North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Pre-Ministerial press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg
2016-05-18

(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

We will have the Foreign Ministerial meeting taking place tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. And Foreign Ministers will address several issues which are high on the agenda and which are important for our security.

And let me briefly take you through the agenda and share some thoughts about the most important issues which will be addressed under the different agenda points.

First, Montenegro.

Tomorrow, we will welcome Prime Minister Djukanovic to sign the Accession Protocol.

Following that ceremony, Montenegro will as of tomorrow participate in all NATO meetings as an observer, or “Invitee”.

Once all Allies have ratified the Protocol, Montenegro will become the 29th member of the Alliance.

A clear sign that NATO continues to help build stability and security in the Western Balkans.

Our second meeting will focus on projecting stability in our wider neighbourhood.

This means helping our partners strengthen their own forces, and secure their own countries.

Because this enhances our security here at home as well.

We will discuss what more NATO can do to support Iraq.

We are already training several hundred Iraqi officers in Jordan.

We have received a request from Prime Minister al-Abadi to expand our training mission into Iraq itself. And we will consider this request from Prime Minister al-Abadi.

In the Aegean Sea, NATO ships are helping cut the lines of illegal trafficking and illegal migration.

We are making a real difference, as part of the broader international efforts.

Figures from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees indicate that the average daily arrivals in April were down around 90% from the month before.

And we will explore what more the Alliance could do in the central Mediterranean, in cooperation with the European Union.

We will also talk about Russia, and our policy towards our eastern neighbours.

Our approach to Russia combines strong defence and deterrence with dialogue.

We have already decided to enhance our forward presence in the eastern part of our Alliance.

Our military planners have put forward proposals for several battalions in different countries in the region.

No decision has been taken on the numbers and locations.

But we are now considering the scale and the scope of our presence in the east.

NATO is a defensive Alliance. And we will do what it takes to defend our citizens. In a responsible and proportionate manner. And in accordance with our international obligations.

At the same time, we continue to strive for more transparency in our relationship with Russia on military matters and reduce the risks of incidents or accidents spiralling out of control.

NATO does not seek confrontation. It is in everyone’s interest to avoid a new arms race.

On Friday, we will focus on NATO-EU cooperation.

The Foreign Ministers of Finland and Sweden, two of NATO’s closest partners, will join us.

NATO and the EU face unprecedented security challenges.

To address them, we are working closer together than ever before.

But we need to do more.

We will discuss how to take our cooperation with the EU to a new level at the Warsaw Summit.

This could include a statement expressing our will to work even more closely together on hybrid threats, maritime and cyber cooperation and on other areas; Playbooks for dealing with a range of hybrid warfare scenarios, to help speed up decision making and clarify in advance who does what.

And linked NATO-EU exercises to test our reactions to an emerging hybrid threat.

Finally, we will discuss our future support for Afghanistan.

Including plans for our Resolute Support mission, and continued financial support for the Afghan security forces.

Our Ministerial meeting will begin exactly fifty days before we meet at our Summit in Warsaw.

The decisions we take at this Ministerial meeting will help pave the way to the Summit.

At the Summit, we will take the necessary decisions to protect our citizens at home and to project stability beyond our borders.

And with that I am ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu: Okay we'll start with Wall Street Journal over there.

Q: I wonder if you are in favour of another NATO Russia Council meeting before Warsaw and whether you think the Foreign Ministers will make a decision on such a meeting in the coming days?

Jens Stoltenberg: Our relationship with Russia will be one of the issues we will address at the Foreign Ministerial Meeting. And what I will do is that I will report back, update the ministers on the outcome of the meeting of the NATO Russia Council we just convened a couple of weeks ago. And the reason why we'll do that is that it was actually the Foreign Ministers in the last meeting that decided that we should take initiative to convene the NATO Russia Council, based on the idea that our approach to Russia is based on this dual track of strength, deterrence and dialogue. And I will report back on the meeting we had telling them that of course we didn't solve all the problems, all the outstanding or different challenges in the relationship between NATO and Russia, but we had a useful meeting. We addressed issues like Ukraine, military activity, transparency, risk reductions and also Afghanistan and we did that in a frank and open way and I think the meeting was useful. This I will inform the ministers about and then based on that we will have a discussion related to convening a new meeting of the NATO Russia Council. So possible further meeting of the NATO Russia Council will be discussed at the Foreign Ministerial Meeting and I think it's wrong if I start to prejudge the outcome of that discussion which will then take place tomorrow.

