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## President Andrzej Duda: Independence not given once and for all

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**Poland's Independence Day, President Andrzej Duda paid tribute to the country's founding fathers, for whom "the vision of a free, independent Poland was more important than anything else".**



Poland celebrated its 99th anniversary of regaining independence on Saturday. The president, speaking at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, was addressing officials and the public that gathered in Warsaw's Pilsudski Square to commemorate November 11, 1918 as the day Poland re-emerged as a sovereign state after more than a century of partitions.

The president pointed to the symbolic nature of the venue, formerly the site of the famous Saski Palace and now dedicated to Poland's greatest independence hero, Marshal Jozef Pilsudski

President Duda also reminded the public that exactly a year earlier, he had announced the start of preparations for the country's independence centenary on November 11, 2018.

In this connection, he thanked the speakers of both the Sejm (lower house) and Senate (upper house) as well as all lawmakers, for passing the Centenary Celebrations Act.

"The preamble to this act, the first sentence", the head of state observed, "makes reference to those key figures whom we have to thank for independence".

"An independence", the president added, "which returned after many struggles in 1918, an independence for which so many had striven".



In these efforts, the Polish people were led by their most prominent statesmen. "In our history, may the names of these people - Marshal Jozef Pilsudski, Ignacy Paderewski, Roman Dmowski, Wincenty Witos, Ignacy Daszynski, Wojciech Korfanty - be always etched in gold, because it is thanks to them that independence returned", Andrzej Duda urged.

For all their political differences, these independence fathers respected one other, the president emphasised.

During the central Independence Day ceremonies, President Duda stressed that "we must remember about the price of independence, the price of freedom".

"We cannot forget that independence is not given once and for all, and that the most important aspect of the political process is to strengthen it", the president stressed.

People must also remember that faith in the Republic of Poland is of crucial importance in everyday life and work, Andrzej Duda went on to say. "Devotion to the homeland, to the nation, to every fellow citizen is the most important thing".

"It is beyond everything, beyond our ideological divisions, beyond all disputes, beyond quarrels, and every dispute, even the fiercest one, must head towards dialogue and understanding", President Duda argued.

Only this way will Poland be able to build a foundation for a strong state, according to President Andrzej Duda. "A state that will never be broken again. One that cannot be removed. One that can never be destroyed in order to obliterate Poland from the map again", the president said.

In his speech, Andrzej Duda recalled the circumstances surrounding the erection of Warsaw's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, which stands on Pilsudski Square, and stressed that the anonymous soldier entombed in it was one of the onetime Polish defenders of Lviv (in today's Ukraine), which belonged to Poland before World War II.

"Several years after we regained independence, Polish people stood on this square just like today, gathered for a big patriotic ceremony - the entombment under the arcades of the Saxon Palace of the remains of a boy exhumed from a grave near Lviv. A defender of the Polish Republic who fell fighting for Poland. An unknown soldier, a volunteer, who clutched his cap in his lifeless hand", the president said.



Andrzej Duda also made reference to the words spoken at that ceremony by Bishop Antoni Szlagowski, observing that they should be "engraved in the memories and hearts of all generations of Polish people".

"Bishop Szlagowski said: 'Who are you to God, grey, forgotten, nameless soldier? You are the eternal fighting spirit of the nation, and your name is courage. You are the inexhaustible, undefeated strength of national ideals, and your name is sacrifice. You are the all-victorious independence of the national spirit'", President Duda recounted, quoting the church official.

Concluding his address, the head of state wished independent Poland all the best on the threshold of its centenary (due on November 11, 2018), and hailed the heroes of the Polish freedom struggle.

"Long live free, independent, sovereign Poland on the threshold of its independence centenary. Hail and glory to the heroes of our free and independent motherland", the president said in Pilsudski Square.

Source: PAP



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