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NATO-Russia Council foreign ministers agree priorities to guide the Council's work

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From Vladivostok to Kaliningrad

In agreeing to establish the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in May 2002, President Putin brought his country closer to NATO and promoted NATO-Russia cooperation as one of Russia's key foreign policy directions. Four years later, in May 2006, Russian officials along with NATO and Allied representatives gathered in Vladivostok to launch the NATO-Russia Rally and then travelled across Russia, visiting eight other cities, to inform Russian people about the level of cooperation in the NRC and also to listen to people's perceptions of NATO-Russia relations.

From city to city, NATO and Russian officials were met in crowded university auditoriums and conference halls full of students, professors, experts and parliamentarians, as well as veterans and ordinary people simply wanting to learn more about NATO-Russia cooperation and to voice their opinions. From Vladivostok to Kaliningrad, officials had a real opportunity to discuss both formally and informally with Russians from all walks of life and get a true picture of Russian public opinion about one of the tenets of their country's foreign policy.

The initiative had the support of NRC foreign ministers, who endorsed it in December 2005. Moreover, at their latest meeting, in Sofia, Bulgaria, in April, they agreed on the need to give priority to heightening public awareness of the NRC's goals, principles and achievements.

The NATO-Russia Rally was the first joint action organised by NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and the Russian authorities, along with Allied embassies and consulates in the Russia. It proved to be a challenging event.

Was it necessary?

Among officials, it is clear that terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the consequences of failed states and regional conflicts constitute common challenges facing Russia and NATO member states alike — challenges that no single nation or security alliance can manage on its own.

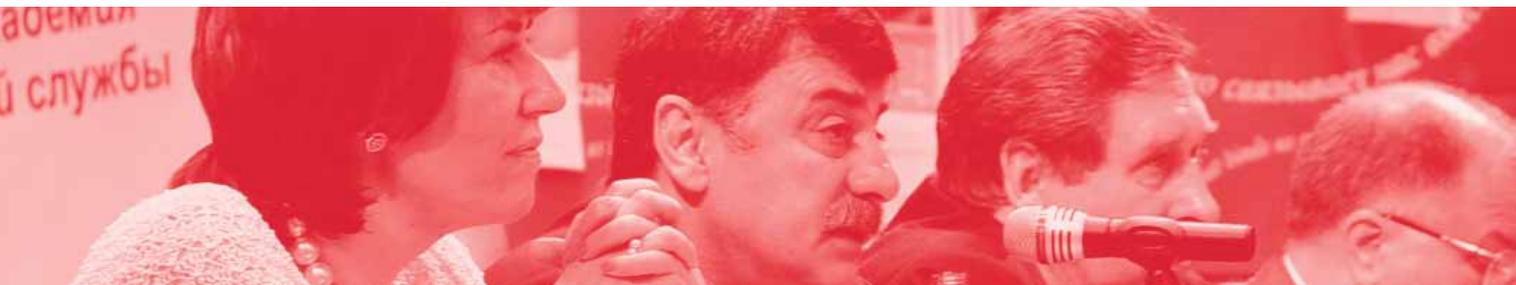
Yet, despite a solid record of NRC achievements in the last four years, public opinion in Russia does not seem to share the same level of commitment to NATO-Russia cooperation or perhaps simply the same level of knowledge. Past clichés remain deeply rooted among Russian people, many of whom still see NATO as an “aggressive military bloc”, “encircling Russia”, or simply a “military tool in the hands of American leadership”. It must be said that old stereotypes dating back to Cold War times are also perceptible in Western societies with regard to Russia, presenting their own set of challenges to the development of common understanding, but in Russia the problem is particularly acute.

Some argue that joint actions make the case for our partnership better than words. In 2006, military cooperation to prepare Russian naval personnel to deploy to the Mediterranean in support of NATO Operation Active Endeavour, as well as the launch of the NRC pilot project for training Afghan and Central Asian personnel in basic counter-narcotics skills, speak volumes about the common threats we face and the potential for joint efforts in the struggle against terrorism.

But still, many in Russia are not convinced. A recent poll conducted by the All-Russian Centre for the Study of Public Opinion (VCIOM)¹ indicates that 40 to 45 per cent of the population harbours negative feelings towards NATO. At times, certain Russian public figures tap into this large segment of the population, using these negative sentiments for their own political gain. Many still believe, after all, that it is “patriotic to be anti-NATO in Russia”, as one observer mentioned when reporting on the Rally from Volgograd².

¹ http://www.nato.int/docu/other/ru/stories/2006/pdf/vciom_report.pdf

² http://www.ng.ru/politics/2006-05-17/3_kartblansh.html



At a time of rhetorical confrontation, words do matter. Certainly, joint actions can speak for themselves, but making the case for NATO-Russia cooperation in front of our publics is critical. After all, NATO-Russia cooperation is a good story to tell!