Oana Lungescu: Montenegro Public TV, first row.

Q: You already said that NATO member states tomorrow will sign the protocol of Montenegro succession. So what's your message to Montenegro People today before the signing? And do you think that it's also a historic day for the alliance?

Jens Stoltenberg: It is an historic day for the alliance, for Montenegro and for the stability of the western Balkans. Because Montenegro, the enlargement of NATO with Montenegro

confirms that NATO's door is open and it's one new step in a very successful policy of enlargement of both NATO and the European Union and the enlargement of NATO over many years have contributed to stability, to peace and security in Europe and now Montenegro is going to be part of that. Of course this has to be ratified by all 28 allied parliaments or parliaments in the 28 allied countries but there is a strong support and we sign the accession protocol tomorrow. And from tomorrow Montenegro will participate in all NATO meetings as an observer. So it is an historic date, both for Montenegro and for NATO.

Oana Lungescu: Okay. Reuters, over there.

Q: Thanks, Robin Emmott, Reuters. Secretary General could you give us an update on your thinking about Libya? Is there any consensus on doing defence capacity building in Libya itself? Do you think that will be discussed on Thursday or Friday? And also when it comes to working more with the EU Libya seems like the sort of natural theatre for that, can you give us any update on, beyond what you said in your trip to Washington? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: We will discuss what NATO can do to support the new government in Libya, the Government of National Accord. And NATO has a very clear mandate from our heads of state and government that we should stand ready to support the new Government of National Accord in Libya, if so requested. And we will discuss how we can do that at the Foreign Ministerial Meeting. We are not addressing any potential combat operation or military intervention, what we are addressing and what we are going to discuss at the Foreign Ministerial Meeting is the potential or possible assistance and help when it comes to for instance institution building. Because to have strong defence institutions, structures, plans, security strategies are of great importance and of course the more we are focused on how we can train and help Libya the more important it is also to have the structures and the institutions which these soldiers can work as part of or in support of. So we will look into that. I spoke recently with the Libyan Prime Minister and he is very much aware of the mandate we have in NATO to provide support and we will continue to discuss both among the 28 allies but also with Libya how we can help them. And of course everything NATO does will be in close coordination with the efforts of the European Union, UN and others and it has to add value to the efforts of others.

Oana Lungescu: Commasant (sp?), second row here.

Q: Secretary General one more question about Montenegro and what's your point of view, does the Government of Montenegro, should they organize a referendum on this topic or the decision of the government or the parliament is enough? And second question, the Russian authorities have already mentioned that they are really worried about this enlargement and can take some response measures, for example economical measures. Have you discussed this topic with your Montenegrin colleagues and are they worried about it? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: It is a fundamental principle that every nation, every independent sovereign nation has the right to decide its own path including to decide what kind of security

arrangements it wants to be part of. And Montenegro has decided as an independent sovereign nation that they want to be part of NATO and 28 NATO allies has, have decided that they welcome Montenegro into NATO. And therefore I very strongly believe that there is absolutely no reason whatsoever to try to deny Montenegro that right to make their own independent sovereign decisions. And therefore any sanctions or reactions from Russia will be absolutely unjustified because it's about respecting the sovereign decision of a sovereign nation, Montenegro, to decide on its own path and that should be respected by everyone. Then on how Montenegro should make the decision, well that's up to Montenegro to decide because Montenegro is an independent sovereign democratic state. So whether they do the, make that decision by decisions in democratic elected parliament or in other ways, that's up to them to decide as long as this is a democratic decision and that's what's going to take place in Montenegro.

Oana Lungescu: DPA, over there, thanks.

Q: Secretary General, Montenegro is going to join NATO. What about Macedonia?

Jens Stoltenberg: When it comes to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia we are following the developments there very closely. And I would like to express concern about what we see related to the political situation and it is important that the minimum condition for normal political democratic life is in place. And we have seen with the enlargement of, the invitation of Montenegro to join the alliance that the door of NATO is still open but it is crucial that if we are going to move further with FYROM then we have to both solve the problems related to the name but also we have to make sure that minimum conditions are put in place for credible elections. And it is also crucial that the country's leaders address persisting rule of law problems including revoking the recent the presidential pardons, supporting the work of the special prosecutor. So there are reasons to be concerned and we are following the developments of the Former Republic of, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia very closely.

Oana Lungescu: NTV.

