

I take tremendous satisfaction in finding that one of my very first duties as Canadian foreign minister is to attend a meeting of the North Atlantic Council. I have a number of reasons for this. To begin with, let me reaffirm that Canada continues to place great importance on co-operation with its NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] allies for the purpose of strengthening transatlantic and European security. Secondly, in the face of the complex and multidimensional threats to our security, we feel that multilateral co-operation is the most effective, if not the ultimate, solution. Finally, NATO, an alliance in terms of its political and military dimensions, can contribute decisively toward guaranteeing our common security, both through direct action and through association with the United Nations [UN] and the CSCE [Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe]. In fact, these elements and our viewpoints on a certain number of key points on this meeting's agenda will be looked at in the review of foreign and defence policy planned by the new Government of Canada in the coming months.

The threats that I mentioned will continue to exert heavy pressure on NATO. We must, therefore, see that its internal integrity is preserved, while enabling it to adapt to the new requirements. I think we must make sure that NATO remains attentive to the security concerns of its neighbours. Moreover, in view of the constraints being felt by all of us today, NATO must fulfil its mandate in the most efficient way possible, since it will be increasingly difficult to find new resources.

The key to the problem lies in careful management of resources, and I am pleased to see that progress has already been made in this direction with the budget for the NATO infrastructure. We must continue these efforts and take a critical look at NATO's civilian and military budgets. This will be essential, if the Organization is to respond to the new demands facing it.

Mr. Secretary-General, I agree with you concerning the issues that will have to be dealt with, if our January summit is to succeed. Canada feels that, in order to deal with them, NATO must, above all, reaffirm its reason for being and its commitment. Its credibility depends on it. Consequently, both during our ministerial meetings and at our January summit, we must do everything we can to strengthen the alliance. Allow me to point out that the transatlantic dimension is central; we cannot allow internal preoccupations and differences to weaken it. This dimension requires, in turn, a positive and constructive recognition, in compatibility with the alliance, of the new European identity in security and defence. Canada has long advocated this approach, and feels that we must develop new ideas, of the "separable but not separated" type, and form a joint panel to respond to the concerns and needs of our European friends, while preserving the integrity of the alliance. This we can do, if complementarity and genuine transparency exist between NATO and the Western European Union.