North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO’s Enduring Mission – Defending Values, Together

Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to student audience, National Parliamentary Library Tbilisi, Georgia (followed by Q&A session)
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(As prepared)

Thank you for that very kind introduction.

I appreciate this opportunity to share a few thoughts with you.

About NATO’s mission and evolution.

And the close friendship between Georgia and NATO.

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I first visited your beautiful country in 1985.

It was a very different time.

When Europe was divided by armies, by walls and by values.

Since then so much has changed.

In 1985, you were a Soviet Republic.Now you are an independent state.A close partner of NATO, aspiring to membership.

I join the people of Georgia in celebrating your many achievements over the past quarter of a century.

Perhaps the most important change has been how Georgia has embraced the fundamental values which unite so many countries across Europe. Democracy.Freedom of speech.Freedom of the media.Independence of the judiciary.Protection of minorities.

These are the values that unite us.

They are the values NATO has defended since its foundation in 1949.We have had to defend those enduring values in very different ways.

For our first 40 years, NATO was focused on collective defence.

Defending ourselves back then meant lining up tanks along the West German border.

Then suddenly, in 1989, the Berlin Wall came down.The Cold War ended.And the Soviet Union was dissolved.

With the Cold War receding into the past, NATO entered a new phase.

Our mission evolved from pure collective defence to include what we call “crisis management.”

As violence disrupted the Balkans.And the threat of genocide erupted in Kosovo.

For the first time, NATO sought to manage conflicts beyond our territory.

To defend the lives of the people there.To prevent war from spreading in Europe. And to take a stand against massive abuses of human rights.

This was a new role for NATO.But it was firmly in line with our commitment to universal values.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, NATO was called upon once again.

NATO and our partners went into Afghanistan.To prevent that country from becoming a safe haven for terrorism.

Since then, NATO – with the help of Georgia – has been supporting the Afghan armed forces.

Which we have helped build from almost nothing to an effective force of more than 350,000.

And here – on behalf of all NATO members and partners – I want to express my deep gratitude to Georgia.

You have stood side-by-side with NATO in Afghanistan for many years.

And we recognise and deeply appreciate the sacrifices made by Georgia’s soldiers and their families.

Your troops have made a real contribution to helping the Afghan people find a safer future.And they have helped keep us safe as well. We are grateful for that.

Now, we are in a third important phase of NATO’s evolution.Which in some ways began to take shape when Russia used military force here in Georgia in 2008.

Since then, Russia has kept unwanted troops in the Republic of Moldova.Illegally annexed Crimea.And is worrying the rest of Europe, for example, with the kind of massive, unannounced exercise we are seeing right now.

At the same time, we also face big challenges to the South.

With the emergence of the so-called Islamic State, we have seen a tragic escalation of the civil war in Syria. A series of brutal terrorist attacks in several NATO countries. And the biggest migrant and refugee crisis in Europe since World War II.

NATO is adapting to these challenges from the east and south.

We have bolstered NATO's ability and readiness to defend our territory and our citizens.

We are strengthening our collective defence and deterrence.

We are enhancing our forward presence in the east of the Alliance.In Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, we will deploy, by rotation, four robust, multinational battalions. One in each country.

We will also strengthen our posture in the south-eastern part of the Alliance.

Based around a Romanian framework brigade.

This will be supplemented by steps to strengthen the readiness and interoperability of air and maritime forces here in the Black Sea region.

NATO does not seek confrontation.

All of our measures are defensive, transparent, and in line with our international obligations.

We do not want a new Cold War.

We will continue to seek constructive and meaningful dialogue with Russia.

We will never compromise on our duty to protect our territories and citizens.

We are also taking significant steps to increase stability in our eastern and southern neighbourhood.

Because if our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure.

In the east, we have reaffirmed our commitment to Ukraine, to the Republic of Moldova and to Georgia.

To help these countries resist outside pressure and advance crucial defence and security reforms.

In the case of your country, we agreed on the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package in 2014.

This package was strengthened at our Summit in Warsaw this past July.

Allies are determined to increase and intensify our level of support.

NATO experts work with their counterparts here in Georgia on a day-to-day basis.

To help strengthen your defence capabilities.And to provide advice on planning, education and cyber security.

We have also increased training and exercises for troops from NATO, Georgia and other partners.

Including through our new Joint Training Centre based right here in Tbilisi.

These are significant, concrete measures that enhance Georgia's security and defence capabilities.

NATO was founded by twelve nations in the shadow of the horrors and devastation of World War II.

Gradually, our membership has more than doubled. Today we have 28 members.

Soon to be 29 with the expected addition of Montenegro.

NATO's expansion over the years is the result of our Open Door policy.

Georgia too has applied for NATO membership.

And NATO agreed at our Summit in Bucharest in 2008 that Georgia will become a member of NATO.

We always advise aspiring members that the process of joining NATO takes time and patience. NATO has been working very closely with Georgia to assist your country on the path to eventual membership.

Over the years, Georgia has been one of the biggest contributors to NATO operations.

And NATO has more initiatives and programmes here in Georgia than in any other partner country.

So, today, there is more Georgia in NATO. And more NATO in Georgia.

NATO Allies have been extremely impressed with the strides Georgia has made.

We encourage Georgia to continue on the path toward economic, defence and democratic reforms.

We look forward to your elections next month.

And we trust they will meet the highest democratic standards.

The current visit to Georgia of the North Atlantic Council sends an important message.

The friendship between NATO and Georgia is stronger than ever.

For nearly seven decades, NATO has helped to keep the peace in Europe.

Allies have been united by a common set of values – democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

And we have forged an unbreakable bond.

Between Allies on both sides of the Atlantic.

As the world has changed, NATO has changed.

But we remain committed to our values.

To our determination to defend one another.

And to help promote peace and security for future generations.

MODERATOR: Thank you Secretary General for your very detailed review of the challenges the whole international community is facing today and you also briefly provided the concrete steps which was taken by the alliance with the aim to overcome these challenges. Let me raise my first question and then I promise to limit myself to give more opportunities to Georgian students. Secretary General as you mentioned since the collapse of the Soviet Union and since the end of the Cold War many steps were taken and many agreements were achieved on international arena but concrete facts of drawing dividing lines in Europe and concrete efforts aimed at reasserting spheres of privilege … [inaudible] in the region unfortunately still seriously challenge the strategic agenda of the west to achieve Europe whole, free and at peace. My question is how do you think, where do we stand in this regard? And how do you also see the role of international institutions and of course more specifically how do you see the role of NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): I think that what we have seen is that we have made a lot of progress. We have seen that there is more democracy in Europe now than it has been for ever before. There are more independent democratic states than we have seen ever before and we have seen the crucial role of both NATO and the European Union. So the end of the, after the end of the Cold War, after the end of the Soviet Union, after the end of the Warsaw Pact we have seen more democracy, more independence in Europe than we have seen ever before. And this has been great progress and NATO has been of course been key in that process with the enlargement, taking in many more members and by that also contributing to stability, to democracy and to freedom in Europe. So in one way we are really on the right track to a Europe whole, free and at peace but at the same time we see challenges like we for instance have seen in Georgia with the occupation of

territories in Georgia, with the Russian aggression against Georgia and of course what you have seen in Ukraine. So the picture is mixed and we also see that Russia is trying to kind of re-establish spheres of influence along its borders and for me this just underlines the importance of strong NATO, of strong partnership with other countries in Europe that are not members of NATO and also the importance of underlining that every nation has the freedom to choose its own path including what kind of security arrangements it wants to be part of. So we are moving, we are moving in the right direction but we have seen some very disappointing development especially in Ukraine in the last couple of years.

MODERATOR: Thank you Secretary General. Now we have time for questions, around 30 minutes and I would ask everybody to identify yourself and of course to keep your questions short in order to have more time for conversation. Please lady there, yeah.

Q: Anna [inaudible], Caucasus University. My question is what would be your message to the part of our society pessimistic about Georgia's NATO accession? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Sorry I didn't … the message to?

