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**MEETING OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL
IN DEFENCE MINISTERS SESSION
HELD IN BRUSSELS ON THURSDAY, 8 JUNE 2006**

FINAL COMMUNIQUE

1. The North Atlantic Council met in Defence Ministers' session on 8 June 2006 to review NATO's current operations and missions, and discuss defence aspects of the Alliance's transformation. Our meeting was an important part of the Alliance's preparations for the Summit of Heads of State and Government that will be held in Riga on 28-29 November 2006.
2. We are greatly indebted to all those who have taken part in NATO-led operations and offer our deepest sympathy to the families and loved ones of those who have lost their lives and to those who have been injured in the course of their service. We are grateful to our Partners and other non-NATO nations for their valuable contributions to our operations and missions.
3. Afghanistan remains our number one operational priority. While progress has been made in bringing peace and stability to this country, serious challenges remain. ISAF will be expanding to the south of the country later this summer, bringing additional Provincial Reconstruction Teams under NATO leadership and increasing significantly ISAF's overall force levels. ISAF forces will be robust, well-equipped and will operate with the necessary rules of engagement to respond forcefully to any security threats and challenges that may arise. While ISAF's and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM's missions will remain distinct, the recently agreed command arrangements will shortly be put in place to ensure close coordination between them. NATO will continue to assist the Government of Afghanistan as part of the international community's broader efforts to strengthen security and to enable reconstruction and development throughout the country, with increased emphasis on supporting the reform of the Afghan Security Forces and conducting security and stability operations in coordination with them. We remain committed to continuing our close cooperation and coordination with the United Nations, the European Union, other international institutions and the international community at large, in accordance with the Afghanistan Compact.

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4. We will remain engaged in Kosovo throughout the UN-led status process and the implementation of a settlement on the future status of the province. The new task force structure of KFOR will further improve NATO's ability to contribute to maintaining a safe and secure environment, particularly during this highly sensitive period. We support the efforts of UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari and of the Contact Group to achieve a lasting settlement that promotes stability for Kosovo and the entire Balkans region. We call on Belgrade and Pristina to work together with the UN Special Envoy in a constructive manner and to show flexibility in the status talks. We attach great importance to standards implementation by the concerned parties. NATO will continue to monitor and assist in the development of a safe and secure environment, working with other international organisations, especially with the UN and the EU, in the process of building a stable, democratic, multi-ethnic and peaceful society in Kosovo. We welcome the close cooperation between NATO and EU including in their headquarters in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the continued successful use of the Berlin Plus arrangements in support of the EU's Operation ALTHEA. This confirms the value of close NATO-EU cooperation more generally. We are determined to give more substance to the agreed framework of the Alliance's strategic partnership with the EU.

5. Countries in the Western Balkans must continue to cooperate with each other, promote good neighbourly relations, and reach mutually acceptable solutions to outstanding issues. We remain committed to helping the countries of the Western Balkans, especially through assistance in defence reform, on their path towards Euro-Atlantic integration. The three countries participating in the Membership Action Plan – Albania, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ – have taken significant steps in this process. We welcome their efforts and encourage them to continue to make progress on the work still to be done. We welcome the arrest of Ante Gotovina in December last year. We recognise the efforts made so far, but urge the countries of the region to ensure full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY). In particular, the failure to bring to justice the remaining fugitive indictees, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, remains the key obstacle to consideration for accession to Partnership for Peace. We note Montenegro's declaration of independence, which follows a referendum conducted in line with OSCE and Council of Europe standards.

6. We welcome the formation of the new Iraqi Government, and we reaffirm our support for the Iraqi people, and for the stability, democratic development, unity and territorial integrity of the Republic of Iraq, consistent with relevant UNSC resolutions. All Allies continue to contribute to the NATO mission, consistent with UNSC Resolution 1546, to support the Iraqi security forces through training, in or out of the country, equipping, or contributing to trust funds.

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

7. We strongly condemn terrorism, whatever its motivations or manifestations, and will fight it together as long as necessary. Our efforts to fight terrorism will continue to be conducted in conformity with international law, including the United Nations Charter and relevant international conventions and protocols. In this context, we reiterate our commitment to Operation ACTIVE ENDEAVOUR, NATO's maritime surveillance and escort operation in the Mediterranean, as a contribution to the fight against terrorism. We welcome the anticipated support of Russia and Ukraine, as well as the interest of the other Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Mediterranean Dialogue partners.

