

I would like to welcome President Duda to Estonia.

We are pleased and honored that you chose Estonia as your first presidential visit. Your visit sends a strong message of Estonia and Poland as close allies who share and stand for common interests and values. President Duda, you coming to Tallinn underlines that relations between our two countries are especially close.

It is highly symbolic that we stand here together on the 23rd of August. Today, 76 years ago the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact and its secret protocol were signed in Moscow. As a result, two murderous totalitarian regimes with deadly ideologies divided Europe into spheres of influence, many countries were occupied, grave crimes were committed and millions lost their lives. Poland was the first to lose its freedom on September 1, 1939. Two and a half weeks later, Poland was invaded from the east. And there was a joint Soviet-Nazi victory parade in Brest-Litovsk.

Today let us remember the victims of Soviet and Nazi crimes and honor those who in 1989 confronted the Soviet regime.

Unfortunately we see a haunting reminder of history close to our borders. We certainly have reasons to believe that an eastern neighbour views this region as one of NATO's most vulnerable areas, as a place where NATO's resolve and commitment could be tested. Therefore, it is imperative that we do our part. This means building up the military capability that is necessary and capable to respond to the new challenges. This also means that we deliver a clear message that we are united in our resolve to defend each and every member of the Alliance.

On the allied force presence, Estonia highly values the current US commitment of boots on the ground and of delivering pre-positioned equipment in our region. We are doing our bit so as to be able to provide the best host nation support possible. We continue to consult with key European allies, ensuring a proper European posture in the new forward presence as well.

Obviously, for our bilateral relations, Poland is of great importance.

We see a very clear role for Poland in leading regional security cooperation. Poland is a large country in Europe spending 2% on defence and understanding the importance of hard security. Poland is also the only large country in Europe understanding the meaning of mass deportations to Siberia. Warsaw hosting the upcoming NATO Summit best illustrates this. This Summit comes at a crucial time for NATO to demonstrate that it is implementing the biggest reinforcement of collective defence since Cold War.

Finally, to conclude, I would like to underline that war against Ukraine shows that freedom can be fragile. To cherish freedom and liberal democracy requires heavy work at home, as well as with our allies in Europe and across the Atlantic. In this regard much has changed in comparison to the 76 years before. Back then, Estonia and Poland were on their own then. Today, friends and allies join forces with us in the European Union and NATO. Our security is stronger than ever.

We know that making deals at the expense of other countries "in between" is doomed to fail. No one's liberty is expendable. Europe has paid an extremely high price for giving in to an aggressor once. This will never happen again.