

Press briefing

by NATO Spokesman, James Appathurai

JAMES APPATHURAI (NATO Spokesman): Friends and colleagues, thank you for coming. I thought with so many of you here I would take the opportunity, especially for those who aren't in the Brussels press corps and haven't had an opportunity to discuss the upcoming agenda, to run through it with you, very briefly, some of the issues that are on the agenda, and then I'd be happy to take questions for a little while. I say a little while because at 15:20, 25 or so we, that means the Secretary General and Prime Minister Fogh Rasmussen of Denmark will launch a new NATO TV channel upstairs. You have seen the preview for it, so I will certainly stop in time for you to be able to move upstairs, especially of course the cameras who have a particular TV interest.

But let me start with a short apology. I understand some of you have had difficulties when it comes to accreditation. I apologize for that. I will look into what exactly has been the challenge. I understand that we have managed to clear the backlog, but I do apologize for the difficulties that you have had in getting in. I can tell you I've faced similar difficulties, including in finding a sandwich, but I managed to do that. I hope you did too.

Let me look forward to tonight's discussions and to the discussions over the day and a half that are to follow. Tonight there will be, as you know, a dinner of the 26 Heads of State and Government. This will be an informal dinner, i.e. they are not expected to take formal decisions to stamp or give their blessing to previously agreed decisions. This will be an open exchange of views on a number of issues.

What are those issues? You will not be surprised that enlargement will certainly be, I think, top of the agenda. Enlargement to the Western Balkans. I expect that the aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine will also be addressed tonight. They may well turn in a political sense, in an informal sense to our main operations, NATO's main operations. That is, of course, in Afghanistan and Kosovo.

These discussions will extend tomorrow into the morning and they will discuss a whole host of issues where there has been substantial progress in the Alliance, and where I hope Heads of State and Government can bless progress in areas like on missile defence, on energy security, on looking forward to a future summit and laying the groundwork for work leading towards a new strategic concept in the future. All of these issues are being discussed tonight and tomorrow morning amongst the 26 and I hope and expect that they will have an opportunity to come to agreement and that we'll put out a communiqué to you that is quite substantial and substantive on all the various areas where we have been moving forward.

We will have, of course, a lunch-- well, sorry, first there will be a very important moment when the allies will then welcome those countries, one, two, three, potentially zero, but one, two, or three countries that have been offered to begin-- have been given the offer to begin accession talks with the Alliance and we will have a public ceremony with the Heads of State and Government from whatever country is offered-- is made that offer to come in, take their seat at the table next to the Secretary General, not in alphabetical order because they will not yet be fully members of the alliance but to come and sit next to the Secretary General and begin the process of bringing them into NATO and that will include, of course, that they have to continue in the Membership Action Plan, making reforms--

NATO countries would have to begin the accession process and once the accessions of these countries had been ratified by the NATO countries, the accession protocols would have to be deposited with the depository state which is the United States which of course holds the Washington Treaty. As I say, from beginning to end, that ceremony and those discussions amongst Heads of State and Government will be open to you.

We will have a lunch of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council bringing together NATO countries and all of our partners across central and eastern Europe and then there will be a very important meeting; a high-level meeting on Afghanistan. You are familiar with this, it will bring together the 40 troop-contributing nations in ISAF, President Karzai, Secretary General Ban, President Barroso of the EU Commission, Javier Solana, the High Representative of the European Union, high-level representation from the World Bank, Japan as a major donor-- all sitting together to discuss the future of the international effort in Afghanistan.

We hope that the ISAF troop-contributing nations will be able to endorse a vision statement which will in essence lay out a road map for the future of this operation in the areas in which all of the 40 ISAF contributing nations wish to focus their efforts. There will also be a confidential document, a political military strategy, as we call it, fully coherent with the ISAF vision statement, but which will go into more detail for the ISAF troop-contributing nations on exactly what goals we intend to achieve, how we intend to achieve them, how the allies intend to achieve them, and laying out specific steps with the necessary resources attached to get there.