Q: Yes Secretary General, [inaudible] from NTV. The security situation in the border between Turkey and Syria is really bad and there's more and more attacks from ISIL and other terrorist organizations towards Turkey. Last December alliance have decided to reinforce the security of Turkey and assist, a bunch of decisions has been taken but there are still shortcomings on that. So to that end will you discuss this situation and call the allies who have pledged some help to Turkey to reinforce the security? And what is your view about the situation, what would be the message of NATO and the allies to the population on site? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: The situation along the border between Turkey and Syria will be discussed and of course we are concerned because we have seen several attacks and we have seen also a high number of civilian casualties, innocent people being killed. And therefore this is of great concern for all of us and NATO stands in solidarity with Turkey and I discussed this

difficult and tense situation along the Syrian Turkish border when I recently visited Ankara and met with the Prime Minister, President and several other political leaders. So this is high on our agenda. Underlining the importance of that NATO continues to implement assurance measures for Turkey. We have deployed and decided also to maintain the deployment of Spanish patriot batteries. We have the AWACS flying surveillance over Turkey and we have also the increased the number of port visits, port calls of naval ships or ships from NATO allied countries. We are looking into what more we can do but I think the important message is that the situation along the Syrian Turkish border underlines the importance of the, one of the main topics of the Foreign Ministerial Meeting and that is how can we project stability beyond our border because we see the very close link between stability in our neighbourhood and threats against our countries and our territories and our borders. And therefore everything we can do to support the efforts of the coalition fighting ISIL is also important for Turkey. As I said we are now looking into whether we shall step up, increase our efforts to train Iraqi officers, increasing their capability to fight ISIL and we, we will look into what more we can do in, in providing support for the coalition fighting ISIL.

Oana Lungescu: France Presse.

Q: Secretary General thank you. On the question of the coalition against ISIS there has been a request by the U.S. authorities government for NATO to play on its own role in this coalition. Will this be discussed or will a decision be made during the coming two days? And on the AWACS, there was a decision to do backfilling, has this started and in which countries especially has it started to, the backfilling to the U.S.? There has been talk of the U.S. also requesting a direct deployment of AWACS above Syria and Iraq, is this being considered and will a decision be made? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: As I said one of the main topics of the Foreign Ministerial Meeting and also one of the main topics of the upcoming summit in July will be what we call projecting stability beyond our borders. And that is very much about the fight against ISIL and the main message there is that of course NATO has to be ready and able to deploy large number of combat forces into combat operations also in the future as we have done in the Balkans, in Bosnia Herzegovina, in Kosovo or in Afghanistan. But I think that more and more focus has to be put on how can we enable local forces to fight terrorism themselves, to stabilize their own country and to defend themselves. And that's exactly actually what NATO now is doing in Afghanistan where we are, where we ended our combat mission but we do a large scale train, assist and advise operation to enable the Afghans to fight terrorism themselves. That is what we are now starting to do in Iraq, training Iraqi officers in Jordan and looking into whether we should do also that inside Iraq and that of course is one element in our support to the coalition fighting ISIL. And when we also work with countries like Jordan and Tunisia, stable countries in a region of turmoil and violence, I think that's extremely important to help them now, to help them to maintain the strength and stability to be able to fight ISIL. So for instance we have started to work with Tunisia on special operation forces, on intelligence, that's also part of our efforts to fight ISIL and to fight terrorism. And, and we are also looking into the question of

AWACS. It has been some, some dialogue on what kind of needs that there, that the coalition, what kind of support the coalition needs but we have a good dialogue both with the U.S. and the U.S. led coalition looking into the possibility of NATO providing AWACS support for the coalition.

Oana Lungescu: Spiegel, at the back.

Q: Mr. Secretary General one question concerning the troop enlargement in Eastern Europe. You just mentioned it that NATO will certainly go along the international treaties, one of them or one of the important ones for NATO certainly is the Russia NATO Treaty. So Poland repeatedly, I think the last time over the weekend, mentioned that from the Polish point of view this treaty is no longer valid because it was, it has been done before the aggression on Crimea and so on. How does NATO deal, let's say with these different views if the NATO Russia Treaty is still valid or not?

