

NATO chief speaks to EuroNews ahead of Romania summit

NATO's Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer believes in a strong European defence identity combined with an enhanced NATO. At this week's summit in Romania, the question of Georgia and Ukraine joining the alliance will be top of the agenda, with Russia strongly opposed to it. Controversial troop deployment in Afghanistan will also be discussed.



EuroNews: "Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Secretary General of NATO, welcome to EuroNews. First of all, when it comes to security and defence, does the West still exist?"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "Well, the West, in the cultural sense, is of course cooperating more and more, when you look at the NATO mission in Afghanistan for instance, with the new partners from other parts of the world not traditionally the West."

EuroNews: "But you have mentioned Afghanistan, and in Afghanistan for instance there's a strong demand from the US and from NATO to participate with more troops and many countries are trying not to increase the number of their troops there."

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "I am, as NATO Secretary General, of course, very much in favour that, when those forces come to Afghanistan, there are as little limitations on to the use of the forces as possible. I think there are still too many caveats, as we call them in our jargon, limitations on the use of the forces. If I look at the force levels I am still not completely satisfied, but I am not concerned because many nations have stepped up to the plate, recently and I know that in Bucarest we will see the same."

EuroNews: "Which countries?"



Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "I can't be more specific yet, but the French president gave a very clear indication during his state visit to London about the possibility of France increasing the number of its already considerable force in Afghanistan and I know other nations also are trying to increase the number of forces."

EuroNews: "What about the enlargement of NATO to Ukraine and Georgia? These countries fear that some members, especially the western European members of NATO will bow to Russia's interests and will try to stop this enlargement. What do you think about it?"



Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "We are not discussing membership of NATO for Ukraine and Georgia, we are discussing their possible entry in the so-called Membership Action Plan, but the principle of NATO's open door is a sacred principle. NATO's door is opened, including for Ukraine and Georgia, if they so wish, I mean, it is up to the people and the governments of those nations to decide what they want and the decision on the enlargement are taken by the 26 NATO's allies."

EuroNews: "What do you think about Russian critics?"



Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "Well, I don't share that criticism. I don't share it by definition, because it might imply that this will not be a decision taken by the 26 NATO allies. But if the perception in Moscow - the Russians are our partners, we have a very important partnership with Russia, we have a NATO-Russia council, where we discuss these things - if this is the perception in Moscow, we should openly discuss it. But everybody should realise that the final decision is taken in Brussels by the 26 NATO allies and no one else."

EuroNews: "But Kosovo, the anti-missile shield, and Ukraine and Georgia - these are all elements that are not contributing to good relations among NATO's member states and Russia, don't you think?"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "We are all adults and the relationship between NATO and Russia is a relationship between adults, and such an important relationship, because I underline that we should engage with the Russians and the Russians should engage with us, with NATO, there is only one word, which is engage."

EuroNews: "How?"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "By also taking on the more difficult subjects. You know that you have a bilateral discussion going on, as we speak, between the Americans and the Russians on missile defence. There is also a debate in the NATO framework on missile defence, we are discussing, we have discussed Kosovo several times in the NATO-Russia council, here at ambassadorial level in Brussels. So you talk with each other, you try to understand each other's arguments, but you do that knowing that you will not by definition, at the end of the day, agree on everything and there's nothing wrong with that. I mean Russia has interests, we have interests and the question, of course, is how to combine these interests, how to de-conflict them, if necessary, but on the other hand NATO decides about its own business."



EuroNews: "Some of the Western members of NATO would be more interested in creating a sort of neutral buffer zone, including Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, between NATO and Russia. What do you think about this idea?"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "We have not discussed and I don't see NATO discuss a neutral buffer zone, and, by the way, the Cold War is over so the old notion of neutrality of course is a notion, which was relevant in the Cold War, but much less relevant now given the fact that we have an intensive partnership with the Russians."

EuroNews: "Do you think it is possible to have both European defence and NATO?"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "Yes I think so. I do not favour a European pillar inside NATO, but a grown-up European defence and security identity, as it is called, and by definition an already grown-up NATO, because NATO has grown up in 60 years - it is NATO's 60th anniversary next year - in my opinion, are complementary."



EuroNews: "Do you think that it is important to have this rapprochement between France and the UK, in the perspective of having both a European military defence structure and NATO?"

