North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

# Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers
2019-10-23

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(As delivered)

Good morning.

NATO Defence Ministers will be meeting tomorrow and the day after tomorrow to discuss key issues for our Alliance.

Including our missions and operations, and the increased readiness of our forces, progress towards fairer-burden sharing within the Alliance, and the resilience of our telecommunications systems.

We will also discuss the situation in northeast Syria. I welcome the significant reduction in violence following the joint statement by Turkey and the United States. It is important that all forces on the ground act with restraint and with full respect of international humanitarian law. The recent developments underscore the urgent need for a political solution. NATO fully supports UN-led efforts to achieve that, after so many years of this terrible conflict.

It is also important that we safeguard the gains we have made together against ISIS.

NATO plays an important role in the fight against terrorism. We will discuss our training mission in Iraq, which helps security forces there make sure that ISIS does not return.

And we will restate our commitment to our mission in Afghanistan, which ensures that this country does not become a safe haven for international terrorists once again.

We will also discuss our responses to hybrid threats. And our work to ensure our societies are more resilient.

Civilian infrastructure is a national responsibility. But under Article 3 of our founding Treaty, being resilient is part of every Ally’s commitment to the Alliance, and to each other. This is why NATO defence ministers will agree an update to our baseline requirement for civilian telecommunications.

The requirement is for all Allies to have reliable telecommunications systems in peacetime, crisis and conflict, including for 5G.

This means having in place:

robust options to restore the systems in case of a disruption and outage;

priority access for national authorities to communications networks in a crisis;

thorough risk management plans and mitigation measures;

and timely information sharing within governments and with the private sector.

And it means that Allies should conduct a thorough assessment of the risks to communications systems associated with cyber threats. As well as the consequences of foreign ownership, control or direct investment. I expect Ministers will agree to take these requirements into account when taking national decisions on designing, building and operating their telecommunications networks.

We will discuss these issues tomorrow, together with our partners from the European Union, Finland and Sweden.

Later today, I will address a public conference on Arms Control and Disarmament here in Brussels.

The arms control regime in Europe is eroding, due to Russia's disregard for its international commitments, and the emergence of new actors and new technologies. So we need to strengthen arms control to take account of new realities.

Including by:

Preserving the Non-Proliferation Treaty;

Strengthening nuclear arms control;

Modernising the Vienna Document on military transparency;

And working to develop new rules and standards for emerging technologies.

All of this will help to strengthen the international rules-based order and preserve peace.

In six weeks, NATO Heads of State and Government will meet in London. Our discussions over the next two days will set the stage for the meeting, where we will take decisions to further adapt and strengthen our Alliance to a fast changing world.

And with that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO spokesperson]: Okay, we'll start with Reuters.

QUESTION [Reuters]: Thank you very much. Secretary General, we have heard overnight about the Sochi Agreement between Turkey and Russia on the Syrian border. I wondered, given that Turkey is a NATO Ally, whether, how you view this agreement, whether you see it

as a positive development? And do you see any kind of NATO role, or international role with NATO involved, to, to make this agreement more sustainable and patrol the border in the future? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I welcome the joint statement between the United States and Turkey. And Secretary Pompeo came to NATO headquarters last Friday. We discussed the statement and the way forward, and I welcome the fact that after that statement, we have seen progress. We have seen a significant reduction in violence. And I think, also, this is something we can build on as we strive for a political settlement to the crisis in Syria. The war has been there for years. We have seen hundreds of thousands of people being killed, atrocities. So there is urgent need for progress for a political, negotiated solution. And that's also the reason why NATO so strongly supports the UN-led efforts to find a lasting political solution to the crisis in Syria.

NATO Allies have been present in northern Syria as part of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh or ISIS. And that's the reason why NATO Allies and the United States went into northern Syria. And we have been able to defeat the physical caliphate. We have to remember that NATO is part of the Global Coalition, all NATO Allies are a part of the Global Coalition. And NATO is present on the ground in Iraq, we provide support to the Global Coalition with our AWACS flights and the Global Coalition, led by the United States, has made enormous progress. We have defeated the physical caliphate. Not so long ago, ISIS controlled big parts of Syria and Iraq. Now they don't control any territory anymore. And millions of people have been liberated. That's the reason why we went in. That's the reason why the Global Coalition was established. And we have to make sure that we preserve those gains, that we don't jeopardise those gains, and that we also understand that the fight against ISIS is not over. They can come back. And that's the reason why, for instance, we continue to train Iraqi forces.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, Hurriyet, first row.