Will there also be a discussion of troop-contributions? I fully expect that. You all know, of course, for example, that Canada has made very clear that it requires a partner in Kandahar to be able to extend its contribution. You know the countries like France have indicated that they will, in one way or another, make an offer of troops. There are a number of other countries that are also considering making offers. Let me be very clear, this is not a force generation conference, that has not been the purpose of this Summit, but there will be a force generation element to it which, I believe, when those forces are provided will move us substantially closer to having the ground forces that Commander ISAF requires to perform his mission.

Two more meetings that I wish to mention and that is of course on Friday; one, the very important meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission with President Yuschenko where of course there will be a discussion of A, our partnership with Ukraine and how we intend as Allies and as an Alliance foster the reforms that Ukraine has engaged in and we welcome the fact that Ukraine has stepped up its reforms recently. And second, of course, there is no doubt that Ukraine's aspirations to come closer to NATO will be discussed. I think the allied position at that point will be relatively clear and there will be discussion with Ukraine on how to go forward.

Finally, the NATO-Russia Council, President Putin, is awaited here by all of the allies. He will be warmly welcomed in the NATO-Russia Council where allies and Russia sitting together as 27 countries will share views on issues where they don't necessarily agree: Kosovo missile defence, NATO enlargement, but also on areas of fundamental common interest and that includes, for example, stabilizing Afghanistan, there have been discussions on stepping up our cooperation with Afghanistan in the context of counter-narcotics training with each other, in the context of transit arrangements, land transit in particular, to supply the ISAF mission through the Russian Federation. So we will see where these discussions go.

That is, in essence, a shorthand version and I'm happy take any questions that you might have. I think there was someone down there first. Well, okay. We'll come down after--

Q: Sorry, Television of Montenegro, (Inaudible) so what kind of message should Montenegro expect from the NATO Summit regarding its way to NATO? Thank you.

APPATHURAI: Thank you. The communiqué will be discussed and hopefully agreed tomorrow. There will be clear language when it comes to Montenegro, when it comes to Bosnia and Herzegovina, also when it comes to Serbia. Let us wait and see what the final discussions are but what I can say is that NATO allies believe strongly that the key to lasting stability, security, and prosperity in the Balkan region is Euro-Atlantic integration. They have every intention of making every effort to help the countries of that region to move closer to the Alliance, and I am quite confident that the communiqué will reflect that desire. I think there was...

Q: (Inaudible) from Macedonian Radio; what are the consequences for Greece if she put veto for Republic of Macedonia? Now to membership, is (inaudible) not a strategy for stability on the Balkans? Thank you.

APPATHURAI: Well, thank you for the question. I don't think we should be talking about consequences for any individual country. The discussions between the two parties, as far as I understand, still very much alive. It is not within the NATO forum where this issue will be at 26 where this issue will be either discussed or decided, it will be for the two parties to come to an agreement or not depending on how it is, but certainly it is for the two parties under UN auspices to deal with this issue. I can tell you that all 26 allies wish to see the name issue resolved and resolved as quickly as possible. All 26 allies wish to see all three of the countries in the Membership Action Plan come closer to NATO and, in fact, walk through that door and enter NATO as quickly as possible. So, all I can say from a NATO point of view is the Secretary General, NATO as an Alliance, we all hope that this issue is resolved as quickly as possible but NATO is not playing first violin in this particular orchestra.

Q: James, (Inaudible)... the German press agency. Two brief questions; Secretary General just said he expected several countries to join, since several countries is more than one the assumption is correct that Secretary General expects Croatia and Albania to be accepted as invitees for the membership and the second question, given that there's no consensus in Georgia-Ukraine dossier, is it correct that behind the scenes you're planning to postpone that decision to 2010?

APPATHURAI: Thank you, on the Secretary General's expectations, yes you're right and your English is excellent for a German, several means more than one, but it is up to the Allies to decide and it is not up to the Secretary General to decide. He, of course, has very good information and his own personal views but let us wait and see how the discussions conclude amongst the nations. It's not for me to anticipate that discussion.

When it comes to Georgia and Ukraine, I like you have seen the public statements by President Bush but also the public statements coming from the German government, from the Italian government, from the French government, so I think it's safe to say there are a range of views on this issue that does not preclude, and I think should not be seen to preclude, an interesting discussion this evening amongst Heads of State and Government, potentially again tomorrow morning. When the Allies take a position, it will be a unified position, but they have not come to that discussion yet; this Summit has not yet started, so let us wait and see where it goes.

Q: (Inaudible) from the United Arab Emirates; this Istanbul initiative, is it included in the Summit of Bucharest? And the second question, do you think that the next time it would be held in which country, I don't know, but it will be better than this year, the next Summit? It will be without President Bush and without President Putin. You think we will reach to a better situation than this year? Thank you very much.

APPATHURAI: Thank you. You will see when you see the communiqué tomorrow a very specific text dedicated to the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as well as to a separate one to the Mediterranean dialogue. There should be no doubt of the interest of NATO allies in our cooperation with the countries of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. They want to see that relationship deepen; we will have soon a high profile event in one of the ICI countries, in which the Secretary General will also participate, so even if it's not necessarily the first political issue on today's Summit, because there are a number of other issues from Afghanistan to Kosovo to enlargement and all the other issues that you've heard that are really front-burner events now for NATO-- there should be no doubt of the interest the Allies have and that NATO has in taking forward this relationship.

Yes, the next Summit, whenever and wherever it will be held, and I think it's safe to say it will be held next year, will be without President Bush and President Putin, but I wouldn't want to make predictions on the spirit of it. I think the spirit here has been quite good. The Secretary General will come out and give his press conference tomorrow and he will outline for you all of the different areas in which the Alliance has taken concrete decisions in the last little while and here in Bucharest, confirmed here in Bucharest by Heads of State and Government. It is a very, very substantial list and I know you would expect me to say that but, in fact, even though I'm the spokesman-- taking off my spokesman hat-- it's a very substantial list.

So I think-- hopefully you, but certainly I believe that this Summit has already or will already by tomorrow have substantially taken forward the agenda of this meeting. I hope, and from what I hear in diplomatic circles, I anticipate that the spirit in the NATO-Russia Council will be positive, not negative, not tense, not acrimonious, but friendly with an open exchange of views. Everyone's coming as far as I can see and from everything that I hear with a good and positive spirit.

Who has the microphone next? Over there?

Q: (Inaudible) Reality TV, Romania. I have two short questions; we heard there would be a meeting President Bush (Inaudible)... President Sarkozy, if you can give us some details about this meeting, when and where it will be; and the second question, can you tell us something about the meetings President Putin will have here besides the Council Nato-Russia? Thank you.

APPATHURAI: Thank you. I like these questions because I don't know the answers to either of them and therefore it wouldn't be my job to tell you even if I did now. So, I'm so sorry, I don't know President Bush's schedule, I don't know President Sarkozy's schedule, and I don't know President Putin's schedule. Excuse me. Who has the microphone? Go ahead.

Q: Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty. President Bush who was in Kiev just recently has said that Ukraine and Georgia both fulfilled the criteria to get the MAP and French Prime Minister said that they didn't. Could you clarify please what criteria they had in mind?

APPATHURAI: I, of course, can only be spokesman for one party and that is for NATO. You'd have to ask their spokespeople what they believed. It's a political decision of the 26 whether or not to offer Membership Action Plan and they will take and they are taking account of the broadest range of practical and political considerations. We all know what those political considerations are and I think we know what the practical considerations are. Now, it is for them to decide in what way they wish to address this. I really don't want, in any way, to anticipate their discussions tonight and tomorrow. So let us see tomorrow what the Secretary General says.

