



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

4-5 April 2023

Policy Brief

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NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING,
4-5 APRIL 2023:
KEY TAKEAWAYS

NATO Foreign Ministers met in Brussels from 4 to 5 April to **welcome Finland as NATO's 31st Ally** as well as to **prepare for the upcoming NATO Summit** of Heads of Government and State, which will take place in Vilnius, Lithuania from 11 to 12 July 2023.

Agenda

- **Finland's and Sweden's accession**
- **Increasing support for Ukraine**
- **Threats and challenges from the south**
- **Increased defence investment**
- **China's growing alignment with Russia**
- **Global consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine**

Decisions

- **Ministers agreed to begin developing a strategic multi-year assistance programme for Ukraine.**

I. FINLAND'S ACCESSION TO NATO

- On the ministerial meeting's first day and exactly 74 years after NATO's founding treaty was signed, **Finland became NATO's 31st Ally** when the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs deposited the country's instrument of accession with the United States at NATO Headquarters in Brussels. **With this, Finland also becomes a full NATO PA member.**
- **NATO PA President [Joëlle Garriaud-Maylam](#) (France) participated in the flag raising ceremony** to mark Finland's accession, and issued a [statement](#) welcoming Finland's accession to the NATO PA.
- In his statement with the President of Finland, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasised **the benefits of Finland's membership**: "It is good for Nordic security. And it is good for NATO as a whole. Finland brings substantial and highly capable forces. Expertise in national resilience. And years of experience working side by side with NATO Allies."
- **On the importance of NATO's Open Door policy**, the Secretary General underlined that "President Putin wanted to slam NATO's door shut. Today, we show the world that he failed. That aggression and intimidation do not work. **Instead of less NATO, he has achieved the opposite. More NATO. And our door remains firmly open.**"

II. SWEDEN'S ACCESSION PROCESS

- During his public remarks, **the Secretary General repeatedly addressed the issue of Sweden's accession process.**
- He was "**absolutely confident that Sweden will become a member.**" He argued that "**Sweden has delivered on the commitments they have made under that trilateral agreement.** So nothing should hinder or be an obstacle for also the final ratification of also Sweden to become a member. This is a top priority for the Alliance. This is important for me personally and **all Allies agree that we should try to finalise the accession of also Sweden as soon as possible.**" The best way to address the remaining issues was

to “sit down, meet, consult and find a way forward”. **“Türkiye has some legitimate security concerns and all Allies should address them”**, he noted.

- In the meantime, **with Finland’s membership, Sweden is also safer and is “not left alone”**. “Sweden is very much inside NATO, integrating into military civilian structures. Allies are ready to act and **it's inconceivable that there was any, that there were going to be any threats or military attacks against Sweden without NATO reacting and even more so with Finland as a full member.**”

III. INCREASING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE IN THE FACE OF RUSSIA’S WAR

- **Foreign Ministers discussed how Allies and NATO can step up the already unprecedented levels of support to Ukraine** (almost EUR 150 billion, including c. EUR 65 billion in military support).
- On the first day of the meeting, **the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) came together at the level of Foreign Ministers** – the first time a NUC has been held above Ambassadorial level since 2018.
- While Ukraine’s urgent short-term provision of support was discussed, **Ministers began discussions on the provision of long-term support and agreed to begin developing a strategic multi-year assistance programme.**
- Such a programme would demonstrate that the Alliance is “united in our determination to stay the course,” the Secretary General noted, as well as to “support Ukraine for as long as it takes”. President Putin “thinks Russia can outlast our support. Our meeting today underscored NATO’s enduring commitment to Ukraine”, he said.
- **Ministers discussed how a long-term partnership could help Ukraine “move closer to NATO”**, in the words of the Secretary General. This would include increased assistance with:
 - **strengthening Ukraine’s armed forces;**
 - **transition from Soviet-era to NATO equipment, standards and doctrines;**
 - **interoperability between Ukrainian and NATO armed forces;** and
 - **continued reforms, notably on fighting corruption.**
- **Several Allies increased their contribution to the Comprehensive Assistance Package ahead or at the meeting**, and further increases are expected in the near future.
- **The Secretary General also argued that “we will need to put in place arrangements so that Ukraine can deter future aggression.** And history does not repeat itself. We cannot allow Russia to continue to chip away at European security.” According to him, “This includes strengthening Ukraine’s armed forces and arrangements for Ukraine’s security.”

Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration

- During the Secretary General’s press engagements, he was repeatedly asked about the **next steps in Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic integration.**
- He underlined that **Allies’ first priority** was to preserve the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine: **“Because without Ukraine prevailing as a sovereign independent nation then, of course, the whole issue of membership will not be relevant.”** The **second priority** was to discuss **how the Alliance can “develop our political relationship with Ukraine”**. The Secretary General pointed out that NATO’s

longer-term assistance - outlined above - “helps to move Ukraine closer to Euro-Atlantic integration, to the NATO family”.

