Partners in the southern Caucasus

NATO is deepening cooperation with its Partner countries in the southern Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This reflects the decision taken by Allied leaders at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004 to make partnership with the Caucasus region, as well as with Central Asia, a priority for the Alliance. It is part of NATO’s policy to reach out to strategically important regions, where security and stability is closely linked to wider Euro-Atlantic security.

For the southern Caucasus countries, NATO’s Partnership structures provide a multilateral framework through which they can address security threats. Partnership also enables them to draw on Allied expertise in adapting their defence institutions and capabilities to deal with these threats, and to benefit from Allied support in the pursuit of wider reforms.

In the last few years, each of the three countries has developed an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO, increasing the level of cooperation and tightening its focus on their respective reform priorities (see box p. 2). And in September 2006, NATO launched an Intensified Dialogue with Georgia covering the full range of political, military, financial, and security issues relating to the country’s membership aspirations (see box p. 3). While this is no guarantee that the country will be invited to join the Alliance, it is a measure of the scope and depth of its relationship with NATO.

These developments build on a history of progressively deepening cooperation between NATO and the three southern Caucasus countries, since the early 1990s. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia were early participants in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council – a forum for dialogue established by the Alliance in December 1991 as a first step in reaching out beyond the East-West divide to former Warsaw Pact members, which was later replaced by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. The three countries were also quick to take advantage of the opportunities offered by joining the Partnership for Peace – a major programme of practical bilateral cooperation that was launched in 1994.

At the Istanbul Summit in June 2004, the Allies decided to appoint a Special Representative to the Caucasus and Central Asia. Robert Simmons is the first to be given this responsibility. His role is to maintain high-level working contacts with regional leaders in order to promote regional security and assist Partners in making the best possible use of Partnership tools.

He works closely with regional officials as well as with colleagues in other relevant organizations such as the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. This helps to ensure that communication is ongoing and work is done in a complementary fashion.

His work in the Caucasus and Central Asia is supported by two liaison officers, one based in each region. Each liaison officer works directly in an advisory role with relevant government authorities on achieving the reform goals set out in their partnership programmes with NATO.
Partners in the southern Caucasus

The importance of fostering security in the region

The southern Caucasus is situated between the Black Sea to the west and the Caspian Sea to the east, bordering Russia, Turkey and Iran. The region is a crossroads of peoples and cultures, which has been of considerable geostrategic importance through the ages, and continues to be so today.

One important reason for the Alliance to want to promote dialogue and foster security in the southern Caucasus is that today’s key security challenges – terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failed states and regional conflicts – defy borders and can only be addressed through concerted international cooperation. NATO’s Partners in the southern Caucasus face the same threats as the Allies and also have a crucial role to play in addressing them, not least because they are in geographic proximity to areas of concern for NATO.

Another issue that affects both the Caucasus and the Allies is that of energy security. The region sits on key oil and gas transit routes, and Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea basin have significant oil and gas reserves. Promoting security in the region is in the interest of both energy-importing countries, which are looking to diversify their energy sources and supply routes, and energy-exporting and transit countries, which need to ensure the security of their industry and pipeline infrastructure.

The Caucasus is also a region currently undergoing rapid and significant change as countries there transition to democracy. Such transition periods are always complex and can be a source of instability. However, by supporting this process through the Partnership framework, NATO is helping to enhance stability and, in this way, improving the Caucasus countries’ prospects for economic and social development.

Another important security concern is the fact that all three southern Caucasus countries are involved in protracted conflicts with breakaway regions: Nagorno-Karabakh, officially part of Azerbaijan, is the subject of a bitter dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan; the Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia continue to be sources of tension in Georgia. NATO does not seek a direct role in the resolution of these conflicts.

Lower part of text:

Launched by the Allies after the Prague Summit in 2002, the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) was a new Partnership mechanism aimed at Partner countries with the political will and ability to deepen their relationship with NATO. Within a few years, all three Caucasus countries had developed an IPAP with NATO.

Set in a two-year timeframe, IPAPs are designed to bring together the various cooperation mechanisms through which each country interacts with the Alliance into an action plan that is sharply focused on supporting the country’s reform objectives. Under this arrangement, the individual Partner government sets out its reform plans, priorities and related timelines. NATO agrees to provide focused, country-specific advice and individual Allies seek to coordinate their bilateral assistance to better support the country’s domestic reform efforts.

