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**PRESS COMMUNIQUE PR/CP(2001)172****For Immediate Release  
18 December 2001****STATEMENT ON THE  
SITUATION IN THE BALKANS****Issued at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council  
in Defence Ministers Session held in Brussels  
on 18 December 2001**

1. We reaffirm NATO's strong commitment to security, stability, peace, democracy and respect for human rights in the Balkans, and its determination to oppose all violence, whether ethnically, politically or criminally motivated. The Alliance will continue to pursue this objective vigorously, primarily through the NATO-led peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo as well as Task Force Fox in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia<sup>1</sup>.
2. We reiterate our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries in the Balkans. We emphasize our determination to promote regional reconciliation and co-operation through confidence-building measures, a lasting resolution to the problem of refugees and displaced persons, and co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). We commend the efforts made by the states in the region to play a greater role in building regional security through closer cooperation.
3. We commend the men and women of SFOR, KFOR, Task Force Harvest and Task Force Fox for their outstanding efforts in support of peace and stability. We express our gratitude and appreciation for the sacrifices they have made, particularly those who have suffered serious injuries. We extend our deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost their lives. We are grateful to NATO's Partners and other nations for the substantial contributions they are making to our common effort.
4. NATO presently leads some 60,000 military personnel from 19 NATO and 20 non-NATO nations in the Balkans. The NATO-led presence has been critical in contributing to stability and political progress and continues to be successful. Over the past six years, the challenges and threats have radically altered and operational areas are increasingly affected by common problems. Against this background we believe there is scope for

<sup>1</sup> Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

developing a more regional approach to specific aspects of Balkan operations, including refugee returns, border security and combating organised crime, extremism and terrorism. There is also scope for rationalization of operations in the Balkans, a key objective of which is to enhance efficiency and allow for significant resource savings. We have agreed that the next Six-Month Reviews of KFOR and SFOR will be based on a theatre-wide analysis of current operations and will examine a full spectrum of possibilities for rationalisation and the development of a more regional approach to the NATO-led military presence. Our overall efforts should hasten the building of self-sustaining peace and democracy in the region such that international military forces would no longer be required.

5. We reviewed the status of the NATO-led operation in Kosovo. We remain fully committed to playing our role in achieving the aims and objectives of the international community, in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244. We reaffirm KFOR's commitment to support the return of refugees and displaced persons, including Kosovo Serbs and other minorities, and commend the co-ordination efforts of the Joint Committee on Returns. Co-operation between KFOR and all pillars of UNMIK continues to be excellent. We congratulate OSCE and UNMIK for the successful conduct, supported by KFOR, of the Kosovo-wide Assembly elections in November 2001.

6. KFOR remains fully committed to supporting UNMIK Police and the Kosovo Police Service, and we welcome the process just begun, by which responsibility for public security will be transferred as soon as conditions permit to the appropriate civilian authorities. We are encouraged by the enhanced contribution being made by the multi-ethnic Kosovo Police Service, which has begun taking responsibility for day-to-day policing. We welcome the steps that the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General is taking to enhance law and order, such as creating a Criminal Investigation Unit and taking measures to combat terrorism, control border crossings and curb illegal possession of weapons.

7. The development of the Kosovo Protection Corps towards its goal of becoming a fully effective civil emergency organisation working for the benefit of all citizens of Kosovo continues. We welcome the programme that was established to train the KPC to provide emergency explosive ordnance disposal services. We note that the KPC remains generally compliant, but nevertheless we call on its members to distance themselves from any extremist or criminal activity. We insist on the strict enforcement of the KPC Code of Conduct and disciplinary code. The issue of transferring a further 2,000 KPC members from active to reserve duty must also be resolved as a matter of urgency.

8. KFOR is continuing its robust measures to enhance security on the Kosovo side of the border with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, under Operation Eagle. It is also pursuing a range of initiatives on closer co-ordination with the Ministries of Defence and Interior in Skopje, within means and capabilities, in order to enhance the military effectiveness of border control and interdiction operations, as well as with the Albanian Authorities.

9. We reviewed KFOR's overall force levels and structure and concluded that they should be maintained for the present, with the exception of some further replacement of heavy war-fighting capabilities by units more appropriate for internal security operations. We directed our Permanent Representatives to conduct a further review of KFOR's roles and missions in time for our meeting next Spring. We aim to achieve the greatest possible

flexibility of forces and force rationalisation, including through a review of KFOR's structures.

