



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

POLITICAL COMMITTEE (PC)
Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships
(PCNP)

**MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE
EAST SPECIAL GROUP (GSM)**

MISSION REPORT*

Istanbul and Adana, Türkiye

14-17 June 2022

147 JOINT 22 E | Original: English | 18 July 2022

* This Mission Report is presented for information only and does not represent the official view of the Assembly. This report was prepared by Paul Cook, Director of the Economics and Security Committee.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine gravely threatens security in the Black Sea region, eviscerates freedom of navigation there and accordingly has had serious economic consequences for the countries along its littoral. While Türkiye, like other NATO Allies, must contend with the fallout from Russia's brutal war, its leaders also stress that security challenges from the south, including terrorism, cannot be neglected.
2. This was a central message delivered to members of a NATO Parliamentary Assembly delegation that visited Istanbul and Adana from 14-17 June 2022. The delegation was led by [Marcos Perestrello De Vasconcellos](#) (Portugal), Chair of the [Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships](#), [Fernando Gutierrez](#) (Spain) and [Manousos Konstantinos Voloudakis](#) (Greece), Vice Chairs of the [Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group](#). [Osman Askin Bak](#) (Türkiye), the head of the Turkish delegation to the NATO PA, served as host to the delegation over the four-day visit to Istanbul and Adana.

II. TÜRKIYE'S FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY PRIORITIES

3. With NATO leaders preparing for a pivotal Summit in Madrid at the end of June, Türkiye's Minister of National Defence, **Hulusi Akar** told members of the Assembly that Allies need to reaffirm a 360-degree perspective of the broad range of threats that they confront so that NATO remains fit for purpose. A successful fight against terrorism, he added, demands cohesion, solidarity and unity. He also suggested that non-EU NATO members should be able to participate more deeply in EU military-oriented projects.
4. Minister Akar stressed Türkiye's firm support for Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and noted that his country has provided substantial military assistance to Ukraine that has had an impact on the battlefield. Türkiye does not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea and sees Russia's war as a grave violation of the international order. Türkiye had also increased its contribution to NATO's collective defence arrangements through a higher readiness of its forces assigned to the NATO Response Force, contributions to air policing and surveillance, and support for NATO's new battlegroups on the Eastern flank.
5. The Defence Minister told the delegation that the government of Türkiye feels that it is uniquely positioned to advance negotiations to achieve a peaceful settlement between Russia and Ukraine and has sought to do so in very difficult circumstances. It has hosted talks between Russia and Ukraine and urged both sides to agree a ceasefire and begin to find a diplomatic solution. Türkiye is also exploring with Russia and Ukraine the possibility of establishing a safe corridor for the export of grain but must contend with the proliferation of mines in waters off the shore of Ukraine as well as deep mistrust and apprehensions.
6. Türkiye has the longest coastline along the Black Sea and does not want it to be an arena of international tension. The Montreux Convention, which charges Türkiye with a stewardship role over the straits, is a pillar of the regional security order. That convention has long insured balance and stability and Türkiye is dedicated to upholding it. The problem today is that freedom of navigation in these waters has been undermined.
7. This grave security crisis now demands vigilance, the Minister suggested, including a higher degree of readiness for NATO response forces. Türkiye has supported new battlegroups and has deployed air assets into the Black Sea region. At the same time, NATO must also contend with other challenges including evolving hybrid threats, terrorism, extremist ideologies, frozen conflicts, mass migration and climate change. The Defence Minister noted

that the emerging technologies are also shaping the security environment. Massive data collection capabilities have changed fundamental norms while creating both risks and opportunities.

8. During the meetings, several Turkish interlocutors referred to their country's security concerns in connection with Sweden and Finland's NATO membership bids. As diplomatic efforts, including those led by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg continued, visiting NATO Parliamentarians expressed hope that these would succeed in removing the obstacles for Finland and Sweden's accession processes, stressing that their membership would strengthen the Alliance.

9. Both the Defence minister and Interior Minister **Süleyman Soylu** pointed to the threats to Türkiye posed by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), the YPG (People's Defense Units) and the Gülen movement. They defended Türkiye's right to prevent these groups from fundraising and recruiting. They noted that Türkiye was committed to and plays a proactive role in the fight against terrorism in all its manifestations. This includes confronting Daesh in Syria, with Türkiye stressing it has denied the entrance of hundreds of thousands of fighters seeking to operate in the country. Moreover, Türkiye sees the PKK and the YPG as part of the same organisation and describes their agenda as radical and separatist while noting that both Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have chronicled their violations of human rights. Türkiye's politicians stressed that Türkiye expects support and solidarity from its allies in its efforts to take on these organisations.

