North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister Mevlűt Çavuşoğlu
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(As delivered)

Thank you so much, Minister Cavusoglu.

It's great to be back in Ankara and to meet with you Mevlut, we have met many times and this is my fourth visit to turkey as Secretary General of NATO and I think that reflects the key role and the importance of the Turkish contributions to our Alliance. And I would like to thank you for Turkey's very strong contribution to the Alliance over so many years.

Turkey is at the forefront of a very volatile region. From terrorism and conflict in the Middle East and North Africa to Russia's destabilizing military activities. Turkey is playing a crucial role in tackling human trafficking in the Aegean Sea.

Responding to the request by Turkey, as well as Greece and Germany, NATO took swift decisions to deploy ships to the Aegean in February. Our ships have been collecting information and conducting monitoring. In support of the efforts of Turkey, Greece, and the European border agency Frontex.

I appreciate the very good cooperation between NATO's Standing Maritime Group and the Turkish coastguard and navy. Based on the information NATO and NATO vessels provide, Turkey is taking action to help break the business model of the human traffickers. And figures from different international organisations confirm that the numbers of migrants and refugees crossing the Aegean Sea is now going down significantly. And it confirms that our collective efforts are making a difference. We need to remain flexible because the people smugglers can shift their routes very rapidly.

I also welcome the steps you are taking to implement the agreement with the EU. This is not easy, but it is important for a sustainable solution.

The migrant and refugee crisis demonstrates how urgent it is to find a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict. Despite the announced partial withdrawal, we see that Russia maintains a considerable military presence in support of the Assad regime in Syria. The Syrian ceasefire is under strain. But it remains the best basis for a negotiated, peaceful solution to the crisis.

I welcome Turkey's important contribution to the Global Coalition to counter ISIL, not least by providing critical infrastructure at the Incirlik airbase and by supporting the Coalition in other

ways. We stand united in the fight against terrorism. There can be no justification for the horrific attacks we've seen here in Ankara, in Istanbul, and elsewhere in Turkey. NATO continues to augment Turkey's air defences through AWACS overflights and the Patriot deployment. We have just started training Iraqi officers in Jordan. And I welcome Turkey's offer to host such training in the future.

At our Summit in Warsaw in July, we must step up our support to regional partners to build up their forces and project stability beyond our borders.

In the fight against terrorism, building local capacity is one of the best weapons we have.

We see that every day in Afghanistan, where Turkey plays a key role. You are one of the framework nations in our mission to train, advise and assist Afghan soldiers and police. We are grateful for Turkey's long-standing contribution to our Alliance in so many different ways.

As we face the most significant security challenges in a generation, NATO will continue to stand strong and united.

Thank you.

Q: [Translated from Turkish]

TRANSLATOR: Turkish Akşam Daily and I have a question to both the Minister and the Secretary General. NATO is actually the largest security organization of the world and as the Secretary General has mentioned with respect to fight against terrorism there are a lot of fights that are taking place. In terms of sharing of intelligence between NATO allies do you think this is important and sufficient for the Alliance and is there any opinion of establishing such a joint intelligence mechanism within NATO in the coming days? We know that some NATO countries are objecting to the attitude of Turkey declaring PYD as a terrorist organization. They provide arms or they provide support in the field. How do you evaluate this, as the Secretary General of NATO? How does this affect or harm the joint ideology or the joint forces in NATO? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): We are sharing intelligence within NATO. We are also constantly assessing how we can do that even more efficiently. And we have different mechanisms for sharing intelligence and I think that the fight against terrorism just underlines the importance of NATO and the fact that NATO allies are working together in many different ways but also by sharing intelligence to fight terrorism. I think we have to understand - or it is important to remember - that to fight terrorism is about many different things. We have to have a comprehensive approach meaning that it's about civilian efforts, police, civilian intelligence sharing, but also different military efforts. And NATO contributes to the fight against terrorism in different ways. We share intelligence but we also address the root causes by helping to stabilize the countries where we see ISIL, where we see terrorism and that's actually the reason why we are in Afghanistan - our biggest ever military operation

