

Speech by Dr. Karl A. Lamers MP
President of the Atlantic Treaty Association
on the occasion of the celebration of the
20TH ANNIVERSARY OF
THE HUNGARIAN ATLANTIC COUNCIL
Budapest, 5 October 2012

A.

Mr President Professor Vizi,

Mr Minister Dr Martonyi

Mr Minister Dr Hende

Her Excellency Ambassador Eleni Tsakopoulos

Kounalakis,

Members of Parliament,

Members and supporters of the Hungarian Atlantic
Council,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Tisztelt Hölgyeim és Uraim,

megköszönöm kedves meghívásukat az Önök csodálatos fővárosába, Budapestre. Nagy öröm és megtiszteltetés számomra, hogy ma este az Önök vendége lehetek.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

many thanks for giving me the chance to be here with you today. It is always a pleasure to visit Hungary.

And it is a distinct pleasure to be here in Budapest on invitation from the President of the Hungarian Atlantic Council, **Professor E. Sylvester Vizi**, to whom goes my gratitude for leading the organization. For your dedication and passion, I would like to offer you my most sincere and heartfelt thanks.

And I'm very delighted that the Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Dr. Janos Martonyi** and the Minister of Defence, **Dr. Csaba Hende**, as well as her Excellency Ambassador of the United States of America in Budapest, **Eleni Tsakopoulos Kounalakis**, are with us today.

This celebration testifies the great success of the Hungarian Atlantic Council.

I.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

two days ago, on 3 of October, we celebrated the Day of German Unity with a festive event in Munich as well as with a grand event in my constituency Heidelberg. In my address I stressed the very important role Hungary has played for the German unification.

It was an outstanding and historic moment when Hungary began cutting a remarkable hole in the Iron Curtain in 1989. I mentioned the "Pan-European Picnic" on the Austrian-Hungarian border when several hundreds people fled to the West on 19 August 1989. And I thanked Hungary and its people for their great support. Respect. We will never forget!

And as a saying proves: *“Mountains and valleys will*

not come together, but humans do.”

II.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

we are living in very challenging times, as we now face threats from within our region and abroad. Although terrorism has been partially defeated, its fluid nature requires our constant vigilance.

Threats no longer need a physical territory to operate from and the realm of cyberspace has become increasingly volatile.

But above all, the greatest challenge of all is to maintain the promises set forth in the Atlantic Alliance more than 60 years ago: The promise of solidarity

across the Atlantic, the quest for peace and for effective rule of law.

III.

This is the core mission that the Atlantic Treaty Associations and its members have been pursuing in the twenty-first century. The Hungarian Atlantic Council is part of this mission.

Hungary has a special place in our transatlantic family. It was on **31 of October 1992** that Atlantic Treaty Association took the historical decision of accepting the newly established Hungarian Atlantic Council as its first observer from a former Warsaw Pact country.

Only one year later the then President of the Hungarian Atlantic Council Dr. Peter Akos Bod officially accepted the invitation by the ATA Board of Directors to become the first full Member of the ATA.

Doctor Peter Akos Bod was the right man at the right time. He served his country with dedication and committed himself to the Atlantic cause when it was not fashionable.

He helped the transition from the old to the new system, ensuring that Hungary would play its part in the renewal of the transatlantic link.

Hungarian Atlantic Council has been an important component of this renewal. Only a few years after it joined, in 2000, the annual General Assembly of the ATA was organized in Budapest.

On that occasion, the Hungarian Atlantic Council leadership demonstrated once more its forward looking approach to international security. They were instrumental in supporting the membership of Atlantic

Councils from Austria, Latvia, Finland and Croatia, but above all in supporting Bosnia-Herzegovina and Moldova, who all became ATA members in Budapest.

Amongst the many I wish to acknowledge the role played by Gyula Kodolanyi, a statesman and a poet, who embodied the quest for democracy and freedom of the Hungarian people much before the democratic transition started. And respect to Agnes Szent-Iványi!

And I also wish to emphasize the immense contribution given to the Atlantic Treaty Association by Dr. Ferenc Somogyi and Ambassador Gyorgy Banlaki who served as ATA Vice President respectively from 2000 to 2003 and from 2006 to 2009. They have been invaluable contributors to ATA dynamism and they are deeply missed.

