North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

2016-10-27

(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

We have just finished a very constructive meeting of the NATO defence ministers together with High Representative Vice President Federica Mogherini, where we addressed NATO-EU cooperation.

And the NATO-EU cooperation is now closer than it has ever been before. And this was underscored by the Joint Declaration that I signed together with President Tusk and President Juncker in July.

In December, Federica and I will report to ministers on the practical steps NATO and the EU are taking to move our cooperation to the next level. And we are making our plans reality. We are already seeing that working together pays off. For instance, in the Aegean Sea.

Thanks to our joint efforts, together with Greece and Turkey, the flow of migrants has decreased substantially. That is why last night we decided to continue our Aegean deployment. We are making a difference.

Achieving more through cooperation than we ever could in isolation.

But the situation in the Mediterranean remains extremely serious and we continue to see illegal human trafficking and tragic loss of life at record-high numbers.

Last night Allies decided that NATO's new Operation Sea Guardian will support the EU's Operation Sophia. Within two weeks, NATO ships and planes will be in the Central Mediterranean, ready to help the EU's Operation Sophia with situational awareness and provide logistical support.

This is yet another example of NATO and the EU working hand-in-hand to increase European security.

Today we also discussed concrete ways to counter hybrid threats, enhance cyber security and coordinate exercises.

And we are exploring ways to work together to project greater stability in our neighbourhood.

NATO has unique expertise in this area.

We are currently putting it to good use in Jordan, where we have trained hundreds of Iraqi officers. And last night, we confirmed that training and capacity-building will start inside Iraq in January.

This is an important contribution to the fight against ISIL. Together with our AWACS surveillance aircraft, now flying in support of the Counter-ISIL Coalition.

This morning, we also discussed recent initiatives to strengthen European defence.

Because we must make sure that our efforts are complementary. Duplication would be in no-one's interest. Complementarity and transparency will bolster European security and the transatlantic bond. Let me underline: a strong Europe will make NATO stronger. Especially by delivering more capabilities and by increasing defence spending among European Allies – something NATO has encouraged for many years.

Over the past two days, we assessed the various challenges confronting NATO. We took stock of our progress since the Warsaw Summit and we mapped out the road ahead.

We are as united as ever in our determination to protect our citizens.

So with that, I'm ready to take your questions.

MODERATOR: We'll start with Reuters in the front row please.

Q: Thanks Dylan. Secretary General on Sea Guardian what assets can NATO provide that the EU does not have? And on the Aegean how can you ensure that the Aegean mission can continue next year when Turkey says there's no need for it to continue? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): Within two weeks there will be NATO assets in the Central Mediterranean ready to provide support to the EU Operation Sophia and we will have planes, maritime patrol aircrafts in the Central Mediterranean and we will have ships and this will add value to the presence of vessels from the European Union. So far, Greece and Turkey have announced that they will offer ships to Sea Guardian as of the 7th of November. Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey will provide air assets and that will be mainly maritime patrol aircrafts and I think that is extremely important to help the European Union Operation Sophia obtain a better situational awareness. Then of course other also other allies considering and I talked with several also non EU allies and I know that they are considering also to contribute with different kinds of assets. So I will be able to tell you more about that hopefully in the near future. When it comes to the Aegean activity we decided yesterday evening that we will continue the NATO presence in the Aegean and the reason why we decided to continue the NATO presence is that partly the NATO presence provides operational concrete support to the efforts of the Coast Guards, the Greek and the Turkish Coast Guards and to FRONTEX the European Border Agency and we have seen a very

substantial reduction in the numbers of illegal crossings and we have been able to cut the lines of the criminal networks organizing the illegal crossings. And one of the reasons why we have been able to do so is that many of the first sightings has been done by NATO vessels partly because they're able to operate both in Turkish and Greek territorial waters and also I think it is important to understand that NATO presence in the Aegean Sea adds value, because it is a platform for enhanced cooperation between non EU NATO ally Turkey with Greece and improved cooperation between Turkey and the European Union. So both for the operational reasons, but also as a political platform, the NATO presence in the Aegean has proven very important.

MODERATOR: We'll go to al-Rabean (sic) row three please.

