

**PRESS CONFERENCE BY NATO SECRETARY GENERAL JENS
STOLTENBERG FOLLOWING THE MEETING OF THE NORTH
ATLANTIC COUNCIL WITH GEORGIA AND UKRAINE IN FOREIGN
MINISTERS' SESSION**

04 December 2018

Good afternoon.

NATO Foreign Ministers have just met with the Foreign Ministers of Ukraine and Georgia. We addressed the security situation in the Black Sea region. Including Russia's violations of Georgia's and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Four years ago, Russia illegally annexed Crimea. Now, Russia is attempting to use Crimea to expand its influence. And control the Sea of Azov.

Just a few days ago, we saw Russia use military force against Ukrainian ships and naval personnel. We call on Russia to immediately release the Ukrainian sailors and ships it seized. Russia must allow freedom of navigation.

And allow unhindered access to Ukrainian ports. Russia's pattern of disrespect for the borders of its neighbours includes military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Russia must end its recognition of both regions. And withdraw its forces from these regions of Georgia.

In response to Russia's aggressive actions, NATO has substantially increased its presence in the Black Sea region over the past few years. At sea, in the air and on the ground.

NATO ships routinely patrol and exercise in the Black Sea. This year, ships under NATO command have spent 120 days in the Black Sea, compared to 80 days the year before. Several Allies conduct NATO air policing in the region. Allies also conduct regular reconnaissance flights. And we have set up a Romanian-led multinational brigade in Romania.

Three NATO members – Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey – are littoral states.

So there is already a lot of NATO in the Black Sea. And we will continue to assess our presence in the region.

At our meeting today, we agreed to continue working together to prepare Georgia for NATO membership. We recognised the significant progress Georgia has made with its reforms. And we thanked Georgia for its major contributions to our mission in Afghanistan.

We also restated NATO's solidarity with Ukraine. We recognise Ukraine's aspirations to join the Alliance. And progress has already been made on reforms.

But challenges remain, so we encourage Ukraine to continue on this path of reform.

This is crucial for prosperity and peace in Ukraine.

Allies greatly value our unique partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine. In different ways, each of them contributes to our shared security. And NATO remains committed to strengthening our ties with both countries.

And with that, I am ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to the BBC over there.

Question [BBC]: Yes, thank you very much. Jonathan Marcus, Secretary General, from the BBC. You've talked about NATO expanding its activities in the Black Sea region over the last few years, but clearly that has been insufficient to change Russia's behaviour in the light of the most recent events in the Sea of Azov. Have you tasked NATO Military Authorities to look at other steps to increase NATO military activity in the Black Sea? Or are there other steps that individual NATO countries might take to provide greater assistance to Ukraine?

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: NATO's presence in the Black Sea makes a difference and we have significantly increased our presence there and, during the meeting today, Allies clearly sent a message that they will continue to provide practical support to Ukraine, political support to Ukraine, but also continue to have a presence in the Black Sea region, both within the NATO framework, but also some NATO Allies have presence bilaterally. We support the Ukrainian armed forces in different ways, with command and control, with cyber; some Allies also provide training in different areas. NATO helps them to strengthen their naval capabilities, we help them at the naval academy in Odessa. We also help them to develop maritime capabilities, training exercises and also port visits. And we will of course very closely monitor and watch the situation in the Black Sea region, after the incidents we saw a few days ago. I think also we have to remember and understand that one of the reasons why NATO is in the process of implementing the biggest reinforcement to our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, is actually Russia's aggression against Ukraine. We have battlegroups in the eastern part of the Alliance for the first time in our history, we have the Romanian-led multinational brigade in Romania, we have air policing in the Black Sea, and we have more naval presence. So, all of this sends a very clear message from NATO and NATO Allies, to Russia.

Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to Ukrainian TV in the first row.

Question [5 Kanal]: Good evening. My name is Kristina, TV Channel 5, Ukraine. So, my question is what will be the next steps of NATO in the case of further blockade of the Azov Sea by Russia, if it will continue for example? Because, as we all understand, it is quite a dangerous threat, not just for Ukraine, for Turkey, but for other European countries which suffer from this blockade, and other ships and vessels. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: This meeting in itself was an important message, or sent an important message to Russia. Because having all NATO Allies, and some

of them also have presence on the bilateral level in the Black Sea, and we have three littoral states, all NATO Allies met with Ukraine and Georgia and sent a very clear message about our support. We are present in Georgia, we are present in Ukraine; and they committed to continue and to deepen the cooperation with both Georgia and Ukraine. We will, as I say, follow and monitor. We are following and monitoring closely the developments in the region, including of course in the Black Sea. And then we will, based on our assessments, continue to assess our presence in the region.

Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]: ITAR-TASS, second row centre.

Question [ITAR-TASS]: Thank you very much. Denis Dubrovin, TASS News Agency. Mr Secretary General, four years ago your predecessor, Mr Anders Fogh Rasmussen, has called for restraint in suppressing the Maidan protestors in Kyiv. Would you call now for restraint for the French forces, of police forces, when they are suppressing the riots of "gilet jaunes"? Merci.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: First of all, I think that's no meaning in comparing those two situations. And I also think that to try in any way to compare that is totally wrong. Then, the important thing for NATO is that we support the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and we will never accept and recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea and that Russia continues to destabilise Eastern Ukraine. And we have to understand what happened near the Sea of Azov in this context, because first Russia annexed Crimea, then they built a bridge, and then they used the annexation of Crimea and the illegally built bridge to try to take control over the Sea of Azov. So therefore we continue to call on Russia to release the ships, release the naval personnel, but also allow Ukraine access to the Sea of Azov, with both commercial ships and military ships. Because that's actually an agreement between Russia and Ukraine, and Russia has to honour that agreement. So, any attempt to block, to impede access for Ukrainian ships into the Sea of Azov, will be something which is absolutely in violation of the agreement between the two countries and it's a new example of how Russia is not respecting the territorial integrity of its neighbours. So, this is what this case is about.

Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]: Very last question; RUSTAVI 2, lady in the second row.

Question [RUSTAVI 2]: Georgian TV company, RUSTAVI 2. Secretary General, does Ukrainian side raise some new initiatives about this situation? And second, Hungarian Foreign Minister, he made statement that he will raise issue about the Membership Action Plan to Georgia. Do you discuss, on this meeting, this issue? And which kind of position has other Allies? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: This was one of the topics we addressed in the meeting. I think I will leave it to each individual Ally to refer what they actually said in the specific meeting. But in general, I can say that we strongly support Georgia on its path towards NATO membership and NATO's Heads of State and Government, they stated as late as in July that Georgia will become a member of the Alliance. We continue to provide support to Georgia to implement the necessary reforms. We commend the progress Georgia has made and we continue to work with Georgia in modernising their armed forces, building strong institutions, and we have the training and evaluation centre in Georgia, which we use to work with Georgia. That is important for Georgia, but it's also important for NATO, because it strengthens the interoperability of our forces, and many Allies expressed in the meeting today that they are extremely grateful for the strong contribution of Georgia to different NATO missions and

operations. So, I think this meeting was a strong message of solidarity between NATO and Georgia, and NATO and Ukraine, and that we stand together.

Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]: Thank you very much. This concludes this press point. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: Thank you.

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Zdroj: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_161108.htm?selectedLocale=en