8. Following the signature of the Darfur Peace Agreement on 5 May 2006, we continue to support the African Union Mission in Sudan, in its efforts to ensure the effective implementation of the Peace Agreement. We are ready, following consultation with and with the agreement of the AU, to extend that support. NATO is committed to continued coordination with all actors involved, in particular the AU, the UN and the EU. NATO is considering possible support to the follow-on UN mission.

9. NATO's earthquake relief operation in Pakistan and humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina brought critical relief to tens of thousands in need. We reviewed the lessons drawn from these operations.

10. We attach particular importance to relations between NATO and Ukraine and reaffirm our determination to make full use of the NATO-Ukraine Commission. Ukraine has demonstrated significant progress under Intensified Dialogue in the past year. We encourage Ukraine to continue to demonstrate concrete and measurable progress and resolve in implementing key reforms and policies to make it possible to meet its aspiration for participation in the Membership Action Plan. Georgia has made substantial reforms in the defence, economic, and judicial sectors over the past year. Allies support Georgia's ambitious reform agenda, and will evaluate Georgia's aspirations to conduct an Intensified Dialogue with the Alliance in light of its performance.

11. We welcome the emergence of several initiatives aimed at optimising the planning and conduct of NATO's operations and missions. While NATO has no requirement to develop capabilities strictly for civilian purposes, it needs to improve its practical cooperation, taking into account existing arrangements, with partners, relevant international organisations and, as appropriate, non-governmental organisations in order to collaborate more effectively in planning and conducting operations.

12. We are determined to continue the broad transformation of the Alliance in order to ensure that NATO is able to perform the full range of its missions more effectively and efficiently in a challenging security environment, which is characterised by the threat of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as a range of other risks and challenges, including the disruption of the flow of vital resources.

13. We reviewed the progress that has been made in our transformation efforts and directed further efforts in preparation for the Riga Summit later this year. In particular:

- We are firmly committed to ensuring that the NATO Response Force is a success. We welcomed recent progress towards achieving full operational capability this autumn, stressed the importance of sustaining this in the future, and assessed steps being taken to improve contributions to this key element of NATO's military transformation and to increase opportunities for the involvement of Partners. We look forward to STEADFAST JAGUAR, the major NRF validation exercise, which will be held later this month in Cape Verde.

- We endorsed the Comprehensive Political Guidance tasked by the Heads of State and Government at Istanbul and agreed to present it to them in Riga for their consideration. It provides a framework for the Alliance's continuing transformation and sets out the priorities for all Alliance capability issues, planning disciplines and intelligence. We will continue to monitor its implementation with interest.

- We noted the results to date of the capability initiatives launched in Prague to foster improvements in our capabilities and provided further guidance on the way ahead. We noted in particular the progress achieved by the nationally-led initiatives on strategic airlift and sealift capabilities, including the implementation of the Strategic Airlift Interim Solution (SALIS), and the establishment of a permanent structure for managing sealift assets.

- We reviewed progress in our initiative, launched at the Istanbul Summit, to make our forces more usable through the implementation of political targets for the proportion of each nation's land forces which are structured, prepared and equipped for deployed operations (40%) and the proportion undertaking or planned for sustained operations at any one time (8%). At Istanbul, we also agreed on the need for national usability targets to supplement these high level political targets, taking into account national priorities and obligations. These efforts have had positive effects, and we agreed to pursue them further.

- We also noted the completion of the missile defence feasibility study initiated at the Prague Summit to examine options for the protection of Alliance territory, forces and population centres. We encouraged further work on political-military considerations prior to any decision in this domain.

- We welcomed the completion of the risk reduction study in support of an Alliance Ground Surveillance Capability and noted initial responses from industry to the Design and Development Request for Proposals.

- In addition, we considered a range of possible new capability-related initiatives in such areas as resources, deployability, defence against terrorism and training

for consideration by our Heads of State and Government at the Riga Summit. We directed the Council in Permanent Session to conduct further detailed work and to prepare a further report by the time of our informal meeting in Slovenia in September.

- We also continue to pursue transformation at NATO Headquarters through the adoption of more efficient and effective ways of working and by continuing to prioritise resources in accordance with Alliance objectives.

14. The continuing transformation of our forces will help to ensure that NATO can continue to provide for collective defence and contribute to our security by making a fitting contribution to the international community's efforts to promote stability, with the confidence born of our mutual solidarity and in particular of the indispensable transatlantic link.