is a direct response to a terrorist attack against a NATO ally - the United States, 9/11 2001. But we are also supporting the efforts of the coalition against ISIL. We have assurance measures, military presence in Turkey and we have started the training of Iraqi officers to help them increase their capability and capacity to fight ISIL. So everything from sharing the intelligence to build local capacity in the Middle East, North Africa; we stand ready to also support the new government and national accord in Libya to help them. All of this is important contributions to the fight against terrorism. Turkey of course has the right to protect itself against terrorist attacks, and we have seen horrific terrorist attacks in Ankara and Istanbul and elsewhere in Turkey and there is no justification for this kind of brutal terrorist attacks. And Turkey has the right to defend itself against terrorist attacks as any other country has the right to do so. We stand in solidarity with Turkey and Turkey's an ally which we are working very closely together with in the fight against terrorism.

MEVLUT CAVUSOGLU (Turkish Foreign Affairs Minister): [Translated from Turkish].

TRANSLATOR: The sensitivity of sharing of information and intelligence is present in NATO and we do appreciate this but in terms of information exchange amongst the allies. I think this should be more effective especially the sharing of intelligence should be momentaneous [sic] and on … in time. There are certain lacks on this especially with respect to foreign terrorist fighters and we see the ramifications of this like in the attacks in Brussels and other countries. If we have timely information we know what Turkey can do in terms of foreign terrorist fighters. We have seen this in origin [sic] countries and in destination countries. So amongst the allies and the countries the sharing of information should be improved within the NATO framework and NATO determinism. On the other hand, in terms of PYD/YPG we did provide information to the distinguished Secretary General on what kind of terrorist organization is this, and that there is no difference between PKK and this organization. And the leaders have been enlightened by the (inaudible) Administration, and when you look at the upper level echelons many of them stem from the representatives of PKK and in the terrorist attacks in Ankara the responsible people have been trained in PYD/YPG camps. They have an office in Moscow and the symbol is very clear, the old symbol of the ex-USSR. The ideology is clear. So in Iraq, in Syria and in some other areas, instead of supporting such terrorist organizations as the distinguished Secretary General has proposed, the allies and NATO should actually train in the local forces, increase their capacity, restructure them and we can have a much more healthy fight against terrorism.

Q: [Translated from Turkish].

TRANSLATOR: Daily Sabah. This is a question to the Secretary General. As you have also mentioned in your remarks on 8th of March, Turkey has signed an agreement with the European Union and you indicated that there was important decreases in the immigrants in the Aegean Sea. NATO is currently conducting certain naval missions. Do you think that this mission should end taking into consideration the reduction in these figures?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think what we have seen is that NATO has contributed in an important way to the international collective efforts to cope with the migrant and refugee crisis in the Aegean Sea. And this is part of a broader approach where the aim is to cut the lines of human smugglers; the illegal trafficking. And to be able to return refugees but at the same time also make it possible for genuine refugees to go from Turkey to Europe in a safe and orderly and legal way. So this is one part of a broader package what NATO is doing in the Aegean Sea when we are cutting the lines of the illegal smugglers, human smugglers and their business models. We have seen a significant reduction in the numbers, but I think it's important not to end this activity too early because we still see that the smugglers are trying to get people over the Aegean Sea and also we have to be prepared that if we leave then we can see a return of the high numbers of people trying to cross the Aegean Sea in an illegal and dangerous way. So we have to stay there as long as needed. We do this in very close cooperation with Turkey and Greece and the European Union Border Agency Frontex. And actually I think that one of the important reasons why NATO is doing this activities in the Aegean Sea is that we create an additional platform for cooperation between Turkey and Greece, and between Turkey and the European Union. And that adds … and it makes an important contribution to the overall international collective efforts to cope with the situation. So we we are following the situation, we are in close contact with Greece and Turkey and the European Union, and then I think it's important not to end the activities too early.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/04/21/joint-press-point