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer: "I do, I think (...) the UK is, of course, a key player, the UK being also a prominent NATO member and a member of the European Union. I say again it is very important that if you look at London, you look at Paris, you look at Berlin, that they find agreements on the concept, the concept of strengthening the European security and defence identity on one hand, the concept of strengthening NATO on the other, because they are all prominent members of NATO. Let's not reinvent the wheel in the European Union: complementarity, not duplication, complementarity is the key words here."

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Georgia and Ukraine enter NATO together, or fall away together

Messenger, July 1, 2008.

In Poland last week, Georgia's foreign minister said categorically that the country, if given the chance, would not move toward NATO membership without Ukraine alongside.



It is a touching nod toward the strong ties between the two states, but not the breathtaking promise it may look like. It is not Georgia which has decided to tie its fate to Ukraine: NATO did.

Before the alliance gathered in Bucharest this April, its leaders consolidated the question of Georgian and Ukrainian membership into a single neat package—one which could be weighed on the scales against Russia’s interests.

Germany made its calculations, and decided to sink Georgian and Ukrainian hopes for a membership action plan. But NATO leadership also issued a statement promising that both countries would one day join the alliance.



Georgia and Ukraine did not just share the political victory of that statement; they also shared one critical obstacle to a membership action plan: Russia. And only when Russia’s concerns about eastward NATO expansion are thoroughly mitigated will Georgia and Ukraine—together—be able to move toward membership.

Many here missed that point, criticizing the foreign minister’s statement for supposedly putting bilateral ties with Ukraine above Georgia’s national security interests.

But in fact the statement cost Georgia nothing. And aside from further strengthening ties

with Ukraine, it reinforced the point that Georgia and Ukraine will one day either stand together in NATO—or fall together to Russia.

Messenger, July 1, 2008.

[Pipeline project on the agenda at Batumi GUAM summit](#)

Energy security dominated the preliminary agenda for a GUAM summit beginning today in seaside Batumi.



GUAM, a regional organizational of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Moldova, was intended as a common security and economic space. It has undergone fractures since its conception in 1997 as some pushed to use the group to undercut Russian sway in the post-Soviet space.

Yesterday, summit participants met over a pipeline which could bypass Russia in delivering oil to Europe.

“We have discussed the question of an Odessa–Brody–Gdansk pipeline, which will allow the oil from the Caspian countries to be transported first to Ukraine and then to other parts of Eastern Europe,” the Georgian Energy Minister, Aleksandre Khetaguri, told local journalists.

Currently, the Odessa–Brody pipeline runs north to south, bringing Russian oil to freighters in the Black Sea. A number of countries would like to reverse the flow and extend the pipeline, providing a route for Caspian region oil to reach Europe while bypassing Russia.



“We have never hidden the fact that this project is a strategic one,” said Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, as quoted by the Russian news agency Interfax.

Backers hope an Odessa–Brody–Plotsk pipeline, flowing south to north, will begin operating in 2011.

The project was agreed on at a Vilnius energy summit in October, when the leaders of Georgia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Azerbaijan, and Poland commissioned a feasibility study on the project.

Only three of the four GUAM countries are a part of the project. Left out is Moldova; earlier, the country's president expressed doubts about the direction the regional alliance was headed.

In an interview with Russian newspaper Kommersant, Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin said the future prospects of GUAM are "vague" and that Moldova would not stay in the group "if there is no economic interest" for the country.



Voronin also raised questions about proposals for a GUAM peacekeeping force, saying the current peacekeeping forces in Moldova and Georgia—both Russian-led—should suffice.

The Moldovan leader is not coming to this summit; he also skipped the previous summit in Baku.

But Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili will meet his Polish, Ukrainian, Lithuanian and Azerbaijani counterparts in Batumi. Georgia is also to take the chairmanship of the alliance at this week's summit.

“Being a chair country, Georgia can conduct a role of the bridge connecting all other GUAM members,” said Georgian economist Lado Papava. He said the organization’s only hope for viability is to develop economic relations with Eastern Europe.

Also on the agenda, according to Georgia’s economic development minister, are trade agreements on trucking quotas and a discussion on Azerbaijan’s entry into the World Trade Organization.

Representatives from the Czech Republic, Japan and the United States will also be at the summit.

Temuri Kiguradze
Messenger, July 1, 2008.