Was it useful?

While the Rally's events were well attended, one should not forget that, according to the VCIOM poll, 44 per cent of the Russian population is simply not interested in learning more about NATO. Does this mean that public diplomacy in Russia is useless - of course not! However, it certainly points to the magnitude of the challenge.

In this context, the simple fact that a major public diplomacy event took place was no small achievement. For three consecutive weeks, not a day went by when NATO and its relationship with Russia were not discussed. While the impact of such activities is difficult to assess, simply managing to prepare and carry out such a project jointly in Russia was a success in itself.

For NATO officials and diplomats, experts from Allied countries, as well as for Russian officials based in Moscow, the Rally was a unique opportunity to reach out to a wider circle of Russian partners, beyond Moscow and St Petersburg. New contacts were established and projects for the months and years to come are being developed.

The very nature of the exercise was also unique: a "joint and combined operation" as some observers put it. As a NATO representative working in Russia, it was a rewarding experience for me to have the chance to speak to the Russian public jointly with Russian officials, for the first time. The Rally was also a rare opportunity to bring together various organisations based in Russia that are engaged in daily NATO-Russia business, such as the NATO-Russia Information, Consultation and Training Centre for the Resettlement of Military Personnel Discharged from the Russian Armed Forces, the NATO Military Liaison Mission, the NATO Information Office in Moscow, the Centre for European Security, the Association for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, and various NATO Contact Points. It reflected both our diversity and our common purpose. The core message was clear: what binds us together is a common desire to build confidence through dialogue and to make the best use of existing NRC opportunities.

The need for regular public exchanges was expressed throughout the country. A genuine interest in "institutionalising" this dialogue with the public prompted new ideas, from the

establishment of a permanent NATO-Russia forum to the creation of a NATO-Russia university - ideas which will no doubt be further discussed.

What have we learned?

The Rally underlined the need to do more together in terms of public diplomacy, particularly in Russia, in order to make the case for NATO-Russia cooperation in areas of common interest. While public diplomacy should first and foremost be the responsibility of national authorities it would be difficult today, on the basis of Russian public statements, to tell whether NATO is a partner, a competitor or a foe to Russia. In the spirit of the NRC, NATO public diplomacy efforts should build on the experience of working with Russian officials to create joint opportunities to address Russian publics on issues where our interests coincide, for example, by issuing joint articles, interviews and statements.

The Rally was aimed at the wider public. It sought to create space for open debate within civil society on the substance and direction of our unique relationship, and to provide people with additional information to allow them to make up their own minds about NATO and its cooperative efforts with Russia. In providing such a platform for dialogue, we should also be prepared to address sceptics and opponents to further NATO-Russia cooperation.



NIO Director Isabelle François (front) and a panel of speakers address a NATO-Russia Rally event organised at the Volgograd Academy of Public Administration on 17 May 2006

Public diplomacy is not about preaching to the converted, and should not simply be an exercise in “feeling good” about our achievements. In Russia, we need to address misunderstanding and misinterpretation, and to discuss genuinely difficult issues where our respective approaches may differ. On many thorny issues, NATO and Russia will continue to agree to disagree. While the public will have to get used to the fact that disagreement does not mean confrontation, officials will have to use every opportunity to engage with a clearly sceptical audience.

Stereotypes and old thinking often prevent genuine sharing of information. But providing accurate information is not sufficient to counter stereotypes successfully. What is also needed is a readiness to listen, to open up to new thinking and to be tolerant of different points of view. The Rally was a good exercise in both respects, and clearly a learning experience for all.

Isabelle François
Director NATO Information Office Moscow



Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov attends an informal meeting of the NATO-Russia Council in Sofia, Bulgaria

Priorities for NATO-Russia cooperation

At an informal meeting of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 28 April, foreign ministers agreed a set of priorities and recommendations to guide the NRC's work in the medium-term. Their decision was taken following a stocktaking of the NRC's activities, undertaken in spring 2006, which looked at progress achieved and challenges identified in the course of implementing the NRC agenda.

“For all we have achieved together, I believe that we can and should do better. We should look increasingly to this Council, not just as an umbrella for practical cooperation, but as a forum for frank and open exchanges of views and perspectives on issues where we agree and on those where the search for common ground continues,” said Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General and NRC Chairman, opening the meeting.

The overarching priorities agreed for future cooperation include:

- reinforcing the NRC's political dialogue;
- intensifying efforts to develop interoperability and to deepen cooperation on defence reform;
- intensifying cooperation in the struggle against terrorism;
- further developing mutual trust, confidence and transparency with regard to NATO and Russian armed forces;
- further developing interoperability and cooperation on crisis management;



- identifying areas for result-oriented cooperation on non-proliferation;
- heightening public awareness of the NRC's goals, principles and achievements;
- and seeking adequate resources to support NATO-Russia initiatives.