IV.

Today, the role of the Hungarian Atlantic Council is as vast as before, and it spans from the organization of security related public events, to the engagement of political leaders and opinion makers in the NATO debate.

In the past 20 years, thousands of Hungarians have been exposed to the values of freedom, liberty and peace thanks to the unwearied commitment of a few brave Hungarians who supported the Atlantic cause in your country and in Europe.

And, not to forget, it has made a huge contribution to the work of the Atlantic Treaty Association strengthening reliable transatlantic relations and helping building a civil society support for transatlantic cooperation.

V.

As President of the Atlantic Treaty Association I would

like to express my heartfelt congratulations - both - to this anniversary, but also to your successful work.

In my opinion, two decades of existence of your Atlantic Council means twenty years of successful work for peace, security and stability.

Moreover it means twenty years of convincing engagement and great efforts for the transatlantic partnership as well as for our common goals and values.

B.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

since its foundation in 1954, ATA has strengthened reliable transatlantic relations and it has helped to communicate about what NATO is and what it does.

Further ATA has helped to draw together the leaders of today and tomorrow. It has helped to develop the

values of the North Atlantic Treaty: Democracy, Freedom, Liberty, Peace, Security and the Rule of law.

In my opinion one of the most important challenges is: The communication with the public and a public debate about NATO. It is my firm belief that this is crucial for the future of the Atlantic Alliance.

We must in general continue to improve and intensify our cooperation within the ATA and with NATO. We must also strengthen our ties with the younger generations. We must encourage the youth to participate in shaping their future, our future and must therefore find new and interesting methods in reaching out to them.

C.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

the idea of the European Integration was born and realized after World War II to avoid that a war would ever happen again in the heart of Europe.

We should be always aware of that - especially against the background of two current occasions:

I.

The ongoing financial crisis in several member states of the EU and its impact on the Euro has led to a discussion of the future of European Integration and European solidarity.

Moreover the crisis is not only a major challenge for EU but also for NATO. We must not react to this by cutting our budgets and capabilities in a way that leads to a security crisis. The obvious answer to the financial crisis is to seek out efficiencies through cooperation. Cooperation is not only an option. It is a necessity!

I therefore very much welcome the commitment of NATO leaders at the Chicago Summit to move ahead with “smart defence” by better coordination of military planning; pooling and sharing equipment; and the development of national specializations to avoid costly duplication of assets.

II.

The Arab Spring in Northern Africa and the Middle East is one of the great challenges of our time.

We had and we still have a historic opportunity and indeed a responsibility to respond with clear signals of support to the brave people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and elsewhere who were and are seeking for themselves the same freedoms which we ourselves enjoy.

With our experience, it should be our task to assist all countries on their way to democracy when they ask for our help. But we have always to keep in mind that it is their revolution.

The Atlantic Treaty Association can make a vital contribution, based on our shared values and the experience of those of our members which have themselves undergone democratic transition.

I know that the circumstances that helped integrate

Central and Eastern Europe into the transatlantic community are not comparable to the recent revolts in the Arab World.

However, there is one lesson learned:

The legitimate desire for democracy, development, stability and security can only arise with unanimous intent, with consensus amongst people and political leaders about the future of the country.

These are our hopes for the Arab countries today, as much as we strived for cooperative security in Central and Eastern Europe in the past.

This unanimous consensus was crystal clear in Hungary and made it possible to bring the country to a new and peaceful future.

D.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The vision of a world in peace, freedom and security, this is the vision of the Atlantic Treaty Association and its national chapters.

This is the vision of all of us.

I am very proud, that we are fighting for the same goals and sharing the same values. I am proud, that we all together belong to a community of peace and freedom.

Let us stand together in the future as well: With mutual respect. With mutual trust and in friendship! That is how we will face all challenges.

As Henry Ford once said: *“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.”*

As President of the Atlantic Treaty Association I have to say that we are very proud that the Hungarian Atlantic Council with **President Professor Vizi** in front is one of

our great members. President Vizi, you are a great friend and a distinguished President of the Hungarian Atlantic Council.

Thank you and all members of the Council very much for your convincing work and a very close and trusting cooperation!

I wish you an interesting and fruitful celebration and a happy birthday!