10. The Minister of Defence also said that Türkiye's aim in Libya is to ensure its political integrity. He noted that Türkiye provides training and advice to the internationally recognised government, supported peace and reconciliation among the various groups operating in the country and has provided humanitarian support to that country. He warned of the dangers of Libya becoming a power vacuum and suggested that this concern animated its support for the legitimate government of that country.

11. **Ambassador Tacan İldem**, NATO's former Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy and a member of the independent group of experts on NATO 2030, noted that this group had focused on three ambitions for NATO: strengthening NATO politically, making it stronger militarily and adopting a more global approach. Russia's war on Ukraine has only made these ambitions more relevant. But, he too warned that Allies should not lose sight of the challenge posed by terrorism. This as well as other challenges in the south cannot be neglected, he stressed. He too called for a genuine a 360-degree perspective on security within NATO, arguing that this would be critical to its ongoing relevance. The experts' report, NATO 2030, he added, recognises the threat posed by terrorism and noted that the only invocation of Article 5 in the history of NATO took place in the wake of a terrorist attack.

12. Ambassador İldem argued that China should be seen as representing both a challenge and opportunity. It is emerging as a genuinely global power, and it is therefore essential for NATO Allies, working with partners in the Asia Pacific, to monitor Chinese activities in the region. He noted concerns that arms controls regimes are not functioning as initially envisioned and suggested that China should become a stakeholder in the arms control process. A two-track approach could be helpful so that China could be both engaged and deterred from engaging in threatening action. He also called for a more imaginative approach to technology transfer and noted that technology itself is both a force multiplier and a threat multiplier. He added that Allied countries should not be denied access to key technologies.

13. Ambassador İldem spoke of the NATO PA's support for a Centre for Democratic Resilience at NATO, noting that democracy is the very heart of the alliance. The democratic

health of Allied nations is critical and such a centre would allow the Alliance to acknowledge this in a formal way. He also argued that deeper NATO-EU cooperation is essential. But, he added, any EU quest for strategic autonomy should also be part of an effort to ensure the cohesion of the NATO Alliance. He discussed the Berlin Plus formula – whereby the EU can utilise NATO assets and capabilities for a crisis management operation – and the notion of assured EU access to NATO capabilities when appropriate. He suggested that it might be worth considering a reverse Berlin plus arrangement in which the EU extended NATO assured access to capabilities when it chooses not to be the lead actor in a given crisis.

14. Turkish officials and parliamentarians also exchanged with their Greek counterparts on ongoing bilateral issues and ways to address them.

15. **Ambassador Selim Yenel**, the former First Deputy Secretary of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) organisation opened his remarks by noting that the Russian invasion has shown that the Montreux Convention remains a bulwark of regional security. In March 2022 Turkey invoked Article 19 of the 1936 Montreux Convention by closing the straits to some Russian military shipping. The government of Türkiye remains very concerned about the collapse of grain exports from Ukraine and the effective closing of essential trading routes in the Black Sea. This has totally undermined the notion of a free trading Black Sea in which the littoral countries all benefit from openness. The current situation contravenes the very spirit of the BSEC which has now become all but dysfunctional.

16. He suggested that Russia's decision to attack Ukraine was a fatal mistake. But sanctions alone will not alter Kremlin calculations. The situation also raises questions about the ongoing relevance of the UN Security Council which gives Russia a veto and thus leaves the UN poorly positioned to cope with the challenge.

17. The Assembly delegation also visited the headquarters of the **NATO Rapid Deployable Corps-Türkiye**, one of nine high-readiness corps which are part of NATO's force structure. The Commander welcomed the members and described the long history of the Third Corps and its transformation into a fully operational NATO high readiness corps in 2003 capable of engaging in combined and joint operations through the entire spectrum of potential NATO operations. NRDC-Türkiye had recently completed its fourth rotation as the NATO Response Force (NRF) Land Component Command and was preparing for a mission as warfighting corps headquarters in 2023. He noted that 12 allied nations are contributing to the mission.

18. Preparation for high readiness requires extensive training, exercises, certification of preparation at each phase of the process. NATO decided to enhance its NRF in 2014 by creating a spearhead force within it – the so-called very high readiness joint task force VJTF. This force is capable of quickly bringing land and supporting air, maritime and special operations components into the field within 2 to 7 days. The 66th mechanised infantry brigade – a subordinate element of NRDC-Türkiye – had participated in the previous rotation of the VJTF. On January 1, 2022, Türkiye handed leadership of this force to the Franco-German Brigade.

