

Mr President, Dear colleagues,

It was truly a great honour to stand before you this morning in the beautiful city of Madrid where I had the honour of accompanying our President, Gerry Connolly, and our Secretary General, Ruxandra Popa, at a historic NATO Summit last June. I would first like to congratulate and thank Zaida Cantera and the entire Spanish parliamentary delegation for their outstanding organisation. And to you, Mr President, Gerry Connolly, a huge thank you for your vision, your drive, your ethics and your humanity in serving our Assembly and each of its members.

Like Gerry, I have many ambitions for our Parliamentary Assembly. Because it is an indispensable part of our international action in the service of our ideas and values, I want it to be ever stronger and more respected within NATO and beyond. It is our responsibility, as NATO parliamentarians, to act as watchdogs and messengers, and to continue convincing our fellow citizens that nothing is more important than our democratic values.

In February 2014, I was in Maidan Square in Kyiv to support our Ukrainian friends. At that same moment, Russia was defying the inviolability of borders by tearing Crimea away from Ukraine, exhibiting an imperialist mindset that I had already witnessed as a student in Prague during the dark years of the Soviet dictatorship, and which pushed me into politics to help the people of Eastern Europe break their chains, at my own modest level, of course.

For too long, our Western societies believed that Russia had changed. Too long have we remained deaf to the warnings of our friends from the Baltic States and from Central and Eastern Europe. Too long have we closed our eyes to the approach of a new war on European soil. Today, there can be no more doubt. We are facing Russian leaders who act like true terrorists, displaying a barbarism unworthy of our civilisations by attacking populations and civil infrastructures. And they will have to be judged as such - as terrorists - before an international tribunal. In this situation, our first duty as NATO parliamentarians is to provide concrete support for a military effort to help Ukraine and its people, who, each day, offer exceptional examples of courage and resilience reflecting these values, our values of freedom, democracy and sovereignty.

Never before have our individual and collective responsibilities been so great and the stakes so high. NATO member states have shown exceptional unity in their support for Ukraine, and we can all be very proud of this. Now we too must show the same determination and unity, the same cohesion within our Parliamentary Assembly. That is how we can garner strength and respect, and how, through our parliamentary diplomacy, we can better support NATO's military efforts towards peace and security, in the fight against misinformation and the fake news that weaken the very core of our institutions.

We must continuously assert the primacy of our democratic values and international law in the face of authoritarian regimes. Welcoming to the fold Sweden and Finland, like Montenegro and North Macedonia before them, and setting up the Democratic Resilience Center - which our President so rightly cherishes - will help us in this endeavour.

We must also develop our monitoring and strategy with regard to the Indo-Pacific region and China, which remains a systemic rival. I also consider it essential to develop our links with

other institutions and assemblies, first and foremost the United Nations, but also ASEAN and the Council of Europe.

Additionally, we must strengthen ties between our armies and our populations, especially our youth. I will be proposing initiatives with this in mind, much like I did in my role as Vice-President. And, once again, I thank President Connolly for embracing the Women for Peace and Security Award, whose success has shown that it is something essential in our societies.

Such initiatives will enrich the heart of our Euro-Atlantic alliance. We were able to contribute to the new Strategic Concept; we can continue to move the needle by working efficiently within our Committees and with the support of our wonderful team of administrators, whose work I wish to highlight and whom I would like to thank. We must closely observe developments following the Madrid Summit and will present a strong set of proposals in the lead-up to the next Summit in Vilnius. We will delve into certain topics such as NATO's role in tackling the security repercussions of climate change, whether it be the movements of future climate refugees, or difficulties in ensuring supplies of raw materials, rare earth metals or hydrocarbons. And neither should we sidestep the question of our countries' technological edge, nor of the funding of research and development for the weapons of tomorrow. Our countries will need to find ways to promote a war economy to face future strategic challenges. We will prove to authoritarian regimes that they are not more effective than our democracies in this domain, far from it, as we already proved during the Covid pandemic.

Finally, we will work on a cohesive modernisation of our Assembly, within a working group representing all of our components, and employing a befitting timetable and methods. Thus, our practices will reflect our principles of democracy, solidarity and transparency. Practices through which each person will be heard regardless of electoral events, and always with the aim to better support you in your work as parliamentarians and better support our Alliance.

As such, it is with rigour, by engaging in dialogue and being attentive, that I propose to lead this battle to grow the strength and influence of our Assembly and our Alliance. And still, and always, in full support of Ukraine.

What must bind us, and what I ask of you, is commitment to a moral and ethical pact.

And so, having served our Assembly in various capacities for the past 14 years, it is with great humility that I wish to extend my sincere and heartfelt gratitude for the honour you have bestowed on me to continue, as your President, to work in your service, in the service of this Assembly, and in the service of every person here for our freedoms, our values, for the Euro-Atlantic Alliance, and for us all. Let us remain united and strong. Long live the Alliance, long live Ukraine, long live the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, long live democracy, and once again, Mr President, thank you very much.