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President visits Polish troops on Sophia mission in Sicily

Polish President Andrzej Duda and his wife, Agata Kornhauser-Duda, paid a visit on Thursday to the Polish military contingent of the EU's Sophia mission in Sicily, formed to counteract human smuggling and trafficking in the Mediterranean Sea.



The president visited the Sigonella base, where he got acquainted with the contingent's tasks and the situation in the region. He also took part in a Christmas meeting with soldiers. President Duda was accompanied by Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak, National Security Bureau (BBN) head Pawel Soloch, Chief of Staff of the Polish Armed Forces General Rajmund Andrzejczak and Operational Commander of the Armed Forces General Tomasz Piotrowski.

Speaking to the troops, the president said that serving in the EU's Sophia mission, Polish soldiers were guarding the security of Poland, Europe and the allies and "also saving those who want to get to the EU."



He said the troops, being members of the EU and NATO, were "carrying out tasks far from Poland's borders, but within the framework of our alliance and European obligations." He added that building European military capability through EU cooperation would be "absolutely carried out not only in close coordination, but also within the framework of those activities that we undertake as a member of the North Atlantic Alliance; they must be coordinated activities and, above all, that we cannot allow them to have a competitive nature or for them in any way to cause a conflict of competencies, a clash between the North Atlantic Alliance and the EU."

EUNAVFOR MED operation Sophia is one of the elements of a broader EU response to the migration crisis. The main task of the mission, operating on the EU mandate, is to counteract human smuggling and trafficking in the Southern Central Mediterranean. It also trains the Libyan coastguard and navy, and contributes to the implementation of the UN arms embargo on the high seas off the coast of Libya.



The mission comprises 26 EU member countries. Its headquarters are based in Rome. Poland's contribution to the mission (62 soldiers and two civilians) is among the largest.

Source: PAP

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