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Statement to the press

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by the NATO Secretary General

Good afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to see you all back here in the more familiar surroundings of Brussels. We all worked hard and successfully in Washington. I am grateful to you for all your efforts.

There will be the usual military briefing after my press conference today at 4.30 pm. This will give you more information on yesterday's operations.

What I would like to do today is put the Summit conclusions into perspective.

The Washington Summit was a turning point in NATO's history. It shows that NATO is building for the future and that we are making the Alliance fit for a much broader spectrum of security tasks in the 21st century.

The new Strategic Concept will give NATO the ability to shape the international security agenda. Enlargement will remain a vital part of NATO's evolution. The door will stay open and we will help the candidate countries prepare more actively for the day when they will be ready to join us. In the same way, we will promote a wide-ranging partnership with the other countries in the Euro-Atlantic area. Our successful meetings in Washington with partners demonstrated how strong these links are becoming.

In Washington we also set out an agenda for the further development of the European Security and Defence Identity. We completed all the work following from our decisions in Berlin in 1996. We also set out a perspective as to how NATO and the European Union can work together to build the European Security and Defence Identity of the future in an Trans-Atlantic context and in a way which will involve all Allies.

Let me now turn to the major topic Kosovo. The Washington Summit showed that after 5 weeks of Operation Allied Force NATO is more united and determined than ever. We do not only proclaim our principles. We also defend them. Otherwise we would not be able to ensure that Europe will begin the 21st century as a peaceful and stable continent.

More than ever, I am confident that we will succeed. We have 3 key strengths.

First, the Alliance is rock solid and we have the international community

behind us. Last Sunday our partners in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council joined us in Washington. These countries have different backgrounds and different cultures and religions. But they all made clear in Washington that they support our objectives. They understand why we have been forced to act and they want us to continue. I had the opportunity to meet many of the leaders of our Partner countries on a bilateral basis and I felt their solidarity directly. One leader, President Shevardnadze of Georgia expressed that support yet again publicly in his speech to the Council of Europe yesterday.

In addition to the meeting of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council we had a very important Summit with the 7 countries neighbouring Yugoslavia. They also gave us their full support. Living next door to Milosevic, they understand more than others the importance of NATO standing up to the policies of his government. They know that our success is vital to their future security and stability. They are giving us a good deal of practical support, for instance overflight rights, transit rights and agreeing to host our forces on their territories. But we are also helping them. Our troops are helping them to deal with the refugee crisis. NATO countries are providing financial and other support. And NATO has reassured them that would not allow them to be threatened or attacked by Yugoslavia. The second reason why I am confident that we will prevail is that we have clear objectives which alone can bring a lasting peace to the region. That is why we are insisting on these objectives because we know that anything else would represent postpone the crisis and leave justice undone.

At the same time NATO is not only interested in winning the conflict. We also want to build the lasting peace and stability of the region that will follow it.

In Washington we set out our vision of a South-East Europe that would be at peace, stable, prosperous and increasingly integrated into the European mainstream. We will work hand in hand with the other institutions to achieve this vision. But NATO will have an important role to play.

- We will establish a consultative forum to discuss security issues with the countries of the region.
- We will meet with them on a 19+1 basis.
- We will promote regional cooperation within the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council.
- And we will use the resources of the Partnership for Peace to give them more direct and focussed assistance in addressing their security concerns.

We also welcome the proposal of the European Union to convene a conference on a stability pact for South-Eastern Europe on 27 May. EU Foreign Ministers have also agreed to consider ways of strengthening their relations with Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

We will need to look ahead to the process of reconstruction that must

follow the end of the Kosovo crisis. The G7 and financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF stand ready to offer their financial help and practical advice to the countries of the region.

The Serb people can also be part of this vision - if they so wish. Our quarrel is not with them but with the government of Milosevic - a government which has ruined the Yugoslav economy and made Yugoslavia a pariah state in the international community. The Serb people deserve an alternative - a vision of a democratic Serbia integrated into the rest of Europe and enjoying the same benefits of cooperation and integration. We will offer them such an alternative. I hope they will grasp it.

The third and final reason why I am confident is that our air campaign is working. SACEUR set out for you yesterday the achievements of the air campaign thus far. I will not repeat what he said. You should remember that thus far the weather has been on Milosevic's side. We have achieved all this despite the fact that on two thirds of the days of the air campaign more than half our strike sorties had to be cancelled. But the weather will get better.

At the Washington Summit we decided to intensify the air campaign. There will be more sorties flown by more aircraft looking for more targets.

At the same time we are continuing to deal with the humanitarian situation. The forces in our operation Allied Harbour are arriving in Albania. They are working closely with UNHCR and the international agencies. They are transporting refugees away from the border areas, helping to build refugee camps and delivering much needed assistance and medical supplies.

In Washington we sent a clear and simple message to Milosevic. NATO is going to win and he is going to lose. It is not a question of if but of when. Milosevic can end our air campaign only by accepting the key objectives of the international community. Meanwhile he bears and will continue to bear the full responsibility for what is happening to his country today.

NATO has come back from the Washington Summit in a united and strong position. In the days ahead we will translate this unity and strength into concrete achievements. And we will not let up in our pressure until Kosovo is at peace and the region can look to a brighter future.

