

by NATO Secretary General

Extracts from speech delivered in Chisinau, Moldova – 30 October 2008

The NATO Alliance that I have the privilege to represent will turn 60 next year. Most people will try to slow down a bit when they approach that age. But NATO is busier than ever. As many as 50,000 of our soldiers are deployed in Afghanistan alone, to provide security so that development and democracy can flourish. But we are also keeping the peace in Kosovo. NATO ships are patrolling the Mediterranean in an naval anti-terrorist mission. And, off the coast of Somalia, we have just recently started to escort World Food Program vessels and to help protect international shipping against acts of piracy.

At the same time, the Alliance is also making its unique capabilities and experience available in other areas. We are assisting defence reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are training Iraqi and Afghan security forces. We are assisting the African Union, including with airlifts to Somalia and AU forces in and out of Darfur. And we have played a role in some major disaster response and humanitarian relief operations, including after the floods which hit Moldova this summer.

But even as NATO focuses on challenges far away from our own borders, we are not forgetting that there are unresolved issues closer to home.

It has been and remains a longstanding objective of the Alliance to help create a European continent that is whole, free and at peace – by reaching out to countries all across our continent, offering them assistance and encouragement, and helping them to find their own place in a peaceful, democratic Europe. Moldova deserves its place in a peaceful and democratic Europe. Moldova has a clear European vocation.

In the Balkans, that commitment is clearly bearing fruit. With NATO's help, all the countries in the region are now finding their rightful place among the European family of nations. Several have joined the Alliance and the European Union already, while others have made good progress in that direction.

Elsewhere in Europe, however, several countries find it harder to break with the past and to chart their own future – not least because others try to decide that future for them. Georgia is a case in point. NATO has stood by Georgia through the crisis in August. We have supported the settlement negotiated by the European Union Presidency - I commend the French European Presidency for that - with the Georgian and Russian Presidents and will continue to urge its full implementation. We will continue to urge respect for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. And we will continue to support Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Like Georgia, your neighbour Ukraine has strong Euro-Atlantic aspirations as well, which

NATO also supports. That is why we continue to engage in political dialogue with Ukraine, and to assist the implementation of difficult reforms, in particular the modernisation of its defence structures.

Having said this, NATO is keen to assist and cooperate with all countries in Europe, and to pursue an active political dialogue with each, regardless of whether they wish or do not wish to join the Alliance. And this very much applies to the Republic of Moldova as well.

We understand, of course, and respect, of course, the importance of Moldova's constitutional neutrality. As a matter of fact, NATO has several neutral countries among its most active Partner nations – including Switzerland and Sweden.

And I am very glad that our political dialogue and practical cooperation with Moldova has increased as well these last few years, especially since your country concluded a first Individual Partnership Action Plan – or IPAP – with NATO back in 2006.

Much of our cooperation is focused on the reform of Moldova's defence establishment – to make it more effective, accountable and relevant to 21st century requirements. The adoption of a National Security Concept earlier this year was a major step forward. We hope that it will be followed soon by several additional documents to guide the reform process further, such as a Strategic Defence Review and a National Military Strategy.

It will be important to keep the reform process going, to continue with the elaboration of these documents, to work on a new IPAP, and to build on the progress that has already been achieved – including in reforming your Military Institute and strengthening the Peacekeeping Training Centre. And so I sincerely hope for continued political support – before and after next year's elections – to drive the process forward.

Let me add that this will not only be in your own national interest, but also help to boost security more broadly. Moldova's commitment of five helicopters to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan shows that even relatively small nations can help to provide security well beyond their own region. And Moldova is to be commended for that contribution.

NATO's expertise is not limited to hard, military matters, and neither is our cooperation with Moldova. For example, we helped to coordinate assistance from a number of Allied and Partner nations following the floods which struck your country this past summer. Several NATO nations and agencies work together with the OSCE to repack and destroy stocks of hazardous chemicals and fertilizers, so they do not harm your environment. And we have cooperated on the establishment of the NATO Information Centre here at the University of Chisinau, to promote the dissemination of information and improve understanding about NATO and what it does.

In addition to our practical cooperation, NATO and Moldova have also engaged in closer political dialogue. President Voronin and Moldovan Government Ministers have come to NATO meetings and our Headquarters in Brussels several times. My Special Representative, Ambassador Simmons, has also maintained a continuous and active dialogue, that I was able

to build upon in my own talks here today with the President, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Defence. And I hope that political engagement will continue after the elections next year, because it is vital to a further deepening and broadening of our partnership.

Regrettably, the unresolved issue of Transnistria continues to cast a shadow over the future of your country. And it is on that issue, as well, that continued high-level political engagement will be vital, by all the different parties concerned.

The NATO Allies have always expressed their support for the territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova on a number of occasions. But the mandate and expertise to try and resolve the Transnistria issue rests with the OSCE and those involved in the 5+2 negotiation process, not with NATO. I will say that the Government of Moldova is to be commended for its strong commitment to a peaceful resolution of the issue, and its pragmatic attempts to put new ideas on the table. And we also appreciate its consistent position regarding the Adapted Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe, which is crucial to maintaining military transparency and predictability throughout our continent.

The NATO Alliance that I represent is changing fast. We are responding to a range of new security challenges. And we are reaching out to engage other nations and institutions in a comprehensive approach to those challenges.

At the same time, we are not losing sight of challenges closer to home. We remain determined to contribute to the creation of a Europe that is whole, free and at peace. And we want Moldova to find its rightful place right at the heart of that Europe.