

**Letter of 18 April 2019 from Minister of Foreign Affairs Stef Blok and Minister of Defence Ank Bijleveld-Schouten to the President of the House of Representatives presenting the government's response to the AIV advisory report 'Nuclear weapons in a new geopolitical reality: an urgent need for new arms control initiatives'**

The government would first like to express its appreciation for the thorough analysis and recommendations presented by the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV). Below the government responds to the advisory report in general terms and then specifically addresses the 10 recommendations. The government has based its response on the coalition agreement, which states that 'within the framework of the Netherlands' obligations as a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, the government will work actively to rid the world of nuclear weapons, in view of the great risks associated with nuclear proliferation'. The government's response is also based on the Integrated International Security Strategy (Parliamentary Paper 33 694, no. 12), the Defence White Paper (Parliamentary Paper 34 919, no. 1) and the letter to the House of Representatives on Dutch policy for achieving nuclear disarmament (Parliamentary Paper 33 694, no. 20).

The advisory report gives a striking description of the new geopolitical reality, which the government also recognises (see also the letter to the House of Representatives of 19 October 2018 on the disruption of a cyber operation and the changing security environment, Parliamentary Paper 33 694, no. 22). A long period of relative stability and predictability in Europe seems to be over. We cannot afford to be naive about the changing context and its implications for the Netherlands and Europe. Our security and way of life are paramount. As described in various documents, including the Netherlands' national plan that was presented to NATO in late 2018, the government's political intention is to make long-term investments in a number of priority capabilities that are in keeping with NATO's capability objectives. All countries within the NATO Alliance, including the Netherlands, must take more responsibility for their own security while at the same time continuing to invest in a strong transatlantic bond. The new geopolitical reality also forms the context for Dutch nuclear weapons policy, including nuclear disarmament and arms control.

As the AIV rightly notes, the only way the use of nuclear weapons can be completely ruled out is by banning them completely. This is therefore one of the basic aims of the Netherlands' efforts, expressed in the coalition agreement, to rid the world of nuclear weapons, within the framework of its obligations within NATO. These efforts are guided by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), as the cornerstone of international security and disarmament policy. This includes article VI of the NPT, which establishes the legal basis for effective measures relating to nuclear disarmament and a treaty on general and complete disarmament under strict and effective international control. At the urging of the Netherlands, NATO has also explicitly committed itself to this important article in the communiqués of the NATO summits in Warsaw in 2016 and Brussels in 2018. (See Parliamentary Papers 28 676, no. 252 and 28 676, no. 302.).

The lack of progress on nuclear disarmament and the recent demise of important arms control milestones have rightly caused growing frustration among governments, civil society organisations and the public at large. The government shares this frustration.

The Netherlands is therefore focusing on making concrete and valuable contributions to the disarmament process by acting as a driving force and bridge builder, and is seeking the right position and partners to be able to exert maximum influence. As a medium-sized, non-

nuclear-weapon state, the Netherlands should not pursue an entirely individual policy, but pragmatically identify opportunities, form coalitions and maintain pressure on all fronts so as to be able to take steps – sometimes modest but always material – to achieve ‘global zero’, a world free of nuclear weapons. There is no multilateral disarmament process to which the Netherlands does not make a significant contribution, and in many cases such as the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) initiative and the International Partnership for Nuclear Disarmament Verification (IPNDV), the Netherlands plays a leading role together with appropriate partners.

As laid down in the coalition agreement, the government will continue to play a leading role in the efforts to achieve a nuclear-free world. In the period ahead, priority will be given to the NPT and its review cycle. The continuing focus of the House of Representatives on the Dutch efforts towards nuclear disarmament is a sign of parliament’s support for this policy.

The government must at the same time recognise the current nuclear reality, which is characterised by a multipolar security environment with growing geopolitical tensions and tougher nuclear rhetoric employed by countries such as the Russian Federation and North Korea, costly investments in national nuclear arsenals, and a weakening of the international nuclear arms control architecture. The government thus agrees with the AIV’s observation that nuclear deterrence too plays a crucial role in maintaining the strategic balance of power and preventing the use of nuclear weapons.

