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NATO Parliamentary Assembly

SPRING SESSION

ADDRESS

by

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PRESIDENT OF THE NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

OPENING CEREMONY
FIRST PLENARY SITTING

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Presidents,
Ministers,
Ambassadors,
Dear Colleagues and Friends of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

An old French proverb tells us that "*le hasard fait toujours bien les choses*", and this is the case today in several respects.

First, on a purely personal level, to which you will permit me to refer: I have the honour and the good fortune to welcome a plenary session of our Assembly, in this case the spring session, to the capital of my country during my term as President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

So you can imagine my feelings of pleasure and pride at this time: pride in welcoming you to my city, which is for me – and will, I hope, become so for you also – a perpetual source of delight. Like all Parisians I am in love with my city, with each of its stones, its streets and its bridges. The pride of a Parisian is coupled with the pride of an elected representative, because I am both Deputy and Councillor for Paris for the district where I grew up. Therefore I do not need to tell you, along with my most cordial expressions of welcome, that my team and I are entirely at your disposal during your stay. But enough of "Parisian nationalism". These expressions of welcome also come from the entire French Delegation, from my friend Paulette Brisepierre, the President of the French Delegation, who brings to us the sunshine of Marrakesh, from our former President, Loïc Bouvard, and his Brittany, like Jean-Michel Boucheron, and of course all our other colleagues, from Paris or the provinces.

But let us return to the coincidence which is highly significant politically in this case. It was here in Paris, 51 years ago almost to the day, that the first session of NATO parliamentarians was held. Those who are mindful of history remember that France had been a key major participant in rebuilding the security system in Europe in the immediate post-war period: the signing of the Franco-British Dunkirk Treaty on 4 April 1947, then the Brussels Treaty on 17 March 1948 extending this alliance to the Benelux countries, all of which were landmarks on the way to the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington on 4 April 1949. The inaugural meeting of what was then called the North Atlantic Assembly on 18-23 July 1955 coincided with the establishment on French soil of most of the institutions in the NATO system (the Atlantic Council, the Major Commands, the NATO Defence College). We were then at a key point in the Cold War and in the history of the Alliance, but also in the building of Europe, and France played a major part in that also, a part that was sometimes conflicting...

On 30 August 1954, a year before the North Atlantic Assembly meeting to which I have just referred, the French National Assembly had rejected the Treaty setting up the European Defence Community (EDC), although it had its origin in a French initiative. This rejection was to lead to the rearming of Germany in NATO, not as part of European armed forces. Thus, during the half-century that was to follow, NATO was setting itself up as the dominant defence organisation on the continent, whereas the European Community was building itself mainly around the great economic issues of the Customs Union and the Monetary Union, based on the Treaty of Rome.

There is another coincidence that is worth noting today, when we have this history in mind. How can we fail to note that our session, which starts this very day, coincides with the anniversary of another rejection, that of the referendum on the European Constitution, which the French people ruled out on 29 May last, just a year ago, involving as we know an unprecedented check on the building of Europe

and the *de facto* freezing of the major advances in European defence contained in the Treaty; these, another irony of history, had been included in the Treaty at the request of the French negotiators.

So, fifty years on, history is still repeating itself! The most entertaining aspect is that, just as the vote against the EDC in 1954 had guaranteed that for half a century NATO would prevail over attempts to build a truly European defence, in the same way the rejection of the Constitution on the pretext that it would have "made Europe subject to NATO" leads to exactly the same result ...

Historians will not fail to ponder these repeated ironies. You will understand that I for my part, because we are in Paris, cannot let these coincidences that are not coincidences pass without trying to give you a view of relations between France and NATO at a time when the Alliance itself is still trying to find itself and when many crises and threats can be glimpsed on the horizon in a world that is very far from peaceful; quite the contrary.

Let me first consider the state of our Alliance six months from the Riga Summit. NATO's position today is paradoxical. It is indisputable that the Alliance has survived the geopolitical revolution caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Soviet threat.

Our Alliance has been able to play a fundamental part in consolidating peace on the European continent by a decisive contribution to settling conflicts in the Balkans and by its highly effective commitment to combating terrorism, particularly in Afghanistan.

