

**Statement before the U.S. Commission on Security and
Cooperation in Europe**

***“UKRAINE AND NATO AT THE
BUCHAREST SUMMIT”***

A Statement by

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Introduction

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission,

I am pleased to appear before you today to address the issue of NATO and Ukraine at the upcoming Alliance summit in Bucharest. I will also offer some comments on Georgia and on Russian concerns. I commend the Commission for its interest in the Bucharest meeting, which can have a significant impact on shaping a broader, more stable and secure Europe, something that is clearly in the interest of the United States.

Over the past 15 years, Ukraine has made great progress in transforming itself into a modern European democracy and has developed increasingly closer relations with NATO. NATO members should extend to Ukraine a membership action plan, given the country's commitment to – and progress in – political, economic and military reform, and the contribution it can make to Euro-Atlantic security. Georgia also deserves consideration. Extending a membership action plan would help each country continue its internal reform process to develop political and economic systems compatible with those of the Euro-Atlantic community; foster closer cooperation between those countries and NATO; and create the preconditions for consideration at a later point of membership.

Extending membership action plans to Ukraine and/or Georgia will raise concern in Moscow. NATO should continue to engage Russia in cooperative endeavors that promote stronger links between the Alliance and Russia, and that hopefully will help end Cold War stereotypes that persist in Moscow. At the same time, Russia also needs to do its part to build a more cooperative NATO-Russia relationship. The Russian foreign and security policy elite has to cease clinging to its image of NATO as an adversary. While seeking good relations with Russia, NATO should not allow Moscow a veto, either explicit or tacit, over relations between the Alliance and third countries.

The Membership Action Plan Process

NATO has carried out two rounds of enlargement since the end of the Cold War. Enlargement has brought ten new members into the Alliance's ranks, and promoted a broader, more stable and secure Euro-Atlantic community. Enlargement also has underpinned the dramatic democratic and economic transformations that have swept Central Europe over the past two decades.

Since launching the enlargement process in the 1990s, NATO has asked two sets of questions of prospective members. First, has the country in question implemented the political, economic, military and security reforms necessary to bring it into compliance with NATO standards? Has the country's political-economic system embraced the democratic and market economy values of the Alliance? This reflects the fact that NATO is not just a security alliance but is also an alliance of shared values. Second, can the country make a contribution to Euro-Atlantic security? Does it have capabilities and the political will to use them that will strengthen the Alliance's ability to meet the challenges currently before it?

NATO launched the membership action plan, or MAP, process in 1999 to help guide prospective members in answering these questions. As described in the April 1999 communiqué issued by NATO leaders at their summit in Washington, the MAP process envisages the provision by prospective members of individual programs regarding their national preparations for possible future membership, focused and candid feedback from the Alliance, and assistance in implementing those national programs.

At the Washington summit, NATO announced the establishment of MAPs for Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Seven of those countries – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – progressed to the point where, at the November 2002 NATO summit in Prague, they received invitations to join the Alliance. They became full Alliance members in 2004. Albania and Macedonia, along with Croatia, continue with their MAPs and hope to receive invitations to join NATO in Bucharest.

Membership action plans thus serve as roadmaps to guide prospective NATO members. The process is open-ended: there is no fixed schedule for completing it, and receiving a MAP does not guarantee an automatic invitation for membership. The decision to extend an invitation is a separate political decision, taken by Alliance members after they have reviewed a country's progress on its MAP. A MAP process aims to create the preconditions for consideration of membership. While the presumption is that it will lead to membership, a MAP does not prejudice a country's decision to request membership, nor does it prejudice the Alliance's decision on extending an invitation.

The Case for a MAP for Ukraine

Ukraine has a long history of deepening relations with NATO. Ukraine was the first former Soviet state to join NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994. As NATO planned for its initial wave of enlargement and in parallel discussed how to strengthen NATO-Russian relations, the Alliance decided to pursue a third track: formalizing a relationship with Ukraine. This reflected NATO's recognition that a country with the size and strategic position of Ukraine merited a special relationship with the Alliance. At the July 1997 NATO summit in Madrid, having the day before invited Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to join, NATO leaders approved the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership with Ukraine and established the NATO-Ukraine Council.

NATO-Ukraine relations continued to develop over the remainder of the 1990s. In May 2002, then-President Leonid Kuchma announced Ukraine's ultimate goal of joining NATO. However, questions regarding the seriousness of the Kuchma government's commitment to join and about the course of democracy in Ukraine, as well as other difficulties in Ukraine's relations with the West, made progress in this regard difficult.

In the aftermath of the 2004 Orange Revolution, NATO-Ukraine relations acquired new energy and momentum. President Victor Yushchenko made full integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, including joining NATO, the key priority of his foreign policy.

In April 2005, NATO foreign ministers agreed to establish with Ukraine an intensified dialogue, typically a precursor to a membership action plan.