Jens Stoltenberg: We have decided to increase our military presence in the eastern part of the alliance, that decision has already been taken. What we are discussing now is the scale and the scope of that increased military presence in the eastern part of the alliance. We have received advice from our strategic commanders recommending, advising us to have battalions in different countries in the eastern part of the alliance. We have not made any final decisions, we are now looking into those concrete proposals and we will make the final decisions after the summit in July. But we will increase our military presence in the eastern part of the alliance because that's already decided, we are discussing how that is going to happen. Second everything we do is defensive, it is proportionate and it's fully in line with our international obligations including the NATO Russia Founding Act. And I think it is important to remember that when the NATO Russia Founding Act refers to substantial combat forces what we are looking into is far below any reasonable definition of substantial combat forces. So even some increased presence of NATO forces in the eastern part of the alliance will be fully in line with our international obligations including the NATO Russia Founding Act. And the Russia Founding, NATO Russia Founding Act is something which we then will also not violate but act in line with.

Oana Lungescu: Right at the back.

Q: [Inaudible] from the Danish newspaper Politiken. On the same subject of enhanced presence in Eastern Europe, could you tell us a little bit more about what are the options on the table now? I've seen you quoted earlier this month talking about four battalions. How many countries are we talking about and what numbers?

Jens Stoltenberg: That's a very good question, yeah, but the problem is I'm not able to answer it. Because, and actually I'm able to answer it but if I answer it that would be a bad answer meaning that it's too early for me to give the details. Because we are now in the process of deciding the details and I think that before we have decided the details it will be wrong if I start in a way to go too much into the specifics because that can only create

misunderstandings and also make the process inside NATO more difficult. So of course there are concrete proposals on the table, it's about the size of the forces in which countries and so on. And they are on the table, they are discussed now but since I would very much like to be able to provide you with a very precise answer later on, either after the Defence Ministerial Meeting in June where I guess that we will be able to be more concrete or at least after the summit in July where we make the final decisions, I have to refrain from being too specific. But what I can confirm is that what we are discussing is the proposal from the strategic commanders to have a battalion sized multinational force in some of the eastern allied countries and I can tell you that some of them, some of them are the Baltic countries and that we are looking into this proposal and the important thing is that, is that it has to be a multinational force because a multinational presence sends a very clear signal that an attack on one ally will be an attack on the whole alliance. So the importance of this forward presence is not that it's going to be so very big but the importance that it is a multinational presence sending a clear signal that we stand together united and the forward presence has to be combined or is going to be combined with enhanced ability to reinforce if needed. So you have to also understand that the forward presence is linked to the higher readiness, the high responsiveness of our forces and we have already decided to triple the size of the NATO Response Force and part of that is the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force or the Spearhead Force, a brigade sized force which can deploy on a very short notice. So forward presence, increased ability to reinforce is delivering the deterrence and the defence which is needed. Add to that that we are also investing in infrastructure, in pre-positioning of equipment, ammunition and that the U.S. is in the process of quadrupling its funding for U.S. presence in Europe, quadrupling the funding for what they call the European Reassurance Initiative, deploying brigades and equipment in Europe which will then also increase both our presence and our ability to reinforce. So this is a big thing altogether, forward presence in the eastern part is just one element of a more comprehensive approach.

Oana Lungescu: Rega (sp?) for Europe, yeah.

Q: Thank you. Mr. Secretary General to what extent is Afghanistan important for NATO at this stage? And what specific financial pledges are you going to make during the ministerial meeting? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: Afghanistan is very important for NATO. It's important for NATO for at least two reasons. It is important for NATO because we know that a stable Afghanistan is also good for our security and we have to remember that the reason why NATO and NATO allies and partners went into Afghanistan more than 13 years ago, more than 10 years ago was a direct response to a terrorist attack on the United States, a NATO ally. So a stable Afghanistan is important for Afghanistan but it's also important for us and our security. Second of course Afghanistan is important for NATO because this is our biggest military operation ever and we have been there for many, many years and we have had many, many troops there and we have paid a high price. Casualties, people have paid the highest price and as in all ways this has been a big investment, a huge investment of the alliance in the

stability and the security of Afghanistan. We are now going to address the future of the Resolute Support, our training, assist and advise mission. And as I said we, I think the idea of not doing big combat operations but train local forces to defend themselves and to keep their country safe is an idea which we have actually implemented in Afghanistan because we have ended the combat operation, we do train, assist and advise enabling an Afghan National Security Forces of 350,000 soldiers and police to take full responsibility for the security of their own country. I think that's a very good and sustainable approach. We will decide on, later on on the, I should say, the future of the Resolute Support Mission beyond 2016 and we will also make decisions on funding for the Afghan National Army and Security Forces and I think that the importance of that NATO and NATO allies provide funding is extremely important and we will continue to do so.

Oana Lungescu: NPR.