Preventing the use of nuclear weapons is a top priority for the government. That is why Dutch nuclear policy, as noted in the AIV advisory report, is indeed based on two pillars, i.e. not only on nuclear arms control, disarmament and risk reduction, but also on nuclear deterrence.

It follows that the Netherlands is and will remain fully committed to NATO, a defensive alliance based in part on common nuclear deterrence. As long as potential adversaries have a nuclear capability, NATO must have its own credible nuclear deterrent as an ultimate guarantee for the security of the entire Alliance. Fully in keeping with the government’s intentions and the AIV’s observation, NATO’s deterrence policy is designed to ensure that these weapons need never be used. In some cases, nuclear deterrence can also actually support disarmament initiatives, as part of a policy based on a combination of pressure and dialogue.

Like the Netherlands, NATO is committed to nuclear arms control and disarmament. At the same time, NATO must remain a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear weapons exist. Unilateral nuclear disarmament would only be a symbolic step, and moreover it would come at the expense of the security of both the Alliance and the Netherlands, without actually contributing to the step-by-step process of achieving universal nuclear disarmament. In its Summit Declaration of 11 July 2018, NATO confirmed the goal of a nuclear-free world in accordance with the NPT, and reiterated that the circumstances in which the use of nuclear weapons would be considered are ‘extremely remote’. Within this security organisation, the Netherlands continues to spotlight the issues of arms control and disarmament. The government is also in favour of further reducing the role of nuclear weapons in military doctrines, whenever this is justified in the security context of the Alliance.

The government would now like to specifically address the 10 recommendations made by the AIV.

## ***1. Proposal for a 'nuclear Brundtland Commission'***

One of the AIV's central recommendations is that the Netherlands should propose the establishment of an authoritative international commission – similar to the Brundtland Commission – to investigate the scope for making reliable, specific and binding agreements on controlling risks, quantities and types of nuclear weapons.

The government takes this recommendation on board. Such a commission of eminent experts from some 20 nuclear-weapon and non-nuclear-weapon states could formulate an authoritative and realistic vision of nuclear disarmament based on the action plans previously agreed in the context of the NPT review cycle and thus provide fresh impetus to the disarmament process. Such a commission should also try to involve nuclear-weapon states that are not parties to the NPT in disarmament initiatives. It could also undertake outreach efforts towards non-nuclear-weapon states that support the Nuclear Ban Treaty to ensure that they remain committed to the NPT. Another key task of this commission would be to counteract political polarisation.

The Netherlands views and will continue to view the NPT as the template for the disarmament process, and in this light it is important that such a commission support the NPT review cycle. Ensuring the success of the NPT Review Conference in 2020 is a top priority for the international community and the Netherlands, but also poses a major challenge owing to significant differences of opinion and geopolitical tensions. As chair of the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom), the Netherlands produced strong, substantive outcome documents in 2017, including a wide range of disarmament obligations, thereby laying the foundations for a good result in 2020. As Vice-President of the NPT Review Conference, the Netherlands will continue to do its utmost to this end.

As part of its efforts to support the NPT, the Netherlands will raise the suggestion of establishing such a committee of eminent experts with like-minded UN partners in order to identify opportunities and generate support within the UN General Assembly.

## ***2. Efforts to preserve the INF Treaty and prepare for a post-INF future***

The government agrees with the AIV's analysis of the situation surrounding the INF Treaty and endorses its recommendations that the credible preservation of the treaty merits a concerted effort and that follow-up defensive measures should be taken if Russia is not willing to respect it.

The INF Treaty has made a major contribution to stability and security in Europe for over 30 years. However, a situation in which one of the parties violates the treaty is not sustainable. The Netherlands can independently confirm that Russia is breaching its treaty obligations by developing and introducing a new ground-launched cruise missile with a range of over 500 km, which is prohibited under the INF Treaty. This system may weaken stability and security in Europe in particular (see also Parliamentary Paper 33 694, no. 34). For years the United States, as a party to the INF Treaty, as well as the Netherlands and other NATO Allies have been calling on Russia to return to full and verifiable compliance. However, the Russian government is refusing to enter into a sincere dialogue about this or take demonstrable steps to save the treaty.

As Russia's flouting of arms control cannot go on endlessly, the Netherlands and all other NATO Allies unanimously support the announcement by the US that it intends to denounce the treaty. Until then, the Netherlands will continue to call on Russia to use this period of notice to save the treaty, in accordance with the motion submitted by MP Joël Voordewind (Parliamentary Paper 33 694, no. 30). For example, the Minister of Foreign Affairs discussed the INF Treaty again with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov at a bilateral meeting on 15 February 2019. Moreover, in a keynote address delivered at an arms control conference in Berlin on 15 March, the Minister of Foreign Affairs once again called on Russia to save the treaty by returning to full and verifiable compliance. It was also partly on the initiative of the Netherlands that the INF Treaty was discussed in the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), and the Netherlands will make every effort to ensure that the NRC reconvenes once again to discuss the treaty before the expiry of the period of notice.

Given that Russia will probably be unwilling to destroy the missile system that violates the INF Treaty, the NATO Allies are also assessing the consequences of such a scenario. In that context, NATO is preparing defensive, measured and coordinated deterrence measures to ensure the security of the Alliance. The need to maintain credible Allied defence and deterrence is paramount. The nuclear task performed by the Netherlands in NATO contributes to this. NATO has no plans to introduce ground-launched nuclear systems in Europe.

The Netherlands and its NATO Allies remain strongly committed to dialogue and arms control. As we wish to prevent an arms race at all costs, we must identify and explore opportunities for de-escalation and new, effective arms control steps. The government agrees with the AIV that it is important to involve China and other countries in new arms control initiatives. To this end, the Netherlands is active within the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), which was co-founded by the Netherlands and currently has 12 member countries. The NPDI focuses on issues such as the provision of transparency by nuclear-weapon states, negative security guarantees, and step-by-step nuclear disarmament in the context of the NPT.

### ***3. Strategic dialogue with Russia***

The AIV recommends that the Netherlands play an active role in entering into a new strategic dialogue with Russia on controlling and reducing nuclear weapons. The government endorses the importance of dialogue with Russia in the social, political and military domains. The aim should be to prevent misconceptions, miscommunication and escalation, and identify and shape opportunities for effective and mutual arms control. Despite Russia's increasingly assertive rhetoric and undermining activities, the Netherlands remains a strong advocate of continuing dialogue with Russia, albeit without adopting a 'business-as-usual' approach. As mentioned earlier in this letter, it was partly on the initiative of the Netherlands that the NATO-Russia Council convened to discuss the INF Treaty and it was also at the urging of the Netherlands that the European Union called on Russia to return to compliance with the treaty. In the period ahead, the Netherlands will work closely with its NATO Allies to explore the possibilities for enhancing the dialogue, in particular within the NRC and through strengthening military contacts. Russia's attitude is also a determining factor, and its illegal occupation of Crimea and aggressive actions in eastern Ukraine are not conducive to constructive dialogue. However, the Netherlands will continue to seek and advocate dialogue.

The government remains committed to complete nuclear disarmament. In that context, it favours the withdrawal of all Russian and US sub-strategic nuclear weapons from throughout Europe – from the Atlantic to the Urals. Together with its allies, the government will work to identify opportunities to bring this about and make use of them on the basis of reciprocity, verifiability and irreversibility, as also proposed by the AIV. This would make our continent safer and represent a significant step towards achieving the goal of a nuclear-free world.

Unfortunately, Russia is at this very moment investing heavily in new means of delivery for nuclear weapons, including sub-strategic cruise missiles that violate the INF Treaty. Moreover, the Russian Federation has many times the number of sub-strategic nuclear weapons held by NATO. In addition, the Russian government is using increasingly assertive rhetoric about its own nuclear striking power, and has so far always refused to discuss limiting sub-strategic systems – even when the Obama administration expressed its willingness in 2013 to make ‘bold reductions’.

Nonetheless, enhancing mutual transparency and creating the right conditions could facilitate negotiations with Russia. The government has endeavoured to achieve this in the recent past and will continue to work tirelessly to this end, for example through the NPDI’s transparency initiatives and by encouraging discussion within the P5 on transparency and doctrines. Moreover, the Netherlands remains in dialogue with Russia on nuclear disarmament in multilateral forums such as the NPT review cycle and the Disarmament Conference.

That is why the Dutch government is focusing on steps that will increase the security of the Netherlands and the Alliance in the short term. An example of this are its efforts to devise effective ways of reducing nuclear risks, for instance through measures that improve communication or further raise the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons.

#### ***4. Conventional capabilities***

The AIV states that the prevention of war is based on a balanced mix of conflict management and deterrence. Balanced conventional capabilities reduce the risk of military conflict and with it, the risk of nuclear weapons being used. The government agrees with this analysis. Conventional and nuclear capabilities can enhance each other’s deterrent effect. A shortage of conventional capabilities – alleged or real – can lower the threshold for the use of the nuclear capability in a conflict, while balanced conventional capabilities can have the opposite effect. Moreover, as the AIV rightly notes, it is necessary to prevent a situation in which nuclear options come to be seen as an effective supplement to the conventional military arsenal, as appears to be the case in Russian (but not NATO) military doctrine. Maintaining strict political control over nuclear decision-making is also of the utmost importance.

As already described in its response (2018) to the AIV advisory report ‘The Future of NATO and European Security’ and the AIV advisory letter ‘Russia and the Defence Efforts of the Netherlands’, the government believes that NATO must be able to continue fulfilling its three essential core tasks: collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security. In that context, and certainly also in view of the interaction between conventional and nuclear deterrence, it is important for NATO to be strengthened in various areas, including its conventional capabilities. As the threats to the Alliance are of a varied nature, the measures to strengthen it must be correspondingly broad. Within NATO, the Netherlands is therefore working to further the various organisational reform processes (such as the changes to the

NATO command structure) and to promote further investment in political and military contacts with the United States at different levels.

Another top priority for the government is ensuring adequate financial resources for defence, since this is a precondition for an adequate and effective security policy. This is why the coalition agreement provides for an additional €1.5 billion to be allocated annually to the budget of the Ministry of Defence. The government is thus demonstrating its willingness to implement the agreements made at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014, by increasing defence spending in the period until 2024 towards the NATO guideline of 2% of GDP, with 20% of expenditure going towards new investment. More equitable sharing of burdens within NATO is important for the future of the Alliance and European security. Follow-up steps will be needed to achieve this.

Enhancing credible deterrence and improving NATO's readiness are also matters that are of great importance to the government. In this context, NATO decided at the summits in Wales (2014) and Warsaw (2016) to deploy an enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic states and Poland in order to provide them with reassurance and deter Russia. An enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF) has also been established. The Netherlands is actively participating in both the eFP and the eNRF. For more details about how the Netherlands is working to strengthen the conventional capabilities of the Alliance, reference should be made to the letter sent by the government to the House of Representatives in December 2018 on 'Deployment of Rapid-reaction Forces in 2019' (Parliamentary Paper 29 521, no. 369).

NATO's defence system is based on certain capabilities which, as a whole, enable the Alliance to carry out its three core tasks. NATO has pointed out that, despite the investments, the Netherlands is still failing to achieve – or fully achieve – many of these objectives. In the national plan submitted to NATO in December, the government therefore expressed its intention to invest in five prioritised targets.

Conventional arms control is also crucial to the security of the Netherlands, but it too is hampered by the new geopolitical reality. For example, Russia terminated its participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) in 2015, and is regularly organising large-scale military exercises that are conducted in a manner contrary to the transparency provisions of the Vienna Document of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This year, the Netherlands is chairing the OSCE Structured Dialogue, which is a working group that seeks to create an environment conducive to reinvigorating conventional arms control and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in Europe. The Structured Dialogue is one of the few forums in which such issues are still discussed with Russia, but the scope for progress is limited by the international political context. As chair, the Netherlands is therefore working to generate diplomatic support for continuing, deepening and, if possible, expanding talks on conventional arms control and CSBMs in Europe.

### ***5. Transatlantic relations and European military self-reliance***

The government, like the AIV, recognises the importance of a strong and lasting security relationship with the United States, primarily within NATO but also bilaterally. Indeed, the need for such a relationship has, if anything, become even more important of late, given the military threat posed by Russia. In recent years, the United States has begun investing more

in European security, both within NATO and through the US's European Deterrence Initiative (EDI).

