

Draft Speech

President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

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Mister President,

Madam Speaker,

Ambassador Vershbow,

Colleagues and friends of the NATO Parliamentary
Assembly,

[short introduction in Estonian]

As you know, one week ago, our Heads of State and Government, met in Chicago for an important summit. I had the privilege and honour to represent the Assembly at this distinguished gathering, and I would like, for the record, to express to you, Ambassador Vershbow, our Assembly's highest appreciation.

Our Assembly values the opportunity to present the perspectives of the Alliance's parliamentarians at NATO Summits very much.

In my address in Chicago, I outlined the key issues of our Assembly. Today, I will elaborate on these concerns.

The Chicago Summit was an important milestone for the Alliance. I know that the Standing Committee felt that the Summit could not just be a cheerful "business as usual" gathering. That the Alliance is facing grave challenges, and our publics have the right to expect decisive action from the Alliance leaders.

We all know what these challenges are:

- unprecedented pressure on our defence budgets;
- operational commitments which remain particularly demanding;
- and a changing, ever more complex security environment, with new emerging powers playing a growing role in world affairs, and new threats forcing us to constantly adapt our defences.

These challenges are serious because they call into question the traditional ways of doing business, and they put to the test some of the core underlying principles of the Alliance: solidarity and efficiency.

We must ensure that these fundamental principles remain true today and for the future. This means, first and foremost, preserving and strengthening the transatlantic bond and the solidarity pledge which lie at the heart of our Alliance.

And second, maintaining and enhancing the Alliance's ability to respond to both traditional threats, and to new and emerging ones.

On both accounts, I would say the outcome of the Chicago Summit is reassuring: Heads of State and Government pledged to take several important steps to adapt NATO to the challenges of today and tomorrow.

Now comes the hard part. These pledges must be followed by concrete actions. Our people expect us to act together decisively so that NATO continues to preserve their security. So let me review what I see as the key priorities for this “post-Chicago” phase.

1. Smart Defence

One major challenge to NATO is the ongoing economic crisis.

During the first two years of the financial crisis, defence spending by European members of NATO fell by 45 billion dollars. In the face of such spending cuts, it is increasingly difficult for NATO members to maintain defence capabilities in an appropriate way to fulfil NATO’s commitments and ambitions.

We have reached a critical point where the aggregate of our individual efforts will be insufficient.

We must not react to this economic crisis by cutting our budgets and capabilities in a way that leads to a security crisis!

We must instead concentrate our efforts to make the conviction laid out in the Lisbon Strategic Concept, that NATO remains the fundamental cornerstone of our security and an important contributor to global security, a reality.

This is why we need Smart Defence. We must coordinate our resources more efficiently as a collective whole, and develop a coherent, joint and long-term approach to Smart Defence.

There are already many examples of how effective the principles of Smart Defence can be. An excellent example is NATO's Baltic Air Policing arrangement.

The same is true for air policing arrangements in Albania, Slovenia and Iceland, the AWACS programme, the Allied

Ground Surveillance capability, the Strategic Airlift Capability, and the Multinational Logistics Coordination Centre.

Importantly also, NATO is developing a missile defence capability to protect Alliance people and territory against the threat of ballistic missiles. In Chicago, Heads of State and Government declared the new missile defence system's interim operational capability. This is an important step, both technically and politically.

So there is already a good basis to build upon, and NATO is perfecting the procedures and institutions that will allow it to handle the challenges and opportunities presented by Smart Defence. As Winston Churchill said: "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."

However, while the technical issues seem to be manageable, and the economic aspects are clearly beneficial, some facets of Smart Defence pose difficult political questions with important sovereignty implications.

Ultimately, we need to think afresh, what some call a new “mindset”: we need the strength, the political will and mutual trust to place collective interests and solidarity ahead of individual national concerns.

Only in this way, we can turn severe economic constraints into incentives for a more capable, modernized and efficient NATO.

Through Smart Defence, we Europeans can also demonstrate our commitment to bearing a fairer share of the burden of our collective defence.

Operation Unified Protector in Libya was a true success. At the same time, it brought to light a number of critical shortfalls in our military capabilities in Europe, and our long-standing over-reliance on United States assets. We cannot close our eyes to this situation any more.

We Europeans, in particular, need to get more efficiency and synergy from our aggregate capabilities, and fill the most critical gaps. Whether we do this in the NATO framework or the EU framework doesn't matter.

Both organisations pursue the same goals. We cannot afford competition between them any longer!

2. Alliance adaptation and new and emerging threats

As we adapt our Alliance for the next decade and beyond, we also need to strengthen our capabilities to address not only traditional threats, but also new and emerging ones: cyber-attacks, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, piracy, and climate change, to name just a few.

