North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Prime Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoğlu
2015-11-30

(As delivered)

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, it's very nice to welcome you back to NATO headquarters. You have been here many, many times as Foreign Minister but this is your first visit to NATO as Prime Minister and I welcome you and also congratulate you on your reappointment as Prime Minister. I also thank you for the updated information you provided us during the meeting.

And we just had important discussions on the crisis in Syria and other security challenges that our Alliance faces.

Turkey is a valuable Ally.

We are grateful for the many contributions you make to our shared security.

And for the last three years, NATO has augmented Turkey's air defence.

So Turkey is committed to NATO and NATO remains strongly committed to Turkey's security.

The situation alongside NATO's south-eastern border remains highly volatile.

We discussed last week's incident, which led to the downing of a Russian jet.

All Allies fully support Turkey's right to defend its territorial integrity and its airspace.

I welcome Turkey's efforts to establish contacts with Moscow and through its contacts with Russia, to de-escalate the situation.

It is important to stay calm and to calm tensions.

I urge Russia to play a constructive role in Syria by targeting ISIL, our common enemy.

NATO strongly supports the renewed international efforts to find a genuine political solution to the conflict in Syria.

This is more urgent than ever.

Last week's incident shows how important it is to strengthen international mechanisms.

To build stability, transparency and predictability in our relationship with Russia.

This is key to reducing the risks of incidents and accidents.

And, if they occur, to prevent them from escalating and get out of control.

We will discuss this issue of risk-reduction mechanisms at our Foreign Ministers meeting which starts tomorrow here at NATO headquarters.

So once again, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, it's a great honour and a great pleasure to have you here and welcome.

PRIME MINISTER DAVUTOĞLU

Thank you very much. Distinguished members of the press, we had a very fruitful meeting with Secretary General Stoltenberg. As Minister of Foreign Affairs I came to this headquarters several times, but this is my first visit as Prime Minister of Turkey.

Of course, we shared many issues in our agenda, but the main issue was downing of Russian fighter jet in Turkish airspace on 24 of November. We discussed in detail. First of all, let me express our great gratefulness because of NATO support and personal support of NATO Secretary General after NATO Council meeting last week after this event.

I want to be very clear here: Turkish airspace is Turkish sovereignty. And our action was a defensive action. And we wish it had not happened. But at the same time, our rules of engagement was very clear, was declared in advance, and was informed to Russian side, our neighbour and friend Russia, three times – in Ankara, Antalya and in Moscow. That Turkish airspace should be respected after three violations committed by Russian planes. And we also made very clear that Turkish-Syria border is a national security issue for Turkey.

So it was a defensive action. If there was no violation, there wouldn't be such a crisis today. That the responsibility for the incident on 24th of November clearly does not rest with Turkey by any means. We have no intention whatsoever to escalate the situation.

We are ready to talk at every level in order to prevent further similar cases on Turkish-Syrian border, I underline this is Turkish-Syrian border, not the border of any other country. And Turkey has the right to defend airspace. And Turkey also wants to have good relations with Russia and with all the other countries who are fighting against Daesh on the ground. We are ready to make cooperation. But the bombardment which was done during this incident was not against Daesh. There is no single Daesh – or ISIL – position in this part of Syria. And we have been telling to Russian friends that the bombardments against civilians on our borders is creating new waves of refugees, which do not go to Russia or any other country, but coming to Turkey. And Turkey, after every bombardment, receiving more and more tens of

thousands of refugees from Syria. So Turkey as a country paying the price of this crisis cannot be blamed because of defending our airspace.

What is the lesson out of this experience? First, if there are two coalitions functioning in the same airspace against ISIL, this type of incidents – it will be difficult to prevent. One side, United States-led coalition, including Turkey, is doing operations against Daesh in Syria. On the other side, Russia is doing another operation. There is a need to coordinate these activities against Daesh. Second, if we are fighting against Daesh, we have to fight only against Daesh, not against moderate opposition, not against civilians. Even after this incident, yesterday, there was Russian bombardment in Idlib. And we received, as Turkey, we received the injured people, totally burned. And in Idlib there is no Daesh. There has been bombardment in Azaz by Russian planes against humanitarian convoy, carrying humanitarian needs to Aleppo. So we have to agree that yes, all of us we are fighting against Daesh. And third, Turkish-Syria is a national security border for Turkey.

We respect Russian nation's security concerns, but we also expect Russian friends to understand our nation's security concerns. Based on this, we are ready to talk, to have diplomatic military channels with Russia and with any other country in order to prevent this type of unintentional events, incidents, and in order to plan for the future fight against terror. And in order to have a Syria which after 1st of January, there's a new process for political solution where Turkey, Russia, United States, Saudi Arabia, is four-party group had worked in the past, in last weeks, and thirteen countries came together. Even for this we need to have a strong diplomatic channel to work together.

