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STATEMENTS BY EUROPEAN FOREIGN MINISTERS
IN SUPPORT OF NEW START TREATY

Feria Internacional de Lisboa
Lisbon, Portugal

2:02 P.M. WET

FOREIGN MINISTER ESPERSEN: Well, hi, everyone. I'm Lene Espersen. I'm the Danish Foreign Minister. And with me I have the foreign ministers of Lithuania, the Foreign Minister of Hungary, the Foreign Minister of Bulgaria, the Foreign Minister of Norway, and the new Foreign Minister of Latvia. And we thought that this was an excellent occasion during this NATO Summit to come with a statement regarding the START treaty.

We know that there's a discussion going on in the U.S. Congress regarding the START treaty, and what it's really for us to stress, that for us it's European security that is at stake. If the START treaty is not ratified, it would be a real setback for European security, and therefore, of course, we urge and hope that the U.S. Congress will be able to ratify the START treaty as soon as possible.

FOREIGN MINISTER AZUBALIS: And also I just would like to add that we see this treaty as an entrance to START negotiations -- thank you -- as also we see this treaty as a prologue, as an entrance to start talks about sub-strategical weaponry, which is much more even dangerous, and it's quite difficult to detect. And we are, who are living in the East Europe, especially, know this. That's what we are for START treaty.

FOREIGN MINISTER STOERE: I'm Jonas Stoere, Foreign Minister of Norway. I'd just like to say briefly, I second my Danish colleague. Norway neighbors Russia. We live a few kilometers from one of the largest nuclear arsenals there is. And as my colleague from Lithuania said, this is an entry point to a process which can keep bringing these levels down.

And if those levels go down, we can do a lot of other things, which will enhance security. So missing this

opportunity, I think for all us Europeans, is really something of great concern.

FOREIGN MINISTER KRISTOVSKIS: Okay, my name is Girts Valdis Kristovskis. I am Minister of Foreign Affairs from Latvia. And I want to underline that Euro-Atlantic cooperation is very important for security of my state. And of course, START II [sic] treaty ratification in Congress we support very strongly, and also this policy of President Obama and his administration is very important for security of our region.

FOREIGN MINISTER MLADENOV: Hi. My name is Nickolay Mladenov. I'm the Bulgarian Foreign Minister. START is not just key to the security of Europe but it is key to making sure that today what we managed to achieve in the new Strategic Concept, and that is a NATO that reaches out in partnership with -- to other countries, can actually be implemented. So all I can say is, don't stop START before it's started. (Laughter.)

FOREIGN MINISTER MARTONYI: My name is Janos Martonyi. I'm the Foreign Minister of Hungary. My country has a very special historic experience with Russia. We also have a special geographic location. And with all that historic and geographic background, we wholeheartedly advocate the ratification of START.

It's a general interest of my region, of Europe, and indeed, most importantly, of the transatlantic alliance. It's also a global interest, and I would very much encourage, for this reason, not to kill START before it starts, as it has been just said.

And this is a process which is a promise at the same time and a commitment for the whole world.

Thank you.

MR. HAMMER: I understand the ministers have time for a few questions. If you please use the microphone -- any interest? Karen, please.

Q Thank you for coming to do this. I'd like to ask, did the Obama administration solicit your expressions of concern or did you just get together on your own and decide you wanted to say this?

FOREIGN MINISTER AZUBALIS: For me, it's quite easy to do now what I did, because just four days ago I visited Washington where I had a very fruitful meeting with Secretary Clinton, and in our common conference I just underlined what I said now.

FOREIGN MINISTER ESPERSEN: And I can also tell you, Karen, I am the one who initiated this initiative, and it's actually because we've been discussing in Denmark, being a long-term member of NATO, what we can do in order to at least make the Republican Party in the U.S. understand why this is very important to us.

And I can tell you, besides being Minister for Foreign Affairs, I'm also the chairman of the Conservative Party in Denmark, which is the sister party of the Republican Party. So nobody will ever accuse me of being soft on security.

And this is the reason why I said, well, maybe it could be fruitful for us as a broad member of NATO -- the North, the East, the Central -- to say why it's important for us that the START treaty is ratified and that as soon as possible.

FOREIGN MINISTER MARTONYI: So I just would like to add that that's true. There is a lady behind, as usually -- a blond lady -- but this time this is Lene and not another one. (Laughter.)

So a Hungarian would never refuse a request made by a lady. Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER KRISTOVSKIS: And also, I want to underline that -- I represent Latvia. We regained independence 20 years ago, and even before, United States played a crucial role in support of our -- for our independence needs. And that's why we always very heartily supported U.S. security policy, and especially when this stabilize security in the region, as is related with such treaty.

MR. HAMMER: Okay, Christi. And then we'll go to you.

Q Thank you. Thank you for coming here. I want to ask you if you could speak to the issue of the longer-term commitment in Afghanistan now and how you analyze that. Are there concerns that you would express or other thoughts to share on that? Thank you.

FOREIGN MINISTER STOERE: I think the statement today that came out of that ISAF extended session was very clear. You had

48 troop-contributing countries coming together with the United Nations, the EU, and, not least, President Karzai. And I think we now, if you put the Kabul Conference in July with a very detailed commitment upon the Afghan government and the supporters of the Afghan government with this declaration, you see the period towards 2014 mapped out, and also the underlining that transition towards Afghan ownership does not mean scaling down automatically of our presence. And I found a remarkable consensus on this in today's meeting.

FOREIGN MINISTER MLADENOV: Can I just add something to that? I think it's -- there are three very important steps in this. First is we get the Afghan army to be fully capable. Second we get the Afghan police to be fully capable. But then also get the Afghan institutions to be fully capable to implement what any government should do. And this is very much in line with what the general thinking within NATO has been and what the needs from Afghanistan have been.

Bulgaria, for example, is now going to send more trainers, as many other countries are going to do; increase our contribution to trainers, increase our contribution to the civilian component of the rebuilding operation so that when 2014 comes we don't end up with a fault deadline but we actually cross that date with a commitment of supporting these institutions and supporting this government going further into rebuilding a functioning state in Afghanistan.

And our commitment there, fully confirmed by everyone in ISAF today, is to stay there as long as it takes to get the job done.

Q Just very quickly, could any of you speak to any concerns, particularly the foreign ministers from Latvia and Lithuania, any concerns you had on the concessions the United States made on missile defense in START? Did any of you have any concerns about that?

FOREIGN MINISTER AZUBALIS: I think that our main concern is to keep the allies aligned in unity. This is a main concern. And what we see now from the Strategic Concept, what we see now from communiqué, which now was agreed and negotiated, we see that our main, I would say, challenges very well

presented in the Strategic Concept and in the communiqué. Thank you.

Q -- your Republican counterparts -- with your counterparts in the parliament here, in the United States, with the U.S. Congress?

FOREIGN MINISTER AZUBALIS: I'm representing --

Q No, I mean, have you asked your conservative colleagues --

FOREIGN MINISTER AZUBALIS: We have discussed with them during my visit -- I'm representing the conservative Christian Democratic Party of Lithuania. I know very well -- met with Senator McCain and others, and we just discussed with them.

Q You have discussed it with members of Congress?

FOREIGN MINISTER AZUBALIS: Yes, sure.

MR. RHODES: Chuck, I'd just add that there are no constraints on missile defense in the treaty.