

**PRE-MINISTERIAL PRESS CONFERENCE BY NATO SECRETARY
GENERAL JENS STOLTENBERG AHEAD OF THE MEETINGS OF
NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS IN BRUSSELS**

02 October 2018

Good morning.

At the Defence Ministerial meeting that starts tomorrow, Defence Ministers will take forward the decisions Heads of State and Governments made when they met at the July Summit here in Brussels. And we will address many different issues, but one of the issues we will address is how to take forward the issue of burden sharing and the commitments we made at the Summit to invest more and also to deliver on the other aspects of burden sharing, contributions and capabilities.

Of course, burden sharing is about more than spending. But we agreed that there is a new sense of urgency to invest 2 % of GDP on defence. And to have credible national plans to get there.

We also recognised that significant progress has been made. Last year, European Allies and Canada boosted their defence budgets by a combined 5.2%. The biggest increase, in real terms, in a quarter of a century. And over the past two years, the same countries have spent a cumulative 41 billion US dollars more on defence. I expect all Allies to stay on course, to continue making progress and to honour their commitments.

Ministers will also discuss progress in strengthening our deterrence and defence – in all its aspects. We will meet tomorrow in the Nuclear Planning Group. We will also have a working session to address our continued adaptation in response to conventional, hybrid and cyber threats.

We remain concerned about Russia's lack of respect for its international commitments, including the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the INF Treaty. This Treaty abolishes a whole category of weapons and is a crucial element of our security. Now this treaty is in danger because of Russia's actions. After years of denials, Russia recently acknowledged the existence of a new missile system, called 9M729. Russia has not provided any credible answers on this new missile. All Allies agree that the most plausible assessment would be that Russia is in violation of the Treaty. It is therefore urgent that Russia addresses these concerns in a substantial and transparent manner.

We will also address the instability in North Africa and the Middle East.

We are implementing packages of assistance for Jordan and Tunisia to help improve their defence and security capacities. And preparations to launch our new training mission in Iraq are well on track. At the ministerial, our military commanders will update us on progress in

adapting NATO's command structure. So that we can deal more effectively with the range of challenges we face. And ensure that we have the right forces in the right place at the right time.

Our ability to move forces quickly will be put to the test later this month. In exercise Trident Juncture in Norway. This is one of our biggest exercises in many years. It will include around 45,000 participants from 31 Allied countries and partners. With around 150 aircraft, 60 ships, and over 10,000 vehicles. The scenario is fictitious but realistic. It will simulate NATO's collective response to an armed attack against one Ally. And it will exercise our ability to reinforce our troops from Europe and across the Atlantic. The exercise is defensive. And it is transparent. All members of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, including Russia, have been invited to send observers.

Finally, this meeting of Defence Ministers will strengthen our partnerships. We will meet with the European Union, and with our partners Finland and Sweden. To address our cooperation in areas such as countering hybrid and cyber threats, and improving military mobility. EU High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini will update us on progress on EU defence initiatives. We will also hold a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission. Georgia is one of our closest partners. And a country aspiring to NATO membership.

It makes many contributions to our shared security. We work closely together on Black Sea security. This is a priority for NATO and for Georgia.

Then let me end by saying that we have all watched closely Sunday's consultative referendum in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹. I spoke to Prime Minister Zoran Zaev yesterday and we will remain in close contact. I welcome the "yes" vote in the referendum. It is up to Skopje to decide on the next steps. NATO is ready to welcome the country as our thirtieth member. But the only way is to implement the name agreement. There is no other way to NATO membership.

Accession talks have already begun. And I expect that we will conclude them by January next year.

Once all the constitutional changes on the new name are completed we can sign the accession protocol. Giving Skopje a seat at NATO's table early next year. This an historic opportunity. I urge all political leaders and parties to work together constructively and responsibly to seize this opportunity.

Since 1999 thirteen countries have joined the Alliance, helping spread democracy, stability and prosperity in Europe. Since Montenegro joined last year, foreign investment from Allied countries has doubled there. NATO remains committed to stability and security in this important part of Europe.