QUESTION: This is a follow-up to my colleague's question. You have not referred to Turkish-Russian agreement last night. Don't you think this agreement is also a kind of contribution to de-escalate tension in north-eastern Syria? And my second question is: what specific safeguards do you think NATO Ministers can adopt in their meetings tomorrow and on Friday in the fight against ISIS? Because the conditions in the field have drastically changed in the last 10 days' time. Thank you so much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think it is a bit too early to judge the consequences, the outcome of the statement, the agreement between President Erdoğan and President Putin.

I met with President Erdoğan again a few days ago and, of course, we discussed the situation in northern Syria. I expressed my deep concerns about the situation and the risk of increased human suffering and increased tensions. But I also recognised, of course, that no

other Ally has suffered more terrorist attacks and no other Ally is hosting more refugees than Turkey, and therefore they also have some legitimate security concerns.

I think what we have seen over the last days is encouraging, because it shows that it is possible to move towards a political settlement, a political solution. The first requirement for having a political solution is to stop the violence, is to stop the fighting. And what we have seen is at least some reduction, some significant reduction, in violence and fighting.

Then we need to move on, building on that, and then have a real political, negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria. I don't believe that is easy. That's extremely difficult. But it is also extremely important, and therefore we need to all do whatever we can to make that happen.

NATO will, of course, make sure that we continue to support the Global Coalition. All NATO Allies are members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS/Daesh. NATO is part of that Coalition and we have our training mission in Iraq. I think it's extremely important to train local forces to make sure that Daesh is not able to return. And we will discuss also the importance of providing the necessary trainers, the mobile training teams to our training mission in Iraq. I also visited Iraq recently and the training mission is up and running, but we are still urging Allies to provide even more trainers to our mission. And that is one of the issues we will discuss at the Defence Ministerial Meeting that starts tomorrow.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. We'll take a couple of questions over there. So Washington Post first please.

QUESTION [The Washington Post]: Hi, thank you, Michael Birnbaum from The Washington Post. A question about Ukraine. Trump said that one of the reasons the US had suspended military aid to Ukraine was that European Allies weren't doing enough to shoulder their share of the burden. Are you aware of any US effort to get the rest of NATO to increase its aid for Ukraine? Do you expect that's going to be part of the discussions, either here in the meetings or in some other NATO format in the coming days and weeks? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: All Allies, both in North America and Europe, are providing significant support to Ukraine. First of all, we provide strong political support. We have again and again stated that we don't accept the illegal annexation of Crimea and that we support the territorial integrity of Ukraine. We strongly support the efforts to find a political settlement, the implementation of the Minsk agreements, and we have seen some progress. Also with the exchange of prisoners. So we've seen some new initiatives, some new momentum in the efforts to make progress towards implementing the Minsk agreements.

Then, of course, you also provide practical support to Ukraine. We have different trust funds. We help them to modernise their armed forces, their security forces. Different NATO Allies provide partly support through the NATO mechanisms, but also bilateral support, training and different kinds of support. We help them with command and control, cyber - and NATO, the North Atlantic Council will visit Ukraine, I think it's a couple of weeks, it's in the near future.

We'll also go to Odessa, where we have also started to help them with building naval capabilities. So we are providing support in many different fields from command and control, Allies provide training and so on.

Then, of course, I as Secretary General, I am always pushing Allies to provide more. So I urge Allies to step up, to provide more trainers, to provide more money to the trust funds and to have more activities with Ukraine. And I met with President Zelenskyy and I highlighted for him that we will continue and we will step up. And we are actually in the process of stepping up our support to Ukraine, because at the Foreign Ministerial Meeting in Washington in April, we agreed a new package also addressing some of the different capabilities, but including naval capabilities. So this will be addressed, also, during the meeting today, the need . . . sorry, tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. That's an ongoing conversation in NATO about the importance that all Allies provide support and I'm urging them always to step up and do even more.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Financial Times. Second row.

