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NATO AND RUSSIA

The NATO Allies regret Russia's decision to suspend contacts and to cease cooperation in a number of promising areas because of Allied air operations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Much has been achieved in NATO-Russia relations in recent years to the benefit of stability and security in Europe as a whole. The NATO Allies believe that security in Europe cannot be built without Russia, and that they must seek together with Russia to build trust and cooperation to overcome the divisions of the past, and to handle together security problems of the future.

This aim is central to The Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security signed by the Heads of State and Government of NATO member states and Russia in Paris on May 27, 1997. It represents a commitment by the two sides to help build together a stable, peaceful and undivided continent on the basis of partnership and mutual interest.

NATO and Russia face common security problems in the Euro-Atlantic region - from regional instability to proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It is only logical that NATO and Russia should work together to find common solutions to common problems.

The participation of Russian forces in the NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force in Bosnia (first the Implementation Force (IFOR), and then its successor Stabilisation Force (SFOR)) and the contribution these contingents have made to peace in that region are a powerful example of how NATO and Russia can work together on the basis of shared interests.

Since the Paris signing, Russia and NATO have made significant progress in developing their cooperation and fulfilling the aims of the Founding Act.

They have established the ***Permanent Joint Council (PJC)*** as a venue for consultations, coordination, cooperation and consensus-building between the Alliance and Russia and, where appropriate, for joint decisions and joint action on security issues of common concern. It has become the principal forum for exchanging views and developing security cooperation on the basis of mutual interest.

The PJC has held discussions on a wide-range of issues of mutual concern, including the situation in Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, peacekeeping, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, arms control, defence conversion, air traffic safety, terrorism and nuclear weapons issues.

In February 1999, the two sides had an exchange of views on the updating of Russia's military doctrine and the adaptation of NATO's Strategic Concept.

NATO and Russia have also undertaken a range of practical activities. NATO opened the first ever NATO Documentation Centre in Moscow in February 1998. An information centre to help retired Russian military personnel find new jobs in civilian life was to be opened this spring in Moscow under a joint venture to enable Russia to draw on know-how and assistance of NATO countries. For the time being, work on this project has been suspended.

Progress has been achieved in armaments-related issues. Joint activities were also under way under the recently-signed MOU on defence-related Scientific Cooperation. NATO and Russia pledged to continue their cooperation to deal with computer problems arising from the Year 2000 phenomenon.

NATO and Russia held very extensive negotiations on the situation in Kosovo. They could not agree on how to bring about a political solution to the conflict, although they both agreed that a political solution should be based on autonomy for Kosovo, not independence. The NATO Allies concluded that Belgrade was negotiating in bad faith, and that there was no alternative but to use force as a last resort to support the political aims of the international community.

In just under two years of cooperation under the ***Founding Act***, NATO and Russia started to move rapidly down the long road to enhancing not just their own security but that of all the states in the Euro-Atlantic region. The potential of the Russia-NATO relationship remains huge. The NATO Allies regret Russia's decision to break off dialogue at a time of crisis when close relations and discussion are all the more important. Meeting in Brussels on April 12 to discuss the Kosovo crisis, NATO Foreign Ministers noted that "the Alliance shares a common interest with Russia in reaching a political solution to the crisis in Kosovo, and wants to work constructively with Russia, in the spirit of the Founding Act, to this end."

The Permanent Joint Council (PJC) met for the first time on July 18, 1997.

What is its function?

– to develop trust and co-operation between NATO and Russia in order to address, through consultations, joint decisions or actions, security problems of common concern. Both sides retain the right to take decisions independently of the other.

Who meets?

– the PJC brings together the 19 member countries of NATO, and Russia. It has met regularly at various levels – that of Ambassadors, Foreign Ministers, Defence Ministers and Chiefs of the Defence Staff – throughout the year. The Heads of State and Government of the NATO Allies and Russia can also meet, if required. Chiefs of the Defence Staff and military representatives of NATO and Russia also meet under the auspices of the PJC.

High representatives of the NATO Allies and Russia can also meet in extraordinary session as has been the case on several occasions in the Kosovo crisis.