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NATO AND UKRAINE

A separate Summit meeting between the 19 leaders of the NATO member countries and President Kuchma of Ukraine, which will be held in Washington on April 24, will give fresh impetus to the Distinctive Partnership between the Alliance and Ukraine.

A joint declaration at the Summit meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, the first such at this level, will highlight the progress made in the relationship since the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership was signed in Madrid on July 9, 1997.

The Charter, which moved the cooperative relationship on to a qualitatively higher level, formally recognises the importance of an independent, stable and democratic Ukraine to European development as a whole.

The NATO Allies support Ukraine's sovereignty and independence, territorial integrity, democratic development, economic prosperity and its status as a non-nuclear weapon state as key factors of stability and security in Central and Eastern Europe.

In 1997 President Kuchma declared that Ukraine had made a "strategic choice of integrating in European and Transatlantic structures."

The Distinctive Partnership has opened up new opportunities for practical cooperation and consultation in such fields as civil emergency planning and disaster preparedness, civil-military relations, defence planning and defence conversion by means of seminars, working groups and other cooperative programmes.

"The Ukraine-NATO Charter on a Distinctive Partnership has opened up new avenues for further dynamism in relations between Ukraine and the Alliance in many areas ranging from reform and interoperability of the armed forces to handling ecological emergencies and economic workshops," said Ukrainian Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, speaking at the Wehrkunde security conference in Munich, Germany, in February.

The NATO-Ukraine Commission oversees development of the relationship. The Commission has met a number of times at Ambassadorial, and Foreign and Defence Ministers level. The Washington meeting is the first time it has met at Summit level.

The following are some of the concrete steps which have been taken in the relationship :

- A NATO Information and Documentation Centre, the first such centre in a Partner country, has been set up in Kyiv under a Memorandum of Understanding signed in May 1997. It aims to disseminate accurate information about NATO in Ukraine and, in so doing, correct old stereotypes left over from previous times. A new director has been appointed to head the centre.
- An MOU on civil emergency planning was concluded in December 1997, providing for cooperation in the field of disaster preparedness and other civil emergencies.
- A third MOU was signed in December 1998 providing for the posting of two NATO liaison officers - one civilian and one military - in Kyiv.

Ukraine, a prominent member of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, is playing a strong role in Partnership for Peace and seeking to fulfil a programme of activities that is both ambitious and attainable. The two NATO liaison officers will work in close contact with the Ukrainian authorities to further boost Ukraine's participation in PfP. Additionally, the NATO Allies have officially designated the Yavoriv defence training area, west of Lviv, as a PfP training centre.

Through a joint working group there has been progress in helping Ukraine reshape its defence establishment. Civil-military relations, budgeting and resource planning have been the subjects of several useful meetings. Seminars on the retraining of retired military personnel, and military downsizing and conversion have been held.

Ukraine contributes forces to the 32,000-strong, multinational SFOR (Stabilisation Force) peacekeeping mission in Bosnia. It submitted a number of candidates to serve in the Kosovo Verification Mission organised by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and offered its aircraft for use in the air verification mission in Kosovo.

Ukraine recently published a State Programme for cooperation with NATO until the year 2001, demonstrating Ukraine's intentions to take full advantage of the opportunities offered by PfP and the Charter.

In a two-day visit to Ukraine in July last year to mark the first anniversary of the signing of the Charter, Secretary General Solana emphasised that strong relations between the Alliance and Ukraine were vital for stability, security and prosperity in Europe.

During the same trip he visited the city of Dnipropetrovsk where he made a tour of the Pivdenmash rocket-making complex which, in Soviet times, used to produce the SS-18 nuclear missile but which now produces a range of goods mainly for the civilian sector.

In February this year, NATO's Political Committee, grouping representatives of the Alliance's member nations, paid a visit to Ukraine and heard the views of senior members of the country's leadership on how to push the relationship further forward.

NATO has publicly applauded steps taken by Ukraine to improve relations with its neighbours, particularly two new NATO Allies Poland and Hungary, and Romania and Russia.

NATO organises regular visits by groups from Ukraine to NATO headquarters as part of its information effort aimed at explaining its policies. It also publishes and distributes NATO publications in Ukrainian, including an occasional news bulletin called Novini NATO.