

25 year in NATO what 's next?

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to present the Polish vision of NATO.

I am hope you are interested in learning the perspective of an Ally who guards NATO's and EU's Eastern border.

Let me start by noting that Europe we are living in after 24th February 2022 is completely different than before. The concepts and assumptions that organised the pre-war international environment no longer apply. The model of cooperative security in Europe which was developed in the 1990s or even earlier, since 1975, when Helsinki Final Act was adopted, no longer exists. And let's be frank: there are no chances that it could be resuscitated.

We thus need a paradigm shift in our thinking, accepting the completely changed reality. This has implications for NATO, as well as for the EU. They both should now have the primary role in ensuring security in Europe and be constantly adapted on the basis of an honest assessment of security environment. We can't allow ourselves any more for wishful thinking.

Therefore, before I move on to the Polish vision of NATO, let me underscore a few long-term trends in our security environment, which are particularly important from Polish perspective.

First, it is clear that Russia will remain the grave threat for European security. Its goals continue to be wider than the destruction of sovereign Ukraine. Russia sees itself as being at war with the West. It tries to build a new order on its own terms, not with Europe, but against Europe and at its cost. It is explicit in Putin's speeches and Russian documents, such as the new foreign policy concept. Furthermore, it is underpinned by Russia's self-positioning as a "civilization" separate from the West.

Kremlin's neoimperialist intents can still be realised. The Russian army traditionally had great potential to quickly recover and rebuild its offensive capacity. It is certainly capable of tackling this task faster than many of us think. It is worth to take into account that in 2024 Russian military spending is expected to rise 68 percent year-to-year and reach 7 percent of the GDP – just like in the Soviet times.

Second, the gradual subordination of Belarus gives Russia additional instruments of disrupting security in Europe, both militarily and through hybrid means. Minsk has been offering logistical and infrastructural assistance to Moscow, being an accomplice in its war against Ukraine.

Just mentioning - hosting the remains of Wagner Group mercenaries [around 1500] and signalling they would be used on Polish-Belarusian border. Since April 2022, it conducts with Russia military exercises close to Polish border almost on a permanent basis. Migration pressure from Belarus is not decreasing. More than 26,000 attempts to illegally cross the Polish-Belarusian border were recorded in 2023, while in 2024 only from April 4th to may 20th (6 weeks) the number was 10,500. Last week 3 polish soldiers was injured by migrants and

taken to the hospital. One of them, seriously wounded by migrant with a knife, is in critical but stable condition. Russian declared intent to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus, together with modernisation of its logistical infrastructure, only complicates the picture.

Third, Russia exerts damaging impact on security situation in other regions relevant to Europe's security: from Western Balkans to the Middle East and to the Sahel. The roots of instability in these regions are complex. They were not created by Russia. But Russia intended to use them and now, as we can see last years has learned how to interfere in these regions in new circumstances and how to manipulate the situation in a way that hurts Western interests and disperses Western attention. Moreover, Russian *modus operandi* in Ukraine might increasingly set a bad example for other actors in NATO's neighbourhood who want to stay in power in their countries. In areas and regions that used to be relatively stable, we have begun to be confronted with questioning of the importance of good relations with Europe, more outright expressions of contempt for the West and Western values and even more instances of brutal violence.

Against this background, let me present a few principles on which the Polish vision of NATO is based.

Above all, we should remember that NATO's core mission and greatest responsibility is collective defence, as stipulated in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. It is only NATO that has the detailed defence plans, the command structures and elaborated defence planning process that make collective defence executable. In this role NATO is simply irreplaceable. Therefore, NATO should stay focused on this mission in the long term. It should continue to deny any possibility of aggression, be it minor incursion or full-scale war, be it from the territory of Russia or Belarus or elsewhere. Allied populations need to be safe and to feel safe.

Three elements are particularly important when it comes to NATO military posture.

First, the PRESENCE of Allied forward forces on the Eastern flank should be persistent and robust. We appreciate the Allies contributions in this regard, including their role in NATO battlegroup deployment in Eastern flank countries, from then North in Estonia to the South in Bulgaria. An important guiding principle accepted by all Allies should be that Allied military presence on the Eastern flank is not constrained by any limitations other than Allied sovereign decisions, as we already decided and stated in our communique from Vilnius Summit last year.

Second, it is crucial that Allied forward defence is supported by wider NATO military ADAPTATION. NATO should have military plans which are up to date, concrete forces assigned to them, command structures ready for large-scale and land-heavy operations, prepositioned heavy equipment, as well as appropriate logistics, including reliable fuel supply for military forces.

There is still much to be done in these areas. Many allies can play a significant role in these endeavours. The countries with large armed forces should be able to assign appropriate formations to the new NATO plans as well as appropriate command structures, including at the corps as well as divisional levels. We should also ensure that NATO has necessary enablers and logistical infrastructure. For example, it would be very useful to link Polish and Eastern Allies' airbases to the NATO Pipeline System just as the Western Allies' airbases are.

Third, NUCLEAR POLICY should remain an important element of NATO's overall deterrence and defence. Allies should constantly make sure that the nuclear mission remains safe, effective and credible, also in light of the developments in Russia and Belarus. We count on constant reflection both when it comes to NATO nuclear-sharing arrangements and when it comes to the independent nuclear forces of France and the United Kingdom. They all contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance.

As NATO is not only a military organisation but a politico-military alliance, let me also highlight several issues which are more political in nature.

