

Andrzej Gajcy

The first official foreign visit of new Polish president Andrzej Duda will be to Estonia on Aug. 23, a symbolic and politically charged date that marks the 76th anniversary of the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, a secret agreement that laid out plans to divide eastern Europe between them.

Mr. President, in your opinion, what is the real meaning of this visit and what is rethink and significance of the this anniversary for building a free and safe Europe in XXI century? What do you want to tell Russia and president Vladimir Putin today?

Estonia and Poland are close allies and friends. They stand together for a democratic Europe and share similar patterns for thinking and action. Poland is one of the most important strategic partners for Estonia and a responsible spokesperson in ensuring the safekeeping of our shared values.

The timing of the first visit of President Duda is highly symbolic. The secret agreement between two dictators on this day 76 years ago, allowed for the destruction of states. The sacrifices of millions of allies brought freedom to the victims. But Freedom only came for some. Eastern Europe found their yokes changed but they were not free. Totalitarian rule remained. The Western part of Europe, the part that was truly liberated, found an answer: the integration of Europe, democratic and at peace, without "spheres of influence", without secret protocols.

We have been at peace among ourselves for so long now – seven decades – that we believe this to be the status quo. It is, but only within our own borders. Yet we only delude ourselves if we believe that our own security and safety remains unaffected when our neighbors are invaded, their territory annexed, their cities bombed with Grad missiles.

What do you think about Duda's point of view that countries along the alliance's eastern

flank, stretching from Estonia in the north to Bulgaria in the south, have to join forces to increase pressure on the military alliance to station permanent bases in their countries amid fears over increased Russian aggression in the region?

Estonia and Poland both understand that Russia's aggression in Ukraine is not just about Crimea, Donetsk or Lugansk. Russia's actions in and around Ukraine represent a geo-political shift having reinforced the notion that the security environment in Europe is becoming increasingly unpredictable. Tallinn and Warsaw share the sense of security, a common understanding of the importance of defence expenditures and joint exercises.

The threat from Russia is long term. We also need to have long term deterrence measures. NATO needs a strong deterrence to face ever more resurgent Russia. Most importantly, we need NATO boots on the ground ready to fight if needed. Current level – one US company in each of the Baltic states – is a good start and Estonia highly values US commitment. We continue to consult with key European allies in ensuring proper European posture in forward presence. A sustained multinational presence of Allied forces reinforces the capacity of national forces.

Some western states such as Germany are opposed to this idea. What do you think why?

Germany has been the engine for integration in Europe and is the leader in today's Europe many senses. During my recent state visit to Germany in May, throughout all meetings, I underlined that we in Estonia see clear need for German leadership also in foreign and security policy issues, including enhancing NATO's deterrence along the eastern wing of the Alliance. Estonia highly values Germany's contribution to European security, which also has a visible component – participation in the NATO-led Baltic air security mission and in the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn.

Do you agree that eastern flank countries are treated by NATO as second-class allies and as "buffer zone"?

NATO is the first class of security. In the last year we've seen with our own eyes and

experienced for ourselves how NATO has grown stronger and more decisive. That's the only answer, and the only way we can deter those who attack not only the independence and territorial integrity of neighbouring states, but the democratic way of life of us all.

NATO's Readiness Action Plan (RAP) activities have demonstrated solidarity among Allies and encouraged stronger European commitment. NATO is taking steps in the right direction, especially with decisions about the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.

How do you see a Poland's new president role in standing for the security interests of our region and in strengthening the unity of NATO? What guarantees should be in top the agenda of NATO summit in Warsaw next year?

Senator Richard Lugar's erstwhile dictum that NATO had to go out of its area or would go out of business no longer applies. Clearly we are back in area and back in business. NATO's raison d'être is to defend its members and their territory. Steps started at Wales Summit to ensure a NATO presence across the alliance's territory must be finalized by Warsaw. Only a calm but firm commitment to deterrence can be the immediate response.

NATO's Warsaw Summit should anchor focus on NATO's core responsibility. This must go hand in hand with greater investments in defense by European allies. Maintaining 2 percent of gross domestic product for defense must become a major benchmark of allies' commitment. Allies in Europe need to wake up and realize that meeting that target is vital to giving credibility to deterrence and for revitalizing the transatlantic relationship.

Poland as the regional leader can play crucial role in strengthening regional cooperation in security matters.

Mr. President in my last question I would like to ask You about Ukraine. President Duda had proposed a new format of peace talks on the Donbas conflict with participation of the most powerful European states, as well as Ukraine's neighboring countries, including Poland. What do you think about this idea and what NATO countries should do now to help Kiev in war with Russia?

Ukraine is faced with heavily armed separatists, supported and trained, and equipped by Russia. At the same time, Ukraine is undertaking significant reforms, while facing an unprecedented economic crisis. Diplomatic track is necessary and in this the Normandy format has been serving this purpose. However the Minsk agreements have not brought the desired result.

NATO is assisting Ukraine's defence and security reforms. NATO supports Ukraine's reforms practically with funding and expert advice. Politically, the Alliance should stand firm in our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Putin seems to be operating on the assumption that sooner or later, Ukraine will crumble – economically and politically. Moscow tries hard to split up US and Europe on the issue. Therefore, we need to stay engaged vis-a-vis the conflict resolution in Ukraine. Today, it is once again very important to reaffirm the transatlantic bond and the values that underpin it as a basis for articulating a clear vision and strategy for the future.