QUESTION [Financial Times]: Michael Peel, Financial Times. On Syria, aren't you worried that the fight against ISIS has already been heavily undermined with reports of fighters escaping? And is part of burden-sharing and Allies stepping up, for European Allies to finally take responsibility for their nationals who have fought for ISIS and are detained? And then if I could just ask a small point of brief clarification, on 5G, given the security requirements you've outlined, is it possible for a Chinese company ever to satisfy those security requirements? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Burden-sharing within the Alliance is partly about spending cash. But we often speak about 'the three Cs' – cash, capabilities and contributions. So burden-sharing is also about contributions to NATO missions and operations. And whether we speak about Ukraine, or speak about the fight against Daesh or ISIS, or we speak about Afghanistan, or whatever NATO does, or Kosovo, is always a need to try to make sure that Allies contribute their fair share. And therefore, that's constantly on the agenda of NATO. And we will address exactly that tomorrow: contributions to NATO missions and operations, and a wide range of different NATO missions and operations. And that will, of course, also include what we do in support of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

And as I said, we will then discuss the need, and I will highlight to all Allied ministers that I welcome the support they provide, the trainers they have provided, both to our training mission in Afghanistan, because we have to remember that Afghanistan is also part of our global fight against ISIS. We have to make sure that the caliphate they lost in Iraq and Syria is not re-established in Afghanistan. And we know that ISIS is present in Afghanistan. We have seen some horrendous attacks committed by ISIS in Afghanistan, recently against a mosque where they killed 69 people. So NATO's presence in Afghanistan, and our Train, Assist and Advise Mission there, where we have roughly 8,000 non-US soldiers in that

mission, and then we have the US soldiers, is part of our global efforts to defeat ISIS, and part of burden-sharing. And again, the training mission in Iraq is the same.

So I will urge Allies to step up to do more, partly because we need those trainers, we need to fully resource all these missions and operations. But also partly because when European Allies and Canada do more of that, it also contributes to a fairer burden-sharing.

MICHAEL PEEL: [inaudible, off-mic]

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, I'm coming to that. I'm just addressing the wider thing about burden-sharing. Then foreign fighters, of course, part of that picture. And I expect also that to be discussed at this meeting. NATO is not the main tool to solve that issue, but NATO is a platform where NATO Allies can meet, discuss and also address issues related to foreign fighters.

I also believe that what NATO does when it comes to exchange of intelligence, and also the work we are doing on biometric data is relevant, for also addressing issues and challenges related to foreign fighters.

What I can say is that I believe that what we need is a more coordinated and international, as I say, a coordinated approach to dealing with the issue of foreign fighters and I expect that to be also discussed during this meeting.

Then lastly, on the resilience requirements, which we then will agree at this Defence Ministerial Meeting. These requirements are not about any particular country or any particular company. They are about the need for all Allies to have thorough security assessments and mitigation measures. And that is important, because that is the way we can make sure that we have resilient, safe and secure telecommunications, including 5G in peacetime, in a crisis and in conflict. And that is extremely important because we know that this is important for the whole . . . for the civilian infrastructure, for the civilian society: health care, electricity, transportation. But, of course, in times of crisis and conflict, these infrastructure, or this infrastructure, is also extremely important for the military, for our military operations. So this is partly about protecting civilian infrastructure, but also protecting our military operations. And therefore, 5G is so important for our security and it's part of the resilience pledge we have made together in the Alliance.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll go to Radio Free Europe, third seat please?

QUESTION [Radio Free Europe]: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, Mustafa Sarwar from RFE/RL. To what extent is election transparency and credibility important for Afghanistan's political stability? And what's NATO's role in resolving a potential dispute over election results? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Of course, transparency and predictability related to, when it comes to elections, are extremely important, because we need free and fair elections. I would like to

commend the Afghan Security Forces for protecting and making it possible to have elections in Afghanistan. I think the important message now is that all parties should show restraint and calm and let the electoral bodies finish their work, so we can have the outcome of the elections and then finalise the election process in a well-organised and good way.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Ariana.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Secretary General. I'm Sharif Hassanyar from Ariana News. You had met Dr Khalilzad two days back today. What was the agenda of your meeting with Dr Khalilzad? And at the same time, Secretary Esper came to Kabul and announced that he'll reduce 2,000 troops from Afghanistan. Is there any plan that NATO . . . is there any plan shows that NATO has the same plan?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Ambassador Khalilzad visited NATO a couple of days ago. And he met me and he met the North Atlantic Council. He has been here many, many times consulting with NATO Allies, because, of course, he negotiates with Taliban, or he has been responsible for the negotiations, the talks with the Taliban. The talks have now broken down, but NATO supports and I support the resumption of these talks. But then the Taliban has to show real willingness to make real compromises and to agree on a credible peace deal. Because what we need is a deal which, in a credible way, preserves the gains we have made in Afghanistan for the Afghan people, for women, for journalists, for everyone who believes in a democratic, free Afghanistan, but also for our fight against terrorism. Because we have to remember that the reason why we went into Afghanistan was to fight international terrorism. And, therefore, we supported the resumption of the peace talks, but then the Taliban has to show a real willingness to make real compromises. And we believe that the best way NATO can support the peace process is by remaining committed to our military presence. Because the Taliban has to understand that they will never win on the battlefield. They have to sit down at the negotiating table and make compromises.