At the same time the Alliance has provided itself with new capabilities such as the NRF, to enable it to react more quickly to the whole range of missions likely to arise. Above all, by continuing to develop original partnerships with the European Union in its security and defence dimension, as we see in Bosnia, and on another level with Russia, Ukraine and other members of the Partnership for Peace, whether or not they are candidates for admission to the Alliance.

It must be stressed that the Alliance remains extremely attractive; there have been several waves of enlargement, in 1999 and 2004, which have helped to eliminate divisions in Europe by bringing in former adversaries from the Warsaw Pact. However, there are still other candidate countries, such as Georgia or Ukraine, which have clearly shown their willingness to join the Euro-Atlantic community of values and have embarked upon the necessary reforms with determination. Others such as Croatia, Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia already benefit from machinery such as the Membership Action Plan (MAP). I am convinced that we must give these countries more assistance, encouragement and support, because their accession will enhance the security of the Allies as a whole and will help to reinforce the stability of the European continent. I think that I express the consensus of all the member State parliamentary delegations here present by affirming our common will to give these countries more assistance, encouragement and support, stressing here that the door of the Alliance remains open to those who seek to join it. On the occasion of the Paris session, we will not fail to send our Governments a strong signal, in particular with regard to Georgia and Ukraine.

Although the Alliance's "military toolbox" is working perfectly today, and although this Alliance is still as attractive to many countries, frankness compels me to say that there seems to be a high level of vagueness regarding the concepts and the very *raison d'être* of our organisation: what is the Alliance for, fifteen years after the end of the Cold War? Where is it going? And with what decision-making processes? Oddly enough there are still no clear answers to these questions. Is NATO still, as Angela Merkel said earlier this year in Munich, "*the heart of the transatlantic relationship*", the forum of choice for discussing the Allies' security issues and for taking joint decisions if necessary? On the other hand, should it "*go global*", becoming a "*Global Security Agency*" as Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, the Secretary

General of NATO, whom we will welcome on Tuesday, has said or, as recently suggested by José María Aznar, the former head of the Spanish government, should it "*welcome countries such as Japan, Australia or Israel as full members*"? Or again, should the Alliance in fact be of secondary importance relative to one-off coalitions, summarised by Donald Rumsfeld, the American Secretary for Defense, in his famous formula "*the mission is the coalition*"? How can one fail to notice that the Alliance has not been used, in any event immediately, either in Afghanistan or in Iraq, i.e. in the two major post-September 11 conflicts, which mark what America calls the "*world war against terror*"? Some stress that only 10% of American forces are under NATO command; others are quite rightly concerned should an isolationist America emerge from the war in Iraq; lastly, others wonder about the solidity of the Alliance and its capacity for joint action in the event of a new major international crisis, for example in Iran.

There are at least equal uncertainties on the European side, increased by the negative result of the constitutional referendum in France and the Netherlands, which has checked the political advance of the Union. Everyone here knows the figures: altogether the 25 European countries spend hardly 40% of what America spends on defence, and are capable of lining up hardly 10% of the projection capabilities of American forces. To date we still cannot see any structured European pillar emerging within the Alliance, because the Europeans have settled neither the question of money nor the question of power. Torn between the supporters of neutrality – although we are entitled to wonder what neutrality means after the Cold War! – between "euro-atlanticists" and "euro-gaullists", let us have the courage to say that most European countries are hardly shining examples of clear willingness to stand forth as full partners of the United States.

These uncertainties indisputably have their effect on enlargement, both in the context of the European Union, where "a measure of enlargement fatigue" is now obvious, but also within NATO, with, for example, the coolness shown by some European governments in relation to Georgia's candidature. That is why I am still sure that, when the time comes, our Assembly will have to take the initiative in initiating a wide-ranging discussion on the future of our Alliance with, for example, the formation of a "group of wise men".

My dear friends, because we are in Paris it seems that raising the issue of France-NATO relations is not entirely out of place. The least that can be said is that this is an unusual relationship.

Most French people, and a fair number of Europeans, are convinced that France "left NATO" on 17 March 1966, forty years ago. It is as if public statements, by politicians but also by diplomats, over the years had only deepened the gulf. In French political debate, on the Right and on the Left, the concept of "atlanticism" is almost a public insult. An atlanticist is one who, renouncing the sovereignty of his country, is said to be happy to be the vassal or the backer of American hegemony. Believe me, this is scarcely an exaggeration.

Of course, the reality is a long way from the image projected by such rhetoric.

