North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko
2016-10-20

President Poroshenko, Dear Petro, it’s good to have you back at NATO headquarters. It’s great to see you again.

We just met in New York in connection with the UN General Assembly in September. And then we met in Warsaw Summit in July.

And I think that the high frequency of our meetings reflects the very close cooperation and partnership between NATO and Ukraine. So it’s great to see you again and I really appreciate this opportunity to once again to address the very important issues of the situation in Ukraine and how NATO can continue to provide support to Ukraine.

And the Ukraine crisis continues to be a black mark on the map of Europe.

We know that thousands of people have been killed and many, many injured.

NATO’s support for Ukraine is unwavering. We will continue to support the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

And we do not – and we will not – recognise Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea.

And we are very much concerned about Russia’s continued destabilisation of eastern Ukraine.

For months the full implementation of the peace deal has stalled.

That is why I welcome that you had a meeting yesterday in the “Normandy Format” in Berlin. And I thank you for updating me on the outcome of that meeting and the discussions you just had. Including the plan to create a new road map for implementing the Minsk Agreement.

And it is essential to implement the Minsk Agreement, because the Minsk Agreement is the only viable way to a lasting, peaceful solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

All parties must fully implement the Minsk Agreement. Ukraine has responsibilities to implement its commitments, but Russia has a significant responsibility in this regard, because it continues to support the separatists.

And we know that the OSCE monitors must have safe access to the whole territory to be able to implement the agreement and we have seen that they have been hindered in doing that several times.

We have also seen that threats against the monitors and the jamming of the UAVs are undermining the implementation of the Minsk Agreement. And these actions are unacceptable because they are in total violation of the Minsk Agreement.

Ceasefire violations must end and we cannot allow these ceasefire violations to become ‘the new normal’ in Ukraine.

NATO and NATO Allies will continue to support Ukraine. We will provide practical support and we will provide political support.

We will provide support through our different trust funds. Helping you build security institutions. And we will work on areas for instance such as cyber-defence and the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers. And in other areas to help and support Ukraine in different practical ways.

Ukraine, for its part, has to continue to implement reforms, fight corruption and I welcome your personal engagement in pursuing the path of reforms in Ukraine.

So once again it has been a great pleasure to meet with you. But let me also add that in addition to the situation in Ukraine, we also discussed the very serious situation in Syria.

Because also in Syria we see a Russian presence and we have seen a substantial military build-up of Russia in Syria.

I welcome the temporary ceasefire in Aleppo but this does not go nearly far enough.

Following weeks of Syrian and Russian strikes against civilian infrastructure –including hospitals – the humanitarian situation in Aleppo is appalling.

We need a real solution on the ground in Aleppo. Not a short-lived ceasefire.

But one that addresses the desperate humanitarian crisis. And which will lead to a credible cessation of hostilities.

And therefore I join the international community in its calls on Russia to help end the bloodshed in Aleppo. And to play a constructive role in finding a negotiated solution to the crisis.

So once again Petro, it’s always a great pleasure to have you here and good to have you back at NATO headquarters, so welcome.

MODERATOR: We'll start with UNIAN.

IRYNA SOMER (UNIAN): News agency UNIAN, Ukraine. Iryna Somer. Question for Secretary General. Secretary General, in the light of yesterday negotiations in the Normandy Format do you see a possibility or use to hold next NATO-Russia Council to discuss this issue also with Russian side?

And question for Ukrainian president in the Ukrainian language if I may. [Interpreted:] Dear President, what are your main conclusions from your visit to the Netherlands, I mean Maastricht and to Brussels?

JENS STOLTENBERG (Secretary General of NATO): After the illegal annexation of Crimea in the spring of 2014, NATO decided to suspend all practical cooperation with Russia, and that decision stills stands. We have also implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the illegal annexation of Crimea as a direct response to the aggressive actions of Russia against Ukraine.

But we also decided to maintain channels for political dialogue open because we do not believe that we should try to isolate Russia, we believe that we should combine military strength, defence and deterrence, with a political dialogue. And therefore we have maintained the NATO-Russia Council as a platform, as a channel for political engagement with Russia.

We have also made it very clear that we will raise the question of Ukraine, and therefore we have had Ukraine on the agenda on all the meetings of the NATO-Russia Council since the spring of 2014. We had a meeting in July where we discussed Russia, sorry, where we discussed Ukraine in the NATO-Russia Council, and NATO allies strongly expressed their full support for Ukraine, their full support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity, and we also made it very clear that we do not recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea.

We are ready to have a new meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in the near future. There's no date that has been fixed or decided, but we are ready to convene a new meeting and we are in dialogue with Russia on the agenda and on the modalities. But what is clear is that in the next meeting of the NATO-Russia Council we will also raise the question of Ukraine and once again underline both our support for Ukraine but also underline the importance of the full implementation of the Minsk agreements and also now support the initiative to try to establish a roadmap to implement the Minsk agreements. So we believe in political dialogue because we think it's important to convey clear messages on many issues, and also on Ukraine of course.

PETRO POROSHENKO (President of Ukraine): [Interpreted:] Thank you very much for this issue, for this question. I think our delegation had a very intense program today in spite of the fact that we came at around 3:00 in the morning, flying after the Normandy Format meeting, and already at 8:00 a.m. I had met the President of the European Parliament where we discussed the necessity to speed up the decision-making by the parliament about visa-free regime and also about the support to the trade preferences in the DSFTA, which was offered to Ukraine by the European Commission.

You have seen the reaction of the President of the European Parliament, we are very strong in our position that…, we're very sure that we have the strong support from the majority of the European Parliament, and as for today, after the suspension mechanism will be solved, we don't have any doubts that this decision will be implemented.