So, for us, there is no contradiction between the military presence and the efforts to find a political solution. Actually, we strongly believe that a strong commitment to our military presence is the best way to provide the framework, the basis for a political solution.

NATO Allies have stated again and again that we are committed to the Resolute Support Mission. We have seen some adjustments up and down in the number of troops, as we have seen also with the US presence. But we will stay committed. We will maintain our mission. And the US has also expressed clearly that they are committed. We went into Afghanistan together, we will make decisions on our future presence there together, and, when the time is right, then we will also leave together. But that depends on that we really get a political settlement that enables us to reduce our presence.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll go to NPR/Deutsche Welle.

TERRI SCHULZ: [NPR/Deutsche Welle]: Hi, Terri Schulz with Deutsche Welle and NPR. A couple of questions that you haven't touched on yet. The German Defence Minister has floated the idea of an internationally-controlled safe zone in northern Syria, that could be done in cooperation with Russia and, of course, with Turkey. What is your response to that? Would that be Europe stepping up and taking more responsibility, as it's often called on to do? And also, the Defense Secretary of the US, Mark Esper, says that he believes that Turkey could be responsible for war crimes committed in northern Syria. What is your response to that? And do you fear that the entire meeting will be poisoned by this issue? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, I spoke with the German Defence Minister yesterday, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, and she shared with me her thoughts about the way forward in northern Syria. And I welcome that NATO Allies have proposals on how to move forward, how to find a political solution. And, of course, a political solution, has to, in one way or another, involve all actors on the ground. You cannot have a political solution only involving some of them. So a political solution can have different shapes and different forms, but it has to involve those actors who are on the ground.

And again, we need the political solution and therefore also welcome proposals from NATO Allies on how we can try to move forward. This will certainly be addressed, discussed during our meeting. And I expect Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, the Defence Minister to then share her thoughts with the other Allies.

As I said, I expect all forces on the ground to respect international law. And that's extremely important for this Alliance, because international law is important for all Allies.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, Novaya Gazeta, lady in green. Lady in green here.

JENS STOLTENBERG: You are not a lady in green. No.

OANA LUNGESCU: Front row, please. Thank you.

QUESTION: Yeah, a couple of . . . I had a couple of question, erm . . . questions about Afghanistan, but I want to ask again about Ukraine, to continue this theme. You are to visit Ukraine next week or next two weeks, and some Ukrainian politicians suggested that you and President Zelenskyy will discuss some structural reforms in Ukraine. So what is it about and what it will be in reality, what structural reforms?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The North Atlantic Council will, in a few days, visit Ukraine, will visit Kyiv and Odessa. That's partly to get a better understanding, to have first-hand updates, information from the Ukrainian government, from President Zelenskyy, and from different ministers. We have the meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, will meet there and also a way for us to sit down and exchange views on how NATO can support Ukraine and support the peace efforts. And part of that, again, is what NATO has been doing for several years, but

which we are now looking to how we can do more, to provide help to Ukraine, to reform, to modernise their armed forces, to fight corruption, and to make sure that Ukraine is able to have modern ways for command and control, cyber defences and in other ways reforming their armed forces. So that's the reason why we're going there, and that will be part of the discussions.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, and we have NTV now.

QUESTION [NTV]: Gul Sonomut from NTV. My question is with regard SAMP/T assured measures to Turkey. While you in Turkey, because of the start of the Peace Spring operations, some member state decided to either withdraw or not to renew their deployment over there, and there are lots of shortfalls. So, do you think that in this new configuration there will still be a contribution to SAMP/T whether country who decided, like Spain or Italy, to withdraw will stay on the ground? Or will you use your influence to convince them in that meeting, or other countries, to come with the … [inaudible] of SAMP/T? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Of course, as always, there are national decisions that have to be taken to provide contributions to NATO missions and operations and UN activities. And the tailored, or the assurance measures, for Turkey is something we have had in place for now several years. Different NATO Allies have provided different kinds of assurance measures. And they have been on rotation. So, for instance, when it comes to the augmentation of Turkish air defences, for the time being, it is Italy that provides a SAMP/T battery. And then Spain provides a Patriot battery. And I think it is important . . . and then we have port visits, we have other kinds of assurance measures.