The government is clear that the European NATO member countries must continue to make their contribution to the Alliance, in view of the evolving international security situation and the importance of equitable transatlantic burden-sharing. The House of Representatives has been informed at various times about how the government proposes to implement the Wales Summit agreements on defence spending. The government would refer, for example, to the Defence White Paper and the National Plan on the NATO Defence Investment Pledge (Parliamentary Paper 28 676, no. 308).

In the government's view, a greater role for the EU in terms of security would also help to increase European responsibility within NATO. The various European Defence Cooperation initiatives, such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), create opportunities, for example for investing in conventional capabilities, thereby enabling Europe to take more responsibility for its own security and thus contribute to a more equitable sharing of burdens within the Alliance. The Netherlands is playing an important role in deepening European defence cooperation, for example by pressing for improvements to military mobility in and through Europe. Short-term and long-term goals were agreed for this purpose at the European Council in June 2018 and the NATO Summit in Brussels in 2018. The Netherlands is committed to achieving these objectives within the EU-NATO framework and through the PESCO Military Mobility project, of which the Netherlands is lead nation. This project enhances operational readiness and deployability, and contributes to the security of the EU and NATO as a whole.

In accordance with the coalition agreement, the government is focusing on furthering bilateral and European cooperation on the joint procurement of materiel, on setting up training and education courses together with partners, and on pooling existing materiel. The government is also continuing its policy of making further agreements with like-minded countries on specific bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the aim of strengthening each other's capabilities and increasing the deployability of the combined armed forces through extensive interoperability.

In the government's opinion, NATO is the cornerstone of Dutch and European security policy and bears primary responsibility for collective defence in Europe. Defence and security initiatives developed within the EU should, in the government's view, be closely coordinated with NATO. The government considers that a greater role for the EU in the nuclear field would be undesirable, unrealistic and also contrary to the basic principles of the NPT, which the Netherlands wishes to preserve at all costs. The government agrees with the AIV that the emergence of new nuclear-weapon states on the European continent or the development of an independent European nuclear capability is out of the question.

## ***6. Allied nuclear obligations***

The government takes account of the recent changes in the international security situation, which the AIV also outlined in its report. A long period of relative stability and predictability in Europe seems to be over. We cannot afford to be naive about the changing context and its implications for the Netherlands. Our security and way of life are paramount; that is why the government's stated intention is to invest permanently in alliances and military capabilities that can prevent and, if necessary, respond to aggression. All countries within the Alliance,

including the Netherlands, must assume greater responsibility for their own security, while at the same time continuing to invest in a strong transatlantic bond. After all, only a strong and united NATO – the cornerstone of our security and security policy – can make an impression and offer sustainable and reliable guarantees for our security.

The government's aim is still to ensure that the Netherlands no longer needs to fulfil a nuclear task when the F-16 is eventually replaced by the F-35, since it hopes that the international security situation and the agreements within NATO will make this possible at that juncture. In view of the rising tensions and the risk of an arms race, the government will therefore work with its allies, as noted above, to identify possible ways of achieving the withdrawal of all Russian and American sub-strategic nuclear weapons from throughout Europe (from the Atlantic to the Urals). The government endorses the AIV's analysis that a unilateral withdrawal of US sub-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe would be undesirable for both military and political reasons. If disarmament steps are to make an effective contribution, they must be complete, mutual, verifiable and irreversible. While the government fully recognises that in reality the chance of success is remote, given that there is little likelihood that Russia and other nuclear-weapon states outside NATO would be willing to meet these conditions in the current situation, this makes it all the more imperative to attempt it anyway and to ask the US and other NATO Allies to support such initiatives. The logical time to take such steps would be when the nuclear weapons deployed in Europe are due for modernisation.

