Security in a Changing World
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Toomas Hendrik Ilves, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I would like to explore Estonia’s views and positions on national security matters, and to talk about the necessity for joint security efforts. This is especially relevant in light of the dynamic developments which are taking place in the field of international relations.

Eighty years ago, as a very young nation, we naively believed that countries could be islands unto themselves. That we could survive on our own. This was a very serious mistake, and cost us our independence. After the re-establishment of Estonian independence in 1991, we have tried to adopt more mature policies for maintaining our independence. The basic objective of contemporary Estonian diplomacy is the ensuring of Estonian national security by consolidating it with international, primarily the European Union and Trans-Atlantic national security and defense systems. In the course of achieving these objectives, we have been guided by the principle that national security is an issue, which concerns all nations equally, and by the desire to realistically contribute to the solving of common security problems. We have accepted the fact that we also have to strengthen our internal security. And, according to our resources and capabilities, we have participated in various international operations, and have worked together with various countries and international organizations. On a local regional basis, we co-operate extensively with the other two Baltic states.

At present, we see no need to change our foreign policy priorities. Quite the opposite. We have only received confirmation that our priorities have been sound, and that we must continue the ongoing accession processes with the European Union and NATO.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, allow me to delve into some aspects of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, since the stabilizing and security-producing nature of this international organization is essential for the maintenance of peace and freedom. And especially since the concept of NATO enlargement has recently been vehemently criticized by malicious skeptics.

Originally, as we all know, NATO was a union created purely for security and defensive purposes. But after the end of the Cold War, the alliance acquired new functions -- to help solve internal crises in nations outside of NATO. And now, in conjunction with anti-terrorist operations, NATO’s sphere of activities has become even larger. This very well illustrates how NATO constantly adapts in response to changing circumstances and the development of new threats to international security. NATO, quite obviously, is not an obsolete relic and petrified Cold War structure, for which a place and function can no longer be found in an ever changing world. Actually, well organized international structures, of
which NATO is one of the most essential, can best stand up to the challenges presented by a world in flux.

I would also like to touch upon our common efforts concerning co-operation within NATO, to talk about NATO enlargement, and to define our mutual relations in connection with this enlargement process. The size and resources of our two nations, Turkey and Estonia, and what we can each offer to NATO, cannot of course be compared. Turkey is one of NATO’s key members, who has, since 1952, consistently contributed to the alliance’s development, and who has, over the years, actively participated in the making of many vital decisions and the formulating of essential policy. Estonia, on the other hand, is just a candidate state. But we have conscientiously fulfilled the tasks assigned to us, and have tried to actively demonstrate our solidarity with the democratic convictions of the NATO member states. This has resulted in our participation in the NATO led peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Kosovo, and now, in NATO’s struggle against terrorism. 

But since Estonia has such a small army, it would of course be natural to ask, at this point, what we can practically contribute to the alliance’s intensifying co-operative efforts?

I am convinced, that in addition to their political and symbolic value, small nations, like Estonia, can also serve a very definite practical function. At times, a small nation’s voice can play the decisive role in the process of achieving a political consensus within the framework of a large group. This has, over the years, been repeatedly demonstrated by the successful activity of the Benelux countries. The organization as a whole can only benefit from the fact that the alliance includes members whose national security is greatly dependent on the existence of a strong, prestigious, and vital defensive union. The members and the candidate states who make up this alliance, including Estonia, are not just “consumers of security”, but also very important “producers of security”.

I must stress, that the enlarging alliance’s capability to ensure its security will only increase as new members start to make their full contributions to the joint endeavor. Even in our changing world, NATO’s enlargement has not lost its relevance.

The NATO enlargement question was also a very important issue during President Bush’s visit to Europe in June. In the course of the Brussels NATO Council session, or mini-summit, practically all member states supported enlargement, and several heads of state also concretely brought up the question of inviting the Baltic states to join. President Bush presented a significant speech in Warsaw – the capital city of a former Eastern Bloc country, and now a full NATO member. He predicted that NATO enlargement will more likely be larger than smaller, encompassing democratic countries between the Baltic and Black Seas, who meet NATO membership criteria. President Bush expressed the same decisiveness in the address he sent to the NATO candidate countries’ at the October summit in Sofia, stating that the United States supports NATO membership for all of Europe’s new democracies from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea.