

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, following the North Atlantic Council Summit meeting

It's a three day summit. There are some important meetings still to come; the luncheon with our EAPC, European Atlantic Partnership Council partners. We have the big meeting on Afghanistan this afternoon, and tomorrow, of course, the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and last but not least, the NATO-Russia Council. But, I think given the dinners yesterday night and the discussions the heads of state had this morning, I have, I think, quite some substance to brief you about.

Since last night, we have agreed a set of decisions that will, in my opinion, substantially change the Alliance and Euro-Atlantic security more broadly. It's a long list, get your pens ready.

First and foremost, as you know, the allies have decided to offer invitations to two countries of the western Balkans which will begin accession talks to join the Alliance. To those countries who have achieved their goal, let me say on behalf of all the allies, congratulations and welcome to the family. As far as the nation for which an invitation is not yet possible, I read you the text as agreed by heads of state and government that goes as follows:

“We recognize the hard work and the commitment demonstrated by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ to NATO values and alliance operations. We commend them for their efforts to build a multi-ethnic society. Within the framework of the United Nations, many experts have worked hard to resolve the name issue, but the alliance has noted with regret that these talks have not produced a successful outcome. Therefore, we agreed, we of course the heads of state in government, that an invitation to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ will be extended as soon as a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue has been reached. We encourage the negotiations to be resumed without delay and expect them to be concluded as soon as possible.”

That is the text on the nation which has not yet been invited.

Second important decision; there's agreement to invite Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro to begin an Intensified Dialogue on the full range of political, military, financial, and security issues relating to their aspirations. I think this is another demonstration of NATO's determination. (Speaker overlaps) It is usually the practice here that I finish speaking and then I'm ready and open for questions. If that's not the case then I'm sorry for that.

I was telling you about another decision. That's this decision on Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Montenegro is another demonstration, I think, of NATO's determination to help

security in the western Balkans for the better through partnership and it goes without saying that the allies are open to deepening our cooperation with Serbia as well.

On the discussion relating to the relationship with Ukraine and Georgia, let me also for the sake of completeness read what allied leaders have agreed. And that reads as follows:

“NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agree today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. Membership Action Plan is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership. Today we make clear that we support these countries' applications for MAP. Therefore, we will now begin a period of intensive engagement with both at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding pertaining to their MAP applications. We have asked foreign ministers to make a first assessment of progress at their December 2008 meeting. Foreign ministers have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia.”

That is the text as agreed by the allied leaders on Ukraine's and Georgia's aspirations for MAP.

My fourth remark, missile defence. Allies agreed today, as you will see in the communiqué which will follow later today, that there is a threat and that allied security must be indivisible in the face of it. They recognize the substantial contribution that the planned United States system will provide. And they have decided to task NATO to develop options for a comprehensive missile defence architecture to extend coverage to all allied territory and population not otherwise covered by the US system for review at our 2009 summit.

These were the four big ticket items from our discussions until now. Let me briefly mention three more areas where we have seen real progress. First, we have agreed on a way forward on energy security which sets out the principles that will guide NATO's approach and roles for NATO in such areas as protection of critical infrastructure and consequence management always, and only I should add, where NATO can add value.

We have agreed in NATO policy on cyber defence, which emphasizes the need for NATO and nations to protect key information systems, share best practices, and for NATO to be able to support allied nations if they need to counter a cyber attack.

Finally, I expect, and I use the phrase "I expect" because, I repeat, the communiqué has not been out yet-- is not out yet, but I expect that this time as come again to start looking at NATO's future evolution in a comprehensive way. And allies have tasked the NATO Council in Brussels to prepare what is called a Declaration on Alliance Security for adoption at the summit next year, I which will set the scene for what I believe will lead to an update of NATO's strategic concept.

You heard me say there will be a summit next year and I'm very happy to confirm that it will be hosted together by France and Germany in Kehl and in Strasbourg. Ladies and gentlemen, I hope you'll agree that we have covered-- the allies have covered a lot of ground for one dinner and for one morning meeting, and as I said, there's more to come, so I'll be back to you without any doubt.

