



NATO Foreign Ministers agree to take NATO-EU cooperation to a “new level”:

A review of the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, Brussels, 5-6 December 2017

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Key decisions taken:

- It was agreed to step up cooperation with the EU on a ‘common set of proposals’, including in three new areas: military mobility, information sharing in the fight against terrorism, and promoting women’s role in peace and security.
- Practical and political support for Georgia was reaffirmed, as well as a commitment to the country’s eventual membership of NATO.
- NATO’s ‘Open Door’ policy was also reaffirmed, and progress of each aspirant country will be reviewed at the next Foreign Ministers meeting in April 2018.
- NATO’s role in ‘projecting stability and fighting terrorism’ was discussed, but no new measures were adopted.

Russia; NATO’s role in ‘projecting stability’ and counter-terrorism, including a review of the training mission in Afghanistan and NATO’s role in the [Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS](#); a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission; and a discussion on NATO’s ‘Open Door’ policy.

On the day prior to the ministerial meeting (4 December), a pre-ministerial [press conference](#) was held by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The first day of the ministerial meeting (5 December) began with a background briefing for the media on [NATO-EU cooperation](#), followed by a general [doorstep statement](#) by the NATO Secretary General. This was followed by three bilateral meetings between Stoltenberg and the Foreign Ministers of Turkey and Germany, and the US Secretary of State. No details of the discussions were made public.

Summary of the Ministerial Meeting

The two-day meeting agenda was focused on five main issues: expanding cooperation between NATO and the EU; a discussion of global threats, including North Korea and



(Charles Michel (Prime Minister of Belgium) unveiling the logo with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Brussels, 5 December 2017 – photo credit: NATO)

In mid-afternoon, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) met in Foreign Ministers' session, and was joined by the EU High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini and also the Foreign Ministers of Sweden and Finland. Aside from a few [opening remarks](#) by the NATO Secretary General, the meeting was a closed session, and ended with an [unveiling of the Brussels 2018 Summit logo](#) (see photo on previous page) and an official portrait of the ministers. This was followed by a closed bilateral meeting between the NATO Deputy Secretary General and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Sweden, and a [joint press conference](#) by the NATO Secretary General and the EU High Representative.

The first day concluded with a working dinner focused on two issues: Russia and North Korea (see below).

The second day of the ministerial began with a closed bilateral meeting between Stoltenberg and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, and was followed by a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission. Again, outside of the Secretary General's [opening remarks](#), this was a closed session.

A further [press conference](#) with the Secretary General, was then followed by the second meeting of the NAC (again closed, apart from some [opening remarks](#)) on 'projecting stability and fighting terrorism'. This was followed by a [press conference](#) by the US Secretary of State; a lunchtime discussion on NATO's 'Open Door' policy ; a bilateral meeting between the NATO Secretary General and the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Bulgaria; and a closing [press conference](#) by the NATO Secretary General.

The following more detailed analysis of key aspects of the ministerial meeting draws on a combination of the above links, wider press reporting of the ministerial meeting and NATO Watch insights in attempt to fill the information gaps.

Expanding cooperation with the EU



(EU-NATO cooperation graphic – photo credit: EU)

Following the signature of the Joint Declaration on NATO-EU cooperation in Warsaw in July 2016, [NATO and the EU have been discussing how to expand their joint work](#), including by bringing more coherence in their respective defence capability development priorities and output.

Within the NAC session of this Brussels meeting, NATO Foreign Ministers [agreed](#) to step up NATO's cooperation with the EU. A joint progress report (not publicly available) on implementation of the existing 42 proposals in the July 2016 Declaration was presented by Federica Mogherini and Jens Stoltenberg. These proposals will now be complemented by 31 new proposals, as set out in a new [joint declaration and 'common set of proposals'](#) (published simultaneously by the [EU Council](#)). Future joint work between the two organisations will include three new areas: military mobility, information sharing in the fight against terrorism, and promoting women's role in peace and security. It will take cooperation between NATO and the EU "to a new level," said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The next progress report for ministers is planned for June 2018.

Although many of the new goals remain rather vague, the NATO Secretary General expects NATO-EU cooperation to reach unprecedented levels in many areas, including countering cyber attacks and hybrid threats and enhanced naval cooperation. The issue of 'military mobility'—the new "flagship for our cooperation", according to the NATO Secretary

General—was extensively discussed at the [NATO Defence Ministers meeting](#) in November. The exact details are still being worked out, but it is likely to involve easing customs regulations and improving infrastructure along NATO's eastern flank to ensure that military equipment and troops can move with speed across borders in a crisis. "Moving our forces and equipment quickly is vital for our security. This means we need procedures for rapid border crossing," Stoltenberg said.

In the fight against terrorism, the Foreign Ministers agreed to strengthen the exchange of information between NATO and the EU, as well coordinate counter-terrorism support for partner countries.

In November, European countries agreed to deepen defence cooperation outside of NATO. The so-called Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) involves 23 of the EU's 28 member states. Ireland and Portugal are expected to join later. Denmark, Malta and the UK will probably stay out. All EU countries in Central and Eastern Europe have signed up, despite their wariness of weakening defence ties with the United States. The effort is backed by a €5-billion defence fund launched by the European Commission this summer. At the ministerial meeting, the NATO Secretary General was keen to stress that these new EU measures needed to complement what NATO already does in these areas.

