

Warsaw, Poland

VICE PRESIDENT BIDEN: Good afternoon, everyone. Mr. President, I was pleased to have another chance to get together with you and speak with you today, and I appreciate the fact you made the time to see me in the midst of your own state visit to Poland. I appreciate it very much. And I look forward to seeing your fellow Baltic heads of state tomorrow in Vilnius.

Estonia's success is, in our view, a living testament to what's possible -- where innovators can breathe free and people can speak their minds, where democratic rights and universal freedoms are protected, and when countries are free to choose their own path.

The Estonian people, like many of Russia's neighbors, have a personal stake in what's happening in Ukraine. Your history reminds us of how vigilant you have to remain. And today, Mr. President, we've consulted on a path ahead. We spoke about the steps we're taking alongside many other nations to support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity; to help Ukraine stabilize its economy and conduct fair and free democratic elections; and to condemn and reject Russia's illegal -- absolutely illegal conduct in taking steps to annex Crimea. And also, we talked about how to impose costs on Russia for their aggression. There's no other word for it; it's aggression.

And when we speak about costs, we're talking about more than just sanctions. We're talking about Russia putting itself on a path that undermines long-term confidence and creates obstacles for its full participation in the global economy. That path they've placed themselves on does nothing to help the next generation of Russians compete and succeed in a world that will be led by the most open, innovative and dynamic economies.

The President and I also discussed our commitments as NATO allies. I came here today and will travel to Vilnius tomorrow to stand with our NATO allies and reconfirm and reaffirm our shared commitment to collective self-defense, to Article 5. I want to make it absolutely clear what it means to the Estonian people and all the people of the Baltics. President Obama and I view Article 5 of the NATO Treaty as an absolutely solemn commitment which we will honor -- we will honor.

And that's why, in the past few weeks, we've had substantial -- we have substantially augmented the U.S. rotation of NATO's Baltic air policing program and that protects the skies over Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. We're working to line up countries to continue to augment that rotation after our turn comes to an end and we will turn the mission over to Poland.

Looking ahead, we're exploring a number of additional steps to increase the pace and scope of our military cooperation, including rotating U.S. forces to the Baltic region to conduct ground and naval exercise, as well as training missions. Next week will mark the 10th anniversary of the Baltic States' membership in NATO.

A decade ago, I had the privilege as Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, as a United States senator, to champion your admission. The security partnership we built together has surpassed even the high expectations of those of us who argued on behalf of admission. I know because, as I said, I was one of them.

In Afghanistan, Estonian troops fought alongside Americans. We worked closely together on cybersecurity, which you're leading. Estonia remains one of the few NATO countries that invests, has committed, 2 percent of its gross domestic product to defense year after year.

The relationship, Mr. President, goes beyond security as well as our discussions did. Mr. President, we admire and value Estonia's contribution and the example you set as a successful young democracy. Ours is a partnership based on shared values, and it's no surprise we work together to support other young democracies like Tunisia and Moldova. And as we discussed today, Mr. President, we're working to create an even greater economic integration and cooperation to diversify your sources of energy.

Mr. President, for decades America kept faith with the dream of freedom and independence of the Baltic people. Your security and your success matters a great deal to us. Your friendship also matters, and your personal friendship as well.

So, Mr. President, thank you for making time for us. And may God bless the people of Estonia, and may God protect our troops.

PRESIDENT TOOMAS ILVES: Thank you, Mr. Vice President. And thank you for illustrating what a close relationship we have with this great idea of getting together and discussing how things are going, because ultimately that's how allies are. We don't have these formal meetings where you come in and prearrange, but we get together to discuss how we see things. And I think that is what -- that is the essence of an alliance, is being able to talk with your friends and like-minded people about what needs to be done. And today was a great example of precisely this kind of meeting, and it was -- that's why I say thank you, because it reassured me that things are going the right way.

And of course, we did come here to discuss things that aren't going the right way. The Ukrainian crisis is something that causes concern for all people who believe in freedom and justice and rule of law, and also even in international law, where we see such blatant cases of aggression, of violations of international law, where, if the international community does not stand up, the international order will collapse because the kinds of behavior we've seen is dangerous for the world.

And here, again, thank you for the U.S.'s leadership in the Security Council, and especially Ambassador Power's great statements. We really liked them in Estonia.

But when we think about where we are, it's quite clear that we are -- the actions of the last several weeks have led us to -- are forcing us to reassess the past or the assumptions of the past 20, 25 years. The old idea of NATO, which I remember from 20 years ago, out of the area or out of business, predicated on a Europe that no longer has any threats. That, unfortunately, has turned out, with the actions we've seen against Ukraine, no longer to apply.

The East-West relationship needs to be put on a new standing. We and NATO must draw our conclusions from Russia's behavior in the current crisis; we need and must conduct a review of the entire range of NATO-Russia relations. The principles -- the well-meaning, fundamental principles of the 1997 Founding Act -- NATO-Russia Founding Act don't apply anymore. There is no more respect for territorial integrity, for transparency. And if that is the case, we have to draw our own conclusions. And that is my hope -- that at the upcoming NATO summit in Wales, we will have drawn our own conclusions and refocus on collective defense. The *raison d'être* of NATO is to defend members of the Alliance and defend the territory of the members of the Alliance. And so a refocus on the original idea of NATO is what must come out of Wales.

We discussed, also, the response of Europe. Europe has responded, but it is our belief in Estonia, and, I understand, in some other countries -- among them, the United States -- that the response must be more robust than it has been. The response should not be about the price of gas, it must be about common values and the price of not adhering to those common values. That is a far more serious and costly price, is giving up our values.

So tomorrow, when the Council will meet in Brussels, Estonia will be championing those values. And it is my sincere hope that many members of the European Union will join us in standing up for the values that make Europe Europe.

Specifically on our bilateral relations, let me say, once again, I'd like to thank you, Mr. Vice President, and the United States, for your very swift response to the crisis, and the augmentation of Baltic air policing, backing us up when we feel a need for it. That is what NATO is about. On our part, you can count on us to do what it takes to not only keep up our share of 2 percent, but also when it comes to helping out in Ukraine, for example, our knowhow is there to be used and we are committed to you to help.

Ultimately, I think this, once again, a serious crisis in Europe has shown that the presence of the United States in Europe -- and especially in our region, the Baltic area -- is absolutely vital. It is what allows us to give credibility to NATO. And we thank you for helping us in this way and giving NATO that credibility that all of Europe so desperately needs.

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