



**CANADIAN GLOBAL AFFAIRS INSTITUTE**  
**INSTITUT CANADIEN DES AFFAIRES MONDIALES**

# **Reinforcing Transatlantic Bridges in Warsaw: The NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Spring Session**

by Roger Hilton  
June 2018

# POLICY UPDATE

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## **REINFORCING TRANSATLANTIC BRIDGES IN WARSAW: THE NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY'S SPRING SESSION**

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**R**elationships are never perfect. Typically, they are characterized by shared moments of success as well as discontent. As relationships experience ebbs and flows, sometimes the tonic for recovery is being able to return to an honest dialogue. NATO and its 29 members are not immune from this phenomenon and from time to time require a podium to air their grievances. Since 1955, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (PA) has been providing that platform and continues to do so admirably. Today's version barely resembles its nascent self as the parliamentarians' ranks have grown. Sadly, member discord has remained a permanent feature that ranges from [disagreements](#) between Croatia and Slovenia in the Aegean to increasingly hostile [relations](#) between Greece and Turkey over the detainment of Greek border guards. Based on the collection of internal disagreements, combined with Russian foreign policy brinkmanship, the PA's spring session in Warsaw, Poland could not have been better timed. The current president, Paolo Alli of Italy, reinforced the message about the PA's utility in these tumultuous times: "Our Assembly provides an essential forum for discussing frankly and openly any issues which might arise between us, and helping forge and maintain consensus." NATO faces a litany of internal and external challenges. The PA's 64th annual session will be held in Halifax in November 2018, and given the precarious global security situation, it would be prudent for Canadians to follow the outcomes.

Resolving NATO members' differences is often an overlooked and under-appreciated responsibility. Despite the lack of celebrity associated with the organization, Canadians can be proud that the inaugural NATO PA president was Liberal MP Wishart McLea Robertson who served from 1955 to 1956. Today, the NATO PA is made up of 360 delegates from the 29 member states and 16 associate countries, who have the responsibility of representing their respective countries while engaging in dialogue on global issues and reporting findings back to their home governments. They contribute to the five committees that include: the civil dimension of security; defence and security; economics and security; political; and science and technology. The diversity among parliamentarians should not be overlooked, as this spring a member of Germany's Die Linke (The Left) party – which [argues](#) against NATO's continued existence – attended. At the annual session, the committees produce policy recommendations on which the full assembly votes. Although these recommendations are not binding, they are distributed to the governments and parliaments of member and associate member nations. Upon publication, NATO's secretary general responds to each policy recommendation.

There is great historical significance in Warsaw being the host city. Since Poland became a member in 1999, it has hosted the PA three times and has championed its membership. More recently, it hosted NATO's 2016 summit and is one of the few countries that has consistently reached its two per cent GDP defence spending target. This year also coincided with Poland's Sejm celebrating 550 years of parliamentary activities that date back to 1468.

In anticipation of the spring session, Canada's head of delegation to the NATO PA, Liberal MP Leona Alleslev, shared her perspective on the PA's value and how Canada is contributing to transatlanticism. "It is important to recognize that the strength of NATO is in the unity of 29



nations around their commitments to democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law. Parliamentary assembly meetings are where relationships start and flourish.” Alleslev was also quick to point out that it is more than just a military alliance: “It’s not only about defence and security; it’s actually about our relationship with other countries. Typically, if you have good and trustworthy defence relations, then you will likely have strong trade and political relationships. This feature of NATO proves multilateral institutions still have merit.” On the issue of Canada’s enhanced forward presence (EFP) in Latvia, Alleslev elaborated on her fruitful relationship with her colleagues in the Baltic and why connecting at the parliamentary level is important: “We have been able to spend significant time with parties (that) both form the government and opposition, which is one of the strengths of the NATO PA. We hear from all sides ... today the bond between both countries has been taken to the next level with Canadian soldiers visiting schools and playing hockey.” On the current state of transatlantic affairs, she offered a confident assessment in which there was ample room for improvement at home: “I would say that one of (the) greatest threats in Canada is that our citizenry doesn’t understand what NATO is. A recent IPSOS survey concluded that 71 per cent of Canadian youth don’t know what NATO is; this is disconcerting because people can’t value and support what they don’t understand. That is a significant issue and a risk.”

