

# **South Caucasus & Baltic Parliamentarians' Conference**

## **Strategies for Reform and Cooperation**

*Presentation on:*

### **An inter-parliamentary perspective: The role of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly**

#### **Introduction**

Let me first express my appreciation to the Georgian parliament and to the George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies for the invitation to speak at this important and timely event.

Assisting the development of parliamentary democracy in the transition countries has been a central feature of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's work since 1989. Some of you might actually remember that the first summer school for parliamentarians from Central and Eastern European countries was organised in the mid-1990's in Garmisch, by the NATO PA in conjunction with the organizers of today's event, the Marshall Center.

We have heard many interesting contributions during these two days. I can only support the comments that have been made in other sessions regarding the importance of democratic control in the defence and security sectors and the role of regional and international cooperation in encouraging the establishment of efficient procedures for parliamentary oversight, particularly in transition countries.

My presentation will focus on the perspective of an inter-parliamentary assembly. I will try to highlight for you the specific contribution of inter-parliamentary work in promoting parliamentary oversight in the defence and security sectors.

I will give you the broad picture and a general briefing on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's objectives and extensive experience in this area and my colleague Svitlana will present in greater detail the specific outreach programmes that the NATO PA has developed over the years to support parliaments in partner countries.

#### **The two specificities of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's contribution to reform and cooperation in partner countries**

The NATO PA's perspective and experience in the promotion of parliamentary oversight of the defence and security sector is specific in two different ways:

1. it is a multilateral inter-parliamentary approach
2. its work relates to the specific context of NATO's activities, transformation and enlargement

Let me examine these two features successively.

### **1. The specificity of the inter-parliamentary approach**

As we have already heard from the representatives of the German-South Caucasus Parliamentary Group, inter-parliamentary forums are both different from and complementary to other initiatives at a national, bilateral, regional, inter-regional and multilateral level.

**National mechanisms** for democratic control in the defence and security sectors are evidently the first and most important layer. Defence and security constitute the core attributes of state sovereignty. Responsibility in these areas rests primarily with the executive authorities and involves both military and civilian personnel. Various arrangements also provide for some form of intervention of national parliaments.

In this complex relationship between military vs. civilian, executive vs. legislative, democratic control means first and foremost the subordination of the armed forces to those democratically elected to take charge of the country's affairs, i.e. the subordination of the military to civilian authorities. This is not only a purely institutional question but also implies, in a broader sense, a certain idea of the relationship between armed forces and the societies they protect. In other words, armed forces must serve the societies they protect and military policies and capabilities must be consistent with political objectives and economic resources.

There is also another dimension to democratic control, which is both included in and complementary to the general principle of subordination of the military to civilian authorities. This dimension focuses on the relations between the executive and the legislative branches of governments. It requires that proper checks and balances exist to the powers of the executive (i.e. civilian + military) in defence and security matters. This is precisely the role generally assigned to parliaments.

There is however no universal model for civilian / military relations, as there is no universal model regarding parliamentary oversight in the defence and security sectors. A quick look at institutional arrangements in Western democracies demonstrates how national traditions have shaped each country's conception of what is necessary and acceptable. We have heard yesterday about the German model. This model is unique in many ways and very different from procedures existing for example in the United States, in the United Kingdom or in France.

Despite this diversity, it is possible to identify some common guidelines and principles. In particular, *accountability*, *oversight* and *transparency* can be identified as three fundamental pillars of democratic control. In other words, proper procedures have to be put in place to organise the *accountability* of the executive branch to the legislative branch in defence and security matters, ensure adequate *oversight* by parliament over decisions taken in these areas, and guarantee the broadest possible level of *transparency* of these decisions.

**International cooperation** can contribute to reinforcing and enhancing the exercise of these functions at the national level. This cooperation can be organised in a **bilateral, regional, inter-regional or multilateral framework**.

This conference has provided an excellent example of an inter-regional approach. It is indeed remarkable to see how the new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe are sharing their experience in making the transition to democracy and returning the armed forces to their appropriate place in society with the countries of the Caucasus. Inter-regional initiatives are particularly useful in encouraging exchanges of experience between groups of countries with elements of comparability in their backgrounds and confronted with similar challenges.

I would also like to mention a regional initiative in the Caucasus, which I find particularly interesting. It is the South Caucasus Parliamentary Initiative initiated by the London-based organisation LINKS and which has managed to create a permanent consultative forum for members of parliament from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Although cooperation between the three countries is still very difficult, such an initiative certainly encourages exchanges of views and experiences between three countries sharing many common security challenges and objectives.

Each one of these initiatives has its own specificities, benefits and limitations. However, all share one common and fundamental objective: *to increase the knowledge and expertise of parliamentarians on defence and security issues and thereby contribute to improve the effectiveness of parliamentary oversight*.

**Multilateral inter-parliamentary initiatives** present many of the same characteristics as these other frameworks and also share the same core objective. Specifically, their broader membership and greater resources allow them to perform at least three important sets of purposes, relating to democratic control in the defence and security sectors:

- *promote dialogue, common understanding and experience-sharing; facilitate consensus-building:*

Inter-parliamentary organisations provide a structured and organised forum for discussion and consensus-building on defence and security issues.

