TESTO I – VECCHIO ORDINAMENTO 3° ANNO

Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Kyiv, Ukraine.

28 Jan. 2000

Speech by NATO Secretary General, Lord Robertson

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by saying how much I enjoy being here today. This is my first visit as Secretary General of NATO. The fact that I came here after just three months in office is a sign of the great value I personally attach to the NATO-Ukraine relationship.

But I am not the only NATO official who takes advantage of Ukraine’s legendary hospitality. In just a few weeks’ time, the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s highest political body, will also pay a visit to Ukraine. Both visits symbolise the changes Europe has gone through since the end of East-West confrontation. And both visits are meant to reinforce a message that is very dear to us: NATO and Ukraine are Partners. A self-confident, democratic Ukraine is of strategic benefit for the whole of this continent. We share a common interest in making Ukraine strong, stable, sovereign and secure.

But what exactly is security today? Clearly, the security of a state is no longer measured simply by the strength of its armed forces. More and more we come to realise that the internal situation can determine the future of a country at least as significantly as outside developments. Only if a nation achieves a balance between domestic stability and external security can it really be labelled "secure". The end of the Soviet Union provides us with a clear case in point: the USSR was strong militarily, but its social fabric was weak. So was it ever really secure?

More recently, Yugoslavia provided us with another infamous example. I believe that it is fair to say that the Balkans would look much different today if Belgrade had opted for serious political and economic reforms ten years ago. If they had embraced democracy, ethnic tolerance and human rights, Yugoslavia would not have ended up where it is now: a fraction of its former size, a pariah state, poor, and basically at war with itself. And neither NATO nor Ukrainian soldiers would have to put their lives on the line, as they are doing today, in helping the people of Kosovo to regain a life in decency and security.

In our time, more than ever, the survival of a modern country is measured by how stable it is internally: how well its economy performs; how firmly its democratic processes are entrenched and the rule of law embedded, and by how well it handles delicate ethnic issues. And it is measured by how well it manages to achieve good relations with its neighbours. Of course, military strength remains an important and necessary attribute of a state, but it can never be a substitute for political and economic reform.

Ukraine has followed this logic consistently. When Ukraine gained its independence, it set out on a major transformation. Ukraine embarked on this venture from a position that was far from enviable. At times, the challenges before you must have seemed insurmountable. And yet, within a few years Ukraine has managed to emerge as a respected player in the international arena. With its commitment to democratic and economic reforms, with its enlightened policy on ethnic minorities, and with good relations with all of its neighbours, Ukraine has demonstrated the responsibility and foresight that befits a major European power. Ukraine has consolidated itself as a viable state. And
it has also demonstrated that a policy of gradual integration into European structures and good relations with Russia are not mutually exclusive.

Quite early on, Ukraine made a number of key decisions that foreclose any return to the past. The decision to adhere to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapons state is one. Resolving with Russia the difficult issues of the Black Sea Fleet and the status of Sevastopol is another. These decisions, as well as the bilateral treaties signed with Romania and Poland, confirm Ukraine's determination to pursue an active and cooperative approach to its security.

Clearly, neither the transition of Ukraine nor that of Europe as a whole is complete. There is still a gap between a prosperous Western Europe and a less prosperous East. There is still a gap between democratic ideals and real-life obstacles. But if we have a compass, if we have a sense of direction, if we share a common purpose, this journey will ultimately lead to its destination.

Together, NATO and Ukraine can make progress none of us could achieve alone. NATO can assist Ukraine in tackling some of its most challenging reform projects. But NATO can also help provide the benign security environment Ukraine needs to concentrate on its domestic reforms. Because, as one of my predecessors used to say, security is the oxygen of democracy.

Ukraine, in turn, can use her relationship with NATO to chart her own distinct path into the new Europe. And it can use its relationship with NATO to enhance her contribution to European security -- by enabling us to tackle future challenges together.