As a graduate of the Royal Military College and former Royal Canadian Air Force logistics officer, Alleslev shared her insight on how the issue of women in security has evolved over time:

This topic (is) both domestic and international in nature. One aspect is the number of women involved in uniform in Canada. The other is that peace and security (are) much more than soldiers in uniform; today, it’s about building the civilian infrastructure for government organizations, where we have to actively engage women and explain to them why it’s important to get involved so that they can be empowered to reach their full potential. We are making progress, but more work is left to be done.

Finally, since the annual session in November will be an opportunity to showcase Canada and Halifax, Alleslev was cautiously optimistic about reinvigorating the spirit of NATO at home: “The annual session will be attended by parliamentarians from all 29 member states, which will be a great opportunity to understand what NATO is. It is not every day you have 500 parliamentarians from (an) array of countries together.”

With three days of presentations, panel discussions and draft report considerations, a number of takeaways emerged. In the energy and security committee, Dr. Anders Aslund, senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, presented his research on Russia’s energy policy in Eastern and Central Europe. Specifically, he elaborated on Gazprom’s weaponization of both gas and oil energy products. Underlining its strategy is the desire to secure the Nord Stream 2 project that will add to Germany’s already unhealthy addiction to Russian gas and cut Ukraine out, thereby starving Kiev of much-needed transit fees. Concerned about the threats associated with dependence on a single energy supplier, countries from Eastern Europe and the Baltics repeatedly expressed their reluctance about the project. Aslund also shed some light on how the Kremlin has been promoting



anti-fracking by questioning its viability as an alternative, something Czechia and Bulgaria have already accepted. Despite the miscreant doctrine, the EU competition committee's recent ruling is a step in the right direction, according to Lithuanian parliamentarian Aušrinė Armonaitė, because Gazprom will have to “play by the rules, not with the rules”. On the future prospect of the international trading system, Professor L. Alan Winters of the University of Sussex presented a sobering [assessment](#) of the gradual erosion of a rules-based order where practices are increasingly becoming transactional and international agreements are no longer respected. More frighteningly, international trade is shifting to a “large players’ game”.

## MAIN RUSSIAN PIPELINES INTO EUROPE

- - Active pipeline route
- - Proposed pipeline route
- - Abandoned pipeline route
- Pipeline terminal
- Transit countries



Figure 1: A map illustrating major oil and gas pipelines that originate in Russia and travel through Europe. As the author notes, NATO has grown increasingly weary of Russia's weaponization of oil & gas assets. (Source: European Council on Foreign Relations)

In the defence and security committee, Polish Minister of National Defence Mariusz Blaszczak reiterated the value of NATO's EFP and singled out the threat of the Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad. The threat was addressed on a political level; specifically, how fast the North Atlantic Council would be able to invoke Article V and activate an armed response. From a military planning perspective, Blaszczak recognized the vulnerability of the 64-mile border between Poland and Lithuania known as the [Suwalki Gap](#), where loss of control to Russia would risk cutting off Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia from NATO allies in the event of a conflict.

When it comes to the Alliance's open-door policy, Blaszczak confidently declared that Georgia and Moldova “should be admitted as quickly as possible”. German parliamentarian Wolfgang



Hellmich of the Social Democratic Party provided a progress report on NATO in Afghanistan. Although the Taliban remains active and occupies large swaths of rural territory, they failed to achieve their objective of taking control of a provincial capital and are facing heightened pressure. At the moment, 39 nations contribute to the Resolute Support mission and 27 have pledged to increase force levels, with 16,000 troops expected to be deployed by the end of 2018. Hellmich also discussed the regional interplay between Pakistan and India, where the path to peace is linked to Pakistan's willingness to deny safe haven to terrorist groups who plan, resource and launch attacks inside its borders. With India increasing its role in contributing to Afghanistan's stability, Pakistan's motivations to comply are less than guaranteed, thus complicating matters for NATO.

Any further review of security vulnerabilities would be incomplete without an assessment from the assembly's science and technology committee. Members cautioned that the Alliance is almost a decade behind Russia and China in some areas of military technology development. Earlier this year, Russian President Vladimir Putin bragged about the development of new-generation nuclear weapons, most notably an unmanned nuclear-armed underwater vehicle. China has already allocated billions of dollars to artificial intelligence programs and recently introduced a homemade aircraft carrier. To respond to this technological gap, NATO needs to prioritize its research on cutting-edge equipment to maintain parity with its competitors. Introducing a draft report to the committee, Alleslev [employed](#) her colleagues to inform national governments and their citizens about the urgency of the current situation: "If we are going to deter and defend we need to be in the same game as our enemies."

