

**“Democracy as a pillar of security: 75th anniversary of the signing of the  
North Atlantic Treaty”**

June 25, 2024

Remarks by the Secretary General Thomas E. Garrett

***Excellencies, Governing Council Members of the Community of Democracies,  
Distinguished guests and dear friends,***

I am honored to join you in celebrating the 75th Anniversary of the Signing of the North Atlantic Treaty and the 25th anniversary of Poland’s accession to the Alliance.

In 1999, I was working in Ukraine in support of democratic activists. I watched Poland’s accession to the NATO Alliance from Kyiv with great happiness, encouraged by growing solidarity.

Today, Poland is a leader and Poland leads by example, substantially investing its GDP in defense and, together with other Community of Democracies Member States such as Lithuania, Estonia, Sweden, Finland, and Romania, it protects democracy as it anchors the security of NATO's Eastern Flank.

Later this week, the Community of Democracies will also commemorate another event - In 2000 two colleagues and true friends – Dr. Madeleine Albright and Profesor Bronislaw Geremek - spearheaded a unique project on June 27, inviting nations from every region of the world to come to a free Poland for the conference, “*Towards a Community of Democracies.*”

The initiative for that meeting was represented by Minister Geremek’s belief, speaking then, that “The emergence of democracy as a universally accepted form of government is the most important development of our century.”

Minister Geremek inspired the conference with the idea of a declaration through which participants could reaffirm their commitment to democracy and outline their shared concept of what democracy requires. 106 states concluded the conference through adoption of the Warsaw Declaration, agreeing to "*respect and uphold core democratic principles and practices,*" standards and values found in the Declaration's 19 principles, standards which are fundamental for a democratic state.

Secretary Albright and Minister Geremek, when preparing for the Warsaw conference, were worried primarily about the capacity of new and fragile democracies. Today, we are concerned for all democracies. As US President Joe Biden pinpointed in his address during his 2022 visit to Warsaw, there is a renewed threat to freedom: a battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force. In this struggle for democracy and freedom, we now see next-door Ukraine and its people on the frontlines fighting to save their nation, but also for the security of the entire continent.

Values-based alliances are today of utmost importance since we still find, in different parts of the world, the worrying trend of deterioration of the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and significant challenges to the rule of law and functioning State institutions.

Authoritarian countries exploit contemporary challenges to open and transparent democracies through malign interference in elections and distorting social discourse through disinformation. Democracies must respond and guard against authoritarian regimes by strengthening their adherence to the rule of law, human rights, and democracy within their borders.

We can confidently state: Democracy is the cornerstone of security.

Efforts to counter security threats are greatly enhanced by adherence to democratic norms and an unyielding commitment to human rights. Some take them for granted, but these democratic principles are an integral part of the global architecture, creating an enabling environment for peace, stability, innovation and growth. The international community must stay focused on the ultimate aim of a world composed of states that respect the fundamental rights of their citizens and of their neighbors, we will be that much closer to "saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war," protecting human rights, and achieving

“social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,” as envisioned by the United Nations Charter.

From the Community of Democracies perspective, NATO is one of the most important partners in this endeavor. Firstly, the North Atlantic Treaty is founded on commitment of its members to democratic principles. Secondly, strong members of NATO are the most committed members of the Community of Democracies. These two alliances do not compete – they multiply their potential.

And so we celebrate the original signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, we celebrate Poland’s accession to NATO 25 years ago, and In just a few days we will also celebrate the 24<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Declaration, a lasting testament to Secretary Albright and Minister Geremek.

Although there were many compelling reasons to issue the Warsaw Declaration, one of them was personal for Minister Geremek: For too long, some 50 years, the name Warsaw had been linked to the Warsaw Pact, which was advertised as a security alliance, but in reality served as a tool to restrain once independent nations under Moscow’s thumb.

Madeleine Albright said Minister Geremek took pride in hosting the conference “Towards a Community of Democracies” so that “the name of his beloved capital city could be associated with something newer and more uplifting than the cold war vintage Warsaw Pact. The Warsaw Declaration, a manifesto spelling out the elements of democracy, fulfilled that purpose.”

Thank you for joining with the Senate and the Community of Democracies today to discuss these important and timely issues.