

**An opening address delivered
by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Miroslav Lajčák,
at the conference entitled “*New Challenges – Better Capabilities*”
organised on the margins of the NATO defence ministers meeting**

21 October 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the last meeting of NATO defence ministers, the Alliance’s agenda has gone through a number of fairly significant changes: discussions on the new strategic concept began both in the headquarter and in capitals; revised strategy for Afghanistan, in the aftermath of the recent presidential election, has been adopted; France rejoined the Alliance’s military structures; a military dialogue with Russia resumed at Corfu, and the Alliance entered this new era under the helm of its new Secretary General.

The aim of the conference is to seek answers to questions summarised by five panels. Let me share with you some of the [Slovak] views on individual topics. After joining the North Atlantic Alliance Slovakia undertook to act as an accountable, reliable and predictable ally, to contribute towards enhancing – and bear its share of responsibility for safeguarding – the security and stability in the euro-Atlantic region. Since these commitments have broadened our perception of security, we engage and participate in crisis management operations within the confines of our capabilities and capacities. Our deal of responsibility for developments in the world’s crisis regions translates in our active involvement in operations such as ISAF in Afghanistan, just to mention the most prominent one. The success in Afghanistan, as well as in other expeditionary operations carried out by the Alliance, depends on the willingness of the Alliance members to fully discharge their commitments adopted at political level. This requires that all member countries, even amidst the current financial crisis, provide sufficient financial and material resources, including legislative arrangements, enabling the NATO, as a whole, to respond promptly and effectively.

In line with the needs of its national security, the Slovak Republic advocates the adoption of such decisions at the Alliance level that best match them. This is also the reason why Slovakia endorses, within the Alliance, a balance between the Article 5 operations guaranteeing collective security of the Alliance members, and the non-Article 5 operations. We attach utmost importance to ensuring the protection of NATO members’ territories, in tune with the principle of collective responsibility, and we are fully aware of the security risks outside this zone.

I would like to underline that in the core of our security are our strategic transatlantic relations. NATO that links our security with that of the USA is our only real security guarantee. We support the efforts aimed at the internal transformation of the Alliance and its open-door policy.

Needless to say, the core of our security is the Alliance and its Article 5. We must make sure that the Alliance is prepared, ready and determined to fulfill its core mandate and task. The Alliance must also be serious about its obligations – and that concerns also where and how far to offer enhanced engagement and cooperation, to extend its security guarantees. We might be called upon to deliver, and we must understand this when engaging ourselves, when offering the guarantees. We must be serious about our commitments – to the allies and to our partners. This “return to the basics” should be the way to strengthening our common security and its guarantees. Security and security guarantees of the Alliance and its members must remain equal and indivisible.

Deliberations on the new Strategic Concept of the Alliance are moving forward. It will be an important document incorporating, among other things, commitment by its members to contribute towards enhancing the security of the Euro-Atlantic area. Here I would like to point out some Slovak basic elements for new Strategic Concept.

Allow me first of all to underline that article 5 has to remain as a firm point of reference, but cannot be restricted to defending only our territory. The territorial dimension of security is still important, but our security cannot be longer guaranteed only by the stationary protection of the Atlantic Alliance region, as in the period of Cold War. Secondly, re-asserting the trans-Atlantic relationship. NATO is a community of values. This collective identity underpins the principle of consensus that governs the functioning of the Alliance. Next point is linked to the “partnership policy” and the role of NATO in the global security architecture. The Alliance, especially in recent years, has established a wide range of permanent partnerships in different regions and involving a number of actors. It would be timely to reinforce these partnerships further, through political consultations and by involving them, in political and where possible military terms, in the Alliance’s operations. At last but not least learning from the Afghanistan the NATO and his “comprehensive approach” should be improved in the future. Afghanistan is the type of the asymmetric threat, out-of-area, complex – which we are likely to have to deal in the foreseeable future.

Moreover, we support the utilisation of North Atlantic Alliance’s potential in order to reinforce and enhance its stabilisation effects in international relations by establishing strategic partnerships with Russia and other important players. Constructive approaches within the NATO-Russia Council may help to foster mutual trust and respect for the sake of seeking joint responses to security challenges.

I would leave the discussions concerning military transformation up to defence experts. Let me just highlight one aspect which the Foreign Ministry also considers important. Intensified cooperation between the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU, as well as cooperation between the United States and the EU, are pivotal in addressing the global and regional challenges. It is a natural link which, in our view and according to the popular opinion in our countries, has no other alternative. The balance of powers in the world is extremely fragile amidst global challenges, and this tandem needs to have a clearly defined position. We expect that the EU-NATO cooperation will also have its place in the Alliance’s new strategic concept. Slovakia supports close strategic cooperation between these two partners, in the interest of avoiding inefficient spending of financial, material and human resources and eliminating overlaps and duplicities.

To conclude, allow me to make a few remarks on an exceptionally important panel whose final conclusions will touch upon the transatlantic partnership in the most delicate way (e.g. impact on *nuclear deterrence*). The new initiatives announced by the US President B. Obama in Prague this April offer a qualitatively new perspective on the issue of a complete nuclear disarmament. It is a very ambitious goal, which can only be accomplished through strong commitment and engagement. We support it. In our view, the world without nuclear weapons could be safer and more importantly built on qualitatively unprecedented components of mutual trust. However, a long road lies ahead of us before we make it happen. If we are looking for an answer as to what role NATO should play in this respect, I think a part of that answer can be found in a document from Bucharest summit entitled "*Raising NATO's profile in the fields of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation,*" which deserves our attention. Also, NATO should support all the processes at other forums, which may help this vision come true. We believe that the Alliance, in coordination with other international organisations, can be very helpful in achieving these goals.