



Promoting a more
transparent and
accountable NATO

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NATO needs
to become
closer to its
more than 1
billion citizen
stakeholders

NATO Watch Media Briefing

NATO 'public' consultation on transatlantic bond needs to focus on transparency and accountability

NATO announces Transatlantic Bond consultation

During his speech '[Why NATO Matters to America](#)' at the Brookings Institution in Washington DC on 19 March, Secretary General Rasmussen said:

Because our democracies debate, deliberate, and consider the options before taking decisions, because we value transparency and seek legitimacy for our choices and because we see force as the last, not the first, resort - the only way to address such challenges is for Europe and North America to stand together.

On the same day, and after a meeting of the North Atlantic Council, the Secretary General announced [an Alliance-wide public debate](#) on the transatlantic bond, adding that he had asked three groups – “the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, a group of experts, and a group of young leaders - to consider how we can strengthen our transatlantic bond and strengthen our security today and tomorrow”. Each group is expected to submit their findings to Mr Rasmussen in early June at a conference in Brussels.

NATO Parliamentary Assembly President [Hugh Bayley](#), MP for York, said he was delighted to have been asked to provide the unique perspectives of parliamentarians and to be working with NATO on this key issue in advance of the summit. Initial consultations will be considered during a meeting of the Assembly's leaders in early April in Riga and then finalised at its spring session in Vilnius at the end of May. Mr Bayley said:

Parliamentarians are a visible manifestation of the Alliance's shared commitment to democracy, and they play key roles in making and shaping their nations' security and defence policies. It is also the parliaments of our nations which authorize the allocation of the resources devoted to defence and parliamentary approval is required in many of our nations regarding the employment of their armed forces in operations. Most importantly, parliamentarians are directly in touch with the public and directly accountable to them.

The [policy experts group](#) will be led by Robin Niblett, Director of Chatham House. He will be joined by:

- Martin Butora, Head of the Institute of Public Affairs, Bratislava;
- Ivo Daalder, President, Chicago Council on Global Affairs & former US Ambassador to NATO;
- Camille Grand, Director of the Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique, Paris;
- Ana Palacio, former Foreign Minister of Spain and member of the Consejo de Estado of Spain;
- Roland Paris, Director of the Centre for International Policy Studies, Ottawa;
- Volker Perthes, Director Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, Berlin;
- Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome;
- Sinan Ulgen, Director, Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), Istanbul; and
- Marcin Zaborowski, Director of Polish Institute for International Affairs, Warsaw.

The Atlantic Council of the United States is currently recruiting fifteen “exceptional emerging leaders” to participate in the [group of young leaders](#) consultation which will convene at the Atlantic Council's [Toward a Europe Whole and Free](#) conference in Washington, DC on April 29-May 1, 2014 to begin drafting a report with concrete proposals. Members are also tentatively scheduled to attend the 2014 [Young Atlanticist Summit](#) to coincide with the NATO Summit. Clearly, plans are well established for this group in the United States but there appears to be little or no information about this initiative in other member states.

The consultations undertaken by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the group of experts, and the group of young leaders, which will be consolidated at the Brussels conference in June, will then be carried forward to the NATO Summit in Wales in September. The Summit, titled 'Future NATO', will focus on ensuring that the Alliance has the equipment and skills it requires to deal with the challenges presented by terrorism, unstable states, piracy, missile and cyber attacks, as well as reaffirming the importance of the transatlantic bond.

Mr. Rasmussen said the Alliance is also interested in hearing from the general public “about what the transatlantic relationship has meant to you and how we can preserve it and make it even stronger for future generations”. More information on how the public can take part in these consultations will apparently be posted on the NATO website.