By helping bring about institutional reforms, the IPAPs are making an important contribution to the democratic transition process in the southern Caucasus countries.
conflicts, but supports the efforts of other international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the United Nations, which have specific mandates for their mediation roles. Peaceful resolution of conflict is a core value of NATO, and NATO’s assistance to countries is contingent upon their continued pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution. In fact, this is at the heart of the commitments that NATO’s Partners in the southern Caucasus undertook when they joined the Partnership for Peace.

The framework for cooperation

Partnership is about more than practical cooperation – it is also about values. When Partner countries join the Partnership for Peace (PfP), they sign the PfP Framework Document. In doing so, Partners commit to respect international law, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Helsinki Final Act, and international disarmament and arms control agreements; to refrain from the threat or use of force against other states; to respect existing borders; and to settle disputes peacefully. The Framework Document also enshrines a commitment by the Allies to consult with any Partner country that perceives a threat to its territorial integrity, political independence or security. The purpose of these commitments and of the PfP programme as a whole is to build confidence and transparency, diminish threats to peace and build stronger security relationships with the Allies and with other Partner countries.

The essence of the PfP programme is the partnership formed between each Partner country and NATO. Cooperation is tailored according to the individual country’s needs, abilities and ambitions, and jointly implemented with the government. Partners choose from an extensive menu of activities to draw up two-year programmes of cooperation, known as Individual Partnership Programmes. The activities on offer touch on virtually every field of NATO activity, including defence-related work, defence reform, defence policy and planning, civil-military relations, education and training, military-to-military cooperation and exercises, civil emergency planning and disaster-response, and cooperation on science and environmental issues.

Over the years, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have chosen to be very active in the full range of activities under the PfP programme. They were among the first Partner countries to express an interest in the Individual Partnership Action Plan, when it was first launched in 2002 (see box p. 2).

In addition to bilateral cooperation, the Partnership framework for cooperation has an important multilateral dimension. This is embodied in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), which brings together the 26 Allies with 23 Partner countries in a forum for dialogue and consultation. Meetings of the EAPC are held monthly at the level of ambassadors, annually at the level of foreign and defence ministers and chiefs of defence, as well as occasionally at summit level.

EAPC members regularly exchange views on a wide range of security issues, including the evolving security situations in Kosovo and

GEORGIA’S INTENSIFIED DIALOGUE WITH NATO

NATO offered Georgia an Intensified Dialogue covering the full range of political, military, financial, and security issues relating to the country’s membership aspirations in September 2006.

This does not guarantee an invitation to join the Alliance. Any invitation would be performance-based and subject to the country implementing key reforms and achieving a number of benchmarks. These include a functioning democratic political system based on a market economy; fair treatment of minority populations; commitment to peaceful resolution of disputes; the ability and willingness to make a military contribution to the Alliance and to achieve interoperability with other members’ forces; and a commitment to democratic civil-military relations and institutional structures.

Through structured expert discussions, the Intensified Dialogue provides Georgia with concrete information on the rights and obligations inherent to NATO membership. It also allows NATO officials to examine in greater detail Georgian reform policy and capabilities. This helps identify key areas where Georgia needs to focus its reform efforts and where NATO-Georgia cooperation could be better targeted to facilitate progress. The Intensified Dialogue complements work under Georgia’s Individual Partnership Action Plan, which remains the key programme for cooperation on reform.
Afghanistan, where peacekeepers from Allied and Partner countries are deployed together. The EAPC has also taken initiatives to promote and coordinate practical cooperation and the exchange of expertise in areas such as combating terrorism, border security, and other issues related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and small arms and light weapons. Over the years, the EAPC has also promoted various seminars and workshops focused on practical approaches to fostering regional cooperation in the southern Caucasus.

To facilitate consultation and cooperation, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia have established permanent diplomatic missions to NATO Headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. They are also represented in the Partnership Coordination Cell at NATO’s operational command – Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), in Mons, Belgium – which facilitates their participation in training and exercises. As troop-contributors to NATO-led peacekeeping operations, they also have access to the briefing and planning facilities of the International Coordination Centre at SHAPE.

**Key areas of cooperation**

At first, partnership and cooperation between NATO and its Partners in the southern Caucasus focused on measures to promote transparency and build confidence. Over the years, cooperation has broadened and deepened. Key priorities today are to improve the ability of the forces of these countries to work with those of the Allies and other Partner countries in peacekeeping operations; tailored advice and support for defence and security-sector reforms; and practical cooperation to address shared security challenges. Other important areas of cooperation are disaster-preparedness, science and the environment, and public information.