North Korea, Russia and global threats

According to the Secretary General's press conference, the Foreign Ministers agreed that NATO's approach to Russia decided at the Warsaw Summit in 2016—defence and dialogue—"has been effective". In the lead-up to the next NATO Summit in July 2018, the alliance is looking to continue to:

- Strengthen deterrence and defence;
- Pursue dialogue in good faith; and
- Support partners in Eastern Europe.

Speaking at a [press conference](#) after the NATO dinner, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said

that the United States was seeking agreement with Moscow on deploying a UN peacekeeping force to eastern Ukraine, where Russia-backed separatists are fighting Ukrainian government forces in a conflict that has killed more than 10,000 people since it started in April 2014. But the Secretary of State cautioned that "significant differences" remained between Washington and Moscow over the exact nature of any peacekeeping force.

The Head of Ukraine's Mission to NATO, Ambassador Vadym Prystaiko later [expressed concern](#) to a reporter over the intensification of NATO's communication with Russia, suggesting that it was difficult to tell if this represented a return to 'business as usual' with Russia.

In terms of the threat from North Korea, the messaging from the Foreign Ministers' discussion appeared to mirror that of the [Defence Ministers](#) the previous month: reiterating that NATO strongly supports a peaceful, negotiated solution to the crisis, while supporting regional partners, Japan and South Korea, and that "strong deterrence" would keep all allies safe. However, like the Defence Ministers meeting, few details of the discussions have emerged.

An issue that was apparently discussed on the sidelines of the meeting (but not mentioned in NATO's own media releases) was President Trump's decision to [recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital](#). Media [reports](#) suggest that US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson defended the decision, while other foreign ministers (including [Turkish Foreign Minister](#) Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu) condemned the move as harming chances for peace in the Middle East. Germany's Foreign Minister separately [warned](#) that the Trump administration is undermining the transatlantic relationship between the US and Europe.

Projecting stability and the fight against terrorism

Similarly, few details have emerged as to the nature and scope of the discussions on ways to increase NATO's role in 'projecting stability and

fighting terrorism'. The Secretary General stressed that NATO's experience in training local forces and building the capacity of local institutions—as NATO has done from the Balkans to Afghanistan—are the “best tools to make our partners better able to defend themselves and to combat international terrorism”.

In 2017, NATO started training local forces in Iraq in areas such as countering improvised explosive devices, military medicine, equipment maintenance, and reform of the country's security institutions.

Foreign Ministers apparently “expressed their full commitment” to these efforts, as well as supporting the new Crisis Management Centre in Jordan, which is part of NATO's recent capacity building package for Jordan.

Discussions also focused on NATO's role within the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and how it should evolve as the Coalition moves from combat operations to stabilisation efforts. Without giving any specific details, the NATO Secretary General said, “We know that projecting stability and fighting terrorism are generational challenges. There are no quick fixes. No overnight solutions. We have made progress and we are determined to do more”.

At their earlier meeting, NATO [Defence Ministers agreed to send 3,000 more troops to Afghanistan](#), but it remains unclear as to whether the Foreign Ministers undertook any meaningful review of political progress in the country. Similarly, at the Defence Ministers meeting, Coalition partners were apparently looking to the United States for a clear plan about what follows the physical defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Whether such a plan was any closer to being articulated in the Foreign Ministers' ministerial meeting is also not immediately clear.

The NATO-Georgia Commission

Georgia aspires to NATO membership and the alliance agreed in 2008 to commence a membership application process. The NATO-Georgia Commission (NGC) serves as a forum

for political consultations and oversees the [practical cooperation between Georgia and NATO](#). Since 2008, Georgia has submitted an Annual National Programme with a wide range of reform objectives.

NATO Foreign Ministers [reaffirmed](#) their practical and political support for Georgia, as well as their commitment to Georgia's eventual membership of the alliance. The NATO Secretary General said that the NGC meeting was “very constructive”. It also reiterated its call on Russia to end its recognition of the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and to withdraw its forces from Georgian territory.

The NGC also discussed the “impressive progress” in the implementation of Georgia's reform package. A Joint Training and Evaluation Centre in Georgia is up and running, and the NATO-funded Defence Institution Building School in Georgia has trained around a thousand soldiers. A joint NATO-Georgia military exercise is planned for 2019.

Finally, discussions also centred on strengthening cooperation in the Black Sea region, again without any specifics being divulged, other than that it would involve “information exchanges” and working with the Georgian Coast Guard.

NATO's 'Open Door' policy

Over lunch on the second day of the ministerial meeting, the Foreign Ministers also discussed NATO's ['Open Door' policy](#), which they describe as a “historic success” and “a key contributor to Euro-atlantic security”. Under Article 10 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, any decision on enlargement must be made “by unanimous agreement”.

The Ministers reiterated that accession is a decision for aspirant countries and the 29 NATO member states and that “nobody else has the right to a veto”. (See an alternative take on the enlargement question, [here](#)). In preparation for the next NATO Summit in July 2018, the Foreign Ministers agreed to review the progress of each of the aspirant countries by their next meeting in April 2018.