JAMES APPATHURAI: Questions? Start right there. Do we have microphones? Microphones? Yeah, you have a microphone. They've already handed them out. Go ahead. Go, go.

Q: (Inaudible)

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I'm sorry, I can't hear you.

APPATHURAI: It's not working.

Q: Hello, Georgian Television (inaudible). My question is, which members of NATO were against Georgian integration and what are the problems and why we didn't get MAP today, or yesterday, this summit?

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: As you know, I never comment on positions taken by individual allies.

Q: Maybe details of discussions?

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I never comment on positions taken by individual allies and I'll not make an exception today.

APPATHURAI: It's not working, take the other microphone.

Q: This is working. May I take this? Sorry. Could you comment on the progress of Montenegro on its way to NATO? Thank you very much.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: If I got your question, because I didn't hear it very well--

Q: If you can comment on the progress of Montenegro on its way to NATO, thank you.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Well, as far as Montenegro is concerned, you heard me mentioning, I think, what I consider an important decision which is the entering of NATO and Montenegro in an Intensified Dialogue relationship and I think that is really a very important decision the allied leaders have taken this morning.

Q: (Inaudible) regarding the Albanian invitation-- invitation for Albania. Does NATO has in plan to help this country for the disarmament of the weapons from the period of (inaudible)...

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I'm very, very sorry but I can't hear your question.

Q: My question is related what NATO will do in the future to help Albania in the disarmament of the weapons that this country have from the common years times.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I now realize what you are referring to but let me tell you that, of course, the big importance of the decision this morning I told you about is on Albania getting an invitation and I think that's important enough, albeit there was this very dramatic explosion in Albania not that long ago.

Q: Avid(?) from (inaudible) Dutch Reform Daily. First of all, Secretary General, congratulations with your birthday.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Thank you very much.

Q: We wish you many years of good health and successful diplomacy. The intensive engagement, what you speak about in regard with Ukraine and Georgia, is there any difference with the Intensified Dialogue-- intensive engagement and intensified dialogue, what's that? What does it mean?

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Well this is, as I read in I think what is a very strong statement, this is now different from Intensified Dialogue. We do have Intensified Dialogue, this is the road to MAP and let me re-read the first paragraph of the statement: NATO welcomes Ukraine and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agree today that these countries will become members of NATO. That is quite something, and that's something else than ID.

APPATHURAI: Down here and then over there. Please, yes. No, you.

Q: Secretary General, on Macedonia, will there be in the conclusion any deadline for Macedonia to get this invitation or is Macedonia totally left out from the Alliance, and secondly, will you ask for more troop contribution from Macedonia in NATO operations? Thank you.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Well, first of all, let me start with the last part of your question because your nation's doing very well in that regard and that is commendable. Answering the first part, no, there is no deadline but the allies, in the final part I read, encourage the negotiations to be resumed without delay and expect them to be concluded as soon as possible, but you'll not find a formal deadline here. That is not the case.

(FRENCH OMITTED)

APPATHURAI: Last question is there.

Q: Mr. Secretary General-- here, here.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Where are you, where are you? Here, excuse me.

Q: For Macedonia, again, do you consider there is a big loss for security and stability in the region that Macedonia was left aside? What do you, like, Secretary General, and also all chiefs of governments, expect from Macedonia? How do they have to behave after this? You know that there is a very delicate situation in the region and for Albania my colleague will ask you one more last question.

Q: What do you want to see again from Albania in political and technical standards, now, after the invitation? What do you want to see from Albania?

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Let me take the lady first. That is, of course, a matter now for what happens after the formal invitation. I'm going back to the room now and we'll have a festive meeting with the two invitees and then a process starts which is a well known process because many nations before Albania have gone through that process, and that, of course, will require very intensive context. To your colleague to your left; I'll not hide that, of course, I would have hoped that we would have seen three invitations, but there is the name issue and I read you the text on the name issue. And that is the situation and I can't say less, I can't say more about this, but that is what it is and I can very well imagine that this is a big disappointment-- a big disappointment for your countrymen, but re-read the text and I think that you'll see some encouragement in that text.

APPATHURAI: That's all we have time for, I'm afraid. Thank you.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: I'm afraid I have to rejoin the leaders now but I'll be back.