

It has come with a huge military build-up from the Arctic to the Black Sea.

Constant cyber-attacks. Against our infrastructures, but also our institutions, and our elections. Use of social networks to spread fake news on a massive scale. And to discredit democracy as a valid, legitimate, efficient, political principle.

Litvineko, Skripal. The indiscriminate use of chemical weapons on allied soil.

The continued destabilization of eastern Ukraine. The downing of a Malaysian airliner.

The development and deployment of new, intermediate range nuclear missiles, in breach of the INF Treaty. The disregard of other arms control instruments, including the Vienna Document.

As I just said, a continuing pattern of aggressive behavior by Russia. Which aims at our institutions and is deeply disturbing.

There are also other challenges shaping our security environment today.

With the rise of countries such as China, the global balance of power is shifting.

This brings opportunities for prosperity and partnership. But also potential risks, as nations flex their muscles on the international stage.

New technologies are changing the nature of global competition.

Artificial Intelligence, quantum computing, robotics and automation – are already having an impact, both on our societies and on the relationships between our societies, and on the way any authoritarian regime can aspire to control its people or influence other peoples. In that sense, George Orwell begins to look like quite an amateur.

It is essential that we fully understand what is happening. It's a new era. An era full of uncertainty. One in which Europe and North America cannot commit the mistake of not working together. And standing up for our shared security and common values. We share values. We share threats. Beyond that, any problem is minor and manageable.

We simply can no longer take our peace and our democracy for granted. If we were to do so, we would no longer see the need to protect them. And we would be taking the first step to lose it all.

In recent years, our security environment has become more complex and more dangerous.

But the reason NATO is the most successful political and military alliance in history is because when the world changes, so do we.

We discuss and debate the issues of the day, we define the way forward and then, with solidarity and determination, we act.

And that is what we are doing now.

We are implementing the most important increase in our collective defence for a generation.

After years of cuts to defence spending, NATO Allies are now increasing their defence budgets.

We are streamlining NATO's Command Structure.

We are improving our logistics.

We are increasing our readiness.

And while we strongly urge Russia to return to compliance with the INF Treaty – it still has time to do so – we are preparing for a world without it.

We are strengthening our cyber defences.

We have a Cyberspace Operations Centre.

We are doing everything that is necessary for NATO to be as strong in cyber-space as it is at sea, in the air and on land.

We continue to fight terrorism.

And we continue to help partner countries to our East and South to be better able to meet security challenges in their region.

NATO's deterrence and defence are stronger than they have been for many years.

But we also remain open to dialogue with Russia. Things don't have to be like this. Indeed, at a time when our relationship is strained, dialogue becomes more important than ever.

That is why we continue to meet regularly in the NATO-Russia Council.

And why we maintain regular military-to-military communication.

With tensions as high as they are, it is important that we do not allow incidents or accidents to be misinterpreted or to spiral out of control.

From the very beginning, NATO's ability to protect its people and its values has attracted other nations.

The continued expansion of the NATO family has been one of our success stories.

If you have not done so already, I hope you will all vote to ratify the membership of North Macedonia as the 30th NATO Ally.

And that we will soon see its flag flying at our Headquarters.

Not all countries can become, or even seek to become, NATO members.

But that has not stopped us developing close and enduring relationships with partner countries around the world.

NATO's network of more than 40 partnerships has helped to increase understanding, trust and cooperation across the globe.

So I would like to say a special thank you to those of you who represent our partner nations.

Let me underline too the unique partnership we have with the European Union. The importance of combining

our toolbox, of complementing each other, of avoiding duplication, of building security together.

Pursued in this spirit, European defense initiatives cannot be a problem for NATO. On the contrary, they are an opportunity to strengthen us both.

All these partnerships are a testament to our strength as an Alliance. No other major power has anything remotely similar. And that is something we can be very proud of.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We began our celebration of 70 years of the NATO Alliance in Washington in April, with a meeting of our Foreign Ministers.

And we will end the year with a leaders' meeting in London, not long after your own Annual Session in the same city.

It will be an opportunity to reiterate our message of unity.

It will also be a chance to measure progress on a wide range of issues, from our missions and operations, our increased readiness and reinforcement, our cyber and hybrid defences, and our relations with our partners, including the European Union.

London will be a time to celebrate our past and to look to the future. To consider what more we need to do to ensure the safety of our nations and our people. Just as NATO has done for the last 70 years.

Thank you.

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