

Draft Speech
President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
Dr Karl A. Lamers (Germany)
Plenary Sitting, Bucharest, Romania
10 October 2011

Mister President,
Presidents of the House and of the Senate,
Ministers,
Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Colleagues and friends of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly,

*[Doamnelor și domnilor,
am marea plăcere de a mă afla la București și de a vă putea saluta în acest oraș minunat la
Adunarea Parlamentară a NATO.]*

A.

Almost a year ago, our Heads of State and Government met in Lisbon to reaffirm NATO's enduring relevance and importance, and spell out their vision of the Alliance's role in the next decade.

The underlying assumption behind the adoption of a new Strategic Concept was that the world had changed and that it continued to change. For NATO that means that if it wants to keep providing effective protection for the Alliance's territory and populations, it needs to evolve too.

When they met in Lisbon, our Heads of State and Government probably didn't think that the new vision they outlined in the Strategic Concept would be tested so quickly. But it was. And events since then have proved them right.

From the ongoing financial and economic crisis to the transformation in North Africa and the Middle East, recent world events have confirmed the importance of reactivity, flexibility and effectiveness in our rapidly changing world.

Looking back at the past year, we can say that a lot has been achieved in implementing the New Strategic Concept and the Lisbon agenda.

First,

Allies have reaffirmed their commitment to collective defence.

And they are adding a new layer of protection with a NATO missile defence capability to safeguard our territory and populations from the growing threat of ballistic missiles.

I know Romania stands firmly behind this project, and I welcome the recent signing of an agreement with the United States to host defensive interceptors in your country.

Second,

progress has been made in enhancing the Alliance's role in relation to emerging security challenges, and notably cyber-defence - one of my key priorities of my presidency. NATO will be better prepared to defend against attacks; it will help member states be better prepared. And it now has clear procedures in place to respond to an attack. I welcome these important steps, but I remain deeply concerned about the cyber threat.

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.

I have therefore led visits to the NATO Communication and Information Systems Services Agency (NCSA) in Mons and to the Cooperative Cyber-Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn, and I take every opportunity I can to highlight concerns about this issue.

Some countries still need to build up cyber defence capacities, and there is still much to be done to better coordinate our approaches and our responses to the cyber threat.

Not all this can be done in the NATO context alone. For instance, we need to improve international cooperation in areas like law enforcement to ensure that cyber threats can be addressed adequately across national borders.

Third,
NATO is deepening existing partnerships and reaching out to new partners. And operations in Afghanistan and in Libya have demonstrated the crucial role that partners play in our joint efforts.

Fourth,
NATO has started reforming its civilian and military structures to make them more efficient, more effective, and better able to deal with the broad range of tasks the New Strategic Concept sets for our Alliance.

In other areas, and I'm thinking in particular of NATO-EU cooperation, the pace of progress unfortunately has been slower. The upcoming Summit in Chicago in May next year will provide a good opportunity to review where the Alliance stands on all these issues. Our Assembly will also continue to monitor implementation of the Lisbon agenda.

Another issue of the Lisbon Agenda is the promotion of the role of women in security matters. In this context, I am very glad about the recent decision taken by the Nobel Prize Committee to honour Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakul Karman for their non-violent struggle for safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace building work in Africa and the Arab world.

I fully agree with the committee that we cannot achieve lasting peace and sustainable security in the world unless women obtain the same opportunities as men to influence developments at all levels of society.

B.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in my view, two events will have a profound effect on our security in the coming year and beyond.

One is the financial and economic crisis that entails severe budget restraints.

And the other is the democratic awakening in North Africa and the Middle East.

Let me elaborate on these two issues.

1.

The British writer Aldous Huxley famously wrote: "Facts do not cease to exist because they are ignored". The financial and economic crisis is a fact we cannot ignore today and which will significantly impact our defence policies and our defence budgets.

We are living in a time of financial scarcity. And as parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to oversee the spending priorities of our governments and to balance the many competing demands for scarce financial resources. Our nations each have only one set of armed forces. And - that's what the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's recommendations on the Strategic Concept underlined - we also only have one set of taxpayers.

The crisis shows that there simply is no alternative to working together, to strengthening interoperability and to pooling resources and capabilities. So we need to work together to find common solutions, and when I say “we”, I mean Europeans in particular.

2.

Now, let me turn to North Africa and the Middle East.

Two weeks ago, I visited Tunisia together with our Secretary General, David Hobbs. I was highly impressed by the determination of my interlocutors to demonstrate to the world that the Jasmine Revolution succeeded, and that democracy can be built on the ruins of decades of dictatorship and corruption. Tunisians have a clear sense of the example they are setting for others. “Example is leadership”, the Nobel Prize winner Albert Schweitzer said. Against this background it’s essential to help Tunisia realize the promise of its revolution.

