NATO-UKRAINE relations: The background

NATO's relationship with Ukraine dates back to the very first days of Ukraine's independence. In the quarter-century since, NATO and Ukraine have built a distinctive partnership which has consistently been strengthened over the years.

1992: The first outreach

Just four months after Ukraine's declaration of independence, NATO invited its representative to an extraordinary meeting of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, the body set up to shape cooperation between NATO and the states of the former Warsaw Pact.

All participants in the meeting declared their determination to "work together towards a new, lasting order of peace in Europe through dialogue, partnership, and cooperation" http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23994.htm?selectedLocale=en .

1994: The Partnership for Peace

At the Brussels Summit of 11 January 1994, NATO decided to launch "an immediate and practical programme that will transform the relationship between NATO and participating states. This new programme goes beyond dialogue and cooperation to forge a real partnership - a Partnership for Peace".

The Alliance put particular emphasis on its relationship with Ukraine and Russia, stating that "We believe that an independent, democratic, stable and nuclear-weapons-free Ukraine would likewise contribute to security and stability. We will continue to encourage and support the reform processes in both (Russia and Ukraine), and to develop cooperation with them, as with other countries in Central and Eastern Europe".

The summit declaration can be read at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_24470.htm?selectedLocale=en .

The founding principles of the PfP, to which all partners subscribed when they joined, included the "protection and promotion of fundamental freedoms and human rights, and safeguarding of freedom, justice, and peace through democracy", and "to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State, to respect existing borders and to settle disputes by peaceful means."

The PfP document can be viewed at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_24469.htm?selectedLocale=en

Ukraine joined the PfP less than a month after it was inaugurated, on 8 February 1994. Only four countries (Romania, Lithuania, Poland and Estonia) were quicker to join the partnership.

Following its signature, Ukraine deployed troops to the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Bosnia.

1997: The NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership

On 9 July 1997, NATO and Ukraine signed a charter establishing a distinctive partnership and declaring their intention to "further broaden and strengthen their cooperation and to develop a distinctive and effective partnership, which will promote further stability and common democratic values in Central and Eastern Europe".

The Charter set out a wide range of areas for potential cooperation, including civil emergency planning, military training and environmental security.

It established the NATO-Ukraine Commission as a body where NATO Allies would regularly meet with Ukraine to "ensure that they are developing their relationship and implementing the provisions of this Charter to the fullest extent possible".

The Charter can be read at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_25457.htm?selectedLocale=en

In the years following the signature of the Charter, cooperation between NATO and Ukraine quickly developed. For example, NATO established trust funds to help dispose of toxic waste and to provide retraining for former military officers; provided advice and expertise on defence reforms and democratic oversight of the security services; and invited Ukraine to participate in NATO-led exercises. Ukraine contributed forces to the NATO-led missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo.

2002-2008 Strengthening the partnership

In May 2002, then-president Leonid Kuchma announced his country's aspiration to join NATO. The same month, and in that context, NATO foreign ministers meeting in Reykjavik stated their intention to "give new impetus and substance to our partnership with Ukraine", while encouraging Ukraine to "implement the reforms required to achieve this objective" (statement at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_19577.htm?selectedLocale=en).

In the following years, NATO agreed to an action plan of cooperation with Ukraine, signed an agreement on the provision of strategic airlift, and established trust funds to dispose of excess munitions and small arms.

Following the "Orange Revolution" of 2004-05, NATO and Ukraine launched an intensified dialogue on cooperation. Ukraine contributed ships to the counter-terrorist Operation Active Endeavour and troops to ISAF in Afghanistan.

2008: The Bucharest NATO Summit

At the NATO Summit in Bucharest on 3-4 April 2008, Alliance leaders declared that "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia". (Declaration at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-BF633930-27611814/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm?selectedLocale=en , paragraph 23.)

On 21 August 2009, NATO and Ukraine approved a joint declaration strengthening the role of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, reinforcing their cooperation and supporting Ukraine's political, economic and defence-related reforms. (Declaration at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_57045.htm?selectedLocale=en)

2010: Reinforced partnership

When, in 2010, newly-elected president Viktor Yanukovych announced that his country would in future have non-bloc status, but would continue practical cooperation with NATO at the same level as before, NATO respected that announcement.

At the Lisbon NATO Summit on 20 November 2010, Allied leaders stated that "Recognising the sovereign right of each nation to freely choose its security arrangements, we respect Ukraine's policy of 'non-bloc' status. NATO remains committed to providing the relevant assistance to Ukraine for the implementation of wide-ranging domestic reforms. We welcome the Ukrainian Government's commitment to continue to pursue fully Ukraine's Distinctive Partnership with NATO, including through high-level political dialogue in the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and reform and practical cooperation through the Annual National Programme."

They reiterated their commitment to the Bucharest decision, and welcomed Ukraine's interest in developing new areas of cooperation. (Summit declaration at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm?selectedLocale=en)

Subsequently, Ukraine joined NATO's exercise "Steadfast Jazz" and became the first partner country to contribute a ship to the counter-piracy Operation Ocean Shield. NATO continued to support Ukraine's defence and democratic reforms.

2014: The Russia-Ukraine crisis

When Russia launched its illegal military action against Ukraine, the North Atlantic Council met in emergency session to discuss the implications. On 2 March 2014, the Council stated that "NATO Allies will continue to support Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity, and the right of the Ukrainian people to determine their own future, without outside interference," and agreed that "military action against Ukraine by forces of the Russian Federation is a breach of international law and contravenes the principles of the NATO-Russia Council and the Partnership for Peace" (statement at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_107681.htm?selectedLocale=en). The same day, they held an emergency session of the NATO-Ukraine Commission.

On 5 March the NATO-Russia Council met to discuss the crisis. Afterwards, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_107743.htm?selectedLocale=en) that NATO Allies had decided to reinforce their support to Ukraine's reforms through enhanced political dialogue, further exercises, and building the capacity of the Ukrainian forces.

On 1 April 2014, the foreign ministers of NATO Allies and Ukraine issued a joint declaration (http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/news_108499.htm?selectedLocale=en) condemning Russia's actions and agreeing on concrete measures to enhance Ukraine's ability to provide for its own security, including capacity building and capability enhancement in the armed forces.