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Ten Years in NATO: A Decade in Security
Reflections on Ten Years in NATO

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(Jo regelt kivanok mindenkinek)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply grateful to the organisers for inviting me back to Budapest and I am honoured being given the opportunity to say a few words in the splendid setting of this venerable House of Parliament.

Before I will address the subject allow me to say that I remember with sincere and deep gratitude Hungary's courageous steps in opening the Iron Curtain which paved the way to German unification.

When Hungary joined NATO in 1999 the division of Europe came eventually to an end, a division which had damaged large parts of Europe so badly and which had deprived so many Europeans among them millions of Hungarians of their elementary human rights. When the transition period between the fall of the Berlin Wall and the first round of NATO enlargement ended in March 1999 we witnessed one of the rare moments in history where a nation such as Hungary which had suffered so heavily in the 1956 tragedy was to some extent compensated for the injustice inflicted on it, albeit rather late.

I should mention that it had been the 1956 tragedy which changed my life since I gave then up my plans to study archaeology since I thought one has to enter a commitment to security in order to avoid any repetition. I thus became a military officer who happened to be NATO's highest ranking military officer on the day on which Hungary became a member of NATO. You may imagine that Hungary's membership meant a lot to me personally.

I should also mention with some pride that it was the German Ministry of Defence which pushed the idea of enlargement despite powerful resistance since we saw

enlargement as a key if not the key instrument of achieving lasting stability in the Post-Soviet Europe.

On this day of enlargement in March 1999 the sixteen old NATO nations promised Hungary in return for her membership and her commitment to NATO's collective defence to be on Hungary's side should there be any risk again. Ten years later one can say that NATO kept its promise although the three months of the Kosovo air campaign which began eleven days after Hungary had joined placed a particular heavy burden on Hungary.

But during these ten years of membership the world has changed more dramatically than anyone could have foreseen in 1999, most dramatically in 2008.

The hopes, however, which we had had in spring 1999 that Europe would enter a lasting period of cooperation and partnership did not become reality since Europe lost its unity first during the Iraq Crisis in 2002 and then again when four million Irish stopped the Lisbon Treaty. Moreover, we saw the return of more assertive Russia to the European scene culminating in the crisis over Georgia last summer.

Today, in March 2009 Europe is way off from being united and Europe is by no means a full fledged player in a world full of ever growing uncertainty. Moreover, Europe is badly hit by the global financial crisis and an economic recession which hold the potential of producing damage beyond imagination.

In addition, too many of the problems which haunted Europe back in the nineties are still unresolved, be they situated in the Balkans or in the Caucasus powder keg. To make things worse, we saw in Europe in 2008 for the first time since more than sixty years that a permanent member of the UNSC resorted to the use of force in order to change international borders of another European state. This is an event which cannot be shrugged off lightly although there should be no doubt that Europe and NATO have no alternative but to cooperate with Russia. But there must be no doubts as well about the very basis of partnership and cooperation: There are no spheres of influence and there is no veto right for anyone on the decisions of a sovereign state in Europe.

But the changes throughout the past ten years go far beyond Europe. We witnessed the horrendous attack on the US on 9/11 which ushered in the new dimension of asymmetric global war waged by non-state actors against states which are about to lose their monopoly to use legitimate force, a war in which terrorism, organised

international crime, proliferation of WMD and cyber attack constitute new threats, threats to which neither NATO nor its nations have so far found the proper answers. Most NATO nations still prepare for the big wars if they prepare at all but they do not prepare for the small wars in which insurgencies will have to be defeated.

NATO responded firmly and resolutely to the 9/11 attack when it invoked for the first time ever Article 5 in a situation nobody had ever thought of, an attack on the US. Unfortunately nobody took advantage of this decision and exploited its enormous potential but I hope that the people throughout the world and here in Hungary noted that NATO will act if one of its members came under attack. The promise of the NATO Treaty is still alive: An attack on one of us is an attack on all of us.

But the truly unforeseen change hit all of our nations when the financial tsunami of fall 2008 hit the world. In my view this event produced the biggest threat to our security, a threat for which nobody seems to have an answer at this time and for which no international organisation seems to be prepared at all.

It is a threat which could erode the stability of our nations from within our societies and which could jeopardise democracy since too many citizens are asking why so many if not all control mechanisms failed so badly. Such nagging doubts offer the best breeding ground to demagogues. To limit such dangers all NATO nations must maintain solidarity and they should cooperate as closely as possible since if there is no security at home then it is rather difficult if not impossible to act in solidarity in such distant places such as Afghanistan, places where dangers for all of us such as terrorism are at home.

Moreover, we may see even growing threats as we move into a rather unruly 21st century and in a world of growing instability in which we will have to cope with new risks produced by organised international crime, terrorism which might get access to WMD, cyber war and man-made pandemic illnesses. New reasons for conflict produced by the lack of food, of truly existential resources such as potable water and energy, possibly accentuated by climate change will confront all NATO nations with additional security problems.

To cope with this vast array of challenges will require more international cooperation than ever before since no nation state can any longer cope with them alone. In addition these challenges will require a much better filled tool box since military means alone do simply no longer suffice.

The bad news is that today's NATO is neither capable of dealing with these challenges nor is any of NATO's nations. Thus Hungary and her allies have to make additional efforts to strengthen NATO and, most importantly, reform it.

The good news, however, is that NATO provides a well suited forum of consultation, cooperation and common action, a forum in which all nations can bring their concerns and worries to the attention of their partners and where they can expect appropriate help provided they understand that influence in such an alliance is and will remain commensurate to contributions. Therefore the promise given to Hungary in 1999 is still valid for the Hungary of 2009 which now has at most of her borders allies, friends and partners and which is no longer sitting at the perimeter of NATO. The Hungary of 2009 is embedded in the NATO Treaty Area.

Looking back at ten years of security for Hungary it still seems that the 1999 decision to join NATO was a wise move which meant then and which means today assured security through collective protection. I therefore offer my sincere congratulations upon a decade of security but I add that this does not mean to lean back and to rest on one's laurels. The vision of a Europe whole and free is not yet a reality and therefore NATO's nations should renew on such a day their pledge that the doors must remain open.

(Kösönöm a figyelmet)

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