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NATO Parliamentary Assembly

SPRING SESSION

ADDRESS

by

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INTRODUCTION

This is my first speech to the plenary assembly since becoming President, and I would like to give you a progress report on my first six months. I will do this by relating our activities to some of the key issues currently confronting the Alliance and our Assembly.

TRANSFORMATION

NATO is a dynamic Alliance which has been constantly adapting itself to new challenges which have arisen since the end of the Cold War. The first transformation saw NATO extending stability through a strategy of enlargement and partnership. The fact that we are here today in Slovenia which is celebrating its first year as a member of NATO is testament to the success of that continuing strategy.

NATO is now undergoing a second transformation. This is not yet complete, but it has already resulted in NATO's activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, and soon in Darfur and possibly even the Middle East. This new transformation is aimed at ensuring not only that NATO can meet today's security challenges, but also that its political role and relevance are maintained. Our Committees are heavily engaged in that work and I am sure will make constructive contributions to the debate.

Let me highlight a few of the questions that must still be resolved. What, for instance, will be the nature of the relationships between NATO, the European Union and the United States? How can we develop a more balanced Alliance in terms of capabilities and decision-making? How can we resolve the contradiction which I see between those who wish to keep NATO central to the transatlantic relationship and those who believe that the mission determines the coalition? What is the fundamental *raison d'être* of NATO in today's world?

NATO must not shy away from these basic issues, and our Assembly should not shy away from making its observations and recommendations on them. Our Political Committee's General Rapporteur Bert Koenders is tackling these questions, and we look forward to seeing the final version of his report at our session in Copenhagen when we will decide how best to move forward with the Assembly's analysis of these weighty problems and their possible solutions.

In the more immediate future, we also look forward to hearing from NATO's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, later this morning.

OPERATIONS AND MISSIONS

NATO's current operations provide ample evidence of the remarkable changes that have taken place within NATO over the last few years. NATO is engaged in Afghanistan, Kosovo, and Iraq, and plans are being laid for logistic assistance to the African Union's peacekeeping efforts in Darfur following last week's donor conference in Addis Ababa.

All these operations have a parliamentary dimension: approval of troop deployments, adoption of defence budgets, and explaining missions to the public. We show our interest and our involvement by witnessing operations at first hand, and we do what we can to assist in overcoming some of the obstacles that NATO faces in conducting these operations. And I should add that we find ourselves increasingly converging with colleagues from the European Parliament on issues such as Darfur, the Balkans, and election observation in the Middle East.

Let me give you one example of the effects of our visits to NATO operations. Last year, following an Assembly visit to Afghanistan, we highlighted concerns about force shortfalls in the run-up to the Presidential election. Just over a month ago, we paid another visit to Afghanistan along with General James L Jones, the Supreme Allied Commander. During that visit, President Karzai asked

us to observe the legislative elections planned for 18 September. This will be a real contribution that the Assembly can make to NATO's efforts in Afghanistan, and to the rebuilding of the Afghan state.

I invite you to nominate members of your delegations to participate in monitoring these elections in an effort which I hope will extend to regions well beyond Kabul.

There is still more that we can do to help with NATO operations. At our last session, General James L Jones, the Supreme Allied Commander, told us about the problems of national caveats on the forces made available for operations. Some of these caveats severely limit the freedom of commanders to employ the forces assigned to them. We must press our governments to remove those caveats, or at the very least, declare them in advance so that commanders can make their operational plans accordingly.

We must also support NATO's efforts to produce a new mechanism for funding operations. Right now, the nations providing forces for NATO operations bear the costs of those forces. Some fairer method must be found to ensure that if an operation is agreed by all the NATO nations, the costs must be shared among all those nations. I believe that the Assembly could develop ideas in this area, and encourage our governments to move towards a more equitable sharing of operational costs.

The Defence and Security Committee is looking at these areas in detail, and I am looking forward to learning about their findings later this year.

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

When you elected me as President, I stressed that transatlantic relations would be a key priority. I myself have visited the United States twice since my election as Assembly President, and I look forward to a third visit in order to meet the Speakers of the House and Senate. I support the initiatives of the leaders of the Assembly's Political Groups to make contacts with the corresponding party leaderships on Capitol Hill, and I would urge all our delegations to promote and nurture their contacts with our friends in the United States.

I am pleased to see the delegation from the United States that we have here today and I would like to convey our appreciation to them for their outstanding efforts to support our Alliance and our Assembly.

We must take full advantage of every opportunity our organisation offers to conduct dialogue with our colleagues from the United States. Transatlantic relations are central to the Alliance, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly is a unique forum for legislators from both sides of the Atlantic.

NATO'S NEIGHBOURS

NATO's borders keep changing, and they will continue to change. Just over a year ago, Slovenia acceded to the Washington Treaty along with six other nations. Three more nations – **Albania**, **Croatia** and **Macedonia** – are working hard on their Membership Action Plans, and still more nations aspire to NATO membership in the longer term.