After two days of deliberations and debates, the plenary session convened to hear from senior members of the Polish government as well as NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. Marshal of the Sejm Marek Kuchciński, speaking on potential future enlargement, voiced the Polish government's support for an expansion initiative, saying "NATO's open-door policy must continue for countries that share our values ... the exclusion (of) Georgia and Ukraine outside of the Alliance threatens its stability." In his keynote address, Polish President Andrzej Duda reiterated the need for the American-European bond to endure because transatlantic power derives from its solidarity. Duda was blunt in his assessment of the Kremlin's revanchist policies: "I regret to admit that Moscow has not put up with the ruin of the imperial Soviet Union ..." He urged the Alliance to take a more proactive approach to its southern flank borders, where the rise of illegal migration and exploitation by adversaries leaves NATO exposed.

Stoltenberg, a former Norwegian parliamentarian, reminded his colleagues that at the core of any democracy is a parliamentary assembly that plays a crucial role in protecting individual liberty and the rule of law. Echoing the sentiment of many of the parliamentarians, he acknowledged the demanding international security landscape and the outsized role Russia has been playing in injecting instability. Against the backdrop of Russia's meddling in democratic elections, its refusal to acknowledge the downing of MH-17 and its intentional blurring of conventional and nuclear forces, he previewed the agenda for the upcoming July summit in Brussels.

At the top of the agenda, deterrence and defence will be addressed with a focus on reinforcing investments such as the EFP. To avoid miscalculation and accidental escalation with Russia, the





continuation of the Alliance's dual-track approach will also be addressed. Projecting stability into NATO's neighbourhood through training more local forces and building capacity as an alternative to deploying national forces to extinguish operational oxygen for terrorists is the second agenda item. Improving EU-NATO co-operation in order to avoid duplication and strengthening complementary capabilities is the third item. The Alliance's continued modernization and adaption is the fourth item, looking to maximize the effectiveness of the 7,000-plus personnel in NATO's command structure. The prickly issue of burden sharing is the final agenda item. Besides defence spending, Alliance contributions to missions and operations are moving in the right direction but NATO still needs to do better to deliver on capability targets.

Most encouraging about Stoltenberg's [remarks](#) was his undeniable confidence in the future sustainability of transatlantic relations. These relations ebb and flow and it is natural to disagree on important issues. Despite the 1956 Suez Crisis, France expelling NATO in 1966 and the 2003 Iraq invasion, the Alliance still stands cemented. Given the turbulent times and divisive topics among the transatlantic community, such stoicism and reassurance were warmly received and needed.

Looking towards the July 2018 NATO summit, parliamentarians unanimously appealed for the Alliance to maintain political unity as well as military credibility. In a joint [declaration](#), the lawmakers insisted that the Alliance continue to build upon its ongoing transformation to address a litany of security challenges that above all remind adversaries that an attack on one ally will always be considered an attack on all. As parliamentarians returned to their respective capitals to get back to work and prepare for Halifax, Alleslev captured the reason why the NATO PA is critical to ensuring transatlantic solidarity: "The more times you meet and understand the priorities and challenges of allies, the easier it is to identify opportunities and better solve security and defence threats." As threats to transatlantic relations continue to manifest themselves both inside and out of NATO, member states should never stray too far from the PA's podium to overcome challenges. We have learned since 1955 that sometimes a little frankness can go a long way to saving a relationship.

## ► About the Author

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**Roger Hilton** is a Non-Resident Academic Fellow at the Institute for Security Policy at Kiel University, Deputy Secretary-General of the Youth Atlantic Treaty Association (YATA) and Fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute. He is a 2016 graduate of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna and holds a Masters Degree in Advanced International Studies, as well as a 2013 foreign policy certificate from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Roger has previous experience with the delegation of the Kingdom of Belgium at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In addition, he has worked at the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration in Tbilisi, as well as the Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association in Tallinn. He was a member of the 2016 Riga Conference Future Leader Forum. Roger's research focuses on transatlantic affairs and the post-Soviet Sphere, where his work has been featured in the Center for International Maritime Security, Review of European & Transatlantic Affairs, and Atlantic Voices. To date he has visited half of the former Soviet Republics including the breakaway region of Transnistria as well the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.



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