



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE L'OTAN

Address by the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
Gerald. E. Conolly (United States)

At the Plenary Sitting of the NATO PA

Spring Session Online 2021

Dear colleagues,

We are coming to the end of four days of important and fruitful discussions. It is my great pleasure to **welcome back NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana** to our Assembly.

Dear Mircea,

In just four weeks, NATO Heads of State and Government will meet in Brussels to chart a path for NATO's adaptation for the next decade.

The Alliance is at a **critical juncture** as it confronts a new reality: a world of **systemic competition**. Autocrats in Moscow, Beijing and elsewhere are seeking to promote **parallel norms, institutions and alliances**. These threaten to undermine the rules-based system we have sought to promote and defend since World War II. Meanwhile, **other challenges** put our societies at great risk – from terrorism to climate change to pandemics.

Over the last year, our Assembly has put forward concrete ideas and recommendations for how NATO needs to adapt to these challenges. And over the last days, we could deepened our reflections and refined our ideas and recommendations.

I am **grateful to the Secretary General, and to you, Deputy Secretary General, for engaging the Assembly in the NATO 2030 reflection process.** I know you, as a former parliamentarian and member of our Assembly, recognize the importance of parliamentary and public support for our Alliance.

So, as you prepare for the NATO summit, **let me offer some thoughts about what this Assembly sees as key priorities.**

First, we must reaffirm our **unity and cohesion based on our shared democratic values**. Our commitment to democracy, human rights and the rule of law distinguishes us from other alliances. Without it, we would be just another military block.

This is why **it cannot be just a mantra that we repeat routinely in Summit communiqués**. We must demonstrate that we are serious about – and let me quote our founding fathers here – “safeguard[ing] the freedom, common heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law”.

As an Assembly, we urge our governments to **demonstrate this commitment concretely by establishing a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO**. I am encouraged that the independent



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE L'OTAN

group of experts on NATO 2030 also saw the need for a center on democratic resilience when they reported back to the NATO Secretary General.

As a further tangible contribution, **our Assembly will vote later this morning on renaming our Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security to Committee on Democracy and Security.**

We can **draw inspiration from our Swedish hosts.** They are leading the way in promoting democracy at home and abroad and in engaging the whole of society in the defense of democratic values.

A second priority: we must respond firmly to **Russia's destabilizing actions against Allies and against our partners.**

A revisionist Russia continues **to test our resolve and unity.** We must **strengthen our collective defense.** We must maintain a united posture that **imposes costs and consequences for Russia's aggressive behavior.** At the same time, we must engage Moscow in **credible, serious and clear-eyed dialogue, when it is in our interest.**

We must also stand up to **Russia's ongoing aggression against Georgia, Ukraine and our other partners.**

I have condemned Russia's massive military build-up in and around Ukraine. It is reckless, irresponsible and unjustified. Moscow must bring its troops back to their barracks.

Crimea in particular is the ultimate test of our resolve to defend the rules-based order. We must make clear that **we will never recognize Russia's illegal and forcible annexation and occupation.** This is why our Assembly actively supports Ukraine's Crimea Platform.

Third, we must **speak with one voice in relations with China. We must compete** to preserve our competitive edge, **counter** where we must and **engage** where we can and where it is in our interest. We must also **reinvigorate NATO's partnerships with like-minded democracies.** Many of them are represented here today.

Fourth, we must **complete our drawdown in Afghanistan.** But we have to do so in a way that empowers our Afghan friends to chart their future course and preserves the important gains of the last two decades. This will allow us to **adapt our counterterrorism efforts** to reflect the evolving nature of the terrorist threat.

Fifth, we must **hold the line on defense spending** and live up to the Defense Investment Pledge, including on the 2% commitment. We cannot let China and Russia take the lead in today's technological race and let them define the future of warfare. Mircea, I want to recognize your important work to ensure the Alliance maintains its technological edge and leads in setting norms and standards for emerging and disruptive technologies.

Sixth and last, we must **keep our door open** to countries who seek to join our unique community of democracies. In today's new geopolitical confrontation, we should embrace rather than fear the transformative power of NATO's open door. I am confident the Summit will reaffirm that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO and that our door remains open to Bosnia and Herzegovina too.

Dear Mircea, dear friends,

Our Assembly, including our bipartisan US delegation, has played its part in keeping our unique transatlantic link strong throughout turbulent times. The NATO Summit offers a **unique opportunity to open a new chapter and reinforce NATO as the enduring embodiment of the bond between Europe and North America, based on our shared democratic values.**



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE L'OTAN

This Assembly stands ready to play its part in supporting NATO's important adaptation and continuing to build public support for our Alliance. After the Summit, we also look forward to being an active participant in the updating of the Strategic Concept.

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY