



NATO HQ

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Video interview

with Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, Stefanie Babst

Q: We're here with NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, Stefanie Babst, welcome. What is the next big event coming up for the Public Diplomacy Division?

STEFANIE BABST (NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy): Well, in fact there are two. There are two events that are forthcoming. The first is the EAPC Security Forum that is going to take place in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in Ohrid, on the 28th and 29th of June. And the second is a public diplomacy workshop on the 2nd and 3rd of July. The public diplomacy workshop is very much key for the NATO Public Diplomacy Division. We have invited policymakers, public diplomacy experts and spokespersons from various NATO countries in order to discuss current and future communication challenges.

Q: What is so important about this event? And can you please give us a few examples?

BABST: Well, in fact, there are two reasons why this event will be very, very important for the NATO Public Diplomacy Division. First, given NATO's expanding agenda both on the political side and the military side, there is a growing need to communicate that to the outside world. NATO is very much a security actor in the global environment. So we need to talk to a global audience. So it makes good sense to touch base with our counterparts and NATO capitals once in a while in order to coordinate our efforts better and to discuss best practices and experiences.

Q: What is the Public Diplomacy Division's role in informing the public and the member States about NATO operations and work in general?

BABST: Well, as just mentioned, the Public Diplomacy... the Public Diplomacy workshop will also look at NATO's operation in Afghanistan as one example that we're going to discuss. And I would like to mention in this respect two issues here.

The first one is that NATO's Public Diplomacy Division has the job to propose a political and strategic framework within which member countries and the NATO headquarters can conduct their communication activities. In fact, we have worked for some time already on a dedicated public diplomacy strategy for Afghanistan. And once that is approved, once that is agreed by nations, that will provide a very good framework within both NATO headquarters and as one NATO member countries can implement their communication activities.

The public diplomacy strategy in support of NATO's engagement in Afghanistan will look at master messages, objectives, tools and target audiences; and so we will very much discuss that. But apart from providing the overarching strategic political framework for our communication effort in support of Afghanistan, our division has also started to conduct a number of very practical, very concrete activities; and I would just like to mention a few.

It was almost a year ago that we have established what we called a media operation centre, which is under the leadership of the NATO Spokesman. And it's very much aimed at coordinating media messages, media monitoring and actually improving coordination between NATO headquarters, the troop contributing nations as well as the various levels in the military chain of command.

We have in addition also started to engage with journalists, with opinion leaders. We take them on a regular basis to see to Afghanistan... to make them actually see what ISAF has achieved in practice. We have invited various Afghan opinion informers in recent months like Afghan parliamentarians, female parliamentarians. We have invited representatives of Afghan students. We have invited Afghan NGOs. So we really try to engage as much as possible with Afghan civil society.

And finally we have also started to engage with Afghans in Afghanistan itself. And as a very recent example, it was just a couple of weeks ago that we have organised the first ever student workshop in Kabul gathering roughly speaking some sixty or seventy students from all across the region.

Q: What will this new technology such as the media and the Internet play for PDD?

BABST: Well, we are living in the 21st century so we should also apply 21st century communication technologies. And this is primarily the Internet and other multimedia technologies. I think NATO public diplomacy needs to become much better in applying these modern audiovisual technologies very much aimed at visualizing what NATO is actually doing. And we are undertaking quite an effort in order to improve these capabilities for the future.

Q: Can you please give us some examples on what is going to keep you busy over the next couple of weeks or months?

BABST: Well, we do have a NATO diplomacy strategy for this year in place. And it lists three top priorities. And they will not only keep me busy but I guess keep very much the entire division busy. First and foremost, we need to enhance our communication efforts in support of NATO's role in Afghanistan. So we will definitely work much harder, even harder than now to get the story out.

Secondly, there is a lot to do in terms of helping the Western Balkan countries and particularly the 'aspirant countries' to advance their own communication efforts. So we will work very much in the Balkan countries and with our partners in the Western Balkan countries.

And thirdly, I have put a lot of focus on improving our communication efforts vis-à-vis Russia and in Russia so that is very much assert priority. And on top of that, I said, already we try our very best in order to make NATO more visible and get our story out in a better way. I guess there is not much time left for vacation.