10. We have reviewed civil and military progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). SFOR, building on its success to date, will continue to maintain a safe and secure environment in BiH and remains committed to supporting the work of international organizations in civil implementation, within means and capabilities. In this context, the Alliance attaches particular importance to the need to accelerate the development of civil institutions and local police so they can assume their rightful responsibilities for public security and the rule of law in BiH. We recognise the need to improve the capability, confidence, training and equipment of the police in BiH to deal with civil disorder, and the continuing need for close co-ordination between SFOR, the International Police Task Force (IPTF) and local police. We note that the IPTF mandate expires at the end of 2002 and we welcome efforts to identify a follow-on capability as a matter of urgency. We welcome the initiative of the Office of the High Representative to streamline the international community presence in BiH, and look forward to its implementation, as a further step to advance civil implementation of the Dayton Agreement.

11. The Tri-Presidency's approval of a defence policy for BiH was an important step and we note the Presidency's stated desire to join Partnership for Peace. We welcome the ongoing work to develop a security policy for BiH. We call upon the Presidency to build on these positive steps and accelerate progress on defence reforms, in particular the reduction and restructuring of the armed forces, through the Standing Committee on Military Matters (SCMM). We commend SFOR's work to assist SCMM in the restructuring and reform process, which should be the key focus of NATO engagement with the Armed Forces in BiH.

12. We reaffirm our full commitment to support the ICTY, and in particular its actions to detain persons indicted for war crimes. The detention and the trial of all indicted persons, in particular Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are important. We will continue our efforts to bring war criminals to justice. We welcome recent examples of the Federation's co-operation with ICTY and strongly call on all authorities in the region to fulfil their obligations and commitments under the Dayton Peace Accords in this regard.

13. We reviewed SFOR's overall force levels and structure and concluded that no changes should be made at present. We called for full provision of Multinational Specialised Units' assets in accordance with the agreed Statement of Requirement. On the assumption that progress on the ground will continue and responsibilities for the support to civil implementation will accordingly be transferred to other organizations, we directed the NATO Military Authorities to provide a force transition concept - including benchmarks - and present force structure options in the Spring that preclude a resumption of hostilities and still contribute, within means and capabilities, to a secure environment through a lower presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

14. The success of Operation Essential Harvest and of Operation Amber Fox demonstrates NATO's commitment to the stability and territorial integrity of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in co-operation with other international organisations, in particular the OSCE and the EU. We endorse the decision, in response to a request from President Trajkovski, to extend the mandate of Task Force Fox for a further three months until 26 March 2002. We urge all parties to fully implement the Lake Ohrid agreement and

to continue to work closely with the international community, including on the re-entry of security forces into sensitive areas and the implementation of an amnesty. We urge extremists from all sides to refrain from using violence. We support the role of the NATO Co-operation and Co-ordination Centre and the more structured approach to NATO's presence in the country, including closer co-ordination with national support elements. We note with appreciation the continuing efforts of Allies and Partners who provide appropriate bilateral assistance.

15. We commend the Albanian government for its constructive attitude during the recent crisis in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, encouraged also by the positive contribution in Albania of COMMZ(West) within the context of KFOR.

16. We welcome the improvement in our relations with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and its constructive actions in support of implementation of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 on Kosovo. We call on the Belgrade authorities to develop further their cooperation with the ICTY. We note with satisfaction the FRY authorities' encouragement of Kosovo-Serbs to participate in the 17 November elections in Kosovo and welcome the signing of the FRY-UNMIK Common Document. We expect further co-operation from the democratic government of FRY in resolving problems in Kosovo, such as Mitrovica, transparency in its links with the Republika Srpska and continued action to bring persons indicted for war crimes to justice. We reiterate our support for a democratic Montenegro within a democratic FRY.

17. We note that the situation in Southern Serbia is relatively calm and stable. We urge all parties to continue to work towards peaceful resolution of any outstanding difficulties. We encourage the ethnic Albanians to continue to refrain from using violence. All parties should fully support the multi-ethnic police force and participate in opportunities to integrate into local administrative and political structures, including local elections. The FRY authorities should continue implementation of their plan for a peaceful settlement of the problem. We look forward to a continued and rapid implementation of the confidence-building measures in the Covic Plan. We reaffirm our ultimate objective of abolishing both the ground and air safety zones.