

Speech by **Péter Siklósi**, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Defence, vice –president of the Hungarian Atlantic Council at the 18th International Parliamentary NATO Conference Hungarian National Assembly, on 28 November 2014, Budapest

- Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends and Colleagues
- As a Security Professional I should start my speech by describing the security environment we live in and this year has markedly changed that environment. Yet others have already done that, but just to remind:
- New crises in Europe and in its neighborhood: Ukraine, ISIS/ISIL, Ebola
- Yet, old ones still live with us,
  - some persist and will probably never go away such as migration from Africa,
  - some show positive signs yet worth keeping an eye on such as the Balkans,
  - some are unfortunately deteriorating (e.g. instability in the wider Sahel Region).
- This era of challenges requires vigilance, understanding, trust, cooperation and solidarity among Allies and like-minded nations, as well as credible military forces as a tool of last resort.
- In such turbulent times leadership is required more than ever for effectively managing the multitude of crises. Coalitions need to be formed, alliances need to be strengthened, humanitarian assistance needs to be organized and military campaigns need to be led.
- But the question lingers: Who will assume this leadership in today's world?
- Europe? Just emerging from the financial crisis which hit this continent more severely than the United States, and the consequences also seem to last longer. Just one fact to illustrate: over the last 7 years, NATO members cut defence spending by 20% on average while debt grew considerably. Moreover there were uncoordinated cuts in defence, and there is still no unified European threat perception and a unified view on the role of the armed forces in Europe.
- The US? It has to face the financial realities, and listen to the American public which is weary of many years of foreign military engagement and would rather keep US forces at home. The DoD is also in the midst of a rebalance to Asia and the country is restructuring its military. Conclusion: the US can't do nor doesn't want to do everything alone. Focus is on cooperation with like-minded nations, capacity building for allies and partners.
- However if we look at NATO, where Europe and the United States act in concert the picture looks much more promising. The military operations of the Alliance have been successful, the execution, was extremely precise. The institutional framework, such as

the command and force structure is exercised, and validated often.

- Within NATO the United States often acts as a facilitator, provides the impetus, or the necessary final push to achieve consensus among 28. Besides the military might, this transatlantic consensus is the strongest advantage of NATO. The consensus which is deeply rooted and based on shared values, culture, history and common worldview.
- Of course the security guarantees of NATO cannot and should not be taken for granted. At our founding treaty we have agreed to share the risk, responsibilities and benefits of collective security and no nation can act as a freeloader. We in Europe are aware that we have to step up to our responsibilities. The Transatlantic Declaration and the defence investment pledge adopted at the Wales Summit came at the right time to reinforce this will and to maintain a strong bond.
- The disproportionate reliance on US military assets will hopefully be mitigated by the increased budgetary efforts of European nations, and by the new, enhanced NATO defence planning process, where burden sharing and reasonable challenge are the two main principles.
- As a response to the Ukraine Crisis, the recent reassurance measures in Europe show how the transatlantic cooperation and the solidarity in the Alliance work in practice. At the wake of the crisis the US was the first nations to reinforce air policing in the Baltics and to deploy land forces to participate in joint training and exercises in the region. These steps were almost immediately followed by European states, among others Hungary too, which provided an infantry company to the Baltic region, and will deploy Gripen aircraft to participate in the Air Policing mission.
- Against ISIS, the United States formed a coalition of western and Arab states and president Obama's three-stage plan is a sound and proportionate answer to the threat and we support its implementation. The Coalition's military operations are crucial in defeating the terrorists and we welcome the broad participation of regional countries in this effort.
- Both the steps in the coalition against ISIS and the Reassurance Measures in Europe show that the transatlantic bond is alive and well and the two sides of the Atlantic can work together very effectively in times of need. The US leadership, whether it is upfront as it is in the fight against ISIS, or "leading from behind" as it was the case in Libya is still necessary.
- 65 years ago when the Washington Treaty was signed, Europe needed assistance to its security and the United States was there to provide it. Thanks to these efforts, Europe has also become a net security provider and we shoulder the challenges of today side-by-side with our American allies. Fifteen years ago Hungary has also joined this Alliance and I can proudly say these years have been a success story for all of us. I am certain that the years ahead of us hold many further challenges, but I am confident that we will overcome all of them together.