

National Security Bureau

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President: We are proud to be a NATO member today

We are proud to be today a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, which guarantees security in our part of Europe and of the world, President Andrzej Duda said in the Prague celebrations marking the 20th anniversary of NATO enlargement.

Excellencies,

Honourable Mr Prime Minister,

Honourable Speakers,

All Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I will never forget the extraordinary feeling I had back in 2016 when, as the host - in the sense of the venue - of the NATO Summit in Warsaw, in the evening of the first day of the Summit, I was receiving the Heads of State of the North Atlantic Alliance member states in the Presidential Palace in the Column Hall at the so-called working dinner. Do you know where this feeling came from? Well, in 1955, exactly on 14 May, in the very same room - the Column Hall of the Presidential Palace - the Warsaw Pact was signed. For everyone present here today the implications thereof are obvious.

Whereas in 2016, less than three years ago, the leaders of the North Atlantic Alliance - the largest defence alliance of the free world, which safeguards security of the democratic countries of the transatlantic community, the Western community, were sitting in the Column Hall. As you can guess, it was an extraordinary experience and a source of pride for me to be seated amongst them, representing the Republic of Poland - the country that has aspired to be one of them ever since 1939, since it was torn apart by the Nazi Germany and the Soviet Russia in September of that year in a treacherous attack.

Why do I mention this? For one thing, to make us understand how today's Poles look at their country's membership in the North Atlantic Alliance, the largest defence alliance in the world, the most effective one, at least so far, of all alliances that have ever been made. Admittedly, back in 1939 Poland was also part of an alliance, it had two allies - it was bound by allied pacts with France and Britain. But when Nazi Germany invaded Poland, these two countries, having declared war on Germany as they did, they did not attack Germany, none of them actively starting war operations, nor did they come to Poland's aid.

Sometimes a question pops up: why is it that ever since 2015, when you were still President-Elect of your country, you kept reiterating the need to have NATO troops deployed in Poland, on your soil, and this starting from the first meetings with your NATO allies and, above all, with the Secretary General of the Alliance, Mr Jens Stoltenberg? Well, the reason was to make Poles place their confidence in the Alliance. Looking back at their historical experience, I am convinced that they must feel the presence of this Alliance.

And the geopolitical situation that was evolving around us from 2008 through 2014, when Russia first attacked Georgia and then assaulted Ukraine, unequivocally brought back those previous associations: Russia's imperialist policy, drive to the West, the expansion of the sphere of influence, the occupation of new states and, above all, the desire to return to its former sphere of influence, to which - needless to say here in Prague - none of our countries

wants to return any more.

This is why we value the North Atlantic Alliance in Poland, we value Allied presence in our country, and we take very seriously the obligations arising therefrom. We firmly believe that the presence of allied forces on our territory, in particular the United States army, has always been a guarantee of Europe's security. Because when Europe was really in a very serious danger - I would say that in a dire situation, as it was the case during World War I and then World War II - it was the arrival of American troops that made it possible to restore peace and order in Europe. This is how we look at it in Poland.

Above all, however, we believe in the Alliance, which, as I said, is world's largest military alliance and is the alliance in which brotherhood of arms means brotherhood of arms, support means support, and Article 5 means Article 5, and not the so-called brotherly help, of which I do not even need to speak here in Prague.

I can assure you that we are learning history's lessons well and taking our Allied commitments extremely seriously. We are proud to be today a member of the North Atlantic Alliance, which guarantees security in our part of Europe and of the world and through which we, too, can guarantee the security of those who want to live in free, democratic, sovereign countries, who want to develop and build peace in the world.

Our host, President Miloš Zeman, spoke about the Czech soldiers who fell while defending peace in Afghanistan within the framework of the North Atlantic Alliance, as part of the tasks that the Czech Republic is carrying out as an Allied member - a responsible ally. Mr President, Polish soldiers are also dying, and we also have suffered losses in the missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and other places where Polish soldiers are still present in the North Atlantic Alliance - and there are several such places in the world today.

