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**For immediate release
4 December 2003**

**MINISTERIAL MEETING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL
HELD AT NATO HEADQUARTERS, BRUSSELS,
ON 4 DECEMBER 2003**

FINAL COMMUNIQUÉ

1. As we meet today, NATO is acting to preserve peace through its operations; spreading stability through its partnerships; and reinforcing our community of shared values through the most robust round of enlargement in our history. The North Atlantic Alliance remains the basis of our collective defence and the essential transatlantic forum for security. Today, we took stock of NATO's ongoing transformation to meet 21st century threats and challenges to the security of our populations, territory and forces, from wherever they may come, and gave direction on work still to be done, as we look ahead to our Summit in Istanbul next June.

2. We look forward to welcoming seven new members of the Alliance by the time of the Istanbul Summit, which will strengthen security for all in the Euro-Atlantic area. We are pleased to be joined today by our colleagues from these countries, who associate themselves with this Communiqué. The formal accession of the new members into the Alliance will take place as soon as the ratification process is complete. We welcome the significant contribution the Invitees are already making to our security and the progress they have made in their reform efforts, and we encourage them to continue on this path.

3. We categorically reject and condemn terrorism in all its forms. We express our sympathy to all the victims of terrorism and unwavering solidarity to Allies that have been targeted by it. NATO is determined to use all means at its disposal and to cooperate fully with other international organisations and with its Partners to fight this scourge. We welcome the progress on implementing the package of measures approved at the Prague Summit to improve NATO's capacity to respond to terrorism, and the recent establishment of the Permanent Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit. NATO's Operation Active Endeavour continues to make a significant contribution in the Mediterranean to the fight against terrorism, in cooperation with the International Maritime Organisation; it has helped to maintain security through maritime anti-terrorism surveillance and boarding operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and the escort of designated Allied ships through the Straits of Gibraltar.

4. In Afghanistan, the Alliance now leads the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) under its UN mandate. This operation demonstrates our readiness to deploy forces wherever the Alliance decides, to ensure our common security. Our aim is to assist in the emergence of a united, sovereign country, integrated into the international community, including by assisting the Afghan Transitional Authority in the maintenance of security and stability and in the electoral process according to the Bonn Process. We decided on the progressive expansion of ISAF beyond Kabul in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions, including through temporary deployments for specific tasks and limited in size and duration, provided all military conditions, and requirements for the Kabul mission, are met. We will continue to address the scope of such specific tasks. We welcome the German deployment of a pilot Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), under ISAF, in Kunduz. Expecting that the establishment of additional PRTs will follow, we consider that ISAF could move to assume military command of such PRTs where consistent with military requirements and capabilities. Achievement of these objectives will be subject to consultations with and contributions from PRT framework nations and the provision of the required assets, including for Kabul International Airport. We will review NATO's contribution to stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan on a regular basis. It is necessary to ensure close co-ordination and co-operation between ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom, and also with the Afghan National Army. Our forces will also have to work closely with the UN Assistance Mission to Afghanistan and other international organisations on the ground, including the European Union.

5. We task the Council in Permanent Session to develop for the Istanbul Summit a comprehensive strategy for NATO's engagement in Afghanistan, in close consultation with other International Organisations and the Afghan Transitional Authority. We welcome the appointment of Mr. Hikmet Çetin of Turkey to the position of NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan.

6. The Alliance continues to support Poland in its leadership of a multi-national division in Iraq. The North Atlantic Council will review NATO's contribution to the stabilisation efforts on a regular basis. We welcome the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1511 on Iraq and are committed to its full implementation in order to restore conditions of stability and security in the country, and return governing responsibilities and authorities to the people of Iraq. In that regard, we welcome the "Agreement on Political Process" signed in Baghdad on 15 November 2003. Peace, stability and reconstruction in Iraq remain a high priority.

7. The security environment in the strategically important region of the Balkans is stable but remains fragile. We reaffirm our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all the countries in the Balkans. We want to see enduring stability and peace in the region.

