

Commendation Ceremony on 4 June

Speech by Ambassador IZAWA

Thank you for gathering here today. As ambassador of the Mission of Japan to NATO, I would like to present a Commendation to Ms. Ruxandra POPA, former Secretary General of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NATO PA), for her significant contributions to promoting parliamentary exchanges and cooperation between Japan and NATO over the past 20 years.

Exchanges between members of parliament from Japan and NATO Allies date back to the 1980s, when Japan established the Diet Members' Council for Comprehensive Security, otherwise known as the DMCCS in response to a request from the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA), the predecessor of NATO PA. The creation of the Council kick started regular exchanges between like-minded partners. Currently, former Minister of Defense Gen NAKATANI serves as President.

Since the 26th Annual General Assembly held in Brussels in November 1980, Japan has sent representatives to your General Assembly more than 70 times as an observer country, including online participation and participation by secretariat staff. Additionally, our country has hosted your delegations and facilitated exchanges of views between our parliamentary members a total of 25 times, resulting in increased mutual understanding and cooperation between our parliamentarians.

Ms. Ruxandra POPA has contributed significantly to further deepening the connection between NATO PA based on her deep knowledge of international security affairs and commitment to parliamentary exchange. She joined the NATO PA Secretariat in August 2005, first serving as Director of the-then Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security, and later as Deputy Secretary General. In May 2018, she was nominated as Secretary

General, a position she held from January 2020 to October 2025.

Ms. POPA possesses a deep understanding of international politics and security and has made significant contributions to NATO PA's activities over the years. As noted by NATO PA President Marcos PERESTRELLO, Ms. POPA has worked diligently to ensure that the NATO PA's voice reaches national parliaments, governments, and NATO itself.

Among Ms. POPA's many achievements, her efforts in promoting understanding of Japan-NATO relations among parliamentarians deserve recognition. In particular, Ms. POPA spearheaded the visits of the NATO PA delegations to Japan in September 2022 and again last November. Thanks to Ms. POPA's tremendous efforts, a highly meaningful program was realized which included consultations with officials from the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense, as well as visits

to companies. I believe it was a valuable opportunity for Allies parliamentarians to deepen their understanding of the Indo-Pacific situation and to experience firsthand the benefits of Japan-NATO cooperation.

Understanding and support at the political level are essential for strengthening our relations. I have been actively working to strengthen political dialogue and exchanges between Japan and NATO, and the NATO PA Secretariat plays an extremely important role in achieving this goal. Today's commendation ceremony is a milestone in strengthening Japan-NATO relations and I look forward to the continued cooperation from NATO PA.