

Nato republic,  
hungary, and poland;  
contributed  
decisively, in



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NATO starts the year 2000 with the issue of concern.

The European Allies' defense capability, stabilization efforts in the Balkans, and relations with Russia are at the top of a highly charged agenda. In 1999 NATO accomplished many tasks, which were reviewed in the December 15th Washington Summit. They approved an updated Strategic Concept at the Washington Summit; admitted as new members the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland; contributed decisively, in particular through the conduct of their air campaign and the subsequent deployment of KFOR (NATO-led international peace force), to the international community's objective of creating the basis for long-term peace and stability in Kosovo. What is NATO? NATO is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington on April 4th, 1949, creating an alliance of 12 independent nations committed to each other's defense. Four more European nations later acceded to the Treaty between 1952 and 1982. The now 19 members of NATO include Belgium, Canada, \*Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, \*Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, \*Poland, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, and the United States. (\*Members since March 12, 1999) These countries commit themselves to maintaining and developing their defense capabilities, individually, and collectively, providing the basis for collective defense planning.

The Treaty also provides the framework for consultation between the member countries whenever they feel that their national security is at risk.

Over the past few years, Russia and Ukraine have developed special

independent relationships with the Alliance. This enables them to pursue, in different ways, cooperative programs on a wide range of practical security-related issues of benefit to their countries and to Europe as a whole. Both countries are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). NATO continues to attach importance to discussions and practical co-operation with Russia.

Their aim remains to establish a strong, stable and enduring partnership within the framework of the NATO-Russia Founding Act. NATO encourages Russia to resume co-operation on the broad range of issues foreseen in the Founding Act and to engage actively in the EAPC and the Partnership for Peace. NATO also emphasizes that the further development of their co-operation depends on Russia's respect for international norms and obligations. There are still concerns about the conflict in Chechnya. NATO condemns, in particular, Russian threats against unarmed civilians, such as those in Grozny.

They also condemn terrorism in all its forms but believe that Russia's pursuit of a purely military solution to the conflict is undermining its objectives.

NATO urges Russia to exercise the fullest restraint, to refrain from the use of force against civilians and protect their human rights, to facilitate the provision of humanitarian aid to those in need, and to co-operate fully with international relief agencies and to ensure security for their operations.

Keeping in mind the importance of regional stability and respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of neighboring states, they are

concerned about the impact of the crisis of the entire Caucasus region and

stress the need to avoid steps that would further undermine regional

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security. Should NATO be open to expansion? NATO has always had an open door policy to the membership of new countries into the Alliance.

In fact, NATO encourages countries to apply for membership. At the Washington Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government approved a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to reinforce NATO's commitment to the openness of the Alliance. The report to date says that they are pleased that the MAP process has made an effective start and met with a positive response of the nine aspiring countries. Candidates have submitted annual national programs that enable the Alliance to provide them with direct advice, feedback, and assistance on their preparations for possible future membership. At the Washington Summit the leaders of NATO took steps necessary to ensure that the Alliance will remain the bedrock of its collective defense, and continue to play a key role in the development of a secure and stable peace in the Euro-Atlantic area. As NATO enters the 21st century, they can confidently say that they are ready for the future.