We parliamentarians, just like the military, know that although France left some of the Alliance's military committees for a time (just as today it still does not participate in the work of two committees, the Defence Planning Committee and the Nuclear Planning Committee), this has in no sense prevented it from remaining a full member of the Atlantic Alliance; keeping French forces under national command in peacetime does not exclude the possibility of transferring them to NATO command in the event of war, while France retains total control of its nuclear weapons.

Incidentally, throughout the years of the Cold War, French doctrine could be summarised by the diptych "independence and solidarity", not "independence and neutrality". We recall that De Gaulle, especially in the Cuban missile crisis, like François Mitterrand in the Euromissiles case twenty years later, never confused independence and neutrality ... This was worth remembering.

Since the end of the Cold War, and in reality, the positions of France and NATO have continuously come closer together. The Alliance's military posture has changed with the disappearance of a direct military threat in Europe, from static defence in Central Europe to projection to outside theatres, while nuclear forces became of secondary importance. These developments have brought the two parties closer together: the fundamental transformation of the armed forces towards force projection (in progress in France since 1995 through the impetus given by President Chirac) has brought user doctrines closer together. At the same time, with the disappearance from the European continent of tactical and medium-range nuclear weapons, the theological arguments about nuclear doctrine – graduated response on the one side, French deterrence on the other – now belong to the past.

And if, like me, you go onto the ground, where French forces are committed alongside the forces of our Allies, it is easy to see that military reality is the exact opposite of what public statements still enjoy perpetuating:

- with Great Britain, France is the primary European contributor to NATO or NRF operations. This is true in particular in Kosovo or in Afghanistan, where in the last few days we have paid a price in blood.
- Similarly we see French officers, including generals, in all the high commands of the Alliance: in Mons, in Norfolk or in Naples.

This reality has enabled our Defence Minister, Mrs Michèle Alliot-Marie whom you can hear during our Tuesday morning meeting – to speak of a relationship with the Alliance "free of complexes". As for me, I should like to be able to say that the relationship was untroubled, in the sense that one can and should be, as I am, both a campaigner for the Europe of Defence and a campaigner for the Atlantic Alliance, each reinforcing the other.

Furthermore, the distressing experiences of recent years (in the Balkans, Afghanistan and especially Iraq) have given us a wealth of lessons to contemplate on both sides of the Atlantic: America alone cannot do everything, and neither can the Europeans. So it is pointless when some people talk ironically about "old Europe", supposedly split between Mars and Venus, and others spout diatribes, demonize the Alliance or vainly assail "American hegemonism".

My deeply held conviction – and here I am speaking as the official of a political formation that is the descendant of Gaullism – is that a strong transatlantic link is still in France's interest, and that the United States is our ally and friend. To my mind, a European defence in opposition to the Americans is inconceivable: that is the major lesson learned from the attempts of the past fifty years, from the European Defence Community mentioned before, to the 1958 de Gaulle memorandum, as well as the 1962 Fouchet Plan, the 1963 Elysée Treaty, the Franco-British St. Malo agreement of 1998 and the section of the Constitutional Treaty on the European Security and Defence Policy.

In order to stay alive, the Alliance needs a strong European pillar in which France has a vital role to play. And in order for the "Europe-power", political Europe, to take shape, it needs to co-operate with the United States, not work in opposition to it. That in no way means a relationship of vassalage but rather a true ambitious partnership, which goes beyond speeches and requires Europeans to make sustained defence efforts, as France is now doing.

Let me conclude these introductory remarks by emphasizing that just as I hope the French presidential elections in just one year's time will mark a new beginning for France and European integration, I hope it will mark a new beginning for the France-NATO relationship.

I would like to make a brief reference to our Assembly's work, a topic that we will have a chance to discuss further in our Standing Committee's work and our Secretary General's report.

When you elected me in Venice in November 2004, I outlined the five priorities I wished to pursue: a stronger transatlantic link, civil defence, relations with and democratization of the Muslim world, resolving the frozen conflicts in the Caucasus, and consolidating democracy in Eastern Europe.

With regard to that first priority, I would like to welcome the presence of a strong delegation from the United States Congress. I know that the charms of Paris are not the only reason for their presence here, since our American colleagues were very well represented at our last two sessions in Ljubljana and Copenhagen. Alongside our ever-diligent Canadian colleagues, they form the *raison d'être* of our Assembly: the transatlantic dialogue that is one of the pillars of our common security.

