North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker
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(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

President Juncker, Jean-Claude, it’s great to see you again.

And as you just said we had an excellent meeting and we also have an excellent cooperation you and I and we are also now in the process of developing a better and more close cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

And I very much welcome your strong personal commitment to strengthening the cooperation between NATO and the EU.

That is something we need more than ever because we face a more challenging security environment.

And as you said we have just discussed the migrant and the refugee crisis and the EU is responding, NATO is responding and by doing that we are now working more closely together than we have done before and we are also proving to the world that we are able to work together, address together and cooperate in addressing the biggest migrant and refugee crisis Europe has seen since the end of the Second World War.

And as you all know NATO decided at our Defence Ministerial meeting the 11th February to support the efforts of the EU, of European NATO Allies to manage and to handle the migrant and refugee crisis. And 24 hours after we made the decision, we deployed the first ship in the Aegean Sea.

Then just before your Summit last weekend we decided to expand our support for the EU and we have decided to expand our support in three ways.

We have increased the area of operation. We have now moved into Greek and Turkish territorial waters and we have started to focus on the area around the Greek island of Lesbos. And we are planning to move further South in the coming days and weeks and this is an important part of what we are doing. It’s to then have naval presence in the Aegean Sea both in Greek and Turkish territorial waters.

The other thing we did during the weekend was that we decided to increase our cooperation with the EU and Frontex. And I'm very grateful that we have been able to really establish a very practical cooperation with Frontex. We have an exchange of liaison officers and we also agreed on the procedures on how to share real time information between the NATO vessels and the activities of Frontex. And this is important because the NATO ships are gathering information doing surveillance, reconnaissance, monitoring the situation and this is something which is important for both the Greek coast guard, the Turkish coast guard and for Frontex.

And the third thing we did was that we decided to increase the number of ships. There are now five ships in the area, there will be more ships in the coming days and we also have helicopters on most of the ships so we are increasing the presence of NATO vessels with modern equipment, advanced capabilities, which are then providing the support for the EU efforts to cut the lines of the illegal networks and the illegal trafficking of people across the Aegean Sea.

We will continue to support you, we will continue to work closely with you, but as you also mentioned we are also expanding our cooperation in another area and that is the challenges related to hybrid warfare. These kind of threats which are a combination of military and non-military means, covert and overt operations, and there, there is really a need for close cooperation between the EU and NATO. Related to issues as early warning, as supporting and defending critical infrastructure as energy infrastructure. And of course when it comes to cyber. And in all these areas we are now stepping up our cooperation and we believe very much that both the EU Summit in June and the NATO Summit in July will be important milestones where we have a unique opportunity to further expand our cooperation.

And I believe that a strong Europe is good for NATO and that a strong NATO is good for Europe and based on that common understanding we very much welcome that we are expanding our cooperation.

MODERATOR: Thank you we have time for one or two questions if there are any? Please if you, if you take the microphone.

Q: Hi, Julian Barnes, Wall Street Journal. For Secretary General how can the NATO mission re-enforce the new EU migrant proposal and where does the Turkish the monitoring mission on the Turkish Syrian border stand that you talked about last month? Have you gotten assets for that and when will that start? And Mr President, what does Turkey need to do, what does Turkey need to change for refugees to be returned from Greece? What does Turkey need to do in line with the Geneva Convention and when would the first Syrians return to Turkey from Greece?

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): So what we are doing is that we are helping, supporting the local, the countries in the region, meaning Turkey and Greek, supporting the Turkish Coast Guard, the Greek Coast Guard and the efforts of Frontex. And the main way we are doing that is by providing critical information. As I said we are

conducting surveillance, reconnaissance, gathering information and sharing real time information with the Greek and Turkish authorities and Frontex. They requested this because the whole reason why we are in the Aegean Sea was a proposal, a request from Turkey from Greece and Germany at our Defence Ministerial meeting in the beginning of February.

So it was a response from NATO to a request from Turkey and Greece supported by Germany that is the reason why we are there because they saw and we agreed that NATO has some capabilities which are of value for the efforts they are, they are doing in the Aegean Sea to manage and to control the situation there in a better way than they've been able to do so far. When it comes to the Turkish Syrian border we already have what we call assurance measures, NATO assurance measures in Turkey meaning AWACS planes meaning some naval presence and other capabilities which delivers assurance to Turkey for instance we have Patriot Batteries augmenting the Turkish Air Defenses.

This of course also gives us some information some ability to monitor the situation in the area and now we have agreed with Turkey we did that at our Defence Ministerial meeting the 11th of February to intensify, to increase our surveillance of the border between Turkey and Syria and we are in the process of establishing and agreeing with Turkey on how to do that in the best possible way. I think the important thing is that the situation of course is still very fragile, Turkey is the ally most affected by the crisis in Syria hosting more than two and a half million refugees.

At the same time I very much welcome that the cease fire or the cessation of hostilities is largely holding and this is the best possible basis for renewed efforts to find a political negotiated solution to the crisis in Syria and NATO strongly support both the full implementation of the cessation of hostilities but also of course all efforts to try to have talks, negotiations to find a political peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria.

JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER (European Commission President): As concerns your questions, I have to say that we are in contact with the Turkish government because Article 38 of the Asylum Procedures Directive is requesting from – in this case - Turkey to prove by all means that they are complying with the basic requirements of the Geneva Convention. And so it could easily be that both in Greece and in Turkey some pieces of legislation would have to be brought through Parliaments, but this has to be seen in the course of this week.

MODERATOR: Thank you we have time for one more question. Nicola.

Q: I have a question for both. The problem between NATO and the European Union, we know it is a problem named Cyprus. Do you have the hope that this problem could be resolved before the two summits in June and in July? And what could change the agreement on Cyprus? Could it be, at the end, a new agreement, a formal agreement between the European Union and NATO? Just one question of Mr. Stoltenberg on the problem of the right of sailing for the, for frigates they are in the Aegean Sea what about the right to the persons they are rescue in sea to have asylum in Iraq (sic) (inaudible) the European warship?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I can take the last question first and that is what we agreed with Turkey was that people who are rescued at sea and that are coming from Turkey can be returned to Turkey at the same time we stated clearly that what we are going to do is has to be of course in accordance with international law and national regulations and at the end this is a responsibility of the nations, national responsibility for those nations who provide ships to our military presence in the Aegean Sea. I also see that Turkey and EU are discussing different ways to also have a more common approach and I welcome those efforts.

When it comes to Cyprus I think that it will be wrong if I announced or started to speculate on when they when it will be possible to have an agreement but I think it's right to say that there are some encouraging signs and there are some progress has taken place. And I welcome very much the progress that has been made and also the efforts of the U.N. to facilitate talks and to support the efforts to find an agreement related to the challenges and the disagreements in the conflict we have seen in Cyprus over several decades. So we support those efforts and we welcome the progress we have seen.

JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER: In fact I have nothing to add. As far as I know – and I know – that the talks on the ground are progressing. The two communities are in permanent contact. I have received the two negotiation Chiefs of the two communities a month ago here in Brussels; I am quite optimistic that a deal will be found in Cyprus. And if this deal will have been found, the whole atmosphere will have changed and it will ease the problems we can face inside.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. That's all the time for today.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Okay bye.

JEAN-CLAUDE JUNCKER: Bye.

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