

Two anniversaries mark milestones in NATO-Russia relations

Fifteen years ago, on 27 May 1997, the signature of the NATO-Russia Founding Act provided the formal basis for bilateral cooperation. And ten years ago, on 28 May 2002, the creation of the NATO-Russia Council provided a forum for the Allies and Russia to meet as equals to discuss and cooperate on issues of common interest. Driven by a spirit of pragmatism in the face of shared security challenges, the relationship has come a long way since these milestones, though it has yet to live up to its strategic potential. At the recent Chicago Summit, Allied leaders welcomed the important progress in cooperation over the years and reiterated their desire to see a true strategic partnership between NATO and Russia, as agreed at the NRC Summit in Lisbon in 2010. Recognizing that differences remain on specific issues – such as Georgia, missile defence and NATO's intervention to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1973 in Libya – the Allies underlined the need to improve trust, reciprocal transparency and predictability. Building security together by further developing practical cooperation on common security challenges, such as issues related to Afghanistan, terrorism, piracy and particularly missile defence is the best way forward. Remarkable progress has been made over the years in the relationship between NATO and Russia.

Progress

Dialogue and confidence-building in the early 1990s soon bore fruit, when Russian soldiers deployed alongside Allied counterparts in the first NATO-led peacekeeping operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as the largest non-NATO troop contingent. The signing of the Founding Act in 1997 widened and deepened the framework for cooperation. Despite differences over NATO's Kosovo air campaign in the spring of 1999, Russia played a notable diplomatic role in resolving the Kosovo crisis at later stages and deployed peacekeepers to support the Kosovo Force. The relationship was given new impetus and substance in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks. Recognizing the need for coordinated action to respond to common threats, the Allies and Russia decided to establish the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in 2002 to strengthen dialogue and cooperation in areas of shared concern. Following Russia's military action in Georgia in early August 2008, the Allies suspended formal meetings of the NRC. Formal meetings resumed in 2009. A NATO Information Office and a Military Liaison Mission in Moscow continue to help promote cooperation and build trust. Russia's diplomatic mission to NATO and Russian Military Branch Offices at NATO's two top military command headquarters are also facilitating cooperation.

Building trust through practical cooperation

Continuing differences on key issues should not overshadow the track record of successful NATO-Russia cooperation on shared security concerns. Most importantly, NATO and Russia have a common interest in a stable and secure Afghanistan in a peaceful region. Several initiatives are underway to help stabilize the country. One NRC project is assisting the Afghan Armed Forces to operate and maintain their helicopter fleet, as transition to Afghan security lead takes hold. Training of Afghan army helicopter maintenance staff on Russian territory began in April 2012. Under another successful NRC project, some 2000 Afghan, Central Asian and Pakistani counter-narcotics personnel have been trained to date, helping to develop regional capacity against the threat of drug trafficking. Important work is also far advanced on developing multi-modal reverse arrangements for transit of non-lethal cargo for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). Underlining the shared commitment to securing

Afghanistan's future, Russia sent a special representative to participate in the expanded ISAF meeting at the Chicago Summit. In the area of combating terrorism, the Cooperative Airspace Initiative – aimed at preventing terrorists from using aircraft to launch attacks similar to those of 9/11 – is now operational. Another project is developing technology that will enable the stand-off detection of explosive devices in mass transport environments, with trials due to take place in 2013. The NRC's first civilian-military counter-terrorism table top exercise was conducted in March 2012, based on a fictional scenario involving a terrorist incident on the high seas. It was a very valuable exercise which allowed NATO and Russia to discuss how we would operate – and cooperate – if such an incident really happened. And it strengthened still further the cooperation we already have in the fight against terrorism. Countering improvised explosive devices is also an important focus of ongoing work. Work is underway to strengthen cooperation on counter-piracy off the Horn of Africa, in particular by improving communication channels during naval operations. Other military-to-military cooperation focuses on logistics, combating terrorism, search-and-rescue at sea, theatre missile defence and military academic exchanges. At the NATO Summit in Lisbon in November 2010, NATO invited Russia to explore opportunities for missile-defence cooperation. Discussions on this subject continue. At the Chicago Summit, NATO leaders stressed that NATO's planned missile defence capability is not directed against Russia, nor will it undermine Russia's strategic deterrent. It is intended to defend against potential threats from beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. While regretting recurrent Russian statements and measures directed against NATO's missile defence system, the Allies welcome Russia's willingness to continue dialogue on finding a way to develop future cooperation on missile defence. NATO is determined to work through the NRC to see how independent NATO and Russian missile defence systems could work together to enhance European security. The Allies look forward to the establishment of the proposed NATO-Russia Missile Data Fusion Centre and the joint Planning Operations Centre. They also propose to develop a new transparency regime based on a regular exchange of information about the current respective missile defence capabilities of NATO and Russia. Cooperation on theatre missile defence continues, most recently with a computer-assisted exercise that took place in March 2012 in Germany. This exercise was a good opportunity to develop, explore and assess various options for conducting missile defence in Europe. Further developing practical cooperation in these and other areas – in particular missile defence – will help increase mutual trust. This is the best way to realize the pledge made by NRC leaders at their summit meeting in Lisbon in November 2010: to *"work towards achieving a true strategic and modernized partnership based on the principles of reciprocal confidence, transparency, and predictability, with the aim of contributing to the creation of a common space of peace, security and stability."*