Since we are in Estonia, I would like to focus on cyber-defence, which is also one of my main priorities. As you know, my first presidential visit led me to the Baltic States. In Tallinn I visited your Cooperative Cyberdefence Centre of Excellence.

A lot has been done already to secure NATO's networks and build Allies' capacity to prevent and deal with the consequences of attack.

I welcome these important steps, but I remain deeply concerned about the cyber threat.

On Saturday, I had an opportunity to meet Colonel Ilmar Tamm, the Head of the Cooperative Cyberdefence Centre, who told me about the progress of this institution.

The Centre plays a vital role in helping to build national capacity and sharing good practices. And indeed, much more can be done to build our collective capacity, and better coordinate our response.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Awareness means empowerment. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly can help to raise awareness of this challenge and ensure that our own countries are playing their full part in international efforts to increase cyber security. And the same is true for the other threats I mentioned.

3. Afghanistan

Let me now turn to our greatest operational challenge: Afghanistan.

I want to pay tribute to Estonia's contribution. Very early on, Estonia adopted what we now call the comprehensive approach, contributing simultaneously to combat, training, reconstruction and development.

As parliamentarians, we have a clear responsibility to explain to our citizens why we are there: No more export of terrorism from Afghanistan! And for that, a secure, peaceful and stabilized Afghanistan is an essential precondition.

We owe this to the Afghan people. We owe it to our soldiers fighting in Afghanistan and to those whose lives have been lost or forever changed there to ensure that their sacrifice is not in vain.

We need a responsible handover, coordinated decisions on troop levels, and a sustainable post-2014 strategy.

The Chicago Summit sent a strong positive signal by confirming our collective commitment to the transition strategy, and committing to support the Afghan National Security Forces financially, and with training, advice and mentoring, beyond 2014.

For the first time, the Summit brought together not only representatives of ISAF troop contributing nations, but also from all the countries and institutions which have a stake in the security of Afghanistan and of the region.

Engaging Afghanistan's neighbours in particular should be one of our top priorities. This is why I will myself travel to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan this autumn.

It is essential to reassure our partners in the region that the end of the NATO combat mission in Afghanistan will not mean the end our interest in Afghanistan or the stability of that region.

4. Partnerships - Russia

And this brings me naturally to another important priority for the post-Chicago phase: partnerships. Partnerships have become a core mission for NATO and a vital dimension of the way we do business.

As our Heads of State and Government have agreed in Chicago, we need to reach out to all those nations that face the same security challenges and share our ambition to build a more secure world.

At the same time, we must continue to strengthen our cooperation with our traditional partners. As Henry Ford said: “Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.”

And here I want to mention in particular our unique and indispensable partnership with Russia.

This week, we celebrate two important milestones in NATO-Russia relations:

Yesterday marked the 15th anniversary of the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security. Today is the 10th anniversary of the Rome Declaration, which created the NATO-Russia Council.

In the spirit of those landmark documents, NATO took a big step in Lisbon when it pressed the reset button. You might say it was a leap of faith.

Our Assembly also pressed its own reset button, on the understanding that parliamentary dialogue and diplomacy help address differences, promote better understanding and share views on issues of common concern.

A lot has been achieved since Lisbon, but this regained trust in the relationship is fragile. Political signals matter. So I hope that we will see positive signals coming from Moscow, from newly re-elected President Putin.

The Assembly has already engaged in a constructive dialogue with the new Duma delegation, and obviously, we continue to value our ongoing dialogue with the Federation Council.

After our session in Bucharest last year, I led a visit by our Bureau to Moscow, the first Assembly visit there for over five years. We also look forward to resuming Committee visits to Russia later this year. We hope that we can consolidate here the achievements of the last year.

Let me say a few words about two other partnerships.

5. Ukraine

First: Ukraine. I have on several occasions expressed the Assembly's serious concern regarding recent political developments in Ukraine, and in particular the imprisonment of former government officials, and their treatment in prison.

When news emerged about the brutal assault on former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko during her transfer from prison to hospital last month, I issued a statement condemning such actions, and urging President Yanukovich to release Ms Tymoshenko without any further delay and to allow her to receive medical treatment abroad.

Two days ago I received a letter of Ms. Tymoshenko's daughter that encouraged the Assembly to increase the pressure on Ukraine to return to a democratic path. On Saturday, I agreed with the leader of the Ukrainian delegation, Andriy Shkil, that I will lead a visit to Ukraine in July and to send a strong signal:

We are deeply troubled by recent developments. Ukraine has pledged to uphold democratic values and principles as part of its partnership with NATO and its aspirations for European integration.