I think that these assurance measures are important. And, of course, I have urged Allies over the years to provide assurance measures, and I will continue to underline the importance of these assurance measures, because they show that, despite the differences we see between NATO Allies about the situation in northern Syria, we have to be able to deliver on the activities we do together.

And that also includes, for instance, the NATO activity in the Aegean Sea, where we currently have six ships helping to implement the agreement between Turkey and the EU addressing the illegal flow of migrants over the Aegean Sea.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Europa Press. Yes. Lady over there.

QUESTION [Europa Press]: Thanks, Ana Pisonero from the Spanish news agency, Europa Press. It's actually a quick follow up to the colleague's last question. Do you actually expect a decision in this ministerial on what to do with . . . with the SAMP/T and the Patriot battery? I mean, very clearly you want them to continue. It's polemic for some Allies in this context, there are other Allies pushing to continue to not make a bad gesture vis à vis Turkey. Do you expect a decision in this ministerial, or would we still have time, because the replacements would not need to be until the end of the year? What's your thinking there? And a second

quick question, if I may: do you think it's fair, the critics that President Macron made last Friday during the second day of the European summit? Precisely on the reaction, how NATO had reacted to the . . . to the Turkish offensive. I mean, do you . . . do you see where he's coming from? Particularly on the credibility of the whole of NATO, which is a member of the . . . of the Global Coalition Against ISIS, to, in a kind of way have . . . have left the fundamental partner, local partner on the ground? You're always explaining how important it is to train local forces, for them to do their own combats, but then if the main Ally is left . . . is left aside, what does that say about the Alliance? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO agreed several years ago that we will provide assurance measures to Turkey. And we also agreed that we should provide air defence batteries to augment their air defences. And as I said, over many years, or several years, we have provided different kinds of assurance measures and we have augmented their air defences. Different nations have, by rotation, provided these different assurance measures.

I expect, of course, this to be discussed at the meeting tomorrow, because we will discuss the situation in northeast Syria, the instability to the south for the Alliance, and of course, these assurance measures are triggered by the volatile and the difficult situation we have had there for several years.

I don't expect any final decision, because it's, at the end of the day, this will be for nations to decide what kind of capabilities they provide to the different assurance measures that NATO has agreed. So that's a national decision to be taken and the nations will then announce what they do or not do.

It's absolutely meaningless to try to hide that there are differences when it comes to the situation in northern Syria between NATO Allies. That's a matter of public record. It's something you can all read in newspapers, or watch on television every day, that there are differences. And of course, that's always difficult when Allies disagree. That's also the reason why I think it's important that we meet, because the best way of addressing disagreements is to sit together around the table and then to discuss and try to find the way forward.

And therefore, I am encouraged by the agreement, or the joint statement, between two major Allies, Turkey and the United States last week, where they at least agreed on the way forward in some very critical areas. And following that statement, following the agreement on that statement between Turkey and United States, we have seen progress. We have seen significant reduction in violence. I'm not saying that all problems are solved. I'm not saying that all disagreements between NATO Allies have disappeared. But I'm saying that compared to where we were before that, we are now in a better place. But still, many challenges and many problems ahead of us.

So I think it's important that NATO provides that platform for discussion, for having frank and open discussions about the difficult issues. And then to look into what we can do. Partly, when it comes to missions and operations, and, not least, when it comes to making sure that

we don’t jeopardise the gains we have made in the fight against Daesh. The training mission in Iraq, making sure that the caliphate which they lost in Iraq and Syria is not re-established in Afghanistan, and many other things we can address together in the fight against Daesh.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Agence France-Presse, yeah, if you go down, gentleman just there, second row.