Q: Hi thank you, Teri Schultz with NPR and CBS. In the last week you have upgraded the missile defence capabilities in Romania and Poland which naturally provoked a response from Moscow including the renewed threat to possibly station nuclear warheads in Kaliningrad. We've also seen increased, I don't know, continued buzzing of Estonian airspace for example. How would you gauge Russia's response and if you have any new message to them other than the one that we've heard for years about ballistic missile defence in this case, what would that be? Thanks.

Jens Stoltenberg: What we have seen is that Russia is behaving in a more assertive way in many different theatres and areas. And we have seen for instance the irresponsible and unsafe behaviour of Russian planes coming very close to NATO ships and planes in for instance the Baltic region. For us this just underlines the importance of the dual track approach of NATO in our relationship with Russia. We need strength, we need deterrents and we are delivering on that, we are implementing the biggest military adaptation of NATO since the end of the Cold War. At the same time it underlines the importance of transparency, predictability, dialogue with Russia. And I think that both the downing of the Russian plane over Turkey and the incidents we have seen in the Baltic Sea and the Baltic region with the buzzing of the American ship highlights the importance of that we enhance mechanisms, of risk reduction, transparency, predictability so that we try to avoid that kind of incidents and accidents for happening again. And if they happen make sure that they don't spiral out of control and create really dangerous situations. So it may be that I've said something similar to this before but it's very much the same message because we are confronted with the same kind of Russian behaviour.

Oana Lungescu: Georgian Public Broadcaster.

Q: Georgian Public Broadcaster. Mr. Secretary General as we are waiting and preparing for Warsaw Summit my first question is about meeting in Warsaw. How NATO is going to reconcile the commitment to the open door policy with the political and military policy in which

Russia remains? We read statements made by Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, he warns Sweden against NATO membership, he warns Georgia and at the same time some Georgian politicians even Members of Parliament say that open door policy of NATO is increasingly selective and it is not because Georgia is failing to meet expectations.

Jens Stoltenberg: The assigning of the accession treaty for Montenegro tomorrow shows that NATO's door remains open. And we continue to work with Georgia, another aspirant country and I strongly believe that the summit of NATO in July will recognize the progress Georgia is making and will reiterate our strong commitment to both provide strong political support to Georgia but also to provide practical support for Georgia. Working with Georgia to implement reforms, build institutions and to enhance Georgia's ability to modernize its armed forces. I participated in the inauguration ceremony of the joint training centre in Georgia some months ago and I have addressed several times with NATO allies the importance of that NATO allies provide practical support assistance to Georgia. So we will continue to work with Georgia, we will continue to defend Georgia's rights to make its own decisions and we will continue to work on reforms and help Georgia moving towards NATO membership.

Oana Lungescu: Norwegian Media, lady on the second row.

Q: Hello. Is it correct summing up that now NATO is intensifying the effort to prevent and to fight terrorism, the threat from the south, compared to for instance some time ago in that the threat from the south will take a larger part of the NATO's whole engagement in the year to come?

Jens Stoltenberg: Our challenge is that we have to do two things at the same time. We have to be present in Europe, provide collective defence deterrents in Europe. At the same time we have to address the turmoil, the instability and the threats stemming from the south from ISIL, from terrorist organizations. And this is actually the first time in NATO's history that we have to be so focused on both those tasks at the same time. And that's also the reason why we are now implementing the biggest adaptation of NATO since the end of the Cold War and the reason why we are both reinforcing our collective defence in Europe with more presence in the eastern part of Europe, with more readiness and preparedness of our forces and with more U.S. presence. As I said quadrupling of the U.S. funding for troops, for equipment, for training, for exercises in Europe of U.S. forces is a very strong signal and I welcome that. So we are doing a lot on collective defence in Europe. At the same time we are stepping up our efforts to fight ISIL and terrorism. Partly by continuing our operations in Afghanistan because even if Afghanistan is not always directly linked to ISIL we have to remember that the reason why we are in Afghanistan is to fight terrorism, different kind of terrorist organizations including also some affiliated with ISIL. And then as I've mentioned several times we are stepping up our efforts to help Iraq, we are looking into what more we can do for direct support to the coalition also with AWACS capabilities and we are working with several countries in the region like Tunisia and Jordan to help them defend themselves and to remain stable countries in the region of a lot of instability. So yes we are stepping up our efforts to

fight terrorism but that's not something we are doing on the expense of our efforts addressing the challenges in Europe, we have to do both, our collective defence in Europe, we have to do both at the same time. And there's a 360 degree approach and collective defence is also about threats stemming from the south, for instance Turkey. Turkey is attacked regularly from the south, from Syria, so I think that we have to understand that collective defence is also about the south and stabilizing our neighbour is also about the east when we work with for instance countries like Moldova, Ukraine and other countries in our eastern neighbourhood. So this is a huge challenge but NATO has been able to respond and adapt.

