

06 Sep. 2013

Fulfilling Europe's Potential

Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Inter-parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, Vilnius

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a privilege and a pleasure to stand before you today. I see many familiar faces in the audience, including representatives from the European Parliament and national parliaments whom I have known for many years.

Let me start with the situation in Syria, which is of concern to the whole world. We have all seen the terrible images of what happened in the suburbs of Damascus on August 21st. A massive chemical weapons attack. Civilians gassed by their own regime.

A variety of sources point to the responsibility of the Syrian regime. NATO Allies have condemned this attack in the strongest possible terms. And it cannot go unanswered.

NATO continues to play its part as a forum of consultations where North America and Europe consult every day.

Our Patriot deployment continues to keep watch over Turkey. And we continue to protect and defend the Alliance's south-eastern border.

But as the situation in Syria demonstrates, we continue to face significant security challenges. And it is vital that we are prepared to meet them together.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this hall, over two decades ago, Lithuania regained its sovereignty and began its journey towards Euro-Atlantic and European integration.

That journey has led to remarkable success. Nearly a decade ago, Lithuania became a valued NATO Ally, and a respected member of the European Union. This country has become safer. And Lithuania's security has helped make the entire Euro-Atlantic region safer.

As an Ally, Lithuania has shown commitment to our shared security. This country has helped to strengthen our political solidarity. And it has made important contributions to our operations, including to our ongoing mission in Afghanistan.

Lithuania has also been a leader on the issue of energy security. I am pleased to attend the opening of the NATO Centre of Excellence on Energy Security here later today. This institution will prove indispensable as we explore ways to address an important concern.

And as the holder of the European Union presidency for the first time, Lithuania has vowed to push for strengthened cooperation between the European Union and NATO.

For all this, I extend my thanks to Lithuania's government and to the people of Lithuania.

Today I speak to you as NATO's Secretary General. But I also speak to you as a proud European who believes in Europe -- and who cares greatly about the future of our continent.

And because I care for Europe's future, let me be very clear from the start. If we in Europe do not invest more - financially and politically - in our own defence and security, then in the future, we will not speak of our influence in the world, but of the influence of others over our world.

Let me give you a few figures. Over the last four years, most European NATO Allies have reduced their defence spending. Some by more than 20%.

By contrast, defence spending in the emerging world is increasing quickly. In 2012, Asian defence spending overtook Europe's for the first time. By 2015, it is forecast that defence spending in China alone will be equal to that of the 8 largest European NATO Allies combined.

While our defence spending is falling, global security challenges are rising. Nation-state instability. Missile proliferation. Terrorism. Cyber-attacks.

To tackle these challenges, Europe needs soft power instruments. But it also needs to back them up with hard military capabilities.

Our continent has half a million more soldiers under arms than the United States. But we continue to fail to get the most out of those impressive resources.

For example, basic and technical training is largely the same for all our forces, particularly where nations use the same equipment. But there are too few examples where our forces train efficiently together.

And the problem is compounded by our industrial practices. For example, we operate close to forty different types of infantry fighting vehicles – many in small numbers, but protecting national industries. The result is poor economies of scale, excessive running costs, and inefficient training.

So – in essence – if we Europeans want to tackle the challenges we will face in the future, then, we must raise the level of our ambition.

We must let go of the lingering national rivalries of the past.

And we must pool and share more of what we have and use it more effectively.

Our security isn't optional. It is vital. And to preserve it, we Europeans need to invest in a strong Europe. We need to invest in a strong NATO. And we need to invest in a strong partnership between NATO and the European Union.

as you know next December the European Union will hold an important Summit on security and defence.

In the run-up to the Summit, I believe the countries of Europe should focus on three key areas.

First, capabilities. European countries have made real progress in developing new capabilities such as heavy transport aircraft. But we are all aware of the shortfalls. These shortfalls include drones for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

While we have already made progress on addressing these shortfalls, more has to be done.

That will take significant time and investment. Such investment may cost money. But sending out troops into battle without the support they need may cost lives – the lives of our troops and of those we are meant to protect.

At NATO, we are working hard to provide critical capabilities. Our Smart Defence initiative, for example, has 29 multinational capability projects in the pipeline. The first – a helicopter maintenance project in Afghanistan – was recently completed.

And for its part, the European Union is working to provide capabilities through pooling and sharing. For example, the European Union is leading a multinational programme on acquiring more air-to-air refuelling planes.

I strongly welcome this. It will enhance the European Union's ability to act, and NATO's as well. I encourage the European Union to use the December Council to make further progress on this important initiative.

Second, industry. To develop effective and modern capabilities, Europe needs effective and modern industries. National borders should not be barriers to competition. Instead, we need a truly European defence market that leads to innovation, better and cheaper equipment, and a better return on every euro spent.

Making the defence industry in Europe stronger, more sustainable, and more streamlined is a vital part of Europe's ability to ensure its future security.

Finally, forces. European countries should take a long hard look at the forces they will need in the future. No single European country on its own can produce the forces of the size, scale and skills that we have deployed during the past 20 years. But together, we can.

So if European countries are to have access to the full spectrum of capabilities and forces they require, they must cooperate more closely.

NATO and the European Union share the same values. We share the same strategic analysis of the challenges we face. And we have the same vision. Our two organisations are on the same road and travelling towards the same destination – a Europe where our nations share responsibility for our security and remain a force for good in the world.

As we travel, we must ensure that we don't push each other off the road by pursuing similar projects. We don't have the money for it, and our taxpayers don't have the patience for it. Cooperation, not duplication, is the way to success. And you, as parliamentarians, are critical in making it happen.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a believer in both Europe and NATO, I am convinced that Europeans should not be content with playing the role of a global spectator. We can be and must be global actors.

At the European Council in December, we Europeans have to make a strategic choice. We should put our money where our mouth is, and our resources where the need is. We should build capabilities, not bureaucracies. And we should build them together -- as Europeans cooperating with each other and with our North American Allies.

Thank you.