By the end of 2005 and early 2006, officials in Washington and other NATO capitals had begun to consider the prospect of extending a MAP to Ukraine at the Riga summit in November 2006 were Ukraine to continue its reform progress. Officials at the White House, moreover, reportedly even began to consider the possibility of inviting Ukraine at the 2008 summit to join NATO.

This surge in NATO-Ukraine relations was derailed in September 2006, however, when then-Prime Minister Victor Yanukovich met with the North Atlantic Council in Brussels. He said that, while he favored close cooperation with NATO, he did not support a membership action plan. Given the division between Yushchenko and Yanukovich on this question, NATO did not offer a MAP in Riga, understandably choosing to wait until the Ukrainian government could articulate a unified position in favor of a MAP.

This point has now come. In a January letter to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Yushchenko, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Rada (parliament) Speaker Arseniy Yatseniuk reiterated Ukraine's commitment to full integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and requested that Ukraine be granted a MAP at Bucharest.

Ukraine has a persuasive case. It has implemented significant reforms since regaining independence in 1991. As for political transformation, Ukraine is the only former Soviet state other than the Baltic nations to achieve a Freedom House ranking of "free," which it did in 2005, 2006 and 2007. Democratic elections have become the norm. Ukraine has held three national ballots over the past three years – the final round of the presidential vote in December 2004, Rada elections in March 2006, and preterm Rada elections in September 2007 – that were assessed by Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other monitors to be free, fair and competitive. While politics in Kyiv reflect an ongoing struggle for position and influence that is often not pretty, the struggle is largely based on democratic rules of the game. The country, moreover, boasts an increasingly professional and independent media that is unafraid to challenge power. Non-governmental organizations have flourished and have had real impact.

Ukraine has also made major progress on economic reform. It reversed the decline that devastated the economy during the 1990s and has achieved eight consecutive years of economic growth. Growth has averaged between six and seven percent per year, one of the most impressive growth rates in Europe or the former Soviet Union. Interestingly, Ukraine's growth rates are comparable to those of Russia. While Russia's economic boom since 2000 has been driven largely by the production and export of natural gas and oil, Ukraine has few such resources and instead must cope with dramatically rising energy prices. For example, Ukraine today pays more than three times the price for imported natural gas that it paid in 2005. Ukraine has put the basic institutions of a market economy in place and has begun to draw substantial foreign investment. The private sector now accounts for two-thirds of gross domestic product. Ukraine's trade patterns have increasingly oriented themselves toward European markets.

Ukraine likewise has made important strides in restructuring its military, moving from a large, Soviet-style army in 1991 to a much smaller, more mobile force that increasingly is configured to meet Ukraine's current security challenges and comply with NATO standards. Over the past 15 years, Ukrainian forces have acquired considerable experience in joint operations with NATO and American forces, often in the context of joint Polish-Ukrainian units created in the late 1990s.

Ukraine has moved well down the path of transforming itself into a modern European democracy, the kind of country that NATO has welcomed into its ranks over the past ten years. Indeed, Ukraine's progress in political, economic and military reform compares very well with the progress made by countries such as Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Romania when they received their MAPs in 1999.

Furthermore, Ukraine has demonstrated that it has serious military capabilities and the political will to use them. Ukrainian transport aircraft have provided strategic airlift to NATO forces; an agreement formalizing this cooperation was finalized in 2007. Ukrainian forces have participated alongside NATO and American troops in Balkan peacekeeping operations, such as in Bosnia and Kosovo. Ukraine deployed a chemical and biological weapons defense unit to Kuwait in 2003 and three battalions to Iraq in 2003-2005, making it at one point the fourth largest troop contributor to the coalition. Ukraine's military assets would make it a net contributor to Euro-Atlantic security.

The greatest weakness in Ukraine's case for a MAP is that ultimate entry into NATO does not now command broad support among the Ukrainian public. Opinion polls typically show that 25-30 percent of Ukrainians support membership, while some 50 percent oppose it. Much of this opposition may be related to a lack of understanding about how NATO has changed and what it is today. The Ukrainian government has stated its intention to conduct an information campaign regarding NATO and that, before submitting a formal request for membership, it would hold a referendum to gauge the views of Ukraine's citizens.

This should not disqualify Ukraine from a MAP. Other countries in the past have been granted a MAP despite low levels of domestic support for joining NATO. For example, polls showed relatively weak public support in Slovakia and Slovenia. But the governments of those countries used the period of their MAPs to broaden public support. Ukraine's leaders say that they will do the same. Polls in Ukraine have shown growing support for European integration, to the point where 60-70 percent of Ukrainians today favor joining the European Union. A MAP can help crystallize a consensus in Ukraine for full integration into the Euro-Atlantic community, including NATO.

