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## Let's shape the Polish military together, President says on Army Day

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**President Andrzej Duda, in a speech on Armed Forces Day on Tuesday, called on the Polish people to unite in shaping the army.**

Speaking on Tuesday at a keynote event to mark Polish Armed Forces Day, at the Marshal Pilsudski (see: NOTE 1) memorial in Warsaw, Duda said, "the Polish authorities are doing all they can to answer the current needs of the Polish army".

"We are doing all we can to spend as much as possible on its modernisation, as well as to reverse the unfavourable changes which have taken place over past years", the president emphasised.

"A lot of mistakes have been made, but I strongly believe that they can be rectified", Duda added.



He said that just as defence spending had been raised after being slashed in previous years, so the adverse changes in the command system could be overturned.

The president conceded there were competing concepts of army reform, but said he was convinced both the government and the opposition recognised, "that the most important thing is the common good, that is, first and foremost, the Republic of Poland, of which the Polish army is an essential part".

"This is the army of the Republic of Poland, not anybody's private army", Duda stressed.

"This is an army which we have to shape together, for whose benefit we must work in concert", the president added.



Duda emphasised it was thanks to the army that Poland was free, sovereign and independent.

"I assure you that as the head of the Polish army, I am open to the best possible cooperation" - the president declared - "but I also assure you I know what it means to be the president and head of the Polish Army."

"I am convinced that it is my duty as president to protect all the values I have just mentioned", Duda added.

"I am trying to fulfil this role as best I can and I assure you I am going to do it throughout my term in office", the president said.

He also announced the army's technology would continue to be modernised, with annual defence spending planned to rise to 2.5 percent of Gross Domestic Product by 2030.

Duda said these were, "very important challenges", the biggest of which was, "to be able to defend our motherland should anyone dare to raise their hand against Poland".

"I believe we will be able to modernise and expand the Polish army with care and diligence, in a planned and logical way", the president added.

"I believe that in this process we will preserve unity as politicians and that we'll be able to maintain unity within the Polish army as well", he stressed.

"The Polish Army is one, it cannot be differentiated into separate types of armies, nor in any other way", he went on, emphasising that, "all Polish soldiers and all the units deserve respect".



Referring to the Polish-Soviet War (see: NOTE 2), of which the 1920 Battle of Warsaw was the turning point, the president said Poland won it, "partly because over a million people took up arms".

"Today" - Duda said - "we need well-trained Polish soldiers, but also well-trained reserves".

"I believe we will achieve this by creating the Territorial Defence Force. Hopefully we will train it more comprehensively in the future", he added.

Alluding to the Battle of Warsaw, which is the reason why the Armed Forces Day is held on August 15, the president said the day had actually been important for Christians since the 5th century as the date for the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

"But for us, Polish people, it's also a great celebration of a famous Polish victory, of Polish military might and of the Polish nation", Duda explained.

"It's a celebration of victory in the Battle of Warsaw, of a great breakthrough in the Polish-Soviet War, in warding off the Bolshevik assault on Poland", the president stressed, "and also on the whole of Europe, as such were the designs of the Bolshevik leaders, especially Lenin".

Duda added that in his view, Polish strategists and commanders actually wanted, "the breakthrough in the battle to occur precisely on August 15", as Poland's soldiers had always believed the Virgin Mary was protecting them and Poland, and, "this sense, this faith, must have energised the million Polish soldiers on that day, August 15, 1920".

The president emphasised that, "at this time, everybody stood together, regardless of strategic views and ambition".

Duda also pointed out that Poland had received support from abroad, including from America.

"General Frederick Ben Hodges! Today's ceremony is in keeping with tradition, our traditional alliance, the big Polish-American alliance", the president said, addressing the commander of American land forces in Europe, whom he decorated with the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland.

Earlier, Duda had laid wreaths at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and at the Monument to Jozef Pilsudski.



Following the president's address, a parade featuring 1,500 soldiers, around 200 vehicles and 60 aircraft proceeded down Warsaw's Ujazdowskie Avenue.



As is the custom, military units and standard-bearers from allied and partner countries took part in the showcase.

Polish Armed Forces Day was held on August 15, between 1923 and 47, in tribute to the country's unlikely victory over the Bolsheviks in the 1920 Battle of Warsaw.

The date was subsequently changed by Poland's Soviet-controlled authorities, but following the fall of communism, since 1992 the Polish military's special day has again been celebrated on August 15.

Source: PAP

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