

**Assistant Secretary General Kolinda Grabar: Remarks to the NPA
Getting the Message Across: NATO's Narrative Challenge**

February 16, 2014 | Brussels

Good afternoon, President Bayley, distinguished members of Delegations, Parliamentary guests, colleagues and friends,

I am honored to be part of this event today, and thank you for the kind introduction. I am the last speaker of the day and I hope to get your attention in this busy day, while I wrap up what has been discussed so far.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly plays an essential role as the link between the Alliance and our parliaments, and – through them – our publics. As Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, I am grateful for your essential work in engaging with your constituents and your peers on the importance of NATO. The Alliance has a compelling story to tell during this Summit year, and your work has been indispensable in ensuring that our publics hear it loud and clear.

For all of these contributions to this work, I am here to say thank you. But I should add that I also am here today to push a bit of an agenda. (I hope you will indulge me!) And that agenda is simple: NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly can and should do more together. With your help, we want to hear more from constituents about where they believe the Alliance is headed. I am here to seek your feedback on how we can improve our ties and work together during this pivotal year for the Alliance.

With that not-so-hidden agenda in mind, I would like to begin with a few comments about the year ahead for NATO, as well as a brief summary of the Alliance's public narrative as we approach the NATO Summit in September. I will outline some of the key

themes that will guide our programs this year, but I will be brief, as you will continue to hear a great deal about these at tomorrow's Council meeting.

Instead, as the subject of our panel suggests, I'd like to focus our talk on how the NPA and NATO's Public Diplomacy Division can coordinate more effectively and support each other's efforts **to get the message across**. It is essential that we hear your views as we begin our Summit planning. And I assure you, we are listening to your views which are very important to us: Many of you may recall that we commissioned Price Waterhouse Cooper to conduct a survey during the NATO Parliamentary Assembly session in Dubrovnik last October and at the NATO PA Transatlantic Forum in Washington in December. I will cite a few of the surveys' key findings a bit later, and I look forward to hearing your feedback. Thank you again for your help in working with PWC on your views.

But first, a bit of context on 2014: This is an important time for NATO. 2014 is a Summit year. When Heads of State and Government gather in Wales, we will, in effect, be writing a new chapter in NATO's story.

Throughout the year, we mark significant anniversaries of the great conflicts which shaped our world; the enlargements which have helped heal the divisions in Europe; and our ever-widening network of partners as we tackle global security challenges. We will also mark the 65th anniversary of the signing of the Washington Treaty, NATO's founding document.

In addition, NATO's longest combat operation -- the ISAF mission in Afghanistan -- will come to an end, and we will continue to prepare for a follow-on mission.

These milestones mark an inflection point for the Alliance in 2014, one that we will discuss, debate, and celebrate throughout the year as we approach the Summit. The

Summit will represent an opportunity for our national leadership to reflect on these milestones – with the aim of moving the Alliance forward.

And we have a strong case to make. We live in a security environment that is complex – and is only growing more complex. Threats are multiplying and instability is growing. But NATO has demonstrated it is strong, adaptable, and ready to provide security today and tomorrow.

The Alliance has taken on new missions, developed new capabilities, welcomed new members and engaged with new partners. Each time we faced new threats, we have risen to the challenge, learned from the experience, and moved forward.

These elements comprise our Summit narrative that we continue to develop as we approach the Summit.

As we approach the Summit, our publics will be increasingly asking difficult questions about the role that NATO will play after 2014, after Afghanistan, and as we continue to feel the effects of fiscal austerity.

So the stakes are high, and the media environment is daunting: We live at a time in which events unfold in real time. We are operating amid the competitive din of social media. Official voices are sometimes not the most exciting -- and not always perceived as the most credible. But despite these challenges, we have to be a part of that conversation.

Let me briefly lay out the core themes we plan to deliver as part of our Summit narrative. Then I will get back to the issue of what we can do together in order to advance these core messages.

The first core theme you will be hearing quite a lot about as we approach the Summit boils down to a simple phrase: “**Future NATO**” – a term that captures the idea of an Alliance that is rebalancing and adapting to lessons learned over the past 20 years of NATO operations. These lessons break down into three broad categories:

- **First, Partnerships:** We will point to NATO’s experience in Afghanistan as a vivid illustration of how partnerships make the Alliance more capable, flexible, and better-connected.
- **Second, Connectivity:** As our largest combat operation winds down in 2014, it will be essential to remain connected as Allies and with partners so we retain the edge and experience acquired through over 20 years of operations.
- And finally, **capabilities:** We need to persuade our publics of the importance of investing in the capabilities we need to ensure that the Alliance has the right tools to confront tomorrow’s challenges.

