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Paweł Soloch: Poland's Security Priorities

Poland's geopolitical location is responsible for the fact that our country has always treated all questions related to security as of crucial importance. However, the events that took place in the past several years have further emphasized this priority.

For understandable reasons, the issue that causes our greatest concern is Russia's aggressive policies, and the country's readiness to use force, modify borders and break international law.

We are also aware that Europe's security issues are not only related to military threats in the east. They also comprise new, destabilizing factors such as the migration crisis caused by instability in the south, or terrorism. We take notice of these factors, we are trying to fully understand them, and we put emphasis on this in our relations with foreign partners. This is why we have provided our military support to the anti-terrorist coalition in its fight against the so-called Islamic State, and we have shown readiness to participate in further stabilizing efforts.

With these challenges in mind, Poland is expanding its activity within the external dimension – as part of NATO, the European Union and other international organizations – but also within the internal dimension, related to building up the country's own potential.

Within the external dimension, NATO remains, without any doubt, the most important guarantee of our security. It is the strongest alliance in history, in possession of real military power, but also a practical platform of strengthening the transatlantic bond between Europe and the US and Canada.

For this reason, we are very pleased that the latest NATO summit in Warsaw was a demonstration of unity by the allied countries, and the security interests both in NATO's east and south were taken into account, in line with the 360-degree approach.

Regarding the eastern flank, the decisions related to establishing a forward military presence in Poland, the Baltic states, but also Romania and Bulgaria were not only signs of a tangible increase of the region's security, but also a sign that NATO treats the threat by Russia as a real threat. This is fully in line with the Polish diagnosis which

states that currently we are not experiencing a period of turbulence, but we are facing a permanent deterioration of our security environment.

Today, the priority for both Poland's president and the government is to seek a full implementation of the decisions that were made in July at the military level. It is with great satisfaction that I admit that we are on the right track to achieve this.

It must be noted that this is also related to a number of tasks for Poland and other countries from our region that concern ensuring logistics and legal solutions that will ensure efficient mobility of the allied forces throughout Europe, their further deployment and functioning in our region, and also hosting support forces during crisis periods.

Furthermore, Poland does not only wish to be a „security consumer”, but also an active participant of allied presence in the region and south of NATO. We decided to deploy a tank unit to the allied battalion which is under development in Latvia. We plan to deploy a second unit to Romania. Also, we are actively working to strengthen the allied institutions that are located in Poland, such as the Joint Force Training Center in Bydgoszcz, and the command of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin.

By the decision of the president of Poland, Polish F-16 fighter jets, as well as soldiers and military instructors from the Special Forces who train the Iraqi security forces, among others, are taking part in military missions in the Middle East.

It needs to be emphasized that we do not perceive establishing a forward presence of allied forces as final step in NATO's adaptation. We are determined to continue our support to the alliance's adaptation to the new security terms to ensure that it will be capable of reliable deterrence and defense in the face of new threats that emerge from all directions.

We also perceive there is an undoubted potential of increasing Poland's and the region's security within the European Union. Under current treaty terms, it is difficult to relate to the idea of a common European army, but, without doubt, it has an important role to play in such fields as energy security, cyber security, hybrid threats and strategic communication. According to Poland, a closer cooperation between the EU and NATO would be welcome.

We also care about the further development of the Common Security and Defence Policy, and, within its framework, a further search for instruments that allow to react to various crises in Europe's neighborhood, both in the east and south. We would also like that, despite Brexit, the United Kingdom retains an important role in European security.

Naturally, the importance of Poland's alliance with the United States cannot be overemphasized. We are pleased with the US decision to locate an American battalion as part of the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), and an armored brigade as part of the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). We are also hoping for a consistent implementation of the construction of elements of the US missile defense shield on Polish soil.

In parallel with the activities on the international scene, we are reinforcing our national defense capacities. The most visible sign of these activities is the process of military modernization, and the funds that we are determined to allocate with this aim in the forthcoming years. Our priorities include programs to acquire multi-role and combat helicopters, acquiring an air defense system, including anti-missile defense, and various

programs related to expanding the Navy.

Such a broad program to acquire military equipment and weapons can only be made possible by a stable defense budget which is guaranteed by the law at a level of not less than 2 percent of our GDP, which is in line with NATO's recommendations. Moreover, there is an ongoing debate on the further expansion of our defense spending in the coming years.

This said, we do not solely perceive the challenges and potential of the armed forces through the lens of modernization. The issues related to military organization and management, including the strengthening of the reserve mobilization system, improving the armed force's command system or establishing a territorial defense force, are of equal importance.

We should also keep in mind that today's state security system does not only comprise foreign policy and the armed forces. Nowadays, national security consists of a number of mutually interacting and affecting fields that build a nation's resistance to aggression. These include the aforementioned issues related to energy, cyberspace, but also critical infrastructure, the economy along with the defense industry, the functioning of law enforcement and emergency forces, as well as the social dimension which is related to citizens' preparedness to function during crisis periods. The state's capacity to coordinate the activities of all of its entities, and to ensure the continuity of their functioning, is key in this respect.

Paweł Słoch is the head of Poland's National Security Bureau.

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