First, in our vision of NATO there is a place for all democratic European states, including Ukraine. As Article 10 of the Washington Treaty states, all countries which are "in a position to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area" should be free to join.

We are satisfied that Finland and Sweden are already members of NATO. Politically, the accession of the two Nordic countries shows that Putin's intimidation doesn't work and confirms that every state has a right to choose its security arrangements. From military point of view, it has improved the security situation in the strategically vulnerable region of NATO.

Similarly, we fully support Ukraine's membership. Admitting Ukraine would be the most potent deterrent against Russia. 4 reasons/arguments to consider:

1. Convincing Moscow that Kyiv's accession is imminent could persuade it to cease its aggression.
2. The Kremlin should finally understand that it has no right to perceive Ukraine, or any other state, as part of its sphere of influence.
3. Ukraine's membership would be the most economically viable option when it comes to securing lasting peace in Europe, especially when compared to financing its armed struggle for undefined time.
4. Inviting Kyiv would also prove our credibility as an Alliance meaning that we do not take Russia's veto into account.

Second, NATO should adapt not only militarily but also politically to the threat from Russia.

Russia has made a strategic decision to build its strength at the expense of weakening the West and disintegrating institutions created by and with the West. Russian state elite views any compromise with the West only in tactical, *ad hoc* terms. The conflict with both Ukraine and the West is a strategic choice of Russia, not the tactical one.

With that in mind, it becomes clear that the political frameworks created in the 1990s can no longer contribute to security or even stability in Europe. It is obvious that there cannot be any return to reliance on the instruments that were created in completely different conditions. NATO-Russia Council, in particular, is an instrument from different era.

That said, we do not question the fact that NATO needs channels of communication with Russia. They already exist. The Alliance can still use military-to-military channels to lower military risks and reduce the threat of misperceptions.

Third, NATO should be seen as part of wider partnership between Europe and the US. The war against Ukraine once again showed that a solid transatlantic bond is critical for the security of our continent. The early warning that Washington gave about Russia's intention to invade Ukraine restored faith in US intelligence. It was only the US that was able to deploy quickly so many forces to reinforce Eastern flank once Russia rejected dialogue. Poland alone has received 10 000 US troops in early 2022. Furthermore, the US has been fairly sharing the burden of providing support to fighting Ukrainians. However we had last months some suspension, with the US Congress unable to vote on continuing financial support to UA, but finally that crisis was overcome.

The US is with Europe and Europe should not question it.

Therefore, we don't see a need to pursue strategic autonomy from the US in security issues, but we would like to see the partnership between the US and Europe as a relationship of equals.

A strong Europe will be an attractive partner for the US. A partner, with whom Washington can share the responsibility for peace in Europe and for preserving the rules-based international order globally. Consequently, Poland intends to put emphasis on the strategic partnership between European Union and United States during our EU presidency in 2025.

A related issue is a complementarity of NATO and the EU. Both organisations worked hand in hand and made the best use of the instruments at their disposal to address the Russian aggression on Ukraine. While NATO ramped up its defences to deter the threat to European territory of the Alliance, the European Union imposed sanctions on Russia and Belarus and provided support to Ukraine.

1. For the first time in its history, the European Union decided to purchase and deliver military equipment to support a state in its struggle with a military aggression.
2. Within a couple of months it set up a military training mission for Ukrainian armed forces.

Those were breakthrough decisions that will further mark the development of the European Common Security and Defence Policy and cooperation between NATO and the EU.

Finally, let me say how we see ourselves in that vision of NATO.

First of all, we are determined to strengthen our and NATO's deterrence and defence. We are undergoing the unprecedented program of modernisation of our armed forces: procuring fighter jets, tanks, artillery and recon systems and many other types of equipment. We are restoring military bases in the Eastern part of our country and aim at increasing the number of troops in coming years.

Those plans are matched with necessary increase in the level of our defence spending. Military expenditure at the minimum level of 3% of GDP is now guaranteed by our domestic law. In practice, last year, as well as this year those expenditures will be even higher, around 4% of GDP.

We are committed to the security of all Allies. That is why our troops are present both in the Eastern flank and beyond . We participate in NATO forward presence in Latvia and Romania as well as in NATO operations in Kosovo and Iraq. We regularly conduct air policing mission over the Baltic States and Slovakia as well as contribute to situational awareness over the Eastern Mediterranean with a maritime patrolling aircraft based in Türkiye.

Transatlantic community can count on us when it comes to support to Ukraine. We were among those countries that were the fastest in taking concrete decisions. Our assistance has amounted by now to 4 billion EUR and included, for example, 350 tanks, both post-Soviet and Western-made, Mig-29 fighter jets, Piorun man-portable air defense systems, Krab self-propelled howitzer, loitering munition, drones as well as many other types of equipment.

In addition, through our logistic hubs we make sure that the deliveries of weapons and humanitarian aids from other Western countries reach Ukraine. This role does not come without risks to our own territory.

Altogether, this all constitute a huge effort for Poland, but we see it as indispensable for our own security and for the security of the whole Alliance.

We hope to further work with all Allies to make sure that:

- NATO's deterrence and defence posture is robust and credible,
- to seek consensus for Ukraine's admission,
- to work out a new long-term approach to Russia,
- to ensure the strong transatlantic bond continues to link the US and Europe,
- and last but not least, to further develop complementarity between NATO and the EU.