I will hold, just for your information, a press conference tonight probably about 10:30 I have the privilege of list-sitting in an interpretation both and listening to the discussion of the Heads of State and Government and eating a sandwich while they eat, I'm sure, something much nicer. So, I will take the opportunity to come down here and, if I can, provide you an update on the flavour of the discussions. You will also have been enjoying the press reception so I'll be the person who had the worst meal, pretty much, in all of Bucharest.

Q: (Inaudible)... If Greece vetoes (Inaudible) acceptance to NATO, what would be the next step from the Alliance part politically and as far as the procedure is concerned. Is there any intermediate stage? What is the alternative plan? Thank you.

APPATHURAI: Thank you. First, NATO operates by consensus and not by veto; I think that's an important principle. If there is no consensus, then there is no decision but it's not a question within NATO of pulling out red cards and stopping something, it is simply that it has not gone forward. Could there be alternative language, could there be intermediate steps? We've all heard, I think, in the hallways various combinations and permutations, it is-- first, I'm not privy to them. Second, it would not be-- I think it would be too early to speculate on that. There are high-level discussions under way as we speak. Let us let them run their course. The basic principle we have here in this organization is: we would like to see the name issue resolved today rather than tomorrow and certainly as early as possible.

Who has the microphone? There.

Q: Following the (Inaudible) question, Television Greece; would you encourage, then, the two countries, the two parties to go to an agreement in a certain period, in a certain timetable? And a protocol question, is the invitation a pre-condition for the participation of (Inaudible) in the public ceremony of Thursday?

APPATHURAI: Good questions. It is, again, not for NATO to encourage any kind of arrangement between the parties, let the parties work that out, and of course other countries which have an interest in this issue are discussing directly with the capitals as well and let me in no way diminish the important role that Mr. Nimetz and the UN has played, so let us leave it to other parties because it is not for NATO to play a lead role. My understanding, and I'll correct myself later, but yes, my understanding is they would have to receive-- any country would have to receive an invitation to begin accession talks, to be seated at the table tomorrow next to the Secretary General during the public ceremony.

Q: Do you think that-- Vladimir (Inaudible)... Albania. Do you think that the case of Macedonia is connected with the decision that Greek government will have in relationship with the request of Macedonia to be part of NATO, first question? And the second, do you predict any time when Kosovo will be member of NATO?

APPATHURAI: Okay, I have to be very honest could you repeat both of those questions?

Q: The first question is related with the decision taken by Greek government to abolish the request of Macedonia to be part of NATO. It is connected this with the request of Albania to be part of this organization, the first. Okay, and the second is related with Kosovo. Do you predict any time when Kosovo will be fully member of North Atlantic Council?

APPATHURAI: Thank you. First, each country, each of the three countries in this case, is judged by NATO allies on their individual merits, that is a principle we have followed from the beginning, that is a principle that I believe will apply fully now, as well. In other words, what happens in the context of one country should not and I don't think it will affect the aspirations of another. With regard to Kosovo as a member of NATO, I think again we shouldn't be getting ahead of ourselves. There are a number of very important issues that we're dealing with right now as an international community with regard to Kosovo and NATO playing a very important role backstopping the security environment. So, I have not heard any discussion or any decision within NATO of looking forward beyond addressing now what are the immediate challenges related to Kosovo.

I have time for one more if anyone's got more, and there it is.

Q: (Inaudible)... Istanbul Initiative started in 2004. Until now, not all (inaudible) countries have joined the initiative. Any comment on that? Why does it take long time? Thank you.

APPATHURAI: Well you can get the full list on the website and why does it take some time? Actually we don't think that is very much time. The fact that the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative has taken off, has done quite well in our eyes in terms of individual programs of cooperation with individual countries, has to our mind been a real success considering the fact that NATO has no presence in the Gulf region and that we want to do things only at the pace and in the direction which our partners of the ICI wish to set. So for us it has been a very positive experience; for our partners in the ICI I think it's also been a positive experience. We are ready to deepen it and we are ready to broaden it but that has to be only, of course, on the request of and in the direction in which our partners wish to go.

Thank you so much. By the way, NATO TV launch, 25 minutes or so upstairs. Thanks.