And I had the possibility to be assured in that during the summit meeting of the European People's Party where the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the heads of the governments, Angela Merkel and many other heads of government, and they have reiterated again and again that the visa-free regime should be speeded up, Ukraine should be supported in the continuation of the ratification mechanism, and trade preferences should be given to Ukraine.

And what we have seen in Maastricht today, and this is a symbolic city, 25 years ago in this city the financial union began, this is the place which is the kind of symbol of European integration. I was for the first time in that hall where the historic documents have been signed, and I have really felt very firm and reliable support from the Europeans to our aspirations and many other questions about cooperation.

And I had more than ten meetings today with the heads of state and government, and all of them have accentuated that when Russia is demonstrating its irresponsible behaviour in Syria, in Aleppo, in the background of that, today's discussion in the European Council, the question of Russia, the European Council has a very firm position on supporting Ukraine and supporting its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll go next to Reuters, please.

ROBIN EMMOTT (Reuters): Thanks. Robin Emmott from Reuters. Secretary General, a question on Syria. We see that diplomatically Russia is making efforts to talk, but at the same time it's sending warships through the English Channel to the Eastern Mediterranean and some have suggested that this is for a final assault on Aleppo. What do you make of this?

JENS STOLTENBERG: What we have seen is that there has been many attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Aleppo, and I welcome that we now have a temporary ceasefire, but that's in no way enough. We need a lasting ceasefire, and which is fully respected.

When it comes to the Russian carrier group which is on its way to the Mediterranean, it is important to underline that Russia of course has the right to operate in international waters, and this is not the first time we have seen this carrier group being deployed to the Mediterranean, that has happened several times before. But what creates concern now is that this carrier group may be used to contribute to military operations over Syria and be used to increase attacks on Aleppo, and that's something very different than to deploy a carrier group to the Mediterranean as part of a normal deployment, which we have seen before.

So we are concerned that the Russian carrier group will support military operations in Syria in ways which will increase humanitarian and human suffering, and that's why we are concerned about this deployment. NATO navies will in a normal way monitor the Russian ships as they approach the Mediterranean. They will do so in a responsible and measured way, as they always do, because this is part of the way we are following Russian military activities. So it's not un-normal that we see deployment of Russian carrier groups in the Mediterranean, but what is un-normal is that this carrier group can be part of a combat operation, air strikes against Aleppo, and that is the reason why we are concerned.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We have time for just one more. Rudaw, please.

Q: Rudaw Media Network. A question for President Poroshenko. Mr. President Poroshenko, do you believe that the new roadmap that you decided in Berlin on the level of foreign minister can help you to implement the Minsk agreement? And how could be that new roadmap until November? Do you believe that there's enough time for it?

And a question for Secretary General Stoltenberg. You mentioned the war in Syria, in Ukraine, you know that now is the operation of Mosul, how do you see the participation of the member states of NATO in this operation? And know that the Peshmerga, the Kurdish forces fought, and today there are many killed, and there is not enough air strikes of the member states of NATO. Thank you.

PETRO POROSHENKO: Thank you very much indeed. I think that without a roadmap it's impossible to implement that because the roadmap should demonstrate the sequence and responsibility of those who do not implement the Minsk agreement. And if we agreed that it's necessary to provide the comprehensive ceasefire, that would be a responsible person, if we don’t do that it would be fixed by the OSCE. If we agreed to provide uninterrupted access for the OSCE inspectors and they would look, that would be the responsibility and the whole world will see who is responsible for that and it would be done immediately.

Now, if we talk about providing for example the armed OSCE mission, police mission, which was agreed, and this is another result of the Normandy Format, this is very important. And by the way I want to stress that it would be a meeting on the level of ministers. That would be just a preparation work because this roadmap should be approved in the summit of the Normandy Format.

And you see now that we don’t have this meeting from October last year, from the last meeting in Paris, and Ukraine paid a huge price during this year for not implementing Minsk agreement by Russia. This is the…, hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers and Ukrainian civilians were killed by Russian occupational troops. With that situation we think that if we demonstrate the readiness to the public documents as a roadmap with a practical date on each step that will certainly help us to go further, to demonstrate a progress for the return of Ukrainian sovereignty on the occupied territory by Russia.

And I think that the unique solidarity and unity the world, the European Union, our American, Canadian partners throughout the world, demonstrates this is also another very important reason for optimism for the implementation of Minsk.

JENS STOLTENBERG: All NATO allies and NATO support the international coalition to counter ISIL, and we do so because we see that ISIL is responsible for atrocities, they are responsible for terrorist attacks, and they are responsible for killing thousands of civilians in Iraq, in Syria, but also they have been responsible for terrorist attacks in our own streets here in Europe, and NATO provides direct support to the coalition fighting ISIL.

Last week, we had a meeting here at NATO with Brett McGurk, the Presidential Envoy to the Counter ISIL Coalition, and I also recently met with Prime Minister al-Abadi and with the Iraqi foreign minister, so we are in close dialogue with Iraq and with the international coalition countering ISIL, and they have briefed us on the preparations for the military operation to liberate Mosul. I welcome that operation. We know it's a difficult operation because there are many civilians in Mosul, and the international community has to do whatever it can to try to reduce the sufferings of civilians as much as possible.

I know that the international coalition have provided many air strikes and a lot of air support for the forces which are now on the ground, conducting the military operation to liberate Mosul, but I will not comment on specific operational issues because this is not a NATO operation; it's an Iraq-led operation supported by the coalition. NATO supports the coalition, NATO allies are supporting the efforts of the Iraqi forces, and NATO is also training Iraqi forces, but these are operational issues which I think we should leave to those who are directly responsible for the operation in Mosul.

MODERATOR: That's all we have time for. Thank you very much.

PETRO POROSHENKO: Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

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