Ukraine has demonstrated more than sufficient progress to qualify for a membership action plan, and NATO should agree to a MAP for Ukraine. Ideally, this will happen when Alliance leaders meet in Bucharest.

Washington has over the past 14 years led in shaping a forward-looking Alliance view on enlargement and on an open door for prospective members. I therefore hope that the U.S. government, over the next four weeks, will conduct an active diplomacy effort, working with other NATO members who support Ukraine's MAP aspirations, to achieve consensus by Bucharest. A MAP for Ukraine has been endorsed by the Senate in a unanimous vote on February 14, as well as in recent statements issued by Senators Clinton, McCain and Obama.

Georgia Considerations

I have been asked to briefly address Georgia. That country also has a long history of strengthening relations with NATO. Like Ukraine, Georgia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace in 1994. Then-President Edward Shevardnadze increasingly advocated his country's integration into the Alliance, as did President Mikhail Saakashvili, who came to power in the aftermath of the 2003 Rose Revolution. Georgia continued to develop relations with the Alliance and in September 2006 began an intensified dialogue.

Georgia has developed democratic political institutions, making an important break with the past following the Rose Revolution. However, the crackdown on demonstrators and imposition of a state of emergency last November represented a significant setback in the eyes of many Western analysts. Saakashvili attempted to recover by announcing a preterm presidential election, which was held on January 5. While observers noted a number of problems with the election, they concluded that, in essence, it was consistent with Georgia's democratic commitments under OSCE and the Council of Europe.

The Georgian government appears to recognize the damage done to its democratic credentials by the events of last fall. Since his reelection two months ago, Saakashvili has stressed the need for reconciliation, and the government has reached out to the opposition. Last week, the government and opposition agreed to the membership of a board on public television, and they are negotiating the rules for parliamentary elections to be held this spring. These elections provide Georgia an early chance to demonstrate anew its commitment to democratic principles.

Georgia has recorded dramatic progress on economic reform. The economy has grown each year since 2000, with the GDP growth rate exceeding nine percent in 2005, 2006 and 2007. The World Bank last year ranked Georgia the 18th easiest country in which to do business, reflecting the development of market economy institutions there. The new cabinet has made reducing the amount of state control in the economy a priority.

Georgia's military has changed in important ways over the past seven years. Largely as a result of the U.S. "train and equip" program, Georgia today has four battalions fully capable of operating with NATO forces. Two thousand Georgian troops currently are deployed in Iraq, and other Georgian forces serve under NATO command as part of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Such deployments demonstrate the kind of contribution that Georgia can make to Euro-Atlantic security.

In sum, Georgia has a solid case to support its request for a MAP. While its overall record on political, economic and military reform lags that of Ukraine, NATO membership has broad support among the Georgian people. In a referendum conducted in conjunction with the January 5 presidential election, 77 percent of Georgians expressed themselves in favor of Georgia joining the Alliance.

One other consideration affects Georgia. The breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia pose a special challenge for Tbilisi. This is complicated by the presence of Russian forces in those areas and overall Georgian-Russian tensions. Progress in settling these disputes and an easing of frictions with Moscow would undoubtedly ease concern among those NATO members reluctant to develop NATO-Georgian relations too quickly. The Alliance has made resolution of territorial conflicts on a prospective member's territory a prerequisite for membership. It has not, however, been a prerequisite for a MAP.

In sum, Georgia's progress to date is comparable to that of some states that in the past were awarded a MAP. NATO leaders should consider a MAP for Georgia, while reminding Tbilisi that nothing will strengthen its case for ultimate membership more than rapid consolidation of democratic institutions and practices. If NATO seeks a demonstration of Georgia's commitment to democratic practices, Alliance leaders could instruct foreign ministers to decide the question of a MAP for Georgia following the spring parliamentary elections. That would give the Alliance the opportunity to judge how Georgia has internalized the criticisms it received last fall as well as offer a powerful incentive for the conduct of free, fair and competitive parliamentary elections.

The Russia Factor

One cannot address the issue of MAPs for Ukraine and/or Georgia without considering the Russia factor. The Alliance has long made clear that any decision regarding membership is between NATO and the country concerned, and not subject to veto by any third party. Senior Russian officials have said that the decisions are for Kyiv and Tbilisi to make, but the Kremlin clearly does not like the idea of MAPs for Ukraine and Georgia. This reflects Russian unhappiness with NATO enlargement in general, even more so in light of Russia's effort to reassert special influence in the former Soviet space.

Part of this effort to reassert foreign influence stems from Russian disillusionment with what happened in the 1990s. It should be noted that NATO enlargement was not the cause of that disillusionment. The cause was weakness in Russia's internal structures as the country tried to organize itself and reconfigure its economy in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The economic bottoming out at the end of the 1990s and the sense of growing inequalities in wealth contributed to the disillusionment. These were internal Russian issues, not NATO questions.