19. NATO had increased the readiness levels of its forces as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine.

20. The delegation also visited **the NATO Maritime Security Centre of Excellence**, which seeks to develop innovative concepts and to deliver timely expertise that can help enhance maritime security based on requests from sponsoring countries. Greece, Romania and Portugal are all sponsoring countries and their requests for research have priority in the work the centre conducts.

21. The centre tests and validates doctrines and supports exercises and training seminars which it uses to derive key lessons. Capacity building, counter terrorism, upholding the freedom of navigation, the fight against the proliferation of WMD and the protection of critical infrastructure have all been topics of interest. The Centre is also working on studies on cyber intelligence in maritime security operations, hybrid threats in times of crisis, crisis management countermeasures, resilience and the use of unmanned aircraft systems. The Centre's work has been particularly focused on maritime security challenges in the Black Sea.

22. In Istanbul, the delegation also visited the **Baykar** Technology Defence Company, which produces, inter alia, the Bayraktar TB2 medium-altitude long-endurance unmanned combat aerial vehicles that have made a real difference on the battlefield in Ukraine's favour. The company's chief technology officer **Selçuk Bayraktar** told the delegation that the company's support for Ukraine has a moral dimension as Ukraine is a victim of an unjust, illegitimate and brutal invasion. He also said that progress in the field of unmanned vehicles is fundamentally changing the nature of warfare and outlined the company's future plans, including the production of an unmanned jet aircraft. He also noted that drone technology offers immense benefits for the civilian sector as well, from the pursuit of criminals to early detection of forest fires.

III. TÜRKİYE'S PERSPECTIVE ON TACKLING ECONOMIC, CLIMATE AND HUMANITARIAN CHALLENGES

23. Türkiye ratified the Paris agreement in October 2021 and is committed to taking on climate change which **Fatih Dönmez**, Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, suggested has exacerbated security conditions in the south. He said that even if carbon fuels remain essential over the medium term, efforts to diversify energy sources and incorporate renewables must be accelerated now. He added that governments should also consider energy efficiency as a "primary fuel" that will enhance energy security while lowering CO₂ emissions. Minister Dönmez outlined his government's plans to reduce these emissions by 43 million tons over the next decade, an effort that would save Türkiye USD 30.2 billion at 2017 prices, he added. Turkey's primary energy demand has grown at an annual rate of 4.9% over the past two decades. That demand will likely remain dynamic. It has increased electricity generation capacity three-fold in that period, and this includes renewable energy sources.

24. The Minister discussed some measures the government has taken to cope with the current energy crisis. He noted that Türkiye has deployed floating LNG storage facilities and activated regasification projects in Hatay and Izmir to diversify its gas supply base. It is also engaged in a large offshore exploration project in the Black Sea. The estimate is that these fields could contain as much as 540 billion cubic meters of untapped gas. Türkiye is also investing in nuclear energy to increase energy supply security.

25. The government of Türkiye is deeply concerned about the collapse of Ukrainian and Russian grain and fertiliser exports through the Black Sea. **Professor Cagri Erhan**, President of Altınbaş University, told the delegation that the war is driving up global food and commodity prices and warned that famine conditions in Africa could unleash new waves of migration which would prove highly destabilising. The government is in talks with authorities from both countries to establish humanitarian corridors to move these commodities to global markets. These corridors, however, remain heavily mined, he noted, and diplomatic obstacles continue to impede progress in the talks.

26. He said that the war has triggered a massive humanitarian crisis in Ukraine itself. Since the beginning of the crisis millions have been compelled to flee their homes and nearly 4 million have left the country. Many have begun to return but what they faced in Ukraine is a disaster given the wanton destruction of critical infrastructure and housing. The challenges will mount this winter.

27. The economic consequences are not limited to Ukraine as global energy and fuel prices are soaring. Oil prices are 80% higher than last year and global trade has been sharply impeded because of the war and its impact on the supply chain. Commodity prices are also rising. Supplies of grain and fertilizer have soared in prices, and this feeds directly into food prices. Russia and Ukraine account for 30% of global grain exports and much of this trade is now blocked. Russia provides 13% of world's fertilizers which is critical for wheat production. Ukraine provides 50% of sunflower oil. Africa now faces an imminent crisis food crisis, and this could well trigger new waves of migration. This could, in turn, create new opportunities for criminal and terrorist networks. For all of these reasons, Allied countries will need to provide a helping hand to countries facing dramatic food shortages.