And Turkish-Syrian border also is a NATO border. Violation was not only against Turkish border but also against NATO border. Therefore same day, we gave all the details, all the details to NATO Allies in NAC, in Council meeting. And we are ready to share all the information with any party to satisfy, to convince, to explain our position.

And again, I want to express for clear position of NATO, and clear position of Secretary General personally – yesterday I had also the chance to meet with EU leaders here in Brussels – again I want to express our thanks to all NATO Allies expressing their solidarity with Turkey. Thank you very much.

Q & A

QUESTION (NTV): Secretary General, Gul Sonumut from NTV Turkey. The Prime Minister just talked a little bit about it, but there's a lot of speculation within Europe, in press, in Russian press that Turkey did not give the correct information about the flight, that there was no airspace infringement, etcetera. And there's a lot of speculation on that. So can you tell us whether Turkey was crystal clear enough, transparent enough, and shared all the necessary data with all the Allies, and whether really in the meetings in the past, and in the coming meetings, that all the Allies, all the members states are united behind Turkey? Thank you.

SECRETARY GENERAL: Turkey has shared a lot of information with NATO and NATO Allies. And we also had a special meeting of the North Atlantic Council where the Turkish ambassador went through all the information and all the details related to the incident last week. And the information that we have also from other sources is consistent with the Turkish assessment about what happened last week.

And I think what we have seen now just underlines what we have stated several times: and that is the concern related to all the increased activity and presence of Russian military capabilities in Syria and close to NATO borders. Turkey has its right to defend itself, and Turkey has the right to defend its airspace. My message now is that I welcome all and any contacts between Moscow and Ankara. And the important thing is to calm the tensions. And I think also the incidents last week also underlined the importance of us focusing on mechanisms to avoid these kinds of incidents in the future. And if this kind of incident happens again, to do whatever we can to prevent them from escalating and coming out of control.

QUESTION (BBC): Gavin Lee, the BBC. Question to both. First of all, Prime Minister, President Putin has asked for an apology from Turkey. Will you apologise? And question for Secretary General, as a NATO member do you believe there are grounds for Turkey to apologise for the incident which has killed the pilot, Lieutenant Colonel Oleg Peshkov?

PRIME MINISTER DAVUTOĞLU: First of all, let me say, I formed my government last week, the same day when Russia violated, Russian planes violated our airspace. As Prime Minister of a nation which has dignity and as the Prime Minister of the new government which received 49.5 percent support during the last election, which is a record, I can say that the protection of our airspace, land border is not only a right but a duty for my government. And no Turkish Prime Minister or President or authority will apologise because of committing, because of doing our duty.

Turkish airspace, protection of Turkish airspace, Turkish borders is a national duty. And our army did their job to protect this airspace. But if Russian side wants to talk, and wants to prevent any future unintentional event like this, we ready to talk anything. If they want information from us which we have provided, we can give any information regarding technical details of this incident. If they want to improve relations and normalise relations, in all sense, we are ready to talk. But no country can ask us to apologise because of doing our job.

I followed the news regarding economic sanctions and other measures declared by Russia. Here I am saying that in the past, we were all against economic sanctions. And there, during previous crisis, Turkey had a principal position, like today. And Russia was against economic sanctions themselves. Not it is not consistent, it is contradictory to use the same measure against Turkey which was criticised by them when other countries did so in Ukraine. Economic relations is based on mutual interest. And any other new measures we will

approach very calmly. We will not escalate the tension. We will never do anything which will be seen negatively by Russian people.

Russian people is friendly people to Turkish people. For many of them, Antalya is like second home. We expect Russian friends to come to Antalya, to Turkey, in a friendly manner; as a tourist, Turkey is home for Russian tourists. And for economic relations, we hope that Russia will reconsider these reactions, these measures, which will be against our interests both.

And at last I want to underline we are ready to talk, we are ready to share everything, we are ready to discuss for our future relations, which is an asset for both countries. But our military did their job when they protected our airspace. It is our airspace, and our border is an issue of national security but more an issue of dignity for us.

SECRETARY GENERAL: Many NATO Allies and NATO has expressed several times concern about the increased military presence of Russia in the region. And what we saw last week is not the first example of violation of Turkish airspace by Russian planes. And as I said, the information we have is consistent with the information we have got from Turkey. But our focus now is on de-escalating the situation, calming tensions. And we would welcome direct contacts between Ankara and Moscow.

And again, it’s the sovereign right of Turkey to defend its own airspace and territorial integrity. And we will discuss tomorrow at our Foreign Ministerial meeting in NATO how we can strengthen, develop different mechanisms to de-escalate, to reduce risks, and to whatever we can to prevent similar events to happen in future. And if they happen we have to do whatever we can to avoid spiralling out of control. So therefore our focus now is on de-escalation, calming the tensions.

Q & A

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