

**16 SEPTEMBER 2023**

**OPENING REMARKS FOR THE 2023 NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE CONFERENCE, OSLO, NORWAY**

Your Excellency, Chiefs of Defence, Strategic Commanders, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

*Mesdames et Messieurs,*

*Nous sommes honorés de réunir notre conférence annuelle ici à Oslo, à l'invitation des autorités norvégiennes.*

We are honoured to convene our annual conference here in Oslo, at the invitation of the Norwegian authorities.

We have for the first time at our table the new Chief of Defence from Türkiye: General Metin Gürak. Metin, welcome to our club and we look forward to hearing your contributions and advice.

Then, on behalf of the whole Military Committee and Invitee Sweden, I want to thank our hosts for the incredibly warm welcome and the generous hospitality, the “gjestfrihet”, they have shown us since our arrival.

We extend our gratitude to the Minister of Defence, Mr Bjørn Arnild Gram [Byoern Arnild Gram]: we are honoured to have you in our midst today.

And to our brother in arms, the Norwegian Chief of Defence General Kristoffersen.

Dear Eirik,

Thank you for all you and your staff have done to host 1000 years of military experience here at this table. The Norwegian Armed Forces have always been a keen contributor to NATO's missions and operations. And I know that you yourself are a staunch supporter and initiator of cooperation between Allies. To give an example: in the Military Advice that you published last May, the acronym “NATO” is listed 100 times in a 72-page document. I think that gives a fair impression of how closely “NATO” and “national” are intertwined.

And that brings me to the theme of this year's Military Committee Conference: never before have NATO and national defence plans been so closely interlinked.

The plans that Allies agreed in Vilnius will impact the development of all our armed forces for decades to come. We are taking bold steps to further strengthen our deterrence and defence posture.

The centrepiece of all this are the DDA family of plans. This includes the Regional Plans, which are geographically specific plans that describe how we will defend key and relevant places within our Alliance. The Regional Plans are underpinned by objective, threat-based

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Force Structure Requirements, which detail precisely which assets or capabilities are required in a crisis or conflict scenario.

Needless to say, these plans and requirements are living documents. They will be updated as the threats that face us develop. Meanwhile, we are decidedly turning them into action.

Today, we will discuss executability. And that includes:

- More troops at higher readiness;
- Capability building and development;
- Adaptation of NATO's command and control structures;
- More enablement, which includes logistics, host nation support, maintenance, military mobility, and replenishment and prepositioning of stocks;
- And crucially: it involves more collective defence exercise and training.

Because NATO and national defence plans are now so closely interlinked, it is crucial that we not only firmly move forward... but that we also closely consult each other every step of the way.

I am immensely proud of how the NATO Military Authorities have steered the process leading up to these plans. I say that specifically in the presence of our Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Chris Cavoli and our Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Philippe Lavigne.

Chris, Philippe: your inspiring, bold leadership plays a key part in making sure that this Alliance is ready to expect the unexpected: today, tomorrow and at any time in the future. On behalf of the Chiefs of Defence, thank you for all that you and your commands do.

This gathering comes at a time when the Rules Based International Order is under severe pressure. Around the world, and also in our own countries, people are growing increasingly divided and threat levels are going up.

Therefore, it is crucial that we, the NATO military leadership, continue to make sure that the men and women in uniform who serve our Alliance have what they need to protect all we hold dear.

Together, we are protecting much more than physical safety. We are protecting freedom, democracy and the sovereign rights of nations and people to determine their own destiny.

Just like the Norwegian Armed Forces motto, we fight for everything we have and for everything we are: *for alt vi har, og alt vi er*.

We do that by coming together, finding compromises and moving forward as one. By putting the "we" before the "me".

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But let me stress here that that does not mean the “me” is not important anymore. Collective defence starts at home. Having a strong national defence is a key part of contributing to international defence.

In our “all for one, one for all” organisation, it is important that we work on the ONE as well as the ALL.

Every day we are in awe of our Ukrainian brothers and sisters in uniform. They are fighting a war on an unprecedented scale, in uncharted doctrinal territory. History books will show: Ukraine has transformed modern warfare. And they are moving forward every day. Every success is one step closer to victory.

Meanwhile, the Russian Armed Forces keep losing more and more ground and the whole of Russia is suffering under the impact of economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Russia is forced to cooperate with unreliable actors, growing ever more dependent. And yet: the Russian leadership still believes that it will outlast the collective resolve of the Ukrainian people and all those who stand with them.

Russia has been preparing for confrontation for years. And they are willing for their population and their economy to endure unending hardships in order to regenerate military capabilities. In addition, their misinformation machine is making widespread attempts at sowing discontent and divide within western democracies.

President Putin wanted NATO divided and made every attempt to do so. And yet here we stand: more united than ever.

United in our belief that the rule of law applies to all. That conflicts should be solved in the court room, not on the battlefield. And that self-determination is an unalienable right. From the first day of Russia’s war against Ukraine until the very last, and also during the many many years after that, we will support Ukraine in its rightful choice for freedom and democracy. And we will stand together to protect all we hold dear.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Once Sweden joins, we will have a band of 3.5 million brothers and sisters in uniform who protect our great Alliance. They see together what they cannot see alone. They do together what they cannot do alone.

The military profession brings immense opportunities. But it also requires immense sacrifices.

On behalf of the Military Committee, I want to express our deep gratitude and respect for the men and women who serve our Alliance. We thank them for their courage, their professionalism, and their dedication.

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I would like to now take a moment to remember the men and women who paid the ultimate price for our freedom. And all those who are dealing with the physical and mental effects of their time in service.

We honour their sacrifice. We respect their courage.  
Please stand.

[Moment of Silence]

Now, I would like to hand the floor over to General Kristoffersen for his opening remarks.  
Eirik, the floor is yours.

Thank you. I now hand the floor to Minister of Defence Bjørn Arnild Gram.

Minister, the floor is yours.

Thank you for your inspiring words. We are honoured by your presence at this official opening.

I would like to thank the media for being with us for this official opening. At the end of today's conference, General Kristoffersen and I will brief you on the outcomes of our discussions.

Minister Gram, General Kristoffersen and I will walk you out before returning to start our first session of the day.

Thank you.