Next week I will be travelling to the region again, visiting Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana. And in Serbia I will attend our biggest disaster relief exercise, with 40 countries participating. This is the first such exercise hosted in Serbia, which reflects the strong and highly valued partnership between Serbia and NATO.

And with that, I'm ready to take your questions.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Okay, please don't forget to introduce yourselves and your outlet. We'll start with Jane's, over there.

Question [Jane's Defence Weekly]: Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence Weekly. Two questions: do you have any indications or concerns about where Russia intends to deploy its new missile in the future? And second related question; Russia has substantial area denial capabilities in its north western military district, and particularly in Kaliningrad. Aside from air patrols, don't want to talk about air patrols, what is NATO doing to counter that area denial capability? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: To be honest, I didn't get the first question.

Question [Jane's Defence Weekly]: Any indications of where Russia intends to deploy its new missile in the future? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: The US, which is part of the INF Treaty, has determined that Russia is in violation because, according to the US, Russia has started to deploy that missile. They have shared that intelligence with us, but I will not go into intelligence details - just refer to what the US clearly has stated – and I would also say that of course we have looked into this intelligence. We are extremely concerned because it is extremely important to make sure that Russia comes into compliance with the INF Treaty, because the treaty is important. It is a cornerstone of European security. It actually shaped the whole generation of politicians in Europe on security and defence issues. I remember myself, in Norway in the 70s and 80s, how concerned we were about the deployment of SS-20s, the Russian intermediate nuclear missiles, and the decision by NATO to respond with a dual-track decision and then to employ Pershing and Cruise missiles in Western Europe, in NATO Allied countries. And also the great achievement it was when we, in 1987, agreed on the INF Treaty, which then abolished all intermediate-range nuclear weapons. I will not go into details about where we expect Russia to then continue to deploy because, as I said, this is based on intelligence. But we ask Russia to provide answers, to be transparent, and to come into compliance with the treaty in a transparent way, because it is important to protect this treaty.

When it comes to anti-access area denial, well NATO is implementing the biggest adaptation of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, partly with more deployment of troops in the eastern part of the Alliance, partly by increasing our capability to reinforce, if needed. We are investing also in modern capabilities, which are able to deal with A2AD challenges. Again, it's hard to go into the specific capabilities, but it's obvious that NATO is able to deal with this and that some of our highly modern, new capabilities are there also to deal with A2AD challenges.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Okay. Georgian TV, lady over there.

Question [Georgia Public Broadcaster]: Georgia Public Broadcaster. Mr Secretary General, can you tell us about NATO-Georgia Commission, what topics will be discussed, what will be new for our country? And also I want to ask you a question about Russia: we hear very often from Moscow, statements against future enlargement, against our future membership in this organisation, how do you react? Because there is somehow a perception that NATO... that Russia influence has an influence on this process. Thank you very much.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: So, we will discuss our partnership with Georgia. We will update all Allies on where we are and also, of course, make sure that Allies continue to contribute to the different activities that we do together with Georgia. Especially the Joint Training and Evaluation Centre, the different activities; there are also exercises and training activities which are part of our cooperation with Georgia. We will also welcome the support that Georgia provides to NATO. Georgia continues to be one of the main contributors to especially our presence in Afghanistan. And we will also address the challenges we face in the Black Sea. We have seen a substantial Russian increased military presence there, especially in Crimea, and therefore Black Sea security: how we can work more closely together there, is part of what we will address when we meet in the NATO-Georgia Commission. We will also, of course, highlight the importance of reform. We welcome the reforms that Georgia has implemented, but we will urge and continue to support Georgia implementing reforms of its security sector.

On the issue of Russia and membership, well the message is that NATO Allies, Heads of State and Government, they reiterated their decision they made for the first time in Bucharest in 2008, that Georgia will become a member of the Alliance. We reiterated that decision at our Summit now in July. And it's only for Georgia and 29 NATO Allies to decide when that will happen. No other country, including Russia, has any right to interfere in such a process. Georgia is an independent sovereign nation. We recognise and we support the territorial integrity of Georgia. We will never recognise the so-called independent of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and we will continue to support Georgia as it moves towards full Euro-Atlantic integration.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Okay. We'll go to the gentleman over here.

Question [InterpressNews]: News Agency InterpressNews, Georgia. Mr Secretary General, it's good to hear what you say, that the NATO will uphold its commitment for Georgia becoming a NATO member, that it's only up to Georgia and NATO members to decide on this issue. But I want to go back to the Angela Merkel's visit to Georgia, which took place in August, and I will quote her, she said: "I cannot see Georgia's fast accession to NATO. I think we cannot speak about fast accession in the context of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. ... [inaudible] Germany's position". So, it turns out that Russia occupied those territories and Russia use its leverage to make some countries, some NATO Allies, to think about Georgia's accession to NATO not possible in the near future. And does it seem to you that when Angela Merkel says that due to these occupied territories Georgia can't fastly become a NATO member, it's a kind of hypocrisy because Germany itself became a NATO member whilst divided? And it was divided by the Soviet Union and Russia.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: All NATO leaders agreed on the same position when it comes Georgia, in July, which states that Georgia will become a member of the Alliance. And we also stated clearly once again that we fully support the territorial integrity of Georgia, within its international recognised borders, and this includes the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. And Georgia will not be forced to choose between its territorial integrity and membership of NATO. So, Georgia will become a member when it meets the NATO standards. We will help Georgia doing that, by helping Georgia with implementing reforms, rule of law, strengthening its democratic institutions. And in the meantime we welcome the fact that we have more NATO in Georgia than ever before, and we have actually more Georgia in NATO than ever before. So, while we are working towards membership, we continue to

strengthen our partnership, which is of mutual benefit, which is beneficial both for Georgia and for NATO.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Okay, we'll go to the lady over here.

Question: My name is Olga Kravchenko, TV Channel Pryamyj. I am from Ukraine and my question will be the next. How true is tension between Hungary and Ukraine and how to make a... hold a Ukraine-NATO Commission possible? And how to make so that Hungary and Ukraine relation not to be an obstacle for Ukraine and NATO relations? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: Hungary is a highly-valued Ally and Hungary contributes to our shared security in many different ways. Ukraine is a valued and important partner of NATO and we have to remember that one of the main reasons why NATO has implemented the biggest adaptation of our collective defence, and strengthened our collective defence over the last year, is because of Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine. So, Ukraine is an important partner for NATO. I hope that Ukraine and Hungary will resolve the differences which we all know are there. And I hope that through dialogue between Budapest and Kiev, it's possible to find solutions to the disagreements. We will continue to provide support to Ukraine. And also President Poroshenko participated at the NATO Summit in July and we have regular meetings with the government in Kiev, with Ukraine, and we will continue to provide a strong political and practical support to Ukraine.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Okay. We go to Washington Post in the middle. Last row.

Question [Washington Post]: Hi, thanks very much. Michael Birnbaum, the Washington Post. There seem to be many interpretations of what was agreed during the emergency meetings at the Summit. What is the long-term consequence of President Trump's believing that all NATO countries will spend 2% by 2024 and other countries, such as Germany, saying that no such commitments were made? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: What we saw at the Summit was that we reiterated our commitment on burden-sharing, which includes the goal of 2%, spending 2% of GDP on defence. And that's of course a commitment which applies for all NATO Allies and all NATO Allies agreed to that commitment. But perhaps even... and we also agreed that we need credible national plans, laying out how all Allies will make good on their commitments. But perhaps as important as the plans is actually what we really do now, and the reality is that what NATO Allies are doing now is that they are significantly increasing defence spending. Last year, we saw the biggest increase in a generation in defence spending, and more than 5% in real terms. And if you just look at the two last years, we have a total increase of US\$41 billion across Europe and Canada. So, I think we have a good story to tell, meaning that European Allies have really started to move, really started to invest, not only to please the United States, but because it is in their security interest to invest more in defence, when we live in a more unpredictable and uncertain security environment. At the same time, the US is increasing their military presence in Europe, so I think that actions speak louder than words. And the reality is that we see that, despite disagreements on different issues, ranging from trade, environment, the Iran deal, and also some strong messaging and language on, for instance, defence spending, the reality is that NATO delivers more and we are strengthening the transatlantic partnership. North America and Europe are doing more together. So, we have

still a long way to go. I understand the importance of this, but I am encouraged by the progress we have made over the last years.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Okay. We're going to the second row, lady with the long hair.