MODERATOR: To the Georgian society, to the part of society pessimistic ...

JENS STOLTENBERG: Well my message is that Georgia should continue to do exactly what Georgia is doing and that is to implement reforms. Constitutional reforms, electoral reforms, economic reforms, judicial reforms, modernize Georgia. And there are many reasons why I believe that this is so important for Georgia. Of course it enables Georgia to move towards membership because these reforms are crucial, critical for Georgia being able, joining NATO. But in addition these reforms are important regardless of NATO because to have an independent judiciary, to have strong democratic institutions, to have freedom of press, to have the rule of law, to fight corruption, that is something which is important regardless of NATO. So even if NATO hadn't asked you to do it you should have done it anyway because it creates freedom, it creates the best possible framework for investments, for economic prosperity. So there are double reasons for you to pursue the path of reform modernizing the Georgian society because it provides freedom, it provides economic growth and it is the way towards NATO membership. Then it will take time and you need patience but you achieve a lot while you are moving, it's not either nothing or full membership. You have already achieved a lot when it comes to modernizing the Georgian society and you have achieved a lot when it comes to building partnership with NATO. There are NATO advisors in Georgia, we are training your troops, we are increasing the ability of Georgian troops to work together with NATO troops, interoperability we call it in the NATO language, we have the NATO training centre, we are opening this school, defence institution building school, we have the NATO liaison office, we have advisors and so on. So I think yes I understand that you would like to see membership as soon as possible, I understand that you would like to see that I can give you an exact date that you will join next year, I'm not able to do that but I can tell you that you are achieving a lot just by working towards membership because on that road you are

modernizing Georgia and that's good for Georgia regardless of when you are able to join NATO.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Thank you Secretary General and we have next question over there.

Q: Hello I'm Sophia from Sokhumi State University. First of all let me extend my appreciation for NATO for its support of Georgia's territorial integrity and for pursuing the non-recognition policy. So my question is that in the environment where the modern Euro Atlantic security architecture including the principles, the principles of inviolability of state borders is being constantly undermined, what's the vision of NATO on how to deal this challenge? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: It is a fundamental principle which the security order in Europe has been based on since the end of the Second World War that borders should be respected, the territorial integrity, the sovereignty of all nations should be respected and that has been the basis for peace in Europe. And the reason why we are so concerned by what we have seen in Georgia with the occupation of some regions in Georgia and also by what we have seen in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine is that that's violating exactly those fundamental principles and that is serious for Georgia, it's serious for Ukraine but it's also serious for the whole of rest of Europe because it undermines the principles, the framework which peace and stability in Europe has to be based on. And that is also the reason why NATO has reacted so strongly and not only NATO but the whole Europe and NATO together. The European Union has implemented strong economic sanctions against Russia because they have violated the territorial integrity of Ukraine and NATO has implemented the biggest reinforcement to our collective defence and we have as I stated in my speech decided to also deploy forces in the eastern part of the alliance. So credible deterrence, strong defence to underline that NATO will never never accept that any NATO ally is attacked or that the territorial integrity of any NATO ally is violated is part of response to what we have seen in Georgia and Ukraine. On top of that of course we are also then stepping up our support, our cooperation with both Ukraine and Georgia also as a response to what we have seen of a more assertive Russian behaviour in Europe during the last years.

MODERATOR: I cannot agree with you more Secretary General because we can speak about new realities in international relations, the most clear reality [inaudible] the indivisibility of security. It's really hard to achieve security on NATO territory without projecting stability and security in the region and it is really very important that concrete steps are being taken with the aim to strengthen the security of the partner and aspirant countries as well. Thank you for this answer and one more question over there.

