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MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE

The Washington Summit will give fresh impetus to developing NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, which was launched in 1994 and currently involves six non-NATO countries: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Dialogue is aimed at creating good relations and better mutual understanding throughout the Mediterranean, and at promoting security and stability in the region. It reflects the view that security in that region is linked to security in Europe.

Political discussions with participating countries provide an opportunity to share views on a range of security issues relevant to the region. Moreover, an annual work programme sets out measures for practical cooperation that focus on building confidence through cooperation on security related issues in the military field, as well as in the areas of information, civil emergency planning and science.

All participating countries are offered the same basis for discussion and activities but the level of engagement varies from country to country. Activities take place on a self-funding basis. This limits the capacity of some countries to participate.

In December 1998, NATO Foreign Ministers agreed to explore ways of enhancing cooperation with Mediterranean Dialogue countries. As a result, Heads of State and Government have decided to enhance both the political and practical dimensions of the Dialogue, including through further opportunities for discussion and strengthened cooperation in areas where NATO can bring an added value, particularly in the military field, and where the Dialogue countries have expressed interest.

NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue complements other international efforts in the region such as the European Union's Barcelona Process, the Middle East Peace Process, and the Mediterranean initiatives of the Western European Union (WEU) and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

HIGHLIGHTS

- Since 1997, opinion leaders and parliamentarians from each of the six countries visit NATO HQ for briefings on various aspects of NATO policy.
- Representatives from Dialogue countries attend courses at the NATO School in Oberammergau on peacekeeping, conventional arms control, environmental protection, civil-military cooperation for civil emergency planning and European security cooperation.

- International research fellowships are on offer to scholars from Mediterranean Dialogue countries since 1998; five fellowships have been awarded to date covering topics such as competing concepts of security cooperation in the Arab world, economic aspects of security cooperation in the Mediterranean region, and Eastern Mediterranean security.
- In 1999, NATO's two major commands (Allied Command Europe and Allied Command Atlantic) are organising 49 military activities involving participation from Dialogue countries, including observation of Partnership for Peace (PfP) activities in the fields of search and rescue, maritime safety and medical evacuation, as well as exercises related to peace support and humanitarian relief.
- Egypt, Jordan and Morocco have participated in both the NATO-led Implementation Force (IFOR) and the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- As of 1 January 1999, the embassy of a NATO member country has been designated as a contact point in each of the Dialogue countries to assist the Alliance's information effort towards these countries and help foster the Dialogue.
- A Conference on "The Mediterranean Dialogue and the new NATO", organised by the Spanish authorities in cooperation with NATO, took place in Valencia from 24-26 February 1999. It was the first opportunity for Ambassadors from NATO and the six Mediterranean partner countries to meet jointly to discuss the way ahead for NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. As such, it was an important step towards greater interaction between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries. This event was particularly timely before the Washington Summit as the Alliance considers how to move forward NATO's external adaptation, of which the Mediterranean Dialogue is an integral part.