

**Opening remarks, Norwegian Minister of Defence, Bjørn Arild Gram.
NATO MCC opening 16 September 2023**

- **Dear Chair, dear friends – dear NATO family.**
- **Welcome to Norway, to Oslo and welcome to Holmenkollen.**
- **The city of Oslo has a rich history, reaching more than 1000 years back – but it has not always been as peaceful as today. Like many other European Capitals, Oslo has seen its fare share of war and atrocities.**
- **The city was burned to the ground in the 16th century by its own citizens and the attacking Swedes during the “Nordic 7-year war”.**
- **We have stopped burning our cities when swedes are visiting these days. And now, they are even in the process of becoming our allies in NATO. Which we are very pleased with by the way...**

Main Messages

- **I would like to focus on four topics during these opening remarks.**
- **Firstly; NATO’s key role in the High North.**
- **Secondly; burden sharing and the need to remain committed to the transformation of NATO.**
- **Then Ukraine –**
- **Finally, the importance of securing full accession of Sweden.**

NATO in the north

- **NATO is a cornerstone in Norway’s security policy today, as it has been since its foundation – and Norway takes**

active part in the shaping of NATO's strategy throughout the alliance.

- The relevance of the High North is steadily increasing as a stage for global competition.
A large portion of Russia's nuclear capabilities are located at the Kola Peninsula, including its carriers. The importance of this capability has grown proportionally with the decline of Russia's conventional capabilities.
- The vast amount of natural resources in the High North is important to us all. Not only Norway and Russia.
- We share a common responsibility to exploit and preserve these resources both in our time, but also for future generations.
- In order to achieve that the baseline is security and predictability.
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- NATO is - and will remain the most important security provider for peace and stability in the area.
- Our deterrence posture in the region will grow stronger as we are welcoming Finland and Sweden into the Alliance. The Allies in the region have a particular responsibility for developing NATO's deterrence in the High North. Both in terms of troop contributions and posture calibrations.
- The deterrence posture relies upon not only sea lines of communications, but strategic lines of communications. This includes infrastructure in space and on the seabed floor. Such an effort is a huge undertaking for the Alliance in the time ahead of us and should not be taken lightly.
- I am pleased to see that NATO is on the front foot in this regard.

A most welcoming step was the positive signals on the initiative made by Norway and Germany regarding protection of undersea infrastructure.

- **The development of the regional plans is progressing well and I would like to express a big thank you to SACEUR for your leadership in this matter.**
- **With all of the Nordic countries together in NATO, we can better reap the benefits of our well-established cooperation by affiliating all the nations to Joint Force Command Norfolk. This recommendation is based on sound military advice from all the Nordic CHODs.**
- **Between the Nordic nations, there is a close dialogue on how the defence cooperation should develop to bolster not only the defence of this region, but also benefit the security of the alliance as a whole.**
- **Joint Force Command Norfolk is on a path of becoming the HQ capable of taking charge in the north-western direction. We need to continue to bolster our effort to set the conditions for this to happen sooner, rather than later. Norway will do its part to ensure JFC Norfolk meet the requirements to command its regional plan. And SACEUR has to decide when the time has come.**

Then burden sharing

- **Proper resourcing is essential for our collective defence modernisation effort.**

- **Norway have committed almost our entire force structure at the Force sourcing conference.**
- **We also support broadening the use of common funding to meet new requirements.**
- **The Norwegian Government recognizes the importance of burden sharing in the alliance.**
- **That is why we are committed to reach and sustain a minimum of 2% of our gross domestic product (GDP) on defence spending.**
- **We will present a detailed plan to NATO after our new long-term defence plan has been approved by Parliament in the Spring of next year.**

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Ukraine

- **We, as allies, stand firm together in the support of Ukraine against Russian aggression.
The Russian invasion of Ukraine must fail.
This is important for Ukrainian and European security.**
- **Norway's support to Ukraine's defence remains steadfast, and we will continue to provide military and civilian support.**
- **There is political agreement in Norway on a multi-year support programme for Ukraine, at approximately 7,5 billion Euro, distributed over five years.
This will be done through the Nansen support programme for Ukraine.**
- **NATO must continue to stand together with Ukraine, opposing Russian aggression in whatever form it will take.**

- Hence Norway has decided on a long term commitment to help fund NATO's CAP program as well.

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- Finally, Sweden:
- We need to secure the full accession of Sweden. It is time. We have waited long enough.
- This is crucial to Swedish security, to Nordic security and it will enhance the security of NATO as a whole.
- With the Nordic countries united in NATO, the deterrence posture of the alliance will benefit the whole of Europe.
- Norway is ready to provide support to our Nordic neighbours every way we can to make sure the transition to the alliance goes as streamlined as it should.
- Together with our Nordic colleagues, we are ready to prepare a coherent defence planning for the whole Northern Europe, firmly based on the NATO-framework.

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- I wish you all the best in your fruitful discussions during the conference today.
- Once again, welcome to Norway, welcome to Oslo, and thank you for your attention.