Oana Lungescu: We're going to end with two questions in the first row here. So we'll start with Ukrainian Media and then with KUNA.

Q: ..your Atlantic cooperation. Secretary General when do you think you will meet with Russia again? Before summit of NATO in Warsaw or any other idea? And the second question, if you will discuss Russian side about Ukraine which message you are going to provide them? And the third one, are you satisfied how the Minsk Agreement is implementating?

Jens Stoltenberg: First when we'll meet in the NATO Russia Council again, it's too early to tell but I would like to underline that I believe that we should meet in the NATO Russia Council because the NATO Russia Council is a platform for political dialogue with Russia. And after the illegal annexation of Crimea back in 2014 NATO decided to suspend practical cooperation but we decided not to suspend political dialogue. And since the NATO Russia Council is part of this political dialogue I believe that we should meet again. Exactly when that's too early to tell but it's going to be discussed with the Foreign Ministers tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. Second and let me add that dialogue is important but dialogue, transparency, channels for political communication is even more important when tensions are high and when times are difficult as they are now. So I think that the need for political engagement with Russia is even bigger now than it was a couple of years ago because now we really face some challenges and some difficulties in our relationship with Russia. Second, the message, well it depends of course on the different issues we discuss but on Ukraine the message is very clear, that Russia should respect international law, not violate their territorial integrity and the sovereignty of an independent country Ukraine and of course that also Russia should use all its influence and make sure that the Minsk Agreements are fully respected and implemented. You asked me about the Minsk Agreements, then I have to tell you that of course I'm concerned. Because oft repeated last year, the beginning of this year where we saw a lull in the fighting or at least that the ceasefire was mostly respected we have seen gradually an increase in the numbers of violations of the ceasefire and that is undermining the whole Minsk Agreement because the Minsk Agreement is based on the ceasefire. So my message is that the ceasefire has to be respected, heavy weapons have to be withdrawn and the international observers have to have full access to the area so they can make sure that the Minsk Agreements are fully implemented.

Oana Lungescu: The very final question to KUNA.

Q: Kuwait News Agency KUNA. Sir will there be any discussions in the meeting on cooperation with the Gulf Countries in the fight against IS? And secondly will there be a discussion on Syria and how to bring a rapid democratic transition in the country? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: It will be a discussion as part of our discussion on projecting stability, how we can work even closer with our partners in the Gulf region. And I recently visited Kuwait and other countries in the Gulf region and it was a very strong message in all my talks with different interlocutors that we need to step up the cooperation between NATO and the Gulf countries including the GCC or the Gulf Cooperation Council. I'm really, really looking forward to the opening of a new NATO regional training centre in Kuwait and I visited the site for this new facility, it's a big, big building where we're going to have different kinds of training, capacity building activities for the region located in Kuwait and I think that's just one example of how we are increasing our cooperation with the Gulf countries. On Syria I think that I have answered questions related to how we will support the efforts of the coalition fighting ISIL and that's of course related to Syria. It's on the border to a NATO ally Turkey and we support Turkey, we provide assurance measures for Turkey and, and let me add that in addition to the deployment of NATO batteries or patriot batteries, port visits of NATO ships and the AWACS flying over Turkey I think it's important also to add that several NATO allies, so many NATO allies also provide assurance measures for Turkey on the bilateral basis. So there is a lot of NATO presence in Turkey and Turkey also provide infrastructure for both the assurance measures but also for the fight against ISIL with for instance Incirlik Air Base. So this is a very joint effort of NATO, NATO allies and Turkey in the fight against ISIL and also providing the necessary assurance measures for Turkey all at the same time. But the important message on Syria is that there is no way to peace and stability in Syria without a negotiated agreement. So therefore I fully support, even if it's hard, even if it's difficult, even if there has been many setbacks and disappointments to, no other alternative than to support the efforts to find a peaceful negotiated solution and I support the efforts by all those that meet in Vienna and Geneva to try to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much that's all we have time for today but of course there will be ample opportunities for those who weren't able to ask their questions today tomorrow and the day after. Many thanks.

Jens Stoltenberg: Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/05/18/pre-ministerial-press-conference