- He also underlined that:
 - **“it is extremely important to continue to demonstrate that NATO’s door remains open”;**
 - **“Ukraine’s future is in the Euro-Atlantic family”** and
 - **“NATO’s position remains unchanged, and that is that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance.”**

Russia’s announcement regarding the stationing of dual-capable and nuclear weapons systems in Belarus

- During his press conferences, the Secretary General was asked about **President Putin’s announcement that he has sent dual-capable Iskander missile systems to Belarus and plans to station tactical nuclear weapons in the country.**
- The Secretary General noted that the announcement “is **part of a pattern of dangerous reckless nuclear rhetoric**” in an attempt “to stop NATO Allies and partners for supporting Ukraine in their right to defend their own country”. However, **Allies “will not be intimidated” and “will continue to support Ukraine”.**
- He also noted that “we continue to monitor what Russia does also when it comes to any potential deployment of nuclear weapons in Belarus.” Until now, **“we haven’t seen any changes in their nuclear posture that requires any change in our nuclear posture.”**
- He also said that “Belarus has been, and continues to be[,] a platform which Russia uses in its aggressive actions against Ukraine.” He added that “[o]ur message to Belarus is, of course, that they should not be directly involved [...]”.

Additional point

- **The Secretary General welcomed President Zelensky’s 10-point Peace Plan,** as it “upholds the principles at the heart of the UN Charter” and “provides the foundation for a just and sustainable peace.”

IV. THREATS AND CHALLENGES FROM THE SOUTH

- **Foreign Ministers also discussed threats and challenges in the South,** notably instability, terrorism and the growing influence of Iran, Russia and China.
- **The Secretary General stressed that NATO and Allies continue to work with partners in the Middle East and North Africa.** He noted, in particular, the importance of stability, including in Iraq where NATO has a non-combat advisory and capacity-building mission; of addressing the root causes of Europe’s migrant challenges; and of working together with partners Mauritania and Tunisia.

V. INCREASED DEFENCE INVESTMENT

- **Foreign Ministers also discussed increasing Allied defence investment.**
- **The Secretary General was confident that Allies would agree, at the Vilnius Summit, “to have a more ambitious defence investment pledge where we regard**

2% of GDP for defence not as ceiling but as a floor, a minimum that we need to spend more in a more dangerous world on our security.”

- When asked to expand during a press conference, **he argued that the 2% pledge “has been interpreted by many Allies as something that is more like a ceiling” or “something we should strive towards, not a kind of requirement”**. “[M]uch stronger language” needed to be agreed upon in Vilnius, he stressed.

VI. CHINA’S GROWING ALIGNMENT WITH RUSSIA

- **Foreign Ministers also discussed China’s growing alignment with Russia.**
- During the press conferences, the Secretary General pointed out that “China refuses to condemn Russia’s aggression. It echoes Russian propaganda. And it props up Russia’s economy. China and Russia are also stepping up their joint military activities in the Indo-Pacific region.”
- **He also made it clear that “[a]ny provision of lethal aid by China to Russia would be a major mistake.”** However, he noted that “we have not been able to confirm any provision of lethal aid, but this is something we follow very closely. And we also communicate very clearly that this will be a big mistake.”
- NATO’s efforts on resilience on technology “is also a way to respond to the challenges that China poses to our security”, he emphasised.

VII. GLOBAL CONSEQUENCES OF RUSSIA’S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE

- **Foreign Ministers held a meeting with NATO’s Indo-Pacific partners** (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea), together with the European Union, where they discussed **the global consequences of Russia’s war against Ukraine.**
- As the Secretary General noted, “[a]t a time when Russia and China are challenging the international order and democratic values, it is even more important that we stand together as NATO Allies. And with like-minded partners.” He added that “**NATO is committed to working with like-minded partners across the globe to tackle global challenges, uphold the rules-based international order, and preserve peace**”.
- When the Secretary General opened the meeting, he underlined that “**what happens in the Indo-Pacific matters for Europe. And what happens in Europe matters for [the Indo-Pacific]**.” He added that “what is happening in Europe today could happen in East Asia tomorrow”.
- **The Heads of State and Government of Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea have all been invited to the NATO Summit in Vilnius.**
- The Secretary General had a bilateral meeting with the Foreign Minister of Japan. **Japan has recently announced that it would contribute to the Comprehensive Assistance Package for Ukraine and will open a dedicated diplomatic mission to NATO.**