

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

First of all, let me welcome you all to Estonia. Not only do I have the honor to host for the first time the NATO Parliamentary Assembly here in my country, it is also the first time anarchists from over Europe have gathered in Estonia to protest the presence of democratically elected parliamentarians from the Alliance. Eight years after joining the Alliance, this was the one aspect of NATO membership we had not yet experienced.

More seriously, I want to thank you for coming because your presence here raises NATO's visibility, makes NATO less an abstraction and reinforces the commitment we share in the Alliance. NATO has an overwhelmingly positive image here, it is regarded highly and seen as one of the most relevant of international organizations. That is not necessarily the case in many other Allied capitals. For Estonians, NATO is not merely something that is nice to have, but rather is seen as a vital element of security in an insecure and unpredictable world.

I shan't go through the recent Summit decisions – you know them as well as I, but also because this was in our view an implementation summit, not so much an anniversary or a decision-making summit. Which is fine and reasonable – we have a full plate, the 2010 Strategic Concept needs to be implemented and our engagement in Afghanistan needs to be wrapped up (or taken to the next phase, if you prefer the politically correct version).

One thing – and it is no minor matter – that keeps worrying me, however, is the overall health of the transatlantic partnership. The partnership in which one half looks increasingly frail or simply disengaged and the other is looking elsewhere. Where one more or less dislikes military power and is more comfortable talking about other forms of power and the other, who, I would say, sees the world in all its shades and challenges, a Hobbesian world if you will. Yes, military power may represent a logic from another era in Europe but in most other places in the world it still remains very much a logic of today and even tomorrow; it is a logic we have abandoned among ourselves, but wishing it away elsewhere is precisely that: wishful thinking. That Europe is the only continent that continues to disarm itself underscores my point. When the economic crisis hit Europe in 2008-2009, defense was usually the first areas to be axed (and axed disproportionately compared to other expenditures); in reality, the crisis only accelerated what already had become a long term trend.

Of all countries, with the dramatic decline in the economy in here in Estonia in the 2008-2010 you would expect our rhetoric to support the notion that security and defense cannot be a priority when so many other areas need attention and funding. Yet, we have seen things differently. Still a relatively poor country by Western European standards, yet a country that bails out countries richer than we, Estonia also could have found any number of reasons to prioritize spending in areas other than defense. Yet we did not because there is (enough) political will to keep as our priority meeting the commitments we have taken on in joining the Alliance. We have reached the 2% defense expenditure benchmark and we intend to keep to it.

The "smart defense" initiative has been discussed and debated sufficiently so I won't go into this here. Let me just say that smart defense does not mean "cheap defense". Using "smart" to justify "cheap" may strike some as clever but it definitely is not smart. One cannot expect remarkable output without proper input. Or to put it another way, we need not only to be "smart", we also need "defense".

One thing I would urge everyone here to think about is how to maintain all the experiences our militaries have collectively gathered in Afghanistan – be it from the war fighting aspect or the security sector reform perspective – in the post-Afghanistan environment. How to maintain interoperability standards, the logistics, medical and intelligence cooperation accumulated over the past decade of our involvement there, the list goes on.

Nobody would wish for a new conflict to keep up the momentum. I do think, however, that the reality is that we cannot predict when or where a new conflict may arise that requires NATO's involvement. Most likely it will be sooner rather than later, for that is the nature of world we live in. It may or may not look like Libya, it may or may not be a nation-building effort such as Afghanistan – which is why we must plan prudently for a full range of contingencies.

This being Estonia, I wish briefly also to mention cyber defense. The overall momentum in NATO as concerns cyber security, which culminated at Lisbon has waned somewhat, and for various reasons that you perhaps know better. At a minimum, we must fulfill and implement our existing and agreed-upon cyber defense policy. And we need to think beyond that. This does not mean we need to go over to cyber offense (although many of our Allies have done this nationally so why do we not even talk about collectively?) Nor does this mean we task the Alliance to protect our national critical information infrastructure. First and foremost I am talking about understanding that NATO has a clear role in cyber security (as does the EU) and in prioritizing this component of our collective security. For, again, much of the rest of the world is doing precisely that.

It is about switching from the intelligence mindset – need to know where we share little – to an interoperability mindset – need to share – that is recognizing that whatever is used from outside the Alliance against one ally is almost certainly going to be used against other allies.Â Interoperability is what allows NATO to function as well as it does. Why do we hamstring ourselves when it comes to cyber?

Finally, I would like to thank all the Allies who have in the past or intend in the future to participate in the Baltic Air Policing mission. Besides its undisputed military and political value your participation in air policing has immense symbolic value. In a region where there are no collective NATO facilities or headquarters or warehouses, Air Policing means to the people of the Baltic countries – and beyond – that NATO really is here. Thank you.