Against the background of the geopolitical developments outlined above, the Netherlands' commitment to discharging its obligations as a member of the Alliance and the undesirability of taking disarmament steps unilaterally, successive governments since 2002 have taken the position that it was always the intention that the F-35 should take over the existing nuclear task of the F-16. One F-16 squadron is currently responsible for fulfilling this task. The Dutch contribution to NATO's nuclear task is also an example of how the Netherlands has long worked on a daily basis to maintain the collective security of the Alliance and thus also the security of the Netherlands; guaranteeing our security is not free, and the Netherlands is willing to continue making a meaningful contribution to it. In this way we help to strengthen cohesion within NATO, ensure burden-sharing, enhance the credibility of NATO's defence and finally, as the ultimate goal, guarantee our peace and security. It is precisely because the Netherlands performs this task – an Alliance obligation it has discharged for more than 55 years – that it is able to play a more vigorous and effective role in relation to arms control. As the AIV notes, nuclear cooperation within NATO provides a starting point for achieving mutual nuclear arms control, arms reduction and, ultimately, disarmament. In this way, the government wants to continue to constructively stimulate discussions within the Alliance on disarmament and sub-strategic nuclear weapons, while at the same time being a reliable Ally.

## ***7. Exercises***

The government acknowledges the importance of conducting exercises for all aspects of the nuclear task and endorses the AIV's recommendation that exercises for procedures relating to nuclear weapons should continue to be conducted using generic scenarios. Conducting exercises for processes at all levels, from political decision-making to operational readiness, on the basis of generic scenarios, is essential for safe and credible nuclear deterrence. Moreover, such exercises are necessary in order to ensure that the personnel and units involved have the requisite knowledge of and experience with the nuclear task and thus also to prevent the risk of accidents caused by miscommunication and unintentional use.



The Netherlands regularly conducts exercises for all aspects of the nuclear task, and also takes part in NATO and bilateral exercises. As a member of NATO, the Netherlands makes an active contribution to the establishment and implementation of nuclear exercise programmes. The Netherlands will redouble its efforts to ensure that risks continue to be properly managed. To this end and also to improve the provision of information about nuclear weapons policy, the government will take steps to broaden and enhance the nuclear knowledge base.

#### ***8. Artificial intelligence and new technologies***

On the subject of the modernisation of nuclear decision-making and communication, the AIV rightly refers to the application of digital technologies and artificial intelligence (AI). While the government sees opportunities for the deployment and use of new technologies (e.g. for data analysis and intelligence gathering), it also foresees significant challenges and objections, particularly in connection with nuclear systems. The House of Representatives will receive a separate letter about the security implications of new technologies. That letter will also address the issue of drones and autonomous weapon systems (often referred to as ‘killer robots’).<sup>1</sup> These have the potential to be even more effective weapons of mass destruction and as such create entirely new strategic and tactical dangers.

The government agrees with the AIV on the challenges that exist in this area. NATO is taking measures to ensure that nuclear capabilities are not vulnerable to digital disruption. As regards AI, the government emphasises that all weapon systems must be under meaningful human control at all times. In the case of nuclear systems, the government therefore considers that in order to prevent unintentional use, nuclear decision-making must always be under political control, without technical or procedural automatism.

The government stresses the importance of international cooperation in achieving a responsible approach to digital technology, AI and arms control, as also laid down in article 36 of the Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions. This is one reason why the Netherlands has been actively involved from the outset in the discussion about lethal autonomous weapon systems under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW).

#### ***9. Knowledge of and information sharing on nuclear weapons policy***

The AIV rightly points to the need to improve knowledge of and information sharing on NATO’s nuclear policy. To comply with the recommendation that as much information as possible should be provided, the government will adopt a more proactive approach to disseminating information about the objectives, contribution and results of Dutch nuclear policy. This will involve more active communication about nuclear disarmament and credible nuclear deterrence and about how they interact in the security context.

A degree of ambiguity is an inherent element of nuclear deterrence, and this is bound to inhibit unduly open communication. For example, too much transparency about decision-making procedures, numbers, locations and security arrangements relating to the nuclear capability can adversely affect the performance of military operational tasks and hence undermine the credibility of nuclear deterrence. That is why there are NATO agreements on what can be publicly disclosed about its nuclear deterrence.