The Balkans remain a key Assembly priority. Already this year we have held a seminar in Dubrovnik, and our Committees have visited Kosovo and Macedonia. A further seminar will take place in Montenegro in just a few weeks, and Committees will visit both Sarajevo and Belgrade later in the year.

Our discussions have been wide-ranging, but Kosovo has naturally been a key focus. This is a crucial year for Kosovo, and discussions of its status have been at the forefront of our deliberations.

We have also looked at other regional issues and I feel compelled to stress that relations with Croatia are restrained by the failure to make progress in detaining General Ante Gotovina, and the depth of Serbia and Montenegro's commitment to democratic values is called into question by lack of progress in tracking down Ratko Mladic and Radovan Karadzic.

On the subject of democratic values, the Assembly should congratulate itself on its contribution to the international election observation missions in **Ukraine** last year. Those missions played a crucial role in ensuring that the will of the Ukrainian people was respected.

Here I must pay tribute to Bruce George, former President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, and a long-standing member of our Assembly. His leadership of all three International Election Observation Missions to Ukraine can only be described as magnificent.

The Assembly has an excellent relationship with Ukraine which was confirmed to me only last week when I met Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk at the EAPC security forum in Sweden. I am also pleased to report that yesterday the Standing Committee agreed to increase at the Ukrainian delegation's request its representation to the Assembly, and a visit of the Bureau is being planned for early September.

The situation in Ukraine contrasts sharply with neighbouring **Belarus**. This remains an anachronism in Europe, and it is difficult to see how we can help, but we must show that we have not forgotten those people in Belarus who are yearning for the democratic freedoms that we all take for granted. We are therefore inviting opposition representatives to a seminar which will be hosted in Vilnius later this year.

And let me take this opportunity to commend the work of Slovenia's Foreign Minister, Dr. Dimitrij Rupel, who is currently the Chairman-in-office of the OSCE. A vast array of issues is being addressed within the OSCE framework under his guiding hand.

We are also paying close attention to the situation in the Southern Caucasus. This was discussed extensively in the NATO-Russia Parliamentary Committee on Friday, and our Committee on the ~~Civil Dimension of Security~~ is focusing on this region. In the autumn I plan to visit **Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia** with members of the Bureau, and the Assembly will hold a Rose-Roth seminar in Yerevan in October. We will also invite senior figures from Georgia and Russia to present their views on regional issues at our plenary sitting in Copenhagen.

I believe that we must also pay close attention to the Black Sea region, and I intend to visit **Romania, Bulgaria and Moldova** during the course of my Presidency.

The Assembly is also very active in developing a parliamentary dimension to parallel NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has long recognised the need for dialogue with nations bordering the **Mediterranean**, and like NATO, we have recently sought to extend our dialogue further into the **Middle East**.

Our Assembly has created a special status of "Mediterranean Associate Membership" in order to enable our partners in the region to become more involved in our work, and our work takes us increasingly into the region. Later this morning, the Assembly will be invited to endorse the Standing Committee's decisions to accept requests from **Algeria, Israel, Jordan and Mauritania** for Mediterranean Associate Membership.

Together with members of the Bureau, I saw how serious the situation is in the Middle East. Despite early signs of optimism that the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians had resumed, we were deeply concerned at what we saw and heard. Developments in the West Bank are undermining the viability of the Palestinian state, there is confusion over Gaza disengagement, and unilateralism, not negotiation, is the order of the day.

We must avert what could become a renewed spiral of violence and conflict. It is for that reason that I invited parliamentary representatives from the Palestinian Legislative Council to take part in our proceedings, and I intend to invite Palestinian and Israeli representatives to address our plenary sitting in Copenhagen.

Furthermore, we are trying to convene a special meeting at our Mediterranean Seminar in Naples where delegates from the Knesset and the Palestinian Legislative Council can have a dialogue facilitated by our Bureau and the Chairman of the Assembly's Special Mediterranean Group.

PREVENTING THE PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

Let me conclude by returning to an issue affecting the NATO nations themselves. We are all painfully aware of the need to protect our societies from a host of threats, but many of our nations are still poorly prepared to deal with the nightmare prospects of terrorist attacks involving weapons of mass destruction. I believe that we have a special responsibility to ensure that our governments redouble their efforts in this area. One of the reasons that I feel so strongly about this issue is that last year I participated in a decision-making exercise concerning terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. I have invited the organisers of the exercise – including Senator Sam Nunn, a former member of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and currently the co-chair of the Nuclear Threat Initiative – to present a shortened version of that exercise to us today.

I am sure that after participating in this exercise, entitled "Black Dawn", you will share my concerns.

CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, I would like to thank all of the representatives to the Assembly for their support and for their involvement in the Assembly's activities. I am looking forward to the next year and a half of my Presidency, and I would like to thank you all for the confidence you have placed in me.