Already in 1995, when NATO began formally to contemplate enlargement, the rationale in Washington and other NATO capitals for enlargement was to promote a broader, more stable and secure Europe, and to underpin the difficult political and economic

transformations being made by the Central European states on the Alliance's borders. NATO leaders made the point that the Alliance was not just a defense organization, but that it also represented a community of shared democratic and economic values. Spreading those values to NATO's neighbors benefited those countries, the Alliance and Europe as a whole.

The decision to enlarge NATO was not driven by anti-Russian motivations. Indeed, already in 1990, the Alliance began deemphasizing Moscow as a potential adversary and sought ways to promote cooperation. Shortly after deciding to proceed with enlargement, NATO members began to consider ways to develop a positive, forward-looking relationship with Russia. The decision at the May 1997 NATO-Russia meeting in Paris to establish the Permanent Joint Council aimed to put in place a mechanism to promote increasingly greater cooperation between NATO and Russia.

In advance of the second wave of enlargement, NATO made an effort to upgrade its relationship with Russia. The Permanent Joint Council became the NATO-Russia Council in 2002; NATO endorsed new areas for cooperation; and the Alliance agreed that members could discuss a number of issues in that forum on the basis of individual country views, rather than on the basis of a previously agreed NATO consensus.

In retrospect, Washington and other NATO capitals likely overestimated the Alliance's ability through greater NATO-Russian cooperation to ease Moscow's concerns about enlargement. Perhaps NATO members have not been as imaginative as they might have in developing new areas of cooperation with Russia. Perhaps the Alliance could have done more to change the image of NATO held by the Russian foreign and security policy elite and public, which appears to differ little from the image Russians held 20 years ago.

But Moscow bears a significant share of the responsibility for the failure to realize the potential of the NATO-Russia relationship. Moscow has failed to take full advantage of the opportunities of the past six years to thicken NATO-Russian cooperation. This appears due in part to a decision by the foreign and security policy elite to regard NATO as a main, if not the main, adversary. To be sure, one can appreciate that Russia is politically uncomfortable with NATO enlargement in the aftermath of the end of the Warsaw Pact and collapse of the Soviet Union. But it is difficult to understand the emphasis that senior Russian political and military leaders place on NATO as a military threat. Over the past 20 years, the Alliance has reoriented itself away from deterring and defending against a Soviet assault to peacekeeping in the Balkans, anti-terrorism efforts and coalition operations in Afghanistan.

NATO's military structure today looks nothing like it did 20 years ago. For example, at the end of the Cold War, the United States deployed some 300,000 troops, airmen and sailors in and around Europe, centered on four large, tank-heavy divisions based in Germany. The purpose was to deter and, if necessary, defend against a Soviet attack. Today, U.S. forces in and around Europe number around 50,000; U.S. nuclear weapons in Europe have been dramatically reduced; the force structure includes just two brigades in Germany; and the focus of U.S. forces in Europe is peacekeeping in the Balkans and

support for coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. NATO's European members have made similarly dramatic reductions in and transformations of their armed forces.

Moscow seems to ignore this. Given the stability of Russia's Western border as opposed to the threat posed to Russian security by radical Islam and instability in the Northern Caucasus and Central Asia, and the challenge of a rising China, Moscow's emphasis on defending against a supposed NATO "threat" is strategically puzzling.

NATO should continue to work to transform its relationship with Russia. To the extent that that relationship becomes one of increased cooperation, perhaps even partnership on some issues, the easier it may become for Russia to accept that some of its neighbors wish to integrate fully into the Euro-Atlantic community. But that will require that Russians adjust their view of NATO to reflect the realities of today's Alliance.

While the Alliance should not ignore Russian views, concern in Russia should not mean compromising another nation's aspiration to associate with an alliance of shared values that promotes stability and security throughout Europe. It would be a mistake to allow Russia a veto over the extension of MAPs to Ukraine and Georgia. To do so would be to accept a new dividing line between Europe and the former Soviet space. It would deny the opportunity to tens of millions to become full members of the Euro-Atlantic community. And it would encourage those in Russia who wish to reassert a Russian-led post-Soviet bloc rather than develop a relationship of cooperation and full partnership with Europe and the West. These effects would not be in the interest of the United States, of the Alliance or, ultimately, of Russia.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, members of the Commission,

NATO enlargement has been profoundly successful in achieving its goal of shaping a broader, more stable and secure Europe. The Alliance since 1997 has extended ten invitations to join, all of which have been accepted, and there is no reason to regret any of those decisions. The enlargement process has underpinned the dramatic political and economic transformations that have swept NATO's eastern flank over the past 20 years and strengthened the Alliance's ability to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Consistent with the logic of enlargement and the MAP process, NATO leaders should set in motion membership action plans for Ukraine and Georgia, to create the preconditions for consideration of membership for those countries at a later point.

Thank you.

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