- *reinforce mechanisms for national democratic oversight:*

Inter-parliamentary organisations provide a powerful supportive infrastructure. Exchanges of information, experience, best practices, as well as specific training programmes, assist legislators to become more effective in influencing national defence policy through their national parliaments and in holding their executives to account. This function is particularly important in relation to transition countries, which, in the early years of transition, are very

often confronted with a dearth of expertise, particularly among civilian personnel.

- allow for some degree of *collective decision-making and oversight*

The exercise of this function varies from organisation to organisation. A determining factor is the legal status of the inter-parliamentary organisation and its relation with the corresponding inter-governmental organisation. If the parliamentary dimension is recognised and well established, it is possible, in principle, to organise some form of collective oversight. However, there are also obvious limitations to what inter-parliamentary organisations can do in defence and security matters. Defence and security are areas where expressions of national sovereignty and national susceptibilities are very strong. At the intergovernmental like at the national level, they are also characterised by high (higher) standards of secrecy and confidentiality which can seriously limit parliamentary or public scrutiny.

These elements were all reflected in the development of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which was created in 1955 independent of NATO itself, and conditioned its role and influence vis-à-vis NATO during the Cold War.

## ***2. The NATO PA's contribution in the context of NATO's transformation and enlargement***

**The NATO PA** is a policy influencing rather than policy-making body. While it is not officially linked to NATO, it has developed ever-closer relations with its inter-governmental counterpart and is now recognised as an indispensable partner for the Alliance. However, despite the wishes of part of the Assembly's membership, the nature of NATO's inter-governmental decision-making process, based on consensus, means that the contribution of the Assembly lies primarily in creating greater transparency of Alliance policies, contributing to the development of Alliance-wide consensus, and providing governments with a view of collective parliamentary opinion. Direct influence lies in helping parliamentarians become more effective in developing national policies through their national parliaments. Since the end of the Cold War, the role of the Assembly has undergone fundamental changes and one can expect that the relationship with NATO will further evolve.

*Initially, the main functions of the Assembly could be defined as the following:*

- *to foster dialogue among parliamentarians on major security issues*
- *to facilitate parliamentary awareness and understanding of key issues and Alliance policies*
- *to provide NATO and its member governments with an indication of collective parliamentary opinion*
- *to provide greater transparency of NATO policies*
- *to strengthen the transatlantic relationship*

*After the end of the Cold War*, partnership and co-operation have become predominant features of the Assembly's activities. In 1990, the Assembly created the status of 'Associate Member' which allows full participation in Assembly activities, albeit without the obligation to contribute to the Assembly's budget nor the right to vote. In addition, with essential financial assistance from the United States, the Assembly established the Rose-Roth initiative and a series of staff training programs, which Svitlana will present in a minute.

As a result of these new initiatives, the Assembly now fulfils the following additional functions:

- **assisting the development of parliamentary democracy throughout the Euro-Atlantic area** by integrating parliamentarians from non-member nations into the Assembly's work;
- assisting directly those parliaments actively seeking Alliance membership;
- increasing co-operation with countries who seek co-operation rather than membership, including those of the Mediterranean regions;
- **assisting the development of parliamentary mechanisms and practices essential for the effective democratic control of armed forces.**

The NATO PA granted the three Baltic countries the status of associate member as early as 1991, before integrating them as full-fledged members after NATO's second round of enlargement in 2004. Georgia was granted associate member status in 1999 and Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2002. The parliaments of the 6 countries represented here today have actively participated in the whole range of Assembly activities and proven early on their commitment to the promotion of dialogue on security issues and the common values of the Alliance.

Our first partnership seminar took place in Vilnius in December 1991, when Lithuania was facing a number of difficult problems, including, it is appropriate to notice, the unwanted presence of Russian troops. It is gratifying to know that Lithuania, along with its Baltic neighbours, has been prominent in providing support to Georgia and other countries of the South Caucasus.

Today, the Assembly has two principal sessions a year, spring and autumn held in member and increasingly associate member nations. These are supplemented by a multitude of additional meetings, visits and activities. The Assembly is made up of 248 delegates from the 26 NATO member countries, 61 from the 13 associate member countries, a delegation from the European Parliament and 8 parliamentary observer delegations.

Much of what the Assembly is doing with partner parliaments has a direct relationship with NATO's own work, particularly since, very early on in the enlargement process, NATO identified democratic control of armed forces as a principle that countries seeking membership of NATO must implement.

During the long process of NATO enlargement, the Assembly has gathered considerable experience on what needs to be done in the way of reform and how it should be achieved. The evidence for this learning experience lies in the development of MAP's, IPP's and more recently the DIB initiative. Very simply, in providing political and practical assistance to partners, particularly in the area of parliamentary oversight of defence, the Assembly is not just supporting NATO's own efforts, but is an integral part of Alliance outreach policy.

It has also to be noted that, in the current environment, the requirement for parliamentary and public support is as strong as ever, if not stronger. Armed forces are increasingly deployed to far-off places on peace-support operations and receive high media attention. Parliamentarians are called on to provide the resources, frequently to authorise the deployments and to explain to their constituents why such deployments are necessary, and why sometimes they lead to loss of life. Defence reform, underway in many countries, also requires public support and resources. It is in this sense that our work has become an integral part of NATO's own agenda, reflecting the central role of parliaments in the affairs of the Alliance.

I will now let Svitlana present some of the specific programmes and activities of the NATO PA.

Thank you.