QUESTION [Agence France-Presse]: Bonjour, ce sera en français, donc je pense que vous allez avoir besoin de votre traduction. Christian Spillman de l’AFP. Je voudrais revenir sur la question… la poursuivre la question de ma consœur. Vous avez dit toute à l’heure que effectivement la luttre contre ISIS ou Daech n’était pas terminée. Or, effectivement, pour lutter dans cette région, dans le nord-est de la Syrie, on a besoin de troupes au sol. Ces troupes au sol ce sont les milices kurdes. Ces milices kurdes ont été attaquées et sont la cible de l’offensive lancée par la Turquie. Cette offensive, ou cette agression, lancée par la Turquie a été dénoncée par les Etats-membres de l’Union européenne qui représentent un gros bloc au sein de l’Alliance. Elles l’ont condamnée. L’OTAN ne l’a toujours pas condamnée. Je voudrais savoir si c’est un comportement normal de la part d’un membre de l’Alliance de déclencher une agression sans en informer ses alliés et de s’en tirer sans aucune condamnation. La seconde question. Effectivement on peut pas continuer à combattre un mouvement terroriste en retirant ses troupes, or c’est ce qu’ont fait les Américains. Ils ont replié les troupes qui étaient présentes dans cette région et ils l’ont fait sans en avertir leurs alliés. Le président français Emmanuel Macron l’a dit, « j’ai appris ça par un tweet. » Est-ce que vous considérez normal qu’au sein de l’Alliance on soit informé par des tweets de la part du président américain qui représente la force majeure de l’Alliance. Merci.

JENS STOLTENBERG: You are absolutely right, that I said that, that the fight against ISIS is not over. And that’s absolutely correct. And you’re right referring to that. But we have to distinguish between two things. The caliphate, the physical caliphate they controlled in Iraq and Syria, they don’t control anymore. They have lost control of all the territory and all the people they suppressed or controlled in Iraq and Syria. That’s a great achievement. And the only way we were able to achieve that was through the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, that we joined forces and that we worked together and made that great progress and defeated the physical caliphate.

And that’s the main reason . . . that’s the reason why we went in Iraq and in Syria, different Allies participating in different ways, but all NATO Allies have participated in one way or another in the Global Coalition, and NATO is also part of that Coalition.

Then, as I said, there are differences between NATO Allies on how to deal with the situation in northeast Syria. And I have expressed clearly that I am, when I was actually in Istanbul, last Friday, I stated clearly that I’m concerned about the consequences of the then-ongoing Turkish operation, the consequences for tensions in the region, the risk of escalating further

the tensions, human suffering, and also the risk of jeopardising our fight against . . . or the gains we have made in the fight against Daesh. But I also stated that Turkey has legitimate security concerns, because they are on the frontline of this volatile region. That's the reason why I welcome the progress we have seen. I'm not . . . there is a lot of problems ahead of us, but at least it is encouraging that we had agreement last Thursday or last week, and then we tried to build on that to make further progress and to support efforts to find a political solution.

And again, I think that one of the important reasons that NATO plays a role in this is that we provide a platform for Allies, also with different views on how to deal with the situation in northern Syria to meet, to discuss, and that's exactly what we're going to do, starting tomorrow.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Swiss Radio, third row up there please?

QUESTION [Swiss Radio]: Thank you, Secretary General. Talking about limits of international organisations, the EU actually failed to start accession negotiations with Macedonia and Albania. In Northern Macedonia, this has led to a political crisis and the call of new elections. That's a country which is joining NATO. I know they are two different organisations, but I was wondering whether you have any concerns, with the situation that has arised.

JENS STOLTENBERG: It's not for me to give the European Union any advice on how to deal with the requests from North Macedonia to start negotiation talks. We have all seen the outcome of the discussions within the European Union, and that's not for me to comment on that.

What I can say is that we strongly welcome that NATO Allies have proven once again that NATO's door is open. We will soon have North Macedonia as a full member. Almost the majority of NATO Allies have already . . . we signed the accession protocol not so long ago. And just yesterday, the US Senate ratified the accession protocol of North Macedonia, and so has also most other NATO Allies already done, and I expect the rest to do it in the near future. And that's important, because by joining NATO, North Macedonia contributes to stability in the region. It provides a framework for, also, economic prosperity. I spoke recently, a couple of days ago, with Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, and he told me that after they joined NATO, they have seen a significant spike, or increase, in foreign investments. So I welcome North Macedonia as the 30th member. It's not for me to comment on the issue of EU membership.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. I know there are lots of questions. But we'll see you at the ministerial. Thank you very much. This completes this press point.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

robust options to restore the systems in case of a disruption and outage;
priority access for national authorities to communications networks in a crisis;

thorough risk management plans and mitigation measures;
and timely information sharing within governments and with the private sector.

Preserving the Non-Proliferation Treaty;
Strengthening nuclear arms control;
Modernising the Vienna Document on military transparency;
And working to develop new rules and standards for emerging technologies.

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Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2019/10/23/press-conference