

Speech by Prime Minister Ingrida ŠIMONYTĖ
at Model NATO Vilnius 2023
June 8, 2023, Seimas, Vilnius

Your Excellencies Ambassadors,

Dear students,

It is my sincere pleasure to address young leaders, and future Ministers, Prime Ministers and, I hope, a future NATO Secretary General.

I am glad to see your keen interest in the most pressing issues facing NATO nations today. It is a testimony to the younger generation's strong sense of responsibility for the future of democracy, also for Lithuania's and Euro-Atlantic security.

The strength of democracy is measured by the quality of debate and the depth of citizens' engagement. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of education in this regard. We are living in an era where autocratic regimes sponsor massive propaganda via traditional and social media platforms, creating mischievous, fake noise in trying to undermine the ideals of democracy. The best vaccine against autocrats' propaganda is a resilient society and informed citizens who know how to engage in debate, defend their opinion, and how to double-check "the news".

I highly appreciate the initiative of organizers of this *Model NATO* event. I thank all participating students and their teachers for your leadership in strengthening our democratic culture and traditions.

Democracy is not the easiest way and definitely it is not a short-cut: one has to fight for their opinions. Sometimes you win. Sometimes you lose. Sometimes you strike a compromise. Debate unlock the potential of all those involved. This is a true beauty of democracy. Through debate, at the end of the day, we reach the best possible solution.

Today, you will be engaging in the most serious debates, and you will be addressing the very topics currently deliberated by the heads of states and governments of NATO nations.

I will refrain from elaborating on Lithuania's positions to maintain a level playing field and avoid granting an advantage to a respected delegate from Lithuania.

But let me emphasize the points that all NATO nations and all democratic countries across the globe unanimously agree upon.

Russia's war in Ukraine shook the global security and the rules-based international order like nothing else.

Russia's ruthless and premeditated war stands in stark contrast to everything that democracy represents: the ideals of liberty, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law, the value of human life and human dignity.

Every aspect of human decency was crushed by the cruelty of the Russian army.

In the hands of desperate Putin's regime everything has become a weapon, including information, food, energy, nuclear power plants, even water, as we witnessed a few days ago, when the Nova Kakhovka dam was blown up.

Children are being torn away from their families and deported to Russia. Even the youngest are being used as a leverage.

Putin's raw hate for democracy combined with Russia's imperial ambitions poses a long-term threat far beyond Ukraine's borders. Today, the heroism of the Ukrainian people is preventing Russia's war from spreading further into Europe.

But in the long term, it is only strong NATO that can deter Russia from its further aggression. It is clear that NATO needs to adapt. NATO needs swift, bold and overreaching decisions that reflect new geopolitical realities. NATO's ambition to defend every inch of Alliance's territory should be based on credible resources pledged by the members.

We - NATO - are a family of 31, and hopefully, soon of 32 nations, who share the same values. This bond among nations, and a pledge of *one for all and all for one* - is a true strength of NATO.

We will always be on the side of democracy, freedom and the rule of law. It is our responsibility - as governments and citizens - to take all necessary decisions to safeguard these values and further strengthen the Alliance.

Today, you will be representing the governments of NATO. You will have a responsibility to find a consensus among the allies on important topics. You will have a responsibility to make NATO stronger.

Let me wish you very interesting and fruitful debate. And again - my thanks go to the British Council, the British Embassy and the Baltic Institute for Advanced Technology for their invaluable initiative.

Thank you.