Our soldiers are part of the coalition against the Islamic state, they are in Afghanistan - moreover, we have recently increased their number to 400 - our pilots are currently carrying out the Air Policing mission over the Baltic states, they are still in the Balkans, they serve as part of the Tailored Forward Presence in Romania. We are present there! Our soldiers are also in Africa. Why?

Because we believe that a responsible North Atlantic Alliance is guided by the principle of NATO 360 degrees. We believe that, just the way we expect the Allied nations are going to pay attention to the situation in NATO's Eastern flank, where we, as a state, are also going to pay attention to the others - this is precisely the Allied responsibility, taking care of security of the free world.

I wish to thank my friends, fellow Presidents, for approaching this the same way. Our soldiers are dying in defence of the free world, but also in defence of our respective countries and our citizens - I would like to stress this point most emphatically. For it was not for their presence there, in those places that are potentially hot spots, who knows, what our destinies would be, what fate of our countries and societies? Who knows, if it was not for the soldiers, and if it was not for the posture of the North Atlantic Alliance, especially in recent years, wouldn't we be running into a very serious security threat in our part of Europe today?

It is precisely this preparedness that NATO has demonstrated in recent years - especially from the Wales Summit to the Warsaw Summit, where these extremely important decisions were taken to establish an advanced forward presence - on the Eastern flank - who knows what Europe and its security architecture would look like today? Unfortunately, the threats to which we have fallen prey for more than 40 years are returning now, albeit returning in a slightly different form. But without any doubt they are coming back. Is our readiness needed when we are already part of a truly free world? Not only mentally - as I believe we have always been part of it - but also politically and geopolitically? Should we respond to them? Yes, we should - and it is good that our allies perceive them. Also, those who are so far from NATO's Eastern flank. Thank you for awareness.

Above all, however, I would like to thank the citizens of the Republic of Poland, Polish officials and politicians, as well as all the officials, politicians and citizens of our respective countries for their effort taken at that time - 20 years ago,

and then 15 years ago - as they tried to make our countries part of this great community of security and the community of the free world.

I remember how in 2008 or 2009, when we discussed security in the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland, the then President, Professor Lech Kaczyński, in whose office I had the honour of serving as undersecretary of state; a minister in his Chancellery, said then: "We have joined NATO and we are part of a free world. However, the whole world will only realize there is absolutely no longer any shadow of the Russian sphere of influence here, when NATO troops are here. They will be real. And there will be NATO military installations, especially the American ones". Today they are in place, and for this we are very grateful to the free world and to all my fellow citizens who have worked so hard all those years to achieve this.

As I was saying, we take seriously our Allied commitments. We also take seriously this great joy and this great commitment, as it is on the one hand, but likewise a great gift on the other hand: the fact that we can be a member of the North Atlantic Alliance. That is why we fulfil our obligations in line the NATO 360 degree principle, by sending our soldiers wherever they are needed, but also by fulfilling our obligations: spending 2% of our GDP on defence purposes, modernizing our army, the purchases that we make there - from new tanks through the Patriot anti-missile defence system or state-of-the-art artillery and missile systems, HIMARS, for which we have recently signed a contract for purchase. I believe that we will also be able to modernise our Navy and strengthen our air force by purchasing 5th generation aircraft for Poland.

We want to spend more on defence, because Polish society appreciates it is necessary. We want to do it because we know that the best situation imaginable is one where a state is self-sufficient in terms of security, i.e. when it is able to defend itself as much as possible. For us, this is a great guideline of a kind for the future: to build an army that will command respect. We would like for Poland to have such an army.

But we are happy and very proud to be among our allies today. I am very proud and moved to be standing here today in Prague, towards which - looking back at those dark years of our history when we were behind the Iron Curtain - Poland also has a commitment.

Thank you for being here together. Mr President, thank you for inviting me to this meeting. I would like to say that the Republic of Poland will always stand shoulder to shoulder alongside the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia - alongside all those who are aligned with the free world, on the side of freedom, independence, sovereignty, democracy and the self-determination of states. And true freedom - without the so-called brotherly help.

Thank you.

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