The missing link: transparency and accountability

This latest public consultation exercise is to be welcomed, although if past precedents are anything to go by, it will be tightly controlled with a narrow focus on rubber-stamping the existing NATO route map. There is a real need, however, to reassess the internal functioning of the alliance. NATO needs to



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become closer to its more than 1 billion citizen stakeholders. NATO is not only the sum of its intergovernmental political and military parts, but also of the 900 million citizens living in its 28 member states - and the more than 532 million additional citizens in states with partnership or contact agreements with the alliance. These citizens, rather than military forces, police and other means of law enforcement, are at the heart of alliance security.

To deepen and extend this shared values-base requires an updated, more open, transparent and accountable alliance, appropriate to 21st century expectations. Decision-making within NATO remains largely the exclusive preserve of the executive branch of government and an array of inter-governmental bureaucracies. It still does not have an information disclosure policy, while mechanisms for parliamentary oversight within NATO are inadequate. The right of access to information is firmly established in international and national law as a human right and is essential for upholding the values which NATO was created to protect. It therefore applies to all national and international public bodies and should also apply to NATO. The more the public knows about NATO operations and how individual member states contribute to the alliance, the better equipped citizens are to make judgments on and encourage their government to maintain high levels of involvement. In short, NATO needs to become more transparent and accountable without compromising the security of its activities.

Six measures to improve transparency and accountability

1. Establish permanent standing parliamentary committees dedicated to NATO

The scale and importance of the NATO security apparatus demands that national parliaments in member states sharpen their scrutiny of NATO affairs (as has been the case with EU affairs). In the UK, for example, there is a parliamentary European Scrutiny Committee, made up of MPs who assesses the legal and/or political importance of each EU document, decides which EU documents are debated, monitors the activities of UK Ministers in the Council, and keeps legal, procedural and institutional developments in the EU under review.

2. Strengthen the democratic mandate of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly

Greater accountability and openness about how members are selected is a particular priority. The Assembly needs candidates of independent mind, who enjoy cross-party support and who have command of their briefs. At a minimum, the NATO PA representatives should be on fixed term appointments and subject to some form of intra-parliamentary election process (similar to that which was introduced in the UK for select committee chairs).

3. Adopt an information openness policy within NATO consistent with the access to information laws already in place in the alliance's 28 member countries

Such a policy should include guidelines for proactive publication of core information, a mechanism for the public to file requests for information, and an independent review body for hearing appeals against refusals or failures to make information public within a short time-frame. Most member states are happy with the present setup which gives them the discretion to decide (and veto) what is released and when (if at all). But these historically-embedded secrecy practices make it extremely difficult for parliamentarians and citizens to find out the considerations underpinning NATO decisions. To effectively exercise their democratic rights citizens need to be able to scrutinise all the information which has formed the basis of a particular decision.

4. Publish annual financial reports showing figures on NATO revenue and expenditure

Financial management information is routinely provided by other intergovernmental bodies, such as the EU and World Bank. But NATO does not yet provide basic information about its income, expenditure or performance evaluations to the general public. One way for the public and parliamentarians to really understand what's happening in NATO is to follow the money. But without a publicly available annual budget or reliable performance metrics it is often impossible to grasp the significance of what's being proposed or implemented within the alliance.

5. Establish a No-Spying Zone in NATO

Disclosure of US intelligence surveillance activities in allied countries aroused angry political and public reaction. While espionage is a legitimate form of statecraft in some limited circumstances, such as to infiltrate terrorist networks, it is wrong and counter-productive to do this to friends and allies. Under a 'No-Spy Zone' agreement in NATO, certain types of intelligence collection would be renounced and prohibited. National parliamentary intelligence and security committees would also need to be strengthened, and a separate independent multilateral watchdog established to oversee the proposed intra-Alliance no spying agreement, perhaps drawn from members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

6. Establish a TV channel to stream policy dialogues to the public

NATO should broadcast regular and uncensored live sessions of North Atlantic Council meetings, as well as the plethora of other policy dialogues, seminars and conferences that take place inside NATO headquarters. Streaming live sessions to the public would increase the transparency of the organisation and show citizens the importance of community, collaboration and coalition in NATO policy-making.