Question: Jovana Djuriscic, Montenegrin Daily Pobjeda. You said that you have planned to visit Serbia, so I'm wondering what is the purpose of your visit and is it related to the last tensions between Kosovo and Belgrade? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: This is a long-time planned visit to Serbia. Serbia is a close partner of NATO and I am looking forward to go to Belgrade. I had my childhood in Belgrade, so it's always nice to go back there. But in addition, of course, I go there because we have this civil preparedness exercise, which is the biggest ever, and the first time we do that in Serbia. And just the fact that we are able to prove, or to show, that NATO is not only a military alliance, dealing with military threats, but NATO is also an alliance that can help to respond to natural disasters, which we have seen in that part of Europe before, and also helping to create the framework for bringing civilian capabilities and military capabilities together and to deal with a civil emergency or natural disasters. I expect, of course, that we will discuss the situation in Kosovo and my main message is that all parties need to show calm and restraint, and that we fully support the Pristina and Belgrade dialogue to solve the issues and to solve the problems which we see in the relationship between Belgrade and Pristina. KFOR is present, KFOR is there with more than 4,000 troops and some NATO troops are playing a key role in providing security and stability in Kosovo.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Lady in the second row.

Question: Slobodanka Jovanovska, NEZAVISEN VESNIK. Mr Stoltenberg, how do you see the decision of Macedonian opposition party, VMRO, to openly boycott the referendum? And does your statement today means that NATO is not giving up for Macedonian membership and that the accession talks will continue as was planned before?

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: The accession talks continue ... the accession talks with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continues, as long as your country wants to continue those talks and as long as you are implementing the name agreement. And we stand ready to welcome your country as a new member of the Alliance, with an equal seat around the NATO table, with full membership and also with all the benefits that NATO membership will provide to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Because we have seen before that NATO membership is important for security, for stability, but also for prosperity. The latest example is Montenegro, where investments have doubled since they joined NATO. It's for Skopje to decide the way forward now. It was a clear majority in favour of the name agreement, in favour of joining EU and NATO, in the referendum. But at the same time, the turnout was not as high as many had hoped. This is a consultative referendum, and the necessary changes in the constitution have to be made by the parliament. Again, that's for the parliament and for the people of the country to decide. What I can say is that the only way to join NATO is by agreeing and implementing the name deal with Greece. There is no other way. So, I have seen that someone has indicated the possibility of rejecting the name agreement and, at the same time, join NATO. That will not happen. That alternative doesn't exist. So, it's for the people of the country and the parliament in Skopje to decide. But it's my obligation

to make it absolutely clear that there is no way to join NATO without fully implementing the name deal. We are ready to welcome you, but then, of course, you have to implement the deal.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Lady in the centre, last row.

Question [Bloomberg News]: Thank you very much. Bloomberg News. You mentioned earlier the Iran deal, how important is it for the European security and how will the paradigm of European defence change after sanctions against Iran are restarted? And a second question, if I may, about defence spending. Poland proposed to build a military presence for years on his soil. What kind of precedent does it set perhaps for other member states? Thank you very much.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: All Allies are concerned about Iran destabilising activities in the wider Middle East region, and we strongly condemn the financial support for terrorism, including Iran's support to a variety of armed non-state actors. We are also, of course, concerned about their missile programme and we are committed to ensuring that Iran's nuclear programme remains peaceful. Then there are different views on the JCPOA, or the Iran nuclear deal, and that's... what should I say... a fact, but despite the disagreement on the Iran nuclear deal, we all agree on the importance that any nuclear programme in Iran remains peaceful. And we are also concerned about what they do when it comes to destabilising other countries in the region.