Top NATO general visits Russia

The Supreme Allied Commander for Europe, General James L. Jones, visited Russia from 19 to 22 April.

He met for two days with the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces, Army General Yuri Baluyevsky, and key members of his staff in Moscow. They discussed the NATO-Russia Interoperability Framework Programme, which aims to improve the ability of NATO and Russian forces to operate together, as well as ongoing NATO-led operations. In a joint press conference after the meeting, both generals were very positive about their talks and about the future of the NATO-Russia relationship. While in Moscow, General Jones also held consultations with Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and the Chairman of the Security Council, Igor Ivanov.



The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General James L. Jones (left), holds a joint press conference with the Russian Chief of Staff, Army General Yuri Baluyevsky, in Moscow

During his trip, General Jones also visited St Petersburg, where he met General Igor Yevgenevich Puzanov, Commander of the Leningrad Military District, to discuss interoperability and future training opportunities.

Cooperative Airspace Initiative

An important step was taken recently in the NATO-Russia Council Cooperative Airspace Initiative (CAI), with the 30 March decision by the NRC's CAI Working Group to launch the Initiative's implementation phase (Phase II).

The Cooperative Airspace Initiative was one of the first concrete projects launched in the NRC framework. Within a month of the NRC's creation, a decision was taken to set up a specific working group, chaired by NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Defence Investment, to initiate cooperation in the field of civil and military airspace control.

The purpose of the Initiative is to foster cooperation between NRC member states on airspace surveillance and air traffic management, with the underlying goal of enhancing transparency, predictability and the collective capabilities to fight against terrorist threat. Three phases are envisaged. Phase I involved the conduct of a feasibility study to identify the modalities for a Cooperative Airspace Initiative system aimed at improving civil-military coordination. Particular attention was paid to cross-border activities and to situations where civil aircraft could be used as weapons to conduct terrorist attacks. This study was completed and subsequently agreed in 2005.

Based on the study's recommendations, the working group agreed more detailed system requirements and developed a project plan for a low-cost solution using available commercial off-the-shelf hardware and software. International standards and data formats will provide for the sharing of air traffic data between centres in NATO countries and in Russia.

There are two specific objectives for Phase II. The first is to develop and implement a joint NATO-Russia capability for interoperability in air traffic management to enable the reciprocal exchange of air traffic data. The second is to develop and implement operational, training and exercise concepts and coordination procedures to counter terrorist threats to civil aviation. Phase III is the validation phase that will follow on from the

implementation phase. It envisages a series of exercises to verify the operational capability of the overall system and to enhance capabilities to combat terrorist threats to civil aviation.

The Cooperative Airspace Initiative is being financed through voluntary contributions from interested NRC member states.

Nuclear weapon accident response demonstration

NATO and Russian experts observed a nuclear weapon accident response capabilities demonstration exercise, CAPEX 06, at a military site near the city of Cheyenne in Wyoming, United States, from 20 to 22 June 2006. The event was held as part of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) work programme and emphasised the value of the NRC as a practical forum for consultation and discussion of matters of significant substance.

The United States invited the NRC Group of Nuclear Experts to attend the exercise, the third in a series of field demonstrations organised by NRC nuclear powers. The attendance of representatives of NRC member states at the exercise served to enhance practical cooperation and common understanding between NATO and Russia of nuclear weapon accident response procedures.



© 90th Space Wing, US Air Force

US emergency-response staff deal with the consequences of a simulated road accident involving a nuclear weapon convoy

CAPEX 06 simulated a scenario in which a nuclear weapon convoy was involved in a road accident. It focused on safeguarding weapon components and mitigating any consequences. The exercise was part of a regular series of US exercises held to practise interagency response procedures and to test the preparedness of emergency response services to safely and efficiently manage any possible incidents involving nuclear weapons. It involved civilians and servicemen of the US Department of Energy and Department of Defense, as well as local emergency services (police and medical personnel).

About 40 civilian and military experts from NATO, Russia and NATO headquarters attended the exercise. It was the first time that Alliance and Russian Federation representatives together observed a US exercise of this kind.

Moscow-based defence reform course

June 2006 saw the successful conclusion of the first academic year of a Moscow-based defence reform course for active-duty military officers serving at the Russian Ministry of Defence, which is sponsored by the NATO-Russia Council (NRC). The course was approved by NRC defence ministers in late 2004 as part of the 2005 work programme for NRC's working group on defence reform. The course was developed as part of the Group's efforts to enhance the exchange among NRC nations of experience in education and training in the context of defence reform.

