

July 2, 2019
Gdansk, Poland

Baltic Sea Regional Security:
A Field Hearing of the United States Commission on
Security and Cooperation in Europe

Honorable Chairman Wicker, Members of the US Helsinki Commission,

Dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am highly honored to speak in front of such a distinguished US Congress delegation.

Thank you very much for travelling all the way from the United States;
and for your keen interest in the security situation of the Baltic region.

The city of Gdansk is a very appropriate place to conduct field hearings on the Baltic security. We are just 50 miles away from Kaliningrad, one of Russia's Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) fortresses.

The missiles that are based in Kaliningrad (and there are many, including the nuclear-capable *Iskander*) are targeting NATO forces in Europe, - their ability to reinforce the Baltics in particular.

Russia's intermediate-range missiles (SSC-8), which have been deployed in violation of the INF Treaty, also seek to undermine NATO's ability to move forces in Europe and to conduct collective defense. This is a matter of grave concern to the countries located in Russia's neighborhood.

For many reasons – geographic, historic, societal - the Baltic region is bound to remain the most vulnerable part of the Alliance. It will therefore require special attention of NATO military planners.

Year after year, we observe Russia exercising operations against NATO in the Baltics. The focus of these exercises is the Suwalki corridor – a narrow strip of land between Lithuania and Poland. It is critical for the defense of this region.

In case of conflict, Polish and Lithuanian forces will have a special role - to keep this corridor open for Allied reinforcements. To succeed, we need credible NATO military plans, regular exercises as well as full engagement of the United States with its unique military capabilities.

Taking the opportunity, I would like to thank the US Congress for your resolute support to NATO and to the Trans-Atlantic link, which is at the core of our security. We should not allow other policy issues and disagreements – be it on trade, climate or Middle East – damage the defense relations between Europe and the United States.

I would also like to thank the US Congress for the assistance that your country provides to the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

With US support we were able to accelerate our capability-development programs in line with NATO priorities; expand military infrastructure (which is also used by NATO Allies); as well as to increase our large-caliber ammunition stockpiles.

This is a mutually beneficial cooperation. Since 2014, the United States has invested nearly \$80 million to support the Lithuanian Armed Forces. In the same period, Lithuania has committed more than \$200 million in national funds to purchase US defense articles. This figure is likely to grow as new major projects are currently under consideration.

Mr. Chairman, esteemed members of the Congress, I am proud that Lithuania, together with our Baltic neighbors and Poland, are among those Allies who already spend 2 percent (or more) of the GDP on defense. This shows our serious approach to national security as well as to our NATO commitments.

We are determined to act as security providers and to show solidarity with our Allies. Lithuania has deployed forces to all key operational theaters, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Mali, and Ukraine. Our troops have served side-by-side with American soldiers for many years now; and the cooperation between the US and Lithuanian Special Operations Forces is truly legendary.

At present, we are working with the US SOF Command Europe on a new, very interesting project to improve situational awareness and intelligence sharing in the Baltic region.

I would also like to highlight our very close and productive cooperation with the Pennsylvania National Guard. This partnership is already more than 25 years old and is of great value to our countries.

We are also grateful to the US for leading the process of NATO adaptation to the new security realities. There is substantial progress in a number of areas, including overall defense spending within the Alliance.

NATO Command Structure and plans will be adjusted to meet the requirements of Article-5 situations. In this regard, we welcome the reestablishment of the US Second Fleet, which has just completed its first major exercise in the Baltics.

The Alliance also works to improve the *readiness of NATO forces* and to facilitate *military movement* across Europe. These key strands of work is the enduring legacy of the former US Defense Secretary James Mattis.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I would like to highlight two areas, which, in our view, will require special attention over the coming months:

One relates to the recently announced deployment of additional US forces to Poland, which we sincerely welcome.

Presence of US troops significantly changes the risk calculus in the Kremlin, making military challenge to NATO considerably less likely. We hope therefore that these additional US forces will be used to maximize their deterrence value for the entire Baltic region.

The second issue is Air Defense. This is a critical capability gap in the Baltics, which we urgently need to address through our national and NATO efforts.

The new SACEUR, Gen. Tod Wolters, is fully aware of the situation and we look forward to working closely with his staff at SHAPE and US European Command to address this critical shortfall.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to address this distinguished group of US Congressmen; and I very much look forward to our follow-on discussions.