**Security cooperation**

A significant focus of NATO’s cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia is to improve their ability to support NATO-led peacekeeping and crisis-management operations. Bilateral programmes and multinational exercises help to develop the capacity of their forces to work alongside NATO forces. Learning to speak a common language and developing interoperability in terms of standard procedures are essential.

Thanks to such preparations within the PfP framework, forces from all three Partners have deployed in support of NATO-led peacekeeping operations. Armenia has contributed to the peacekeeping force in Kosovo (KFOR) since 2004 within the Greek platoon, and is considering contributing personnel to the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Platoon-sized units from Azerbaijan are serving within Turkish contingents in both KFOR, since 1999, and ISAF, since 2002. Azerbaijan’s contingent in Afghanistan was doubled in 2007. Georgia has supported KFOR since 1999 and a company-sized unit continues to serve as part of the German brigade there, while a platoon-sized unit serves as part of the Turkish contingent. The country has also provided important support for ISAF, allowing supplies to transit through its territory, under an agreement...
signed with NATO in 2005. It also contributed a platoon-sized unit to serve in ISAF alongside a British battalion in 2004 to help provide security for the Afghan presidential elections. Further contributions to ISAF, including medical and special forces contributions, are currently being finalized.

The southern Caucasus Partners also contribute to the fight against terrorism through their participation in the Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism, which was launched in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States. Cooperation in this area includes sharing intelligence, and training and exercises to enhance counter-terrorist capabilities and border security as well as improve preparedness for managing the consequences of a possible terrorist attack.

**Defence and security sector reform**

Defence and security sector reform is an increasingly important area of cooperation with the southern Caucasus countries and is central to the IPAPs they have agreed with NATO. It is an area in which NATO and individual Allies have considerable expertise that the Partners can draw upon. Key priorities are to develop their capabilities to contribute to crisis-management and peacekeeping operations in the Euro-Atlantic area; to help develop the effective and efficient management of state defence institutions; and to promote civilian and democratic control of the armed forces.

The IPAPs strengthen political dialogue and tighten the focus of cooperation with NATO on democratic, institutional and defence reforms. Promoting institutional reforms, in particular, helps underpin defence and security sector reforms as well as supporting the transition towards democracy.

More specific and technical reforms in the defence area are discussed in parallel in the context of the the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP). It helps identify, develop and evaluate forces and capabilities which might be made available for NATO multinational training, exercises and operations. It also provides a framework for Partners to develop effective, affordable and sustainable armed forces as well as promote wider defence reform efforts. All three southern Caucasus countries have chosen to take part in PARP, which is offered to Partner countries on an optional basis. Under PARP, planning targets are negotiated with each country and extensive reviews measure progress annually.

Another key instrument is the Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB). Launched in 2004, the PAP-DIB encourages and supports Partners in building effective and democratically-responsible defence institutions. Its overall objectives include bringing the armed forces and defence and security-sector institutions under effective democratic and civilian control; making them more accountable and transparent; and ensuring they are appropriately sized, structured and funded to meet the requirements of the new security environment.

In Azerbaijan, €1.6 million have been invested in an ongoing project for the disposal and clearance of unexploded ordnance at the former military base of Saloglu and towns of Agstafa and Poylu. These munitions have caused a number of fatalities and injuries to the local populations.

In Georgia, €1.1 million have been devoted to a project for the destruction of some 500 ground-to-air and other missiles at the Ponichala and Chaladid bases. Completed in February 2006, this project has not only removed a security hazard, but has also prevented potential future environmental contamination. A second project in Georgia was launched in October 2007. With a budget of €478 000, it will support the destruction of stockpiles of close to 9 000 missiles.
Another priority for the Alliance is to support Partner countries through the NATO/PfP Trust Fund mechanism with demilitarization projects, aimed at addressing the problems posed by stockpiles of surplus and obsolete weapons and munitions. Two such projects have been launched in Azerbaijan and Georgia (see box p. 5).

Disaster-preparedness and response
Natural or man-made disasters can be overwhelming, even for the best-prepared countries. The repercussions of these disasters often cross borders and so can threaten the security and stability of entire regions. This is why cooperation with regard to effective disaster-preparedness and response (referred to in NATO circles as “civil emergency planning”) is essential and an integral part of partnership activities.

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia are working to improve their national disaster-preparedness and response capabilities in cooperation with NATO. Many activities in this area are undertaken within the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC).

The EADRCC was created in 1998 to coordinate disaster-relief efforts among the EAPC countries. It has, for example, helped coordinate assistance after severe flooding in Azerbaijan and Georgia in 2003 and 2005 respectively, and after forest fires in Georgia in 2006.

