



EDUSKUNTA  
RIKSDAGEN

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

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ADDRESS BY

THE SPEAKER OF THE PARLIAMENT OF FINLAND

MATTI VANHANEN

Your excellencies, President Nauseda, Speaker Čmilytė-Nielsen, President Connolly, Deputy Secretary General Geoana, distinguished members of the Nato Parliamentary delegations.

I thank President Connolly for your invitation to address this Spring Session of the Nato Parliamentary Assembly together with my Swedish colleague, Speaker Norlén. This is a great honour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the early hours of the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, Russia launched an unprovoked full-scale war against Ukraine. This was a direct assault against a sovereign and independent country and a brutal continuation of Russia's war against Ukraine waged since 2014. Russia has once again gravely violated all the principles on which the international cooperation is founded and caused brutal devastation and humanitarian suffering in Ukraine.

At the same time, we admire the resolve and determination of Ukrainians in defending a free, and independent homeland. Ukrainians deserve our utmost respect and fullest support because Ukraine's cause matters, Ukraine's cause is just and because Ukraine is fighting for whole of Europe.

Finland together with the wide international community has been united in supporting Ukraine. We provide comprehensive support consisting also military assistance and shelter for those fleeing the war. We support the International Criminal Court's investigation of war crimes committed by Russia. And we are committed to reconstructing even stronger Ukraine. Our Prime Minister visited Ukraine last Thursday and signed an agreement to continue our support on education sector.

We also support the efforts to end this war. But only in a way, that respects the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of Ukraine. Russia is in no place to dictate the terms for peace.

Ladies, and gentlemen,

As our government's report from this May states - quote starts: "following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a fundamental change has taken place in the security and operating environment of Finland and Europe. Jointly agreed international commitments and principles of European security did not prevent war in Europe". Quote ends.

By Russia's actions the European security architecture has collapsed. Russia has not abided by its international commitments for a long time. It has shown its readiness of using military force against its neighbour. It acts in a highly unpredictable way and its statements concerning the weapons of mass destruction are reckless. Its lack of hesitation to break Geneva conventions and brutal use of sexual violence and targeting civilians are horrifying.

Russia's attempts to question Ukraine's existence as a sovereign state are dangerous. There are no second-class countries, whose sovereignty could be less than others', or sub-ordinated to someone else.

Russia has also openly expressed its desire to have spheres of influence. We found it very striking that Russia demanded in December 2021, among other things, that Nato should rule out of admitting new members. This interferes with the core of every state's sovereign right to decide their own foreign and security policies.

Russia's actions and demands have dramatically also changed Finland's foreign and security policy thinking. There has been a need to adapt ourselves to this new reality and act in a way that would strengthen our own security.

An option of joining a military alliance and for applying for NATO membership, has been included in the Finnish Governments' Foreign and Security Policy White Papers since 2004. It was my first government that adopted this policy.

We have not done the decision to apply for membership lightly, as the military non-alignment has served us well during the past decades. This decision is

based on a democratic process and a comprehensive analysis on the changes in our security environment.

From the beginning of this process, it was clear that the decision needs to be based on a wide public support. It was also obvious, that all political institutions will be engaged in decision-making, meaning the President, Government and Parliament.

At the end, it was, the will of the people, that was the driving force to proceed with the application. Recent polls show almost 80 % public support for the membership. Parliament's vote on May 17<sup>th</sup> leaves no questions either: 188 members out of 200 voted for the application and only 8 against.

From the beginning of the process, it was self-evident, that we should have a close dialogue with Sweden. We share a long history with Sweden, that is our closest ally and partner. Our defence and military cooperation have strengthened during the past years. Current situation highlights this partnership even further. It was crucial, that we both were aware of our national discussion with regard the security analysis. But the decision itself to apply was done independently by each country. However, it was realised from the beginning, that a joint decision would serve the interest of both of us. And here we are, together with my colleague Andreas advocating our countries membership in Nato.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Close and intensive Nato co-operation is nothing new for Finland. We have been participating in the Partnership for Peace Program since 1994, and since 2014 we have been an EOP partner. We have stood side by side with Nato countries in different operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. And we appreciate greatly that from the early days of Russia's invasion we received enhanced access to Nato's intelligence.

NATO is a key actor in contributing to Euro-Atlantic security and stability. We take the step of NATO membership in order to strengthen, not only our own

security, but the wider transatlantic security. We are confident that Finland's membership would increase stability in the Baltic Sea region and strengthen the security of all of Europe. We are a security provider, not consumer and our decision is not against anyone.

After the end of the Cold War, we never let our guard down. The whole society is well-prepared for crisis and the preparedness is based on the concept of comprehensive security. For decades our defence has been based on a general conscription, a large and trained reserve, regional defence and a strong will for national defence. The latest poll conducted a few weeks ago told that 83 % of Finns are ready to defend the nation should we face an armed aggression.

We have systematically invested in our defence capabilities, and our military is compatible with Nato. We reach the goal of 2% of GDP on defence. Our wartime strength is 280,000 troops. We have invested heavily on land warfare and our navy is specialised in operating in shallow waters and the archipelago. Our air defence capability will be strengthened by the decision made in December 2021 to purchase 64 F-35 fighter aircraft. We have excellent arctic capabilities, and cyber defence is under constant development. As a side remark, our team won in April a Nato cyber defence competition.

It is a fact of life that Finland's membership in Nato would expand the area of the Alliance and double its land border with Russia. As our former president Paasikivi said, "geography is something that the Finns cannot do anything about". Our border with Russia has been well-managed, calm and without problems and we aim to keep it that way. Due to the shared border, there is a need to have practical dialogue with Russia, for example on border security and crossings. This is something we will continue regardless the situation.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Finland and Nato share the same values and are committed to defending the rules-based international order and the principles of European security. These principles lay foundation for responding to global challenges and define the rules for interaction. We will be there to ensure that the aggressor won't divide

us, but on the contrary, close the ranks even tighter. And we will be there to ensure, that there is a high price to pay for violating the rules-based international order.

As a member of the EU, we have been advocating the unity of the union and speaking with one voice. This principle will be our mode of action also in Nato.

Mr. President, colleagues,

Now that we have taken this decisive step together with Sweden to apply for the membership, it is time for NATO allies to weigh in. We are joining the Alliance with the strong belief that the commitments are kept. We are grateful for strong words and actions of support already demonstrated by allies.

It is understandable that different issues may be raised along the process. We are doing our part on having a constructive dialogue with allies, and are ready to continue the discussion on any outstanding issues.

With these words I hope that there is a strong support in your respective Parliaments to our memberships.

I thank you for your attention.