As I have said repeatedly, I am convinced that this Assembly has the opportunity - and in my opinion, the duty - to assist if we are asked. We can make a vital contribution, based on our shared values, and the experience of those of our members which have themselves undergone democratic transition.

I hope next year we can take concrete steps to reach out to the new political forces in the region and explore with them possible avenues for assistance and cooperation.

And that includes Tunisia of course, but also Egypt. And now Libya.

I mentioned that our Alliance is based on values, values of freedom and democracy. So when an authoritarian regime in Libya turned with all its might against its own people, our governments stood on the side of the Libyan people, on the side of freedom.

Our Assembly supported NATO’s decision to embark upon Operation Unified Protector to defend civilian populations in Libya against attack, an operation conducted under the clear legal mandate given by the United Nations, and with the support of the Arab League.

Today, although the threat posed by the old regime has not disappeared entirely, we can say with confidence that the military operation is on the verge of completion, and democratic transition has already started in Libya.

Popular uprisings in North Africa have shown how people’s aspirations to freedom can change history. Charles de Gaulle once said: “History does not teach fatalism. There are moments when the will of a handful of free men breaks through determinism and opens up new roads.” Today, in Tunisia, in Egypt, and in Libya, we see free men and women building new roads to democracy.

At the same time, we are inspired by the courage of those daring to oppose oppression and brutality elsewhere, especially in Syria. Unfortunately, violence continues there, as the regime in Damascus chooses to ignore the legitimate aspirations of its citizens and instead clings to power at any cost. Such brutality must be condemned. International pressure must intensify until violence ceases, and until the requests of the Syrian people are met.

C.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

now, let me turn to another important region: Afghanistan. There also, important developments have taken place in the past year. The transition to Afghanistan taking the lead for its own security has officially started, and is being implemented region by region. This sets a clear path for us and for our Afghan friends, which we need to take resolutely, hand in hand.

And here I see an important role for our Assembly. As national parliamentarians, we have a clear responsibility to explain to our citizens the reasons for and requirements of our presence in Afghanistan.

But at the same time, we must ensure that transition is implemented in a coordinated manner, and that decisions on troop withdrawals in one country do not jeopardize our collective effort.

We all know how hard it is to decide to send young men and women to fight in a foreign land. And here let me express my gratitude and highest respect to our soldiers who fight in Afghanistan and in other NATO operations. They risk their lives to protect those of others and to defend our Alliance and the values it represents. Many have lost their lives, many have suffered life-changing injuries, and many will carry deep psychological wounds - damage to their souls. We owe it to them to ensure that their sacrifice is not in vain.

Finally, as parliamentarians, we can play an important role by engaging our counterparts in Afghanistan, but also in Pakistan. So I am delighted that we have delegations from both Afghanistan and Pakistan present here and I look forward to continuing our fruitful cooperation with you.

D.

When you elected me as the president of our Assembly in Warsaw, I outlined the priorities I had set. Before I conclude, I would like to review briefly where we stand on these.

I have already spoken about some of them: NATO's New Strategic Concept and our duty to monitor its implementation, Afghanistan, collective defence and burden-sharing, and cyber-defence.

Other key priorities, I announced in Warsaw, are: our relations with Russia and the challenge of building ties between our publics and NATO and our Assembly.

1. Let me start with our relations with Russia. I am happy to say I think we have made good progress: By assuming that cooperation with Russia is not merely an option, but the only alternative, we slightly re-opened the channels for dialogue with the Russian delegation to the NATO PA. From Afghanistan to arms control to counterterrorism, there are plenty of examples of how cooperation with Russia can enhance our common security. Of course, we have differences and we will discuss these frankly.

But we should not let them prevent us from working together in those many areas where cooperation benefits us all.

In a few weeks, I will lead a high-level delegation of the whole Assembly's Bureau to Moscow. This is an important step in our relationship and I look forward to further fruitful exchanges with Moscow.

2.

Last but not least, I had set communication and public outreach as another priority.

I am glad to report that here also we have made good progress.

One of the camera crews here is making a video about the Assembly and its work. This will be available to all our members and through the Internet. This tool will help us reach out to people through our own websites, and in particular reach out to the younger generation.

I have myself addressed universities and youth congresses in Belgrade and Vilnius - to mention just a few - and I am encouraging such outreach efforts to be included whenever possible as part of the Assembly's many activities throughout the year. This needs to be a long-term effort, and all of us need to contribute to this dialogue.

E.

So looking ahead at the coming year, I see a busy but exciting agenda for our Assembly. And I see opportunities for this body to contribute actively in promoting our Alliance's values, and explaining its roles and missions to our own publics and to our many partners.

I am impressed by the ideas, spirit and engagement which you all bring to our work. This all contributes to greater peace and stability all over the world.

As you know, I am passionate for our Assembly, and I hope that this afternoon, you will again entrust me with your confidence to continue this work and to turn our ambitions into reality.

Vă mulțumesc pentru atenție.

Thank you very much!

_____**ENDS**_____