

Joint press conference

with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and the Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko

JAAP DE HOOP SCHEFFER (Secretary General of the United Nations): Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. It's a great pleasure to meet you again; it's also a great pleasure to be here with the President Yushchenko, of Ukraine.

First of all... because we had an excellent meeting... summit-level meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, which ended just a moment ago.

That was the first one, by the way, since 2004 in Istanbul, and a lot of things have happened, of course, since.

I was already able, briefly, to refer when we met each other yesterday to the... I think, very important decision the Allies took. And I refer, again, to the communiqué and to the statement I made yesterday, where there are some very important words. And that is that, the Allies agreed, yesterday, that Ukraine will become a member of NATO; that the Allies... and let me repeat that here, again, as well, highly value... highly value the contribution Ukraine makes to all... I underline... I repeat, all NATO's operations and missions. I know no other NATO partner in that same position. And that shows and that is a very strong signal of the commitment made by Ukraine to the North Atlantic Alliance.

We've seen reforms in Ukraine; we are seeing reforms in Ukraine. That reform process, without any doubt, will go on.

I also refer to the communiqué and the statement that we will begin a period of intensive engagement with both... at a high political level, to address the questions still outstanding, pertaining to the MAP application.

So we're entering a very important phase. And let me add that... I think... In other words, yesterday's decision was not a stand alone event, as we saw here at the summit. But I think it was the launch of a process that will lead to Ukrainian membership of NATO. And I do think that, as a conclusion, we should not underestimate.

And that was also the gist of the meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and you now that foreign ministers of NATO will make a first assessment of the progress for MAP at their meeting in December 2008.

In other words... and to cut a long story short, it was a pleasure, Mr. President...

VIKTOR YUSHCHENKO (President of Ukraine): Thank you.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER ...to have you in our midst in the NATO-Ukraine Commission, again.

NATO will support Ukraine, whatever... that's asked and necessary in the reform process, and I can assure you that President Yushchenko and I... the Ukrainian government and I will stay in close touch to guard and to guide this process, to use these words.

And having said this, it would be my pleasure to ask President Yushchenko to take the floor.

YUSHCHENKO : (SPEAKS IN UKRAINIAN)

Thank you.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER Thank you very much.

UNIDENTIFIED: First question is...

Q: (Inaudible) News Agency of Ukraine.

Secretary General, what was the main reason to postpone MAP for Ukraine and Georgia, and what work is still laying ahead?

(SPEAKS IN UKRAINIAN)

DE HOOP SCHEFFER Let me start by answering you, that I'm... of course, not going to refer in public to what was an internal discussion, so I'm not going to give you the reasons of the one or the other. What I can give you is what I said, and what I read out in full. And I think in this respect, President Yushchenko and I entirely agree... as you heard the President say a moment ago, that what came out of yesterday's North Atlantic Council meeting is a very strong statement.

And do remember what I said, at the end of my introductory words; this is, of course, not a stand alone event. This is a process and it is in a very important step in a process, where you see in the first paragraph, black on white, "We agree that these countries will..." 'Countries', it's Ukraine and Georgia, "...will become members of NATO."

I think there can be no misunderstanding about that phrase.

YUSHCHENKO: (SPEAKS IN UKRAINIAN)

UNIDENTIFIED: Last question is there.

Q: (INAUDIBLE) BBC World Service.

I'm here, in the middle. Lower down, the centre.

Hello.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Good morning.

UNIDENTIFIED: Secretary General, whatever you say, many have read yesterday's decision to delay MAP as giving a veto to Russian... to Russia, even before President Putin came to town.

How can you confound those critics? How confident are you, that the foreign ministers of NATO will give MAP to Ukraine and Georgia in December? And can you, today, unequivocally say that both countries have got a cast-iron guarantee that they will join the Alliance, one day?

DE HOOP SCHEFFER Well, look. To answer the last part of your question... Can there be any misunderstanding on the line we agreed today that Ukraine will become a member of NATO? I mean, I stand to be corrected but explain to me, please, if you ask me that question... is that... is there ambiguity in that line?

And, of course, that means that the conditions and the criteria will have to be fulfilled; that has always been the case with NATO enlargement. But I stand to be corrected, if the sentence, "We agree today that these countries..." in the text, read, Ukraine, and Georgia, "...will become members of NATO" leaves a shimmer of a doubt. Not in my opinion.

That would be my answer. I mean, I can't make it any shorter, I can't make it any longer. And again, that is a process, of course. I mean, Ukraine will not become a NATO member... NATO member tomorrow, that's also crystal-clear. And I share President Yushchenko's analysis, in this regard.

I think it's a strong text. I presided over the meeting myself, so I think it's a strong text.

UNIDENTIFIED: That's all we have time... MAP in December.

DE HOOP SCHEFFER : Pardon?

UNIDENTIFIED: Second half of the question (INAUDIBLE)...

DE HOOP SCHEFFER: Well, it's clear that's... I stick, again, to the text that foreign ministers in their December meeting will make a first assessment, full stop.

That's also pretty clear.

UNIDENTIFIED: I'm afraid that's what we have time for, Secretary General.

UNIDENTIFIED: We don't have it?

DE HOOP SCHEFFER Thank you, President.

YUSHCHENKO: Thank you.