Q: Thank you. Taya Gregorava (sp?) from Tbilisi State University. While the opinion polls show that majority of Georgia's population supports our country's Euro Atlantic aspirations, however the anti-western propaganda efforts by Russian Federation are increasing not only in Georgia but also in other partner countries. NATO has taken certain steps to mitigate this

challenge, Georgia also on its own has taken certain action by strengthening its strategic communication with NATO. What do you think would be the most efficient format of cooperation between Georgia and NATO to further mitigate this challenge? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I understand the concern you have about Russian propaganda and we have seen that in several countries including in Georgia. At the same time I think it's very important for me to underline that for NATO it is not an option to meet propaganda with propaganda because we actually don't believe in propaganda. We believe that the people are as I say able to distinguish propaganda from facts and information. So for us the best possible response to propaganda is the truth, it's facts and figures and documentation. So what NATO can do is to help you provide the facts and the truth because we believe that in the long run the truth will prevail over propaganda. Let me also add that of course NATO and all the people and all of us at the NATO headquarters in Brussels we can do a lot but in the long run it has to be the people in each and every member state or partner state like Georgia that has to stand up and to counter propaganda in each and every country. Because I trust myself a lot but I really believe that there are Georgians who are the best ones to counter propaganda in Georgia, not me and it has to be done by you in this country. What we can do is to help you with the facts, with the figures, with the analysis, but you have to stand there in the open free debate and that's also the reason why it is so important to have a free press, is that in the long run if you have a free press with different views, a variety of opinions, that's also the best way to counter propaganda and not to be vulnerable to propaganda. So we will help you but you have to do the job.

MODERATOR: Exactly, I completely share your vision on our domestic homework in this respect and it's really important that domestically we should achieve the consolidation of our efforts to the fullest possible extent in order to counter very well organized propaganda against Georgia. We have one question, the military guy there. He's a student from Defence Academy I guess.

Q: [Inaudible], Batumi State Maritime Academy, basic [inaudible]. My question, according to the issue of Black Sea region security enhancement on NATO Warsaw Summit, what kind of contribution can Georgia make as a country having strategic functions in this region? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I have problems with hearing the questions …

MODERATOR: This time me too as well, so you mean the strategic function of Georgia? Yeah, what is the strategic function of Georgia in preserving peace in the Black Sea area.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think that the strategic function of Georgia is to create a strong, modern, vibrant, democratic Georgian society. Because then you reduce your vulnerability from outside pressure and you are doing exactly that. So societies that are strong, that are democratic, that have some core values uniting them are much stronger than countries which are, you know, characterized by corruption, by weak institutions, by deep divisions and so on.

So again the more you are able to modernize Georgia, the more you are able to create a really true open democratic society the stronger and more resilient you will be also from outside or against outside pressure and the more you will contribute to stability in this region. Of course strong defence, strong security institution will be part of that and that's also the reason why I welcome so much the way you are reforming and modernizing your armed forces and your security institutions. You have made impressive progress and thereby also contributed to stability in this region but to be a modern society is not something you achieve and then relax, you have to always continue to reform and modernize in a changing world.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Next, next question over there.

Q: Hello. I'm Diana Homaricki (sp?) from International Black Sea University. My question is about terrorism. After G20 Summit President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan said that official Washington and Ankara will cooperate to clean Raqqa, the capital of so called Islamic State, from terrorists. So what is the position of NATO concerning this issue? And in general what is the current vision of NATO regarding combating terrorism? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: To combat terrorism is a huge task where we need the contribution from many different countries and from many different international institutions and organizations. It's about police work, it's about intelligence, it's about a lot of civilian measures for instance countering the threats coming from returning foreign fighters. But NATO also has a key role to play in the fight against terrorism and I think that we have to remember that our biggest military operation ever, our operation in Afghanistan where Georgia has really contributed, that is an operation which is about fighting terrorism. The reason why we went into Afghanistan was a direct response to the terrorist attack 9/11 2001. And the reason why we stay in Afghanistan is to prevent Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for international terrorists. So NATO plays a key role in fighting terrorism by conducting our military operation, the train, assist and advise presence in Afghanistan. Then NATO also provides support to the international coalition, the US led international coalition against ISIL. We provide support in different ways, we will start to train Iraqi, we train Iraqi officers in Jordan, we will start to train more Iraqi officers in Iraq soon and we also provide AWACS surveillance planes, assistance from them to help the coalition fight ISIL in Syria. All NATO allies are part of the coalition and NATO supports the efforts of the coalition. I also welcome, and of course Turkey a NATO ally is perhaps or is the ally most affected by the turmoil, the violence and the presence of ISIL in Iraq and Syria, Turkey bordering both countries. So Turkey is a NATO ally and NATO has increased its military presence in Turkey to augment and to increase their capability to protect themselves against different kinds of attacks. I welcome closer cooperation between the different countries in the coalition fighting ISIL and especially because United States and Turkey because they are key in the fight against ISIL, two NATO allies, and I think it is of great importance that they work even closer together in the fight against ISIL also of course in Syria.