On Poland, I would just say that NATO and United States is already present in Poland. We have increased our presence in the Baltic region and in Poland already, with more exercises, with more rotational presence, and with a new battlegroup. There are four new battlegroups in the Baltic countries and Poland, and the US is actually leading the battlegroup in Poland. We also see more US presence in different NATO Allied countries in Europe. We welcome that, but it's not for me to comment on a specific proposal which is not on the NATO table.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: Gentleman in the front row.

Question [BBC]: Petr Kozlov, BBC News Russian Service. Secretary General, if you don't mind, I will ask the question in Russian because you have interpreters here.

[Interpreted] - Petr Kozlov, Russian Service BBC. Secretary General, in the spring of this year, a former GRU Colonel, Sergei Skripal, and his daughter were poisoned in Salisbury. The UK blames it on Russia and military aggression was once even used. However, Moscow has categorically denied its guilt in this case. So, what is NATO's stance on this issue, in the view of the Fifth Article of the Washington Treaty? And also, what would be the scale of a subterfuge like this, so that this article could be invoked? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: We stand in full solidarity with the UK after the use of a nerve agent in Salisbury and we fully trust the UK assessment, the UK intelligence. And NATO Allies, and including NATO as an organisation, reacted very firmly and strongly when this happened, because we expelled a high number of Russian officials from NATO and from NATO Allied countries, as a direct response to the Salisbury attack. The UK National Security Adviser, Mark Sedwill, has also briefed the North Atlantic Council, NATO Allies, here in Brussels, on the latest developments in this case and we will continue to stay in close contact with our Ally, UK, on this case, because any use of a chemical weapon or a nerve agent is, of course, of great concern for all NATO Allies. There has been no discussion about

Article 5. This has been about providing strong political support to UK and also reacting by expelling Russian officials.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: One final question. Europa Press, lady over there.

Question [Europa Press]: Thank you. Back on burden-sharing, Secretary General; one third of the countries are not expected to meet the 2% target by 2024. Are there any realistic plans that more Allies will actually meet that target by then? And I would like, if possible, confirmation that in your last visit to the US and in your meeting with President Trump, he didn't actually put again on the table the 4% target, which is seen completely unrealistic by a majority of NATO Allies. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: It is demanding to meet the 2% target for all NATO Allies. Some are already there, but some have a very long way to go. So, I think we all understand that this is a challenge. At the same time, I think we also have to recognise that NATO Allies have made significant progress. When we made the pledge back in 2014, only three Allies met the 2% target. This year, we expect eight Allies will meet the 2% or be very close, depends a bit on GDP estimates, which is significantly more than we had just a few years ago. On top of that, even those who have not yet been able to meet the 2% goal have started to move. And the majority have already put forward plans on how to reach 2%. So, all Allies have started to increase, more Allies meet the 2% goal, and the majority have already put forward plans on how to reach it. But still I admit it's a demanding thing, but if you look at what we have achieved from when we started up till now, it's also a very impressive movement. And that reflects the reality that we live in a more demanding and dangerous world. So, we are investing in defence to keep our close to one billion citizens safe, despite the fact that we see a more assertive Russia, despite that we see the military build up of Russia, with conventional and nuclear forces, and despite new threats as cyber, proliferation, hybrid, and the turmoil, the violence we see, for instance, in the Middle East, Iraq and Syria. So, I believe that we will continue to see progress and I am also encouraged by the more than 40 billion additional US\$ which has been provided over just the last two years. I expect that number to increase significantly and I also welcome the fact that President Trump, when he left the NATO meeting in July, expressed strong support to NATO. He was actually encouraged by the meeting, and he has also addressed later on, several times, that... he has stated clearly that he recognises the progress and the additional funding for defence which we see in all NATO Allied countries. So, we have a long way to go, but we have also made significant progress and we have seen a real shift in the willingness of NATO Allies to invest in defence.

Moderator [Oana Lungescu - NATO Spokesperson]: This concludes this press conference. Before we wrap up, let me just remind you that the working languages at NATO are English and French. Thank you.

1. Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

Source: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_158684.htm?selectedLocale=en