North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press point

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following informal EU Defence Ministers meeting, Bratislava
2016-09-27

(As delivered)

SG: Good afternoon. I will be very brief because I said some words on my way into this meeting, but I just participated in the meeting of the EU Defence Ministers and we discussed NATO-EU cooperation,a nd I'm glad to be able to say that NATO-EU cooperation has never been closer and never been stronger than it is today. And in July we agreed on a joint statement, I agreed on joint statement with President Tusk, President Juncker, which adds even more substance to the NATO-EU cooperation and we discussed the implementation, the follow up, on these issues related to hybrid, cyber operations, exercises and so on, and it's good to see that we are delivering and turning that declaration into reality.

I also like to underline that there is no contradiction between strong European defence and a strong Atlantic cooperation within NATO. Actually, a strong Europe makes NATO stronger. And it was clearly stated by the ministers that what we need is a Europe which provides capabilities in complementarity with NATO, and it's important to avoid duplication. So I welcome the efforts to strengthen European defence because that will contribute to our shared security and I welcome also that it has been conveyed very clearly that this is not about establishing anything which is duplicating any efforts from NATO, but which is in complementarity to NATO.

Then, let me also just add some words about the situation in Syria. The appalling attacks on Aleppo have shaken all of us and the violence and the attacks we have seen also on an aid convoy is morally totally unacceptable and it's a blatant violation of international law and it underlines the importance of finding a diplomatic and peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria and I join the international calls on Russia to show credible efforts to restore the cessation of hostilities to allow humanitarian aid into Aleppo and to create the conditions necessary for UN-led transition talks to resume. So I think the violence and the killing of so many civilians just underlines the importance to support all efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria.

Question by AFP: In your eyes, is the debate on stronger European defence different in the context of Brexit? What is your opinion on that? Is there an opportunity to have a stronger European defence with the Brexit?

SG: Stronger European defence is something I've been calling for for a long time, because stronger European defence is about European nations providing capabilities, strategic lift, precision guided ammunition, and drones, and many other capabilities we need. And the fact that I would like to see more European nations provide more military capabilities is something I've been calling for both before the UK referendum and I called for it after the UK referendum. And I think it's also important to understand that in addition to stronger European defence capabilities we also need closer cooperation between European nations when it comes to a more effective defence industry and we need more research and development and to finance all this we need increased defence spending among European nations. So for me this is something which has been important regardless of the UK referendum, and again, as long as this is in complementarity to NATO and as long as this is not duplicating the efforts of NATO, I think we should only welcome stronger European defence, because that's good for Europe, it's good for the European Union and it's good for NATO.

Question by ZDF: I wonder if you have any reaction or comment to the Clinton/Trump debate from yesterday evening and the statement by Donald Trump that he likes NATO but that he doesn't see the US in the role of world police, would President Trump scare you?

SG: I will not be part of the US election campaign but what I can tell you is what matters for NATO and a strong NATO is important for Europe but is also important for the United States. And we have to remember that the only time that NATO has invoked Article 5, our collective defence clause, was after the attack on the United States on 11 September 2001, and thousands of soldiers from European NATO Allies and also from Canada have been in Afghanistan as a direct response to an attack on the United States. And for me this illustrates that NATO is good for Europe but it's also important for the United States. The United States have global responsibilities and for me this just underlines the importance that Europe contributes more and is able to provide more military strength and take more responsibility for defences and security in Europe. Just to connect to the previous question: the importance of a stronger Europe is not something which is an alternative to a strong NATO. Europe needs the United States and the European Union needs North-America and non-EU members as part of the collective defence we provide in Europe. And if we take Brexit into account, 80% of NATO's defence spending will come from non-EU Allies, and three out of four of the battalions we are going to deploy to the Baltic countries and Poland will be led by non-EU NATO Allies as non-EU members of the NATO Alliance, UK, Canada and the United States. For me this just illustrates that we need a strong transatlantic bond at the same time as we welcome stronger European defence.

Question by Reuters: Robin Emmott

A follow up to my colleague's question on last night's presidential debate. Mr; Trump claimed that the new ASG for Intelligence at NATO would refocus his activities to counter terrorism. I wonder if that was at all true and secondly Mr. Trump also said that the Alliance is focusing

more on counter terrorism because of his criticism. I wonder if there was any truth in that? Thank you very much.

SG: NATO has played a key role in the fight against terrorism for many many years. Our biggest operation ever, our military presence in Afghanistan, is a counter terrorism operation. We went into Afghanistan to prevent Afghanistan from becoming once again a safe haven for international terrorists. And we have built up substantial and strong Afghan army and defence and we support them, help them, train them in fighting Taliban and fighting different terrorist groups. So NATO is and has been playing a key role in the fight against terrorism. We have stepped up our efforts to support the US led coalition to fight ISIL, we will soon provide AWACS surveillance planes to support the coalition fighting ISIL, and improve the air picture of the coalition. And we will also step up training of Iraqi officers to increase their capacity to fight ISIL. So NATO is already doing a lot together with other international institutions, together with other nations, in the fight against terrorism. The new Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence will also of course be a tool in our efforts to fight terrorism. To share intelligence among Allies is one of the tools we use against terrorism. But this is something which has been planned and discussed for a long time and it's not a result of the US election campaign, so NATO has been focused on the fight against terrorism for many many years and it's not a result of the US election campaign.

Question by Public Slovak broadcaster, Jean Daniel: concretely, how can you see, regarding refugees, a coordination between your operation in the Aegean Sea and the EU operation in the Mediterranean Sea? Thank you

SG: NATO's presence in the Aegean Sea has been important, and it has made a difference, and it has helped cutting the lines of illegal trafficking across the Aegean Sea and has contributed to the significant reductions in crossings of the Aegean Sea. We provide real – time information to the Greek coast guard, to the Turkish coast guard and to the EU border agency FRONTEX. In additional to this practical support in the Aegean Sea, the NATO presence with the naval assets, is also important, because the NATO presence has provided a platform for enhanced cooperation between Turkey, a non-EU member to enhance to cooperation with Greece, an EU-member and with FRONTEX. And I think that we can learn from what we have done in the Aegean Sea when we are now also establishing a new maritime operation Sea Guardian. And we are in dialogue with the EU on how we can provide help to Sophia, in the central Mediterranean, we're looking into whether we can provide logistical help, intelligence and in other ways. So this is something which is now being looked into. The details, and the operational details, are now being looked into together with the European Union and then we are ready to also support operation Sophia, but exactly how that's going to be done, remains to be decided.

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