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President: NATO sends clear signal of solidarity

Multinational battalions on the eastern flank are a clear signal of NATO solidarity, President Andrzej Duda said in an interview granted to PAP.

The NATO summit in Warsaw "is of groundbreaking importance" because there has been no similar presence of NATO troops in Poland before, Andrzej Duda told PAP.

"Poland has been in NATO for a long time, but NATO has not been in Poland. Now NATO will be in Poland", the president said, remarking that the presence of US and other allied troops was extremely important for building the architecture of Poland's security.

The security situation has changed in recent years, and the start of this can be traced back to 2008, to Russia's attack on Georgia, according to the Polish president. He mentioned the scenario outlined at the time by the late President Lech Kaczynski, who had said that unless the world strongly opposed that act of aggression, others could follow, including against Ukraine, the Baltic states and perhaps even Poland.

Unfortunately, that scenario has partly come true, Andrzej Duda pointed out, mentioning the attack on Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in this context.

Asked whether four battalions of 1,000 soldiers each in Poland and the Baltic states would be enough to deter Russia, President Duda said that above all this was a clear sign of NATO's intentions. It would show that NATO was tight-knit, efficient, able to make decisions and showing solidarity.

Though it is hard to predict whether this is enough, the most important thing is "that anyone who commits an act of aggression against a country where NATO troops are deployed will at the same time be committing an act of aggression against all the countries", the president also remarked.

Russia is Poland's great neighbour and Poland wants to have the best possible relations with its neighbours, but the dialogue should be one of partnership, Andrzej Duda said. "We cannot allow a situation in which Russia would talk to us or to other NATO countries from a position of strength", he said.

"Before a serious dialogue is undertaken with Russia, it is necessary to reinforce NATO's presence in our part of Europe", President Duda continued, adding that talks with Russia also had to take into account the problem of Ukraine and the implementation of the Minsk accords.

NATO should pursue an open-door policy, according to the Polish president, who expressed satisfaction that the NATO summit in Warsaw would be attended by the prime minister of Montenegro, which is joining NATO. "NATO should support and also leave the door open to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova. Of course, these could be very long-term processes, but closing the door to NATO would be a very bad signal", he also said.

Ukraine can expect the NATO summit to show the alliance's support and to send a signal that NATO considers restoring peace in Ukraine to be one of its goals, President Duda said in reply to a question about his upcoming

meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. "I trust that a signal will be sent by the alliance that NATO is with Ukraine and supports Ukraine", he said.

In relations with Germany, increasing the volume of trade between the two countries will benefit them both, and the best possible relations are also in both countries' interest, President Duda underlined, but added that contentious issues also existed, for example the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, whose construction Poland opposes on the grounds that it is a political rather than an economic project, and one that is detrimental to the European Union and increases Russian gas company Gazprom's potential for delivering gas to Europe and thus gaining domination.

Britain's withdrawal from the EU will not weaken transatlantic relations, according to Poland's president, who added that the British referendum had created a crisis for the EU. "The EU and NATO are two separate organisations that partially overlap. Maybe Britain will want to play an even greater role in NATO", Andrzej Duda said.

EU armed forces could be a tough project to pursue given how little some countries spend on defence, including NATO members, the president pointed out. If a European army were to be built, it would have to be an element of NATO and not a separate, rival formation, as this would weaken transatlantic cooperation, Andrzej Duda added.

Asked about the future of the euro zone and Poland's adoption of the euro, President Duda said this had to be a decision considered calmly, and one that should ultimately belong to Polish society.

Commenting on Polish troops being sent to Iraq and Kuwait, President Duda said there had been no indication that the terrorist threat in Poland had increased as a result. He pointed out that, as a NATO member, Poland was obliged to show solidarity as an ally; it had to support others when they needed allied support.

Asked about the topics of his meeting with US President Barack Obama on Friday, President Duda said that these would include the NATO summit and Polish-US cooperation. "I will also thank (President Obama) for the United States' stance on the NATO summit and its decisions", he added.

Source: PAP; president.pl

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