MODERATOR: Thank you. I think the, one more question comes from the defence academy.

Q: National Defence Academy of Georgia, [inaudible]. First of all thanks for your visit and thanks for your support. My question is that sir how would you assess the importance of NATO Georgia substantial package in terms of the development of the defensibility of our country and groups of interoperability with NATO countries? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The substantial package is a key tool in strengthening and modernizing the defence capabilities of Georgia and we decided in Warsaw in July to further strengthen this too. And of course everything we do when it comes to provide education, training, advice to your armed forces, to your defence and security institutions, help you to get stronger, help you to be more modern and help you to also become more interoperable which is this word describing the ability to work together with other forces, both NATO forces but also other forces from other NATO partner countries. This is good for Georgia that we are exercising together, that our soldiers, your soldiers, our soldiers can work together, learn from each other, train together. And so that's good for Georgia, it makes you a stronger, safer country that we have modern well equipped, well trained forces and good defence structures. But it's also good for NATO because Georgia contributes to many NATO operations. So this is not only something we do because we would like to be kind to Georgia but it's also because we understand that a strong Georgia, a well-trained armed forces of Georgia is also good for us. When you are together with us in Afghanistan of course that we are able to work together, that the Georgian soldiers are world, top class, is good for our operation in Afghanistan. You participate in the fight against terrorism in the Mediterranean, in our operation there, and you also participate in the NATO Response Force. So this shows how the partnership is of mutual benefit both for Georgia and NATO and therefore we have decided to strengthen the comprehensive package which is the main tool which we use to assist you in modernizing your forces.

MODERATOR: Thank you Secretary General. I would add only one to this point that as a result of our joint effort, as a result of very effective military to military cooperation at the Wales Summit Georgia was already officially acknowledged as one of the most interoperable partner and we have already quite significantly benefitted from this cooperation. We hope that NATO Georgia substantial package will be additional benefit in this regard which will prepare Georgia for membership as well. So we have one more question over there, yeah.

Q: [Speaking with Interpreter]. Greetings and warm welcome, my name is Luca Lauria (sp?). My question is bearing in mind that Georgia is placed in a non- stable region neighbouring Iran, Syria, Ukraine, North Caucasus, to what extent Georgia is important for the alliance? And how do you eye the Georgian role in terms of securing peace in the region?

JENS STOLTENBERG: In one way it goes without saying that Georgia is important for NATO because Georgia is one of our most closest partners and you are a partner which we really support. And again we do that because we believe that the strong, stable, democratic Georgia is good for Georgia but it's also good for the stability in the whole region and therefore also good for NATO. So everything we do with our presence here is a sign of that

but just the fact that the North Atlantic Council which very seldom travels together, the 28 nations travelling together visiting another country, I think that happens once or twice a year, we are here again for the second time.

MODERATOR: Exactly.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So that, our presence here today with all the 28 and Montenegro is a strong expression of the importance we attach to Georgia and also the strong political support we provide to Georgia.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We have just five, five minutes left for questions. I think that we can get two questions but I would suggest two collective questions in order to be in time. So one over there, yes, this lady, you, yeah, and one question over there.

Q: Hello thank you for interesting speech. I am Tatria [inaudible], I am studying international relation and politics in Georgian University and my question is what do you think about Georgian political, about political situation in Georgia? And does Georgia has to join in NATO and what will, and what impact will they make on the relationship with Russia? Thank you.