Q: Mr. Secretary General (inaudible) from al-Rabean (sic) News Channel. I have question regarding the last night discussion NATO started last week to the air space observation with its AWACS in the North of Syria and Iraq. Is this the beginning of a bigger role or NATO role will be limited to this operation in the fight against Daesh and if you don't mind I imagine that you discussed also the Turkish (sic) incursion military incursion inside the Iraqi territories which is a problem for Mr. al-Abadi.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO contribute to the fight against ISIL and terrorism in many different ways. All NATO allies participate in the coalition and it is of great importance for the coalition that NATO allies, two decades of joint operations and exercising and exercises, have been able to develop interoperability, the ability to work together in this kind of military operations. So in that sense the coalition takes great advantage of interoperability that has been developed through NATO over the decades. Secondly, we provide direct support by the training of Iraqi officers. We will increase that training and start to train also inside Iraq, not only training of Iraqi officers in Jordan and we have started last week on the 20th of October to fly AWACS surveillance plans to help improve, increase the air picture for the international coalition conducting their airstrikes over Syria and Iraq. Then we will assess what more NATO can do and we will assess the need for for the stepping up, for instance, the training inside Iraq. Let me also add that part of the broader picture is that NATO also contributes to the fight against DAESH-ISIL by for instance working with countries like Jordan and Tunisia. They are islands of stability in, in a region where a lot of instability and supporting helping them, for instance helping Tunisia with developing their special operation forces and intelligence, is an important contribution to make sure that Tunisia remains stable and is able to fight terrorism themselves. And let me also add that our presence in Afghanistan, NATO's biggest military operation ever is, of course, part of our efforts to fight international terrorism and we also see an ISIL present in Afghanistan which is just underlining the importance of our presence there. So all of this just underlines that we will assess, we will follow the situation closely and we will discuss with the coalition and of course with the government of Iraq, and then make decisions later on, on whether to increase our presence and our direct support for the coalition. I welcome that there are many members of the coalition and fighting ISIL and Turkey is one of

the NATO allies that directly contribute to the efforts of the coalition fighting ISIL. I will not comment on operational issues inside Syria because I will leave that to the coalition.

MODERATOR: We'll go to the second row in the aisle here please. On the other side please.

Q: Thank you Secretary General (inaudible) freelance from Kabul. Have you discussed in two days about Afghanistan? What are your views on the current security development in Afghanistan? Second, Afghanistan is not secure country, situation is worse day by day and fifteen province are unsecure in these days, but General John Nicholson, Deputy Spokesperson of Resolute Support say Taliban is not anymore (inaudible), what's your message? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We didn't have a dedicated meeting addressing Afghanistan at this Defense Ministerial but we discussed the situation in Afghanistan during our meeting yesterday as part of a broader discussion related to the security challenges we face. And we all see that the situation in Afghanistan is challenging and the Afghan national security forces faces many threats and they are challenged by different groups, different terrorists groups but also by the Taliban. At the same time we have seen that the Afghan national army and security forces have been able to make a lot of progress. They have shown their dedication, their professionalism and they've been able to hold the ground and deny Taliban the possibility to control any key areas. So what we have seen since NATO ended its combat operation in Afghanistan, at the end of 2014, we have seen that Afghan forces themselves are able to take full responsibility for the security in Afghanistan and they are able to fight back and to counter different Taliban attacks. It's not easy. There's going to be continued fighting in Afghanistan and we have to be prepared also for surprises for the unforeseen, but I think that the main message is that the Afghan army and security forces have proven very capable, very determined and by continued support from NATO with training, assistance and advice for the Afghan forces and continued financial funding, I'm certain that they will, that they are able to continue to hold the ground and to fight back against Taliban.

MODERATOR: We'll go to NPR please.

Q: Thank you. Mr. Secretary General Teri Schultz. With the new program being launched by the EU to train and equip the Libyan Coast Guard, some human rights groups have had concerns that these people must be vetted to the strongest degree possible that there are still a lot of elements that we don't know there. NATO ran into this when it of course had its operations in Libya not knowing exactly who's on the ground. Are you confident that, that this can be done that there are competent Libyan authorities to take over to participate in this training who will be who will respect human rights rule of law etc? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The situation in Libya is not easy and it's a challenge that we have different forces, militia groups fighting each other. NATO strongly support the UN recognized government of National Accord. I met with the Prime Minister Sarraj in in September and we had an experts group from Libya here at NATO headquarters recently and we are now

working with them on how NATO can provide support. Our main focus is not about training but NATO's main focus is how we can build security institutions. And one of the reasons why we are so focused on how to build security institutions is exactly to address one of the challenges you are raising in your question and that is of course that we, to be able to train the right people and to be able to build the right kind of forces, we need that security institutions which shall organize and lead them and therefore we are focused on how we can help Libya build the necessary security institutions and hopefully, we can be able to start that work at some stage, but it has proven a bit, well, what you have seen is that it has been, it has taken some time to find out exactly how NATO can, in the best way, provide support for building security institutions. When it comes to the E.U. training I think it is right for me to leave that to the E.U. to comment on.

MODERATOR: We're going to go to Russian TV in the fourth row please.