Launched in July 2005, the course was developed in partnership with the Institute for US and Canadian Studies (ISKRAN) of the Russian Academy of Sciences and is led by Dr Sergey Rogov, the head of ISKRAN. After rigorous entrance exams, 11 students were accepted for the two-year programme, which awards a master's degree in International Relations. Conducted in the evenings and during weekends, the course involves lectures, seminars and individual tuition. The second academic year starts in September. NATO is supporting the project with a grant of €35 000 for its first academic year.



Russian frigate *RFS Pytliviy* (right) is berthed next to its UK training partner, the HMS Nottingham, at Souda in Greece

Russian ship continues training in Mediterranean

The Russian frigate *RFS Pytliviy* conducted mission-oriented training with NATO from 19 May to 4 June, as part of its continuing preparations for participation in NATO's anti-terrorism maritime operation in the Mediterranean, Operation Active Endeavour.

This training built on the experience gained by the frigate's crew members during their initial at-sea training period in February (see *NATO-Russia News 1/06*). This time, training extended beyond joint maritime maneuvering to include compatibility of systems, familiarisation with NATO standard procedures, and handling of classified information.

A NATO mobile training team embarked on the *RFS Pytliviy* at La Spezia, Italy, on 19 May. The next day, the ship visited the NATO naval command at Naples, before sailing on to Greece, where at-sea training took place with the HMS Nottingham as training partner.

It is hoped that the *RFS Pytliviy* will achieve full readiness for Operation Active Endeavour by September, so that it can start actively supporting the operation in the second half of 2006.

Turning former military personnel into entrepreneurs

The "NATO-Russia Information, Consultation and Training Centre for the Resettlement of Military Personnel Discharged from the Russian Armed Forces" (the NATO-Russia Retraining Centre) organised a conference on "The development of small and medium-sized enterprises by former military personnel in Russia" in Serpukhov on 11 May. The event brought together representatives of federal, regional and local administrations in Russia, diplomats from some Allied member countries, NATO staff and several former Russian military officers now working as entrepreneurs.

Participants identified several obstacles to the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises by former military personnel. These include the lack of knowledge in the areas of marketing, finance and legal regulations, as well as bureaucratic hurdles and difficulties in getting access to micro-credits in Russia.

This year the NATO-Russia Retraining Centre will start offering advice and consultancy to its trainees on how to become entrepreneurs. It will also seek to facilitate their contacts with financial institutions in Russia, some of which are beginning to develop micro-loan opportunities for small entrepreneurs. Possibilities to access credit from foreign partner banks are also being explored.

Looking at defence budgets and budgetary processes

The Russian Military District Officers' Mess in St Petersburg hosted a seminar on "Financial Planning, Costing Methods and Defence Budget Execution" on 30 May. It was co-chaired by Lyubov Kondratyevna Kudelina, the head of the Economic and Financial Service of the Russian defence ministry, and Patrick Hardouin, NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Regional, Economic and Security Affairs.

The event was organised under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) Working Group on Defence Reform and

Cooperation. It provided an opportunity for NRC member states to share experiences on different financial planning techniques, costing and procurement methods, as well as controlling and auditing tools used during the defence budget execution phase. Over 50 officials working on financial and budgetary matters attended this seminar, where presentations were given by experts from Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Norway, Russia and the United Kingdom.

The following day, a workshop was held on “Economic and financial terminology related to defence”.

Russia hosts meeting on modern society's challenges

The NATO-Russia Council (NRC) Committee on the Challenges of Modern Society met for the first time in Russia on 6 April. The meeting was hosted by the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, Valentin Stepankov. Committee members reviewed ongoing activities with the aim of launching joint concrete projects in the near future.

Progress on a short-term project on eco-terrorism was welcomed. It is seen as an essential tool to enhance international cooperation in order to be able to respond rapidly and efficiently to possible attacks on water resources and agriculture. Furthermore, with a view to developing a practical application for the work being conducted in this area, a planning grant for a future Science for Peace project has been awarded under NATO's science programme. This project would be devoted to creating a virtual centre to gather, organise and share information that is readily available and non-sensitive among participating countries in the event of a terrorist attack on environmental resources.

The Committee looked forward to a third workshop on oil-spill response operations in arctic climate conditions, which will be hosted by Canada in October.

A new proposal to use airborne sensors on military aircraft for environmental monitoring was also discussed. A workshop will be organised on this subject in Turkey in November.



NATO-Russia News aims to highlight different aspects of NATO's cooperation with Russia. It is based on *Novosti NATO*, a quarterly newsletter for audiences in Russia, which is published in Russian.

NATO Public Diplomacy Division

1110 Brussels, Belgium

Email: natodoc@hq.nato.int

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NATO Information Office

at the Embassy of Belgium

Ulitsa Mytnaya 3, 119049 Moscow, Russia

Tel.: +7 495 937 3640

Fax: +7 495 937 3809

Email: office@nio-moscow.nato.int

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