MODERATOR: And other question?

Q: [Inaudible] State University. First of all thank you for your visiting and thank you for this meeting. How would you evaluate contribution of Georgia in strengthening international security and stability? Is the Resolute Support Mission successful in Afghanistan? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Okay. Thank you so much. First about the political situation in Georgia. Well I think that I should not have an opinion about the political situation in Georgia because that's for the people in Georgia to decide and you have different parties. I met many of them in the parliament this morning and I am in favour of democracy in Georgia. I'm in favour of strong democratic institutions in Georgia, I'm in favour of fair and free elections in Georgia but I'm not going to have any opinion about what kind of parties are the best parties in Georgia because that's up to the people of Georgia to decide and to vote for different parties. And actually I welcome the fact that there are different opinions, in all democratic societies there are different opinions and that's part of being a democratic society is that people disagree. If people don't disagree, if there are not different opinions then you should be really concerned because then there is no real democracy. So yes I have an opinion about or as I say the democratic system in Georgia, it has to be a democratic, strong, transparent, robust democracy but how you in a way decide to use that democratic system it's up to the people of Georgia to decide. And I look forward to the elections and I expect them to meet the highest standards of democratic elections.

Then you asked me about Georgia and NATO, well I think I answered. We have reaffirmed the Bucharest Decision, I was actually in Bucharest back in 2008 when NATO decided that Georgia will become member. But to become member you have to meet the standards, you

have to continue on the path of modernizing, reforming and let me also add that it may take time, it may require patience but as I've stated and underlined many times what you do while you are moving towards NATO benefits Georgia. So the reforms are also in your benefit regardless of membership.

Then Russia. So we see a more assertive Russia, we see a Russia which has implemented a substantial military buildup, which has been willing to use military force against neighbours, Georgia and Ukraine. But at the same time we underline strongly and that was also a clear message from Warsaw that we don't want a new cold war, we don't want to isolate Russia. Russia is our biggest neighbour and we have to manage our relationship with Russia and we have to also avoid that when we have more military activities, more military presence along our borders, we have to avoid accidents, incidents which can trigger really dangerous situations. And we just got reports from the Black Sea yesterday that we had a new incident with unsafe behaviour of Russian planes flying very close to an American plane in international air space. And these kind of incidents are dangerous because they can lead to really dangerous accidents, incidents and we have to avoid that they spiral out of the control and that's one of the reasons why we are looking into how we can develop mechanisms for risk reductions, for transparency, for predictability in our relationship with Russia to avoid these kind of incidents and accidents from happening and if they happen prevent them from spiralling out of control.

Then what Georgia can do. I think I have already answered that question. You can do a lot and you're doing a lot and the best thing you can do is to continue to become a modern, democratic, strong, resilient society. That's good for you and its good for the stability in the whole region.

MODERATOR: Thank you Secretary General. Unfortunately I have to apologize whose questions we could not get, we don't have any more time. But I would say that today's meeting really reminded me Secretary General Lord Robertson's informal meeting 16 years ago in Tbilisi. I was one among the students who were raising questions on possible prospects of improving cooperation with NATO and partnership with NATO but the spirit of today's discussions and the topics raised by students really proved that since then NATO Georgia relations have improved significantly and really achieved very high standards. Because today Georgia provides significant contribution to international peace and stability, today Georgia is already formally acknowledged as one of the most interoperable partner of the alliance. Georgia today for NATO is not only a valuable partner but also an aspirant country irreversibly standing on NATO membership track and of course it is worth to mention how important is the Bucharest Summit decision which says that Georgia will become a member of NATO. So with your permission I would end this meeting on this very positive note. I would extend our gratitude once again for your very strong support and for your very interesting speech, remarks and for completeness of your answers and of course I would ask everybody to join me in applauding Secretary General. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

MODERATOR: And last but not least I have the great pleasure to invite to the podium Director General of National Library of Georgia who will be presenting the real masterpiece of Georgian literature, medieval epic poem Knight in the Panthers Skin.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much.

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Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/09/08/natos-enduring-mission-defending-values-together