In this letter, the Netherlands is providing as much transparency as possible within the framework of these Allied agreements. The government is also engaged in intensive discussions at various levels within NATO on ways of achieving greater transparency about US sub-strategic nuclear weapons in Europe. Here too, however, Russia's increasingly assertive rhetoric and its undermining military activities are having a negative impact. For example, there is clearly no willingness at present within NATO to embark on a discussion about revising security agreements. Nevertheless, the government will continue to raise this subject within NATO.

The government will continue to make every effort to explain its nuclear and security policy and provide as much information as possible about all relevant facts, but it is not in favour of unilateral decisions that clash with NATO agreements about what aspects of this policy can be publicly disclosed. Not only would this be at odds with the Netherlands' obligations as a member of the Alliance, but it would also undermine its credibility and position within NATO. Nor would it be in the interests of the security of the Netherlands and the Alliance.

Besides transparency about nuclear policy, other subjects of major importance in this connection are education, knowledge building and knowledge sharing about nuclear policy. The Netherlands encourages projects, research and education, for example by supporting the annual 'Disarmament and Non-Proliferation of WMD' course run by the Asser Institute and various research projects conducted by institutions such as the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. The Netherlands has also set up an extensive non-proliferation project with the participation of four PhD students and is funding two work placements every year at the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean (OPANAL). The Netherlands remains involved in further knowledge development, and is trying to bring stakeholders into contact with one another to ensure that nuclear knowledge is not lost and continues to develop. To support this, the nuclear knowledge base will be expanded and enhanced.

#### **10. *Multilateral disarmament***

Implementing the NPT, including article VI, is a priority for the Netherlands. As stated in the letter to the House of Representatives about Dutch efforts to achieve nuclear disarmament, it is indeed true that the Netherlands cannot on its own compel others to accept disarmament; there are limits to Dutch influence. As recommended in the AIV advisory report, the government is therefore focusing on using its strong knowledge base to identify effective initiatives and find the right partners to be able to exert maximum influence.

In 2017, the Netherlands was the sole member of NATO to participate in the negotiations on a treaty to ban nuclear weapons. It did so because it considers that every initiative that could contribute to nuclear disarmament deserves attention and commitment. However, the Netherlands cannot support the text of the treaty because it is not in keeping with fundamental Dutch principles. For example, the treaty text could undermine the indispensable NPT; almost no aspects of the ban are verifiable, and there is no widespread support for the treaty (for example, among nuclear-weapon states). Moreover, the treaty text is incompatible with NATO membership (see the letter on this subject to the House of Representatives of 14 July 2017, Parliamentary Paper 33 783, no. 26). On 30 January 2019 (Parliamentary Paper 33 783, no. 31), the government explained how it intends to implement the motion submitted by MP Joël Voordewind on 'generating support for the treaty on a nuclear weapons ban'. This treaty contains several elements that are not compatible with the Netherlands' commitments

as a NATO member. Nonetheless, the government remains fully committed to implementing the disarmament section of the coalition agreement. It will continue to speak out internationally about the need for a world free of nuclear weapons and will continue reminding nuclear possessor states of their responsibilities.

This centres around the Netherlands' role as Chair of the NPT PrepCom in 2017 and hence as Vice-President of the 2020 NPT Review Conference, as described above. The Netherlands is also a co-founder of and active within the Non-Proliferation and Disarmament Initiative (NPDI), working, for example, with the nuclear-weapon states to improve transparency in the context of the NPT. The Netherlands is an initiator of a UN Group of Governmental Experts on nuclear disarmament verification. It is also one of the chairs of a US-led nuclear disarmament verification partnership and will organise a meeting of this partnership in the summer. The Netherlands continues to work for the establishment of a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) and organised a nuclear disarmament colloquium in Geneva this month April, bringing together academics from around the world to present new ideas to disarmament diplomats.

The government remains committed to both nuclear disarmament and nuclear deterrence, which, individually and as a whole, contribute to the security of the Netherlands.

**[1] The government rejects outright the development and use of autonomous weapon systems that are not under meaningful human control. See also the government's response of 4 March 2016 to the AIV advisory report 'Autonomous weapon systems: the need for meaningful human control' (Parliamentary Papers 34 300 X and 34 300 V, no. 88).**