28. In Istanbul, GSM Rapporteur [Luca Frusone \(Italy\)](#) presented the first draft of his report, [Migration Challenges and the MENA Region](#), which explores the implications of Russia's war, climate change and poor governance on migration from the south. The Rapporteur pointed out that migration challenges caused by Russia's war in Ukraine have now surpassed those precipitated by conflicts in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the broader MENA region. Moreover, this conflict has very serious implications on the MENA region as well, given its impact on global commodity and food prices. That said, migratory pressures linked to conflicts in Syria and Iraq will continue to impact relations between Europe and the broader MENA region. While stakeholder countries concluded cooperative agreements – including the agreement between Türkiye and the EU – tensions emerged between those advocating for relatively open reception policies, on the one hand, and those pushing for strict border closures, on the other. The Rapporteur noted that, in recent waves of migration, Libya has become a central transit point for migrants from sub-Saharan Africa including the increasingly unstable Sahel.

29. Mr Frusone said that multifaceted approaches to the challenge were needed, including 360-degree situational awareness, all-of-government approaches and a degree of international solidarity. Coping with the challenge also requires measures that deal with the push factors in crisis-ridden societies. He argued that NATO itself can provide vital support to countries of the region that either directly or indirectly shape the dynamics of migration and the forces that drive it. These include bolstering defence and security capabilities, building resilience, reinforcing counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, border control, cyber security and civil protection and supporting the notion of good governance and democratic accountability.

30. The discussion generated parliamentary inputs for the final draft which will be presented for adoption at the GSM's autumn seminar. **Manousos Voloudakis** (Greece) suggested making a clearer distinction in the report between the concepts of "refugees" and "migrants". He also suggested changing the map on page 8 of the report and using the official name of the Republic of North Macedonia. **Ahmet Berat Conkar** (Türkiye) noted that migration is a global phenomenon, and Türkiye is at the centre of major migratory flows. Türkiye welcomed migrants and refugees with extraordinary hospitality. Unfortunately, the international community failed to support Türkiye adequately, Mr Conkar regretted. He also said he would convey some suggested amendments for the report to the secretariat. **Fernando Gutierrez** (Spain) spoke about the link between migration and transborder criminal activities. With regards to paragraph 54, he stressed the importance of international cooperation and

development assistance. He also advised not to refer to Melilla and Ceuta as “enclaves”. He suggested rephrasing the reference to the Canary Islands that are part of the EU. Finally, he suggested changing the caption of the graph on page 9 and deleting the reference to “a better life”. **Nicu Falcoi** (Romania), referring to paragraph 71, said that the refugee crisis in Ukraine should not be compared to what transpired in Belarus, where refugees were used as a tool of political pressure. **Ahmet Yildiz** (Türkiye) stressed the importance of the Türkiye-EU deal, but he expressed his concern that the deal could collapse because the promises given to Türkiye, such as on visa liberalisation, were not respected. **Utku Cakirozer** (Türkiye) expressed his support to the amendments submitted by Mr Conkar. He also noted that most Syrian refugees reside in host communities rather than camps. He therefore advised to discuss the refugee situation not only with state institutions, but also with municipalities and NGOs. He suggested discussing this aspect more in the report. **Spilios Livanos** (Greece) highlighted the role of the EU in addressing the migration and refugee challenges. He noted that the measures that EU and NATO are taking to support southern member states are on the right track. **Vytautas Bakas** (Lithuania) noted that Lithuania is also guarding the external border of the EU and NATO. He stressed that Putin has been using Belarus and now the food crisis to trigger migration and to destabilise NATO. Since paragraph 74 mentions the Taliban, Mr Bakas suggested also mentioning Russia’s role in artificially creating migration waves. **Theodora Tzakri** (Greece) stressed the need for more ambitious multinational support for countries most exposed to refugee and migration crises. The integration of refugees and legal immigrants needs to be bolstered, while ensuring relocation in the spirit of solidarity.

31. The delegation visit concluded with meetings at the country’s largest temporary accommodation centre outside Adana. Türkiye hosts roughly 4 million Syrian refugees and seeks to foster their social and economic integration. The parliamentarians learned that while most Syrians who have sought refuge in Türkiye reside in cities, some of the most vulnerable have remained in government-provided shelters where the Turkish state and a range of NGO’s provide vitally needed social, medical and educational support. The parliamentarians met with camp staff and residents at the centre and participated in a graduation ceremony for students studying there.

32. The centre was established to control mass migration from Syria that started in 2011. The Centre in Adana is the largest such facility in Türkiye, hosting over 16,000 individuals under statutory protection. It has focused on meeting the basic needs of the most disadvantaged populations of migrants. Those who are not positioned to contribute to the economy are given priority.

33. The Centre included several schools and roughly 6,000 young people are educated there. The working languages are Turkish and Arabic. Students can go on to university. The Centre also offers free health care day and night and employs 52 medical personnel on the premises.