Another key theme we will address in Wales is our experience in **Afghanistan**. It will be vitally important for NATO to explain ISAF’s legacy to our publics.

Finally, we will stress that the **transatlantic bond** remains a pillar of the Alliance.

Speaking more broadly, the Summit is an opportunity to communicate persuasively with citizens who are questioning NATO’s relevance -- particularly with the end of the ISAF mission. Many people question why we need defence at all. We need to make the case that the preservation of our security and values is not given.

Now, this is not the end of our discussion on Summit themes – on the contrary, I am looking forward to questions today and to continuing this conversation over the next six

months. But this is also a good time to examine how the NPA and NATO's Public Diplomacy Division can better coordinate our efforts.

Much has already been achieved. Our staffs are in close contact here in Brussels. We work together on briefings – sometimes we bring groups to you and sometimes you bring groups to us. This is incredibly valuable – last May the NPA organized a visit for a group of Russian parliamentarians – something that would not have been possible if we were working alone. We also worked very closely together during the recent NPA visit to Kyiv. At the same time, I believe that we can do even more in our joint efforts to reach out to national legislative bodies.

It is no secret that involving members of national legislative bodies in both Allied and partner countries is one of our most critical priorities. The role of the NATO Parliamentary assembly in this respect is absolutely crucial. We rely on you and your colleagues to help us reach out to parliamentarians who are not necessarily as engaged in security and defence issues as you are.

I've mentioned the challenging media environment in which we operate. Right now, we live in a world where facts and opinions are exchanged and disseminated with the click of a button. In this environment, the ability of elected officials, governments, and multilateral organizations to engage and facilitate dialogue has never been greater – but at the same time, we have never faced more competition. We can have more of an impact if we are working together.

And as I mentioned, we are listening to your feedback. We commissioned the PWC surveys last year to take a close look at how we can communicate with you more effectively. We worked in close cooperation with the NATO PA Secretariat on the surveys, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NPA staff for its superb work and excellent support.

The surveys sought your views on the way in which NATO communicates with you and on your perceptions of NATO more broadly. Let me share with you some of the conclusions of the survey, which is based on the views of 97 parliamentarians, from both member and non-member countries:

- NATO PA Delegates have a very favourable perception of NATO, with 51% of respondents saying that the Alliance totally fulfils its goals and 40% that it somewhat fulfils them.
- Delegates believe that more than half of their parties have similarly positive views of NATO, but only 25% of their constituencies share these views.
- Respondents recommended that outreach towards constituents, especially youth, should be improved to convince them of NATO's value and relevance. Some expressed the view that citizens have moved beyond the idea of NATO as a necessary entity.
- 92% of respondents reported that they integrate their NATO PA activities into their national work either sometimes or always.
- Delegates indicated that they are satisfied with the frequency and quality of NATO outreach and that more person-to-person contact would be useful.

These findings point to a positive picture of how we are communicating with each other. However, I believe they also point to areas in which we can do more – and move forward together. I will mention three areas in particular, but this is just a beginning -- I welcome your ideas on how to build on this list:

1. First, I believe there is more we can do to compare notes on target audiences. You know your constituents – you know the issues they follow and those they don't. You know what will appeal to them and what won't. And you may be the primary conduit through which they gather information to form their opinions about a range of subjects, NATO included. So you are well-placed to carry the message of NATO's relevance. To the extent possible, we'd like to build on that good foundation. We can do this only with your feedback.
2. Secondly, the PWC survey emphasized one of those audiences in particular: the younger generation. We should do more to combine our efforts in engaging younger audiences, ideally through increased cooperation with universities and schools. We need to explore ways in which NATO can contribute – in terms of substance, contacts, and technology – to your own youth outreach.
3. Thirdly, NATO should increasingly look to the NPA to help amplify our outreach towards next-generation policymakers. We would be grateful for your advice and expertise on how best to build on your existing partnerships with local political groups and policy organizations.
4. Fourth, we should collaborate with you more closely on increasing our regular contacts with parliamentarians – beyond existing mechanisms. Your suggestions in this respect would be more than welcome.
5. Finally, and more broadly, we should improve our channels of communication and coordinate our efforts in systematic, concrete ways – perhaps through targeted distribution lists and working groups.

These ideas are, of course, simply proposals, but I believe they represent a practical way forward. And I hope they will help steer our discussion today. We hope that this is just

the beginning of the conversation. We look forward to staying in touch with you to continue this dialogue, and to share ideas.

As you can see, NATO has its work cut out for all of us this year. The road ahead to the Summit will be challenging. It will require unity of purpose among our Allies. It will require political resolve in NATO capitals to help our publics understand why defence matters, and why NATO matters.

Once again, thanks very much for your tireless support of our outreach efforts, and now I look forward to taking your questions.