8. Our missions in the Balkans continue to evolve. The improved security environment in Bosnia and Herzegovina will allow for further reduction of SFOR by next Spring. Over the coming months, Allies will assess options for the future size and structure of SFOR, to include possible termination of SFOR by the end of 2004, transition possibly to a new EU mission within the framework of the Berlin+ arrangements and to a new NATO HQ Sarajevo. We task the Council in Permanent Session and the NATO Military Authorities to consult with their EU counterparts on

Bosnia and Herzegovina, in accordance with agreed texts and procedures and within the framework of Berlin+. We will consult, as appropriate, with all other parties concerned, including the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

9. In Kosovo, KFOR's presence remains essential. We welcome the proposal of the Contact Group to establish a date for review of Kosovo's progress in meeting internationally endorsed standards. Further advancement towards a process to determine Kosovo's future status, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, will depend on the outcome of this comprehensive review. We encourage all parties to work constructively to meet the agreed standards, and to support the efforts of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Mr. Harri Holkeri. Direct dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina on practical issues of mutual concern remains a key benchmark and an indispensable element of the international community's policy of "Standards before Status"; we encourage Belgrade and Pristina to pursue their dialogue in good faith.

10. We are committed to help the countries of the Balkans integrate fully into Euro-Atlantic structures. We encourage regional cooperation among the Balkan countries. We expect them to assume ownership of, and implement, pressing reforms. They must comply fully with their international obligations, including full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), in particular bringing to justice all those who are indicted by the Tribunal, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, as well as Ante Gotovina, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1503.

11. We call on the Government and all political actors in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ to continue to work toward full implementation of the Ohrid Agreement. NATO's support to the European Union's Operation Concordia successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of the Berlin+ arrangements. NATO has conducted its preliminary lessons learned process and we will conduct a lessons learned process with the EU.

12. We encourage Albania, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue pursuing the reforms necessary to advance their candidacies for NATO membership. We want them to succeed and will continue to support their reform efforts through the MAP process. We reaffirm that the current round of enlargement will not be the last and that NATO's door remains open.

13. We recognise the progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro in their efforts to join Partnership for Peace (PfP), welcome substantive progress on defence reform, and will continue to assist both countries in meeting established NATO conditions for PfP membership. We look forward to welcoming them into PfP once they have met the conditions set forth by the Alliance, including full cooperation with the ICTY, in particular to detain and turn over persons indicted for war crimes to the Tribunal. We urge both countries to envisage the Istanbul Summit as a realistic target by which they could meet the outstanding conditions. We will assess the two countries' progress on their possible accession to PfP in advance of the Istanbul Summit.

¹ Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

14. We task the Council in Permanent Session to review and develop NATO's Balkans strategy, encompassing political aspects as well as operations, in time for the Istanbul Summit.

15. NATO and the European Union share common strategic interests, and we remain strongly committed to enhancing our cooperation. Since our last meeting, NATO-EU cooperation has made concrete progress and is developing in a constructive manner. We agreed a concerted approach for the Western Balkans. We look forward to further substantive cooperation with the EU, including through the Berlin+ arrangements. A joint NATO-EU crisis management exercise was successfully held in November. NATO-EU consultations and cooperation on questions of common interest relating to security, defence and crisis management, such as the fight against terrorism, mutually reinforcing capabilities, and civil-emergency planning, were stepped up and will continue to be developed. We have tasked the Council in Permanent Session to consider how to reinforce, by the time of the Istanbul Summit, the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU as agreed between our two organisations, including through effective consultations with the EU, respecting the autonomy of the two organisations, and in a spirit of transparency. NATO and the EU could also co-sponsor a seminar on terrorism.

16. NATO's Partnerships, which contribute greatly to security and stability across the Euro-Atlantic area, are of increasing value and importance. During the ten years of its existence, Partnership for Peace has been an increasingly effective instrument for cooperation in such areas as peace support operations and the fight against terrorism. The Istanbul Summit should build on progress made at Prague to re-focus PfP to reflect its post-enlargement dimensions and the Alliance's focus on new threats. We have therefore tasked the Council in Permanent Session to develop proposals to further tailor Partnership to tackle key thematic issues and individual Partners' needs and capabilities, to promote defence reform which encourages military transformation and interoperability, and to enhance regional cooperation and mutual support. In this context the Council will examine whether and how selected Partnership activities might be opened, on a case by case basis, to other countries which might express an interest in such involvement. These new measures should allow for more focused and deeper practical cooperation. We agree to promote a special focus on the strategically important regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia.

