

Opening remarks

**by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
North Atlantic Council Summit meeting with invitees**

Good morning,

Today, NATO leaders have invited two new countries to start accession talks with the Alliance. I am delighted today, as all of you, to be able to welcome the Presidents and Prime Ministers of Albania and Croatia to this special meeting of the North Atlantic Council.

NATO's enlargement has extended the sphere of security and stability in Europe.

It has helped to preserve and enhance liberty, democracy, and the rule of law –values that underpin our Alliance.

The countries who join us can be rightly proud of what they have achieved in meeting NATO's demanding criteria for membership. The many years of hard work within the Membership Action Plan have paid off.

Due to your hard work, Allies can be confident that your admission to the Alliance will strengthen NATO.

Your presence at our table will further enhance the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area, and in particular of Southeast Europe.

You all come from a region which has been affected by terrible conflicts until only a few years ago. That is why your membership has a special significance. It heralds the beginning of a new chapter for the Western Balkans – and it shows the way forward to a future in which that region will be fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic institutions.

Membership of NATO, Presidents and Prime Minister, means assuming serious responsibilities. Every NATO member has to add value and make a clear contribution to security. We know and we expect that you will continue to work hard to complete reforms and ensure that you are able to make ever stronger contributions to this Alliance. Looking at your important contributions to our missions, we know that we can continue to count on you.

So let me say again: Welcome. We are very glad to have you with us.

I would now like to invite the Dean of the North Atlantic Council, President Bush, to address the meeting.

INTERVENTION BY PRESIDENT BUSH

Thank you very much.

I would now like to ask the Heads of State and Government of those countries that have been invited to begin Accession Talks with the Alliance, to address the meeting.

**INTERVENTION BY PRESIDENTS AND PRIME MINISTERS OF CROATIA AND
ALBANIA**

Sursa: NATO