We greatly value the active co-operation with our Ukrainian Friends. We appreciate the frank and open dialogue we have with you.

But these developments call into question Ukraine's commitment to European values. We are looking to Ukrainian authorities for a clear demonstration that they remain committed to respecting the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

6. Arab World

In expanding and strengthening NATO's partnerships, we also need to seize the unique, historic, opportunity to fundamentally re-shape our relations with the Arab world.

We must support those who aspire to the same freedoms and rights that we all enjoy.

Of course, countries of the region are following different paths, and none of those paths is easy. There are setbacks, and the risk of backsliding into new autocratic regimes is never very far away.

Violence continues in Syria, despite the authorities' stated commitment to United Nations peace efforts. I condemn Friday's horrific massacre in Houla in the strongest terms.

Any form of violence against the civilian population is unacceptable. Syria must fully comply with the terms of the UN ceasefire plan, and allow UN monitors to conduct their mission safely and unhindered.

So, we should not be naïve: the situation in the region carries dangers and challenges. However, we should also not lose sight of the unique window of opportunity the Arab Spring has opened, first and foremost, for the people of the region, but also for our relations with the region.

I feel encouraged by developments in Egypt, where presidential elections are currently taking place. The strong participation is a clear reaffirmation of the people's call for democracy!

As you have heard me say on numerous occasions, I am convinced that this Assembly can make a vital contribution in reaching out to the new political forces in the Arab world and exploring with them possible avenues for assistance and cooperation.

We are not starting from scratch. Our Assembly already has a long history of cooperation with partners in North Africa and the Middle East, and I am delighted that many of our friends from the region could join us for this Session in Tallinn.

But I want our Assembly to set the course for taking this cooperation to the next level. Our new cooperation must better reflect our common interests, but also the fundamental values to which all our citizens aspire.

We have started already. Two months ago, in Marseilles, we reviewed with our colleagues from the region the possible entry points for assistance in economic and political transition. We must build on these initial discussions and develop concrete actions.

Second, we also need to continue to show our presence. This is why I am planning to travel to the region a second time: To deepen our engagement with Tunisia, and hopefully open up dialogue with Egypt.

But I must mention that our Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group chaired by Senator Cabras is also at the forefront of the Assembly's engagement efforts, and our Committees too are increasingly playing an active role in this vitally important area.

7. Open Door Policy

Let me now mention NATO enlargement, an issue long championed by the Assembly. New members have revitalized our Alliance, and I therefore welcome the strong message of encouragement and support that the Chicago Summit sent to our friends who are still waiting to walk through the door: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro.

As Graham Greene said: “There is always one moment when the door opens and lets the future in.” I think, our Heads of State and Government in Chicago have espied the future already.

Our Annual Session in Prague in November will provide an excellent opportunity to reflect on where we stand ten years after NATO’s landmark Summit there, which marked the Alliance’s inclusion of seven new members, including our host today, Estonia. So I hope we can make NATO enlargement a central theme for the Prague Session.

8. Communication and young people

Before I conclude, let me say a few words about one important, last issue: public communication. You know this is an issue I feel particularly strongly about, and I think we should all feel strongly about, because it brings us back to the challenges I mentioned at the beginning of my speech.

At a time when we face unprecedented strains on our budgets, it becomes even harder to justify why we need to spend money on defence. All of us here know why: because security is an essential prerequisite for economic prosperity, and because without continued investment in defence, we run the risk of an irreversible erosion of our capabilities. But we need to do a better job explaining this to our citizens.

We also need to do a better job explaining to them what NATO is and that our Alliance provides a unique and indispensable guarantee for their security.

And first and foremost, we need to reach out to the next generation, to the young people in our countries, because they are our future. But also because they grew up in the post-Cold War era.

Their threat perception significantly differs from the threat perception of our generation that has grown up in the times of bipolarity.

The young generation was born into a world with more distant and multi-faceted, but not less dangerous threats. But these dangers are less obvious and tangible. That increases the need for explaining security policies.

Public communications efforts are an investment for the future. This is why I was glad that the Atlantic Treaty Association, of which you know I am also the President, hosted a Young Atlanticists Summit on the margins of the Chicago Summit.

We need more initiatives of this kind, and I am determined to ensure that our Assembly plays its full part in this area as well as in all the other areas I mentioned today.

The Spring Session in Tallinn needs to send a strong signal that we parliamentarians have a clear sense of the very importance of NATO. We understand the need for a value-based Alliance. We know that we need to restore NATO's position on the global stage.

Thank you for your attention.