17. Security in the Euro-Atlantic area is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean. We look for additional progress beyond that achieved since the Prague Summit in upgrading the Mediterranean Dialogue. We direct the Council in Permanent Session to consider ways to further enhance this relationship by generating, in consultation with all Mediterranean Dialogue partners, by the time of the Istanbul Summit, options to develop a more ambitious and expanded framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue. This initiative will genuinely improve cooperation in a number of fields, including on defence reform and interoperability, including through PfP-like instruments, and open more Partnership activities to the Mediterranean Dialogue partners on a case by case basis. Our efforts will complement and mutually reinforce other Mediterranean initiatives, including those of the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

18. The NATO-Russia Council, in which NATO member states and Russia work together as equal partners in areas of common interest, continues to make valuable contributions to security throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. Our political dialogue has developed on key security issues, including Afghanistan and the Balkans. Our practical cooperation has reached a new level, including in military-to-military projects; and, through our focus on improving interoperability, we have also laid the groundwork for future military cooperation, including potentially in joint peacekeeping operations. We welcome progress made on nuclear confidence building measures, and on the safe management of nuclear and radiological material. We look forward to approval of an ambitious Work Programme for 2004. We are committed to building on this progress, and to further enhancing the NATO-Russia relationship.

19. We remain committed to stronger NATO-Ukraine relations under the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership and welcome progress made over the past year in the implementation of the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan and Ukraine's 2003 Annual Target Plan. We look forward to concrete implementation of the Annual Target Plan in 2004, including the conduct of free and fair Presidential elections, improvements to media freedom, strengthening arms export controls, and progress on and funding for the Defence Review. We encourage Ukraine to pursue all reforms necessary to its goal of full Euro-Atlantic integration, and we will keep under active review all possible options to support Ukraine in these efforts.

20. We are closely following the development of events in Georgia. We call on the Georgian authorities to hold free and fair elections, planned for January next year. We support the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. The Alliance remains committed to developing Partnership with Georgia through using the full range of Partnership instruments.

21. The Alliance's policy of support for arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation will continue to play a major role in the achievement of the Alliance's security objectives, including preventing the spread and use of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery. We stress the importance of abiding by, fully implementing and strengthening existing international arms control and disarmament accords and multilateral non-proliferation and export control regimes. Early admission of all invitees into all appropriate existing non-proliferation regimes could play a positive role in that regard. In particular, we underline our commitment to reinforcing the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the pre-eminent non-proliferation and disarmament mechanism, and ensuring the full compliance with it by all states party to the Treaty. We will also strengthen our common efforts to safeguard nuclear and radiological material.

22. The Alliance supports the aims of the Proliferation Security Initiative to establish a more co-ordinated and effective basis through which to impede and stop shipments of WMD, delivery systems, and related materials flowing to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern, consistent with national legal authorities and relevant international law and frameworks, including the United Nations Security Council.

23. We remain committed to the protection of civilian populations. We welcome the progress made in the implementation of the Civil Emergency Planning Action

Plan for the Improvement of Civil Preparedness against possible Terrorist Attacks against Civilian Populations with Chemical, Biological and Radiological Agents. We look forward to its full implementation in order to reinforce national preparedness and reaction to civil emergencies.

24. As we have consistently stated, we remain committed to the CFE Treaty as a cornerstone of European security, and reaffirm our attachment to the early entry into force of the Adapted Treaty. We recall that fulfilment of the remaining Istanbul commitments on Georgia and Moldova will create the conditions for Allies and other States Parties to move forward on ratification of the Adapted CFE Treaty. We welcome the approach of those non-CFE countries, which have stated their intention to request accession to the Adapted CFE Treaty upon its entry into force. Their accession would provide an important additional contribution to European security and stability.

25. We urge swift resolution of the outstanding issues between Georgia and Russia as set out in their Istanbul Joint Statement of 17 November 1999 and, to this end, call upon the parties to resume negotiations at an appropriately senior level. We note the progress that was made on withdrawal of Russian military forces from Moldova during the first half of 2003. We regret that this progress was not sustained and that the 31 December 2003 extended deadline, agreed in the framework of the OSCE, will not be met. It is essential that efforts be intensified to complete the withdrawal in early 2004. We will continue, via the OSCE, to assist in this process.

26. Based on the enduring principles enshrined in the Washington Treaty, NATO today is demonstrating our commitment to multilateralism through effective action and our shared commitment to: the transatlantic link; NATO's fundamental security tasks including collective defence; our shared democratic values; and the United Nations Charter. As we prepare for the Istanbul Summit, we invite the Council in Permanent Session to intensify consultations on the challenges and threats facing the Alliance, and how best to respond to them.

27. We continue to attach high priority to the implementation of measures to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the NATO Headquarters organisation, including through modern management and financial systems, sound and transparent management of the new Headquarters project, and improvements to gender balance and diversity in the Alliance's International Staff.

28. We wish to thank Lord Robertson of Port Ellen warmly for his leadership role in guiding NATO's transformation. We are confident that the new Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, will continue to carry forward NATO's evolution, and build on the Alliance's record of success, and we pledge our full support to him.