Q: Hello, with just one question from RTV (inaudible) Russian State Network. My question is connected with the tragic events that we, the tragic news that we received from Syria last evening. The airstrikes in the Idlib province that were held by either Syrian or by Russian warplanes killed at least 35 people there including at least 22 children and human right organizations describe it as one of the deadliest attacks against the local civilians during the last months. So how do you see the situation, do you consider this as war crimes and do you see any possibilities now to influence and increase pressure on Russia in order to prevent the further escalation and further humanitarian crisis in Syria? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I'm very concerned about the situation in Syria and it is a tragic situation because we see that the fighting continues, the bombing continues and the human suffering continues. And therefore I call on Russia and the Assad regime to stop all their indiscriminate bombing which we have seen also have also have where a lot of civilians have lost their lives and and I think it's important to continue to support all efforts to try to at least reach an agreement on a cease fire and a lasting cease fire as a first step towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria. NATO will continue to provide support for international coalition fighting ISIL at the same time we will continue to support the efforts to try to find a political solution to the conflict.

MODERATOR: We'll go to Aradie (sic) in the seventh row.

Q: (inaudible) German radio. It's no secret that there are certain I'm over here, over here ya ya ya. That there's certain NATO countries especially Germany and France who strive for stronger EU when it comes to defense. From what you've heard today from them and also from the High Representative are you reassured these possible double structures can really be avoided in the future?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I strongly believe that it's absolutely possible to strengthen the European defense in a way that it's complementary and not duplicating the efforts of NATO. And the reason why I believe that is, that 22 members of NATO are at the same time

members of the European Union and there is no will to compete with ourselves. And I also believe that a stronger European defense will strengthen NATO especially because the focus now is on how a stronger European defense can provide more capabilities, better coordination and also increase defense spending. And that's something that NATO has asked for for many many years and and I'm certain and it has been very clearly conveyed from the European leaders, from High Representative Erica Mogherini but also from others for instance from Defense Minister (inaudible) that this not about a European Army. This is not about E.U. doing collective defense. This is not about the European Union building up structures that should start to compete with, for instance, NATO structures, our headquarters in Europe. But this is about how can the European Nations develop capabilities, how can they better coordinate their efforts and how can they provide more resources, increase defense spending and that way I'm certain that a stronger Europe will contribute to stronger NATO.

MODERATOR: We have time for just one or two more. We'll go to the Wall Street Journal please.

Q: Thank you. Mr. Secretary General, one what did you take away from the SACEUR presentation yesterday on Russia and over this meeting you've announced a broad array of forces to the East and Russia has countered with their own build-up in the Baltic Sea. Can NATO move fast enough to respond to Russian moves?

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO is able to defend all allies against any threat and we have adapted our collected defense. We have increased our readiness and the preparedness of forces and we have increased our presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance. Just to make sure that we also, in a more challenging security environment with more Russian military presence close to our borders, continue to deliver credible defense. And again the reason why we are so focused on credible defense and credible deterrents is that we know that strong defense, credible deterrents is the best way not to provoke a conflict but to prevent a conflict. So we have adapted, we have responded to the increased Russian military presence close to NATO borders. The briefing that SACEUR gave us outlined in a way the picture of Russia which has invested heavily in modern defense capabilities which is exercising its' defense capabilities more extensively now than before and also of course a Russia which has used military force against neighbours. So we are responding, but we are responding in a measured and responsible way because we are not seeking a new Cold War. We want to keep tensions as low as possible.

MODERATOR: Last question to Georgian TV please.

Q: Georgia Public Broadcaster (inaudible). Mr. Secretary General you last night spoke about Black Sea region security. Can you tell us more about role of Georgia and, for example, in what form we will participate in the future, involvement of Georgia in this new reality? And also can you comment about the elections held in Georgia, I mean parliamentary elections

we had no chance to ask this question after the election that's why I'm asking. Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: On the elections, I welcome the elections, I welcome that Georgia has held elections which are widely regarded as free and fair and for me this just confirms that the, that Georgia is strengthening its democratic institutions. On Georgia and Black Sea security while we discussed yesterday and made decisions yesterday on strengthening NATO presence in the Black Sea region with a Romanian led brigade and with more presence in the air and at sea, we will come back to more details in February, but we have seen that all the (inaudible) Nations, for instance United Kingdom, announce that they will provide some air assets for air policing over in the Black Sea region. Georgia is a key partner for NATO. It's a highly valued partner and we are working closely with Georgia in many different ways. The whole North Atlantic Council recently visited Georgia and we have and we inaugurated I think a year ago the new training centre in Georgia and we will have a big exercise together with Georgia this year so we are working with Georgia in many different ways. We have NATO presence in Georgia and Georgia is contributing to different NATO missions and activities. So we will continue to build a strong partnership with Georgia that is important for NATO but also important for the security of Georgia.

MODERATOR: And that's the last question, the last press conference at this Ministerial. So thank you all very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/10/27/press-conference