Exercises provide a valuable opportunity to assess capabilities in action and identify areas for greater cooperation in future. The southern Caucasus Partners have been participating in such exercises since 2000. In recent years, most EADRCC activities, including a number of exercises, have been initiated, organized and conducted in Partner countries. This reflects the high value that Partners place on cooperation in civil emergency planning, which represents the largest non-military component of PfP activities.

Science and the environment
Scientists and researchers from the southern Caucasus countries benefit from opportunities offered under the NATO Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Programme, which promotes collaboration, networking and capacity building among scientists from NATO and Partner countries. Activities supported include research, seminars, workshops and joint studies on security-related scientific issues and environmental concerns.

Collaboration is a tradition among scientists and a requirement for scientific progress. The networks created also fulfil a political goal of building understanding and confidence between communities from different cultures and traditions. Another objective is to promote the sharing and transfer of technology to help Partner countries address their particular priorities.

Aside from projects concentrating on research in specific areas, the SPS Programme also seeks to strengthen the scientific and academic communities in the southern Caucasus countries. The Virtual Silk Highway project aims to improve access to the internet for research facilities in the Caucasus and Central Asia through a satellite-based network. Networking Infrastructure Grants assist Partner countries’
research institutions by providing equipment that will improve the security level and quality of their telecommunications facilities.

Public information
Another key area of cooperation with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia is public information. Work is ongoing to build networks with universities, non-governmental organizations, and the press and media to increase public awareness of the Alliance and the benefits of cooperation with NATO, as well as engage civil society in dialogue on wider Euro-Atlantic security issues. Numerous activities, such as seminars, conferences, workshops and publishing projects, are organized by local non-governmental organizations with the support of NATO and in cooperation with state authorities.

Groups of opinion leaders from each of the three countries are regularly invited to visit NATO Headquarters and SHAPE for briefings about the Alliance. NATO officials often travel to the region to speak at public events. NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division has also supported the creation of information centres on NATO in each of the countries to serve as focal points for the dissemination of relevant publications and documentation.

NATO and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) have joined forces in the southern Caucasus to support a river monitoring project, funded under the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme. This initiative, which was launched in 2004 and will run till the end of 2008, seeks to reduce a potential cause of disputes related to common water resources.

Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia jointly use the Kura and Araks rivers and their divides. As is often the case with transboundary rivers, they share common problems related to water supply and river pollution due to agricultural and industrial activities. The project aims to establish a laboratory for water monitoring in each of the three countries with modern equipment, highly trained staff and standardized operating procedures.

The project also provides for the monitoring of radioactivity in the water to detect any radioactive isotopes which may be released into the water accidentally or intentionally as a terrorist act.
Milestones

1991  Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan declare independence from the Soviet Union.


1999  Azerbaijan and Georgia contribute forces to the Kosovo Force (KFOR).

2001  Georgia hosts its first NATO/PfP exercise, “Cooperative Partner 2001”.

2002  Georgia hosts NATO/PfP exercise, “Cooperative Best Effort 2002”.

Armenia and Georgia are connected to the Virtual Silk Highway.

Armenia begins participation in the PfP Planning and Review Process.

Azerbaijan contributes troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan.

2003  Armenia hosts its first NATO/PfP exercise, “Cooperative Best Effort 2003”.

Azerbaijan is connected to the Virtual Silk Highway.

2004  NATO’s Istanbul Summit places special focus on the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Georgia finalizes its first Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP).

Armenia contributes troops to KFOR.

Georgia contributes soldiers to ISAF to help provide security during the presidential elections.

2005  Georgia and NATO sign an agreement to permit ISAF supplies and personnel to transit through Georgia.

Georgia opens an information centre on NATO with the support of NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division.

Armenia and Azerbaijan finalize their first IPAPs.

2006  Armenia and Azerbaijan open information centres on NATO with the support of NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division.

NATO offers Intensified Dialogue to Georgia.

2007  Georgia hosts a NATO/PfP air exercise, “Cooperative Archer 2007”.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Individual web pages on NATO’s relations with each Partner:

Armenia:
www.nato.int/issues/nato-armenia

Azerbaijan:
www.nato.int/issues/nato-azerbaijan

Georgia:
www.nato.int/issues/nato-georgia

NATO publications are available from the E-Bookshop at:
www.nato.int/ebookshop

NATO Backgrinders provide information on different areas of Alliance policy and activity. They are published under the authority of the Secretary General and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion or positions of individual member governments.

NATO Public Diplomacy Division
1110 Brussels – Belgium
www.nato.int
natodoc@hq.nato.int

© NATO 2007