I will not return to the long debates we have had at various Standing Committee meetings on our American friends' participation in our work. We are aware of the legal constraints on them, and particularly the obligation of the roll-call vote in the two houses of Congress.

I am pleased to note that, under the impetus of our colleagues Congressmen Joel Hefley and John Tanner and Senator Gordon Smith, the American delegation always attends the plenary sessions and the Standing Committee's meetings, and each year the Congress arranges several Committee meetings in the United States. We are also extended a very warm welcome at the Transatlantic Forums. So the transatlantic dialogue is strong and only needs to be enhanced.

My only regret at present – and I spoke about this to House Speaker Dennis Hastert, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and Senator George Voinovich in Washington last November – is the lack of American participation in the work of the Mediterranean Special Group. This group, dynamically led by our friend and colleague Jean-Michel Boucheron, discusses key issues like the Middle East Peace Process and more generally changes in the Arab-Muslim world. It is disappointing that we cannot benefit from our American colleagues' participation, particularly during the trips we take to that region.

With regard to civil defence, it must be said alas that from Madrid to London, and from Amman to Sharm el Sheikh, terrorism has continued unabated in recent months, and the latest declarations by al-Qa'ida leaders prove that we should expect nothing and negotiate nothing with those who show contempt for human life.

At the Ljubljana session last year, our Assembly took part in a simulation of a nuclear terrorist attack, thanks to the collaboration of our friends in the Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) led by our former colleague, Senator Sam Nunn. It is up to us to continue raising the awareness of our national parliaments and our public, and the report produced by our colleague Lord Jopling will make a valuable contribution to our work.

My third priority is relations with the Muslim world.

The Muslim world is the next-door neighbour of the Atlantic Alliance's geographic space. One of NATO's oldest Members, Turkey, has a Muslim majority, and I would like to thank Turkey for its decisive role on the Alliance's southern flank. The Alliance is also present in theatres of operations such as Bosnia and Afghanistan, whose populations are mainly or wholly Muslim. Finally, in recent decades large proportions of Muslims have migrated to Europe. For the past two years our Assembly, through the Mediterranean Special Group in particular but also the Political Committee chaired by Markus Meckel and the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships led by Karl Lamers, has looked beyond the problem of Islamic terrorism to act as an intermediary of the Istanbul Co-operation Initiative proposed by the Alliance Member countries.

Our successive missions to Jordan, Israel, the Autonomous Palestinian Territories, Mauritania, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman have all demonstrated the need for a dialogue but have also revealed deep rifts.

Now more than ever before, it is up to us to continue these efforts. And I am pleased that several Arab national assemblies – including Morocco, Jordan, Algeria, Mauritania, as well as the Palestinian Legislative Council and the Israeli Knesset – have already joined us as associate Mediterranean members.

Fourthly there is the resolution of frozen conflicts.

In recent months our Assembly has been very active in the Caucasus region, where we have organized many meetings, seminars and, most recently, a presidential visit to Georgia, during which our Assembly's Bureau managed to travel to Abkhazia and South Ossetia but was unfortunately prevented from visiting the Russian military bases that Russia has committed to dismantling by 2008. A detailed report on the situation in Georgia will be available in the course of our session. But I would like to emphasize the value that I attach to the peaceful settlement of these conflicts, which we will encourage by helping Georgia to find its place in the Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The different conflicts in the Caucasus seemed so important to me that I invited the Presidents of three countries – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – to come and speak to us. Only Mr Kocharian turned down the invitation (after having initially accepted it), but we will have the privilege of hearing Mr Saakashvili and Mr Aliev speak and the chance to ask them questions in the plenary, for which I would like to extend my warmest thanks.

I would like to conclude these remarks by talking about one more priority, the consolidation of democracy in Eastern Europe, to which our Assembly made a direct contribution by monitoring the recent Ukrainian legislative elections with our friends from the OSCE. On that occasion in March, we observed the Ukrainian people demonstrating their political maturity by calmly choosing their representatives from 45 lists in impeccably run legislative elections. In a few minutes we will have the chance to hear Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk speak about the domestic situation in his country and the prospects for accession to the Euro-Atlantic institutions, after which he will take your questions. Mr Tarasyuk is the special envoy of President Yushenko, who was obliged to remain in Kyiv this weekend for the formation of the government. In addition, this afternoon we will have the opportunity to hear Mr Alexander Milinkevich, who is here to talk about a completely different situation in his country, Belarus, where rigged elections were held last March and where, incidentally, our Assembly members were banned from travelling.

