

Statement by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the NATO-Russia Council at Foreign Ministers level (8 Dec 2011)

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (Secretary General of NATO): We have just had a good and lively discussion in the NATO-Russia Council. This is a forum for all topics and at all times. And that is the way it was today. Where we agree, we continue practical cooperation. And where we disagree, we continue to work for an agreement. That is what partners do. A year ago, in Lisbon, we agreed to take the path towards a true strategic partnership. We agreed on the first concrete steps that we would take together. And today, we agreed that we have made good progress. We are working together to bring peace and stability to Afghanistan. We are working together to make the seas safe against pirates. And we are working together to develop new ways to prevent terrorist attacks. We agreed to work together more effectively in the fight against piracy. Russia has proposed seven different measures to reinforce our common efforts off the coast of Somalia – such as improving coordination and communication, and cooperating on medical support, logistics and refuelling. All 29 members of the NATO-Russia Council have now endorsed those ideas. And we are looking at ways to put them into practice. We agreed that international controls on biological and toxin weapons are important – and that we will work to make them stronger. We also noted a significant milestone in our shared efforts to combat terrorism. The horrific events of 9/11 showed us the devastating use terrorists can make of civilian aircraft. Since then, we have been working together to create a system to detect and prevent such an attack in Europe. We call it the Cooperative Airspace Initiative. And I am pleased to say that the system is now ready for operations. We also discussed ways to enhance transparency. Our positions may not always converge – for instance on Libya, conventional arms control, or Georgia. But even when we disagree, transparency is the best way to reduce tension and build trust. That is particularly the case with missile defence. It's no secret that differences remain on how to organise our cooperation in this area. But the sort of intensive dialogue we've had today shows that we are committed to finding a way forward. On missile defence, we do not agree – yet. But we all agree that it is important to keep on trying. To keep on talking. And to keep on listening to each other's concerns. Because that is the spirit of Lisbon. And because we know that, if we can reach agreement on this issue, it will take our relationship to the next level. Our cooperation is broad and strong – and while we continue the dialogue, we can make progress that benefits all of us. With that, I am ready to take two or three brief questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): And please introduce yourselves. Over there.

Q: Yelena Chernenko, Kommersant daily newspaper from Russia. Yesterday, before leaving here to this meeting today the Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergei Lavrov, said that there will be no progress on NATO-Russia relations as long as NATO does not listen to Russia and Russia's concern. Why does not NATO listen to Russia's concern?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (Secretary General of NATO): We listen. And we have listened today. I hope Minister Lavrov has also listened to NATO concerns. And that's actually the essence of our dialogue. We listen to each other. And of course we take Russian concerns seriously. This is also the reason why I have repeatedly stressed that the NATO missile defence system is not directed against Russia. We do not consider Russia an enemy. We do not consider Russia an adversary. We consider Russia a partner, and we want to develop a true strategic partnership as we decided one year ago in Lisbon. And we do believe

that is it part of that true strategic partnership that we ought to cooperate on missile defence. So we take it seriously when the Russians request assurances that our system is not directed against Russia, and we have reiterated it is not directed against Russia, and invited Russia to cooperate so that they can see with their own eyes that it is not directed against Russia. And provide transparency through that cooperation. So we take it seriously. And we do believe that we have provided the right answers.

OANA LUNGESCU: BBC.

Q: Yes, Secretary General, Jonathan Marcus, BBC. Could you just set out the timescale that you hope for an eventual agreement with Russia? You've been saying all along you hope something to be agreed by the Chicago NATO Summit. Isn't it far more likely that this is an issue that Russia will want to negotiate with the next incoming U.S. administration and so therefore any movement on this subject is likely to be delayed for some considerable time?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I think we should all recall that this will be an ongoing process. What we are going to develop is called a phased-adaptive approach. So we will, during the next around ten years, gradually introduce the NATO-based missile defence system. So, of course, the dialogue will also go on for quite some time. But I think the first step will be to reach an agreement on a political framework, so to speak, by May when we have the NATO Summit in Chicago, because at that Summit we will declare an interim operational capability of the NATO system. And it would be quite natural that we reach an agreement with Russia at the same time. So this is the reason why the first time horizon would be, and should be, May next year.

OANA LUNGESCU: Over there.

Q: Russian State TV, Zvezda TV channel, Ministry of Defence of Russia. My question is about the progress, so we still don't have an agreement, but if we speak about the progress in talks with Russia in missile defence, so what kind of progress is it? Maybe a few words or more about it. How do... how are you going to work with Russia to cooperate?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On missile defence? As an example, we have suggested that we visualize the common purpose of our missile defence cooperation through the establishment of two centres, two jointly-staffed centres, that can constitute a framework for exchange of data, for preparation of common exercises, for elaboration of joint threat assessments, just to mention some examples? Hopefully we could reach an agreement on the establishment of such two centres. That's at least an idea to consider. I have also reminded people that already in 1997, when Russia and NATO approved the first founding document, also called the Founding Act, the first document that structured the cooperation between NATO and Russia, already then in 97 we declared that we will not use force against each other. That's a political... that's really a strong political statement, a strong political guarantee, if you wish. I think it would make sense to reiterate that strong political statement, and the more so because next year we can celebrate the 15th Anniversary of the Founding Act from 1997. And actually, next year we can also celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, which took place in Rome in 2002. So we have two excellent occasions to celebrate in Chicago, and we could do that by a refreshment of what we have decided already many years ago, that we will not use force against each other. That's a strong political commitment, that's a strong political guarantee. Thank you.