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Statement by the NATO Defence Ministers on the Readiness Action Plan

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We, the Allied Defence Ministers, met today to review progress and direct further work on the implementation of the NATO Readiness Action Plan. At the summit in Wales, our leaders set out the response of the Alliance to the substantial changes in the security environment on NATO's borders and beyond. As we progress towards the Warsaw Summit in 2016, our meeting today is an important stepping stone towards adapting the Alliance's military strategic posture. We are working to ensure that our Allied forces maintain the high levels of readiness and coherence needed to conduct NATO's full range of missions, including deterring aggression against NATO Allies and demonstrating preparedness to defend NATO territory.

The Readiness Action Plan, approved by Heads of State and Government, provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications, as well as to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighbourhood, the Middle East and North Africa. The Plan strengthens NATO's collective defence and also its crisis management capability. Defensive in nature, the measures will contribute to ensuring that NATO remains a ready, robust and responsive Alliance capable of meeting current and future challenges from wherever they may arise, and that NATO has the right forces in the right place at the right time.

The implementation of the Plan is well underway, and we have achieved considerable progress since the Wales Summit. The Alliance has increased the presence of land, maritime and air forces in the eastern part of its territory. These Assurance Measures initiated in May last year are continuing through 2015, as planned. They demonstrate Alliance resolve and solidarity. All Allies are contributing to this effort – 28 for 28.

We have also made progress on Adaptation Measures to bolster NATO's readiness and responsiveness. Today, we agreed to enhance the NATO Response Force, which will become

a division size joint force with significantly increased readiness and highly capable and flexible multinational forces. These will be trained and organised to rapidly respond to a variety of contingencies. In addition to air and maritime components and Special Operations Forces, its flagship element will be a new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), centred on a multinational brigade with up to five manoeuvre battalions with some elements ready to move within 2 to 3 days. We welcome the declaration of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom to assume the role of a framework nation for rotations of this force in the coming years. We also welcome the availability of the Interim VJTF capability for 2015 led by Germany, the Netherlands and Norway, with some other Allies participating, which has already started training and exercising. We also welcome the efforts of other Allies contributing to enhancing the NRF by raising the readiness of their forces. Furthermore, initial work has already commenced on adaptation with regard to the south.

In addition, we decided on the immediate establishment of the first six multinational command and control elements – the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs) – on the territories of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania initially, which constitute a visible and persistent NATO presence in these countries. They will facilitate the rapid deployment of Allied forces to the region; support collective defence planning; and assist in the coordination of multinational training and exercises.

We welcome the work of Denmark, Germany and Poland to develop the Headquarters Multinational Corps Northeast to provide an additional high readiness capability to command forces deployed to the Baltic states and Poland, if so required, and to enhance its role as a hub for regional cooperation. We also welcome Romania's intention to make available a new deployable Multinational Divisional Headquarters as Multinational Division Southeast.

Today, we reiterate the commitment of our nations to Alliance solidarity and the security and protection of our populations and territories. We will continue reviewing the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan and take further decisions at our coming meetings, in line with the decisions taken at the Wales Summit.