So there you have it, my dear colleagues, an overview of the five priorities on which we have worked so hard over the past few months.

During our session in Paris, we will be sure to address at least four other topics, which to save time I will only touch upon, since we will have an opportunity to discuss them further in committee and in the Standing Committee meeting.

The first of those topics is our relations with Russia, just a few weeks before Russia chairs the G8 Summit in St Petersburg. The meeting of our NATO-Russia Committee on Tuesday afternoon is expected to be particularly interesting, in a climate marked, as you know, by a visible cooling of relations between Washington and Moscow. I am thinking of Vice-President Dick Cheney's speech in Vilnius and President Vladimir Putin's response in his Russian state of the union address.

While the rhetoric is tending to deteriorate, I have noted other worrying tensions, particularly with regard to the energy supply to Europe but also on a wide range of issues affecting Russia's domestic and foreign policy, including the Iranian nuclear issue and Moscow's attitude to the conflicts in the Caucasus. These are issues that we will have an opportunity to discuss on Tuesday and at our seminar in Sochi next month with our Duma colleagues.

China's rising power will also be on the agenda for our work in Paris. Our Economics and Security Committee will devote part of its work to two reports, one by Mr Jos Van Gennip on energy security, and the other by Mr Petras Austrevicius and Mr John Boozman on China's development, both of which emphasize this country's growing role in international trade.

Faced with this reality, it is important for our Assembly to intensify its relations with China. That is why our Economics and Security Committee has already made two missions to China, and why we have invited five Chinese observers to our session in Paris, led by the Chinese Ambassador to France, to whom I would like to extend a cordial welcome. I would like to add that our Bureau will travel to China next July to establish high-level political contacts with the Chinese authorities.

Finally, the Iranian nuclear issue, which is a hot topic right now, will also be addressed in our work, in particular in Political Committee and Science and Technology Committee reports by our colleagues Diana Strofova and Ruprecht Polenz.

My dear colleagues, we have an especially busy session ahead of us in the coming days. In addition to the regional thematic issues that we will address in the plenary session thanks to our guests from Ukraine, Belarus and the Caucasus, and in addition to the topics I have just mentioned that will be discussed in the committees, in the second plenary sitting we will also discuss NATO reform and enlargement in the run-up to the Riga Summit.

You will have a chance to speak directly with the Secretary General of the Alliance, Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, with Permanent Representatives on the North Atlantic Council, and with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander of the United States European Command, General Jones.

Our Defence and Security Committee, with reports by Mr Julio Miranda-Calha and Mr John Shimkus, and our Political Committee, with a report by Mr Bert Koenders, will prepare this meeting, and I must encourage you to read these reports, which carefully relate the most important elements of this debate.

Finally, the internal reform of our Assembly, which I wanted to drive forward during my presidency, will also be the topic of much discussion, particularly during the Standing Committee meeting. I would like to extend my warmest thanks to our colleague, Vice-President Pierre Claude Nolin, who has accomplished a massive task by leading a discussion group on the reform of our Assembly. This group made a large number of proposals that I would like to see taken up by all the delegations in order to make our Assembly more responsive, more flexible, and more influential, both toward our respective governments and toward our public. I hope that these proposals, which were discussed in detail at the last Standing Committee meeting in Gdynia, Poland this spring, will be adopted in the Paris session, a session where, as you will have noticed, a number of changes in how we organize our work (holding two plenary sittings and a true opening ceremony) are being tested out.

Finally, I could not conclude my remarks without warmly thanking the presidents of the two French Assemblies, Mr Jean-Louis Debré and Mr Christian Poncelet, who are our hosts for this session and whose staff have worked non-stop for months to make this meeting in Paris a pleasant event for all of you and an effective forum for our work. I would also like to thank Mrs Michèle Alliot-Marie, who will attend our closing meeting on Tuesday, and the officers of our military units which you will have an opportunity to visit on Saturday and Sunday, and which will enable you to discover the scale of the French contribution to our common alliance.

Have a nice stay and fruitful work in Paris.

Thank you.
