

**Speech by Lieutenant General Stephan Thomas, Vice Chief of Defence of Germany
at the official ceremony on the occasion of the Corps' 20th anniversary**

*General Wojciechowski,
Lord Mayor of Szczecin,
Generals and Admirals,
Ladies and Gentlemen!*

This Year in March we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the accession of Poland, Hungary and Czech Republic to NATO. I am honored to speak to you today on behalf of General Zorn, the German Chief of Defense, as today we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Multinational Corps Northeast (MNC NE) as an important milestone here in Szczecin.

Looking back in history, 20 years ago, in 1999, the founding nations of POL, DNK and DEU hoisted their flags here in Szczecin in front of the HQ of the MNC NE as a visible sign of our readiness to contribute to security and to strengthen NATO's alliance pillar in North East jointly. As NATO is the central frame of reference for Poland's security.

We Germans know how life under persistent military menace is and how it feels to be a potential battlefield, as we had been living posed by Soviet military threat for more than 40 years. But we also will not forget that the first elements of the so-called "Iron Curtain" had been broken up by Polish patriots in the late eighties.

I personally witnessed the Corps HQ's development in the course of these 20 years beginning as a HQ of Lower Readiness with the exercise Cristal Eagle and developing to a High Readiness HQ, which today consolidates contributions from 23 nations serving the same mission. The Corps achieved the mandatory "Full Operational Capability" status in 2005. As one of SHAPE'S NATO Deployable Headquarters, it has been able to participate in and conduct NATO missions since 2006. During my time as a branch chief in the DEU MoD and member of the Corps board the Multinational Corps North-East provided the core of the ISAF HQ in Afghanistan from January to August 2007, and again participated in ISAF in 2010.

The increased significance of the MNC NE was further demonstrated through the result of the Wales Summit on 4th of September in 2014, when the Alliance responded to the increasing threat and aggressive politics of RUS at its Eastern flank by establishing the VJTF as a strong signal of its deterrence. And now for more than two years after laying the foundation of Enhanced Forward

Presence in Warsaw in 2016, the NATO member states have been making a strong and significant contribution to continued solidarity. Therefore, Germany also assumed responsibility with its engagement in eFP with our NATO partners. Finally, the NATO Readiness Initiative, launched in Brussels last year, will result in a further development of NATO and underline its resolve to stand together for the protection of our common values and principles.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Corps HQ has become unique in NATO Force Structure. Specifically, in 2017, NATO certified it as a headquarters for high readiness forces, which meant a transfer of the command of land operations on the northeastern flank of NATO to MNC NE. In the course of this certification, Germany doubled its military personnel and increased the share of reimbursement from 30 to 40 percent, and so did Poland.

It is, as a regional custodian, the only Corps HQ in the NATO Force Structure, which has a fixed area of responsibility. It permanently commands the multinational divisions Northeast in ELBLAG (POL) and, once established, - North in ADAZI (LVA), as well as the NATO Force Integration Units in POL, EST, LVA, LTU, HUN and SVK. In the case of a regional crisis, the Corps is also responsible for receiving the rapid response forces. Not only to manage up to five divisions and 20 support units, but also to organize and coordinate land operations as a land component command along with other allied forces; furthermore, it is planned to develop the Corps into a "Regional Component Command". This means that NATO will continue to be a significant Alliance of trusted partners capable to make political and military decisions jointly and rapidly in order to respond to changing environments.

Within this context, the increased importance of the Multinational Corps Northeast is obvious as the Corps serves as a key element of deterrence and defense on the eastern flank of NATO. Poland has been host nation for its allies for 20 years now and will be for the years to come. Moreover, it is an excellent host nation! For which we remain grateful to our Polish friends.

In conclusion, I am glad to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Multinational Corps Northeast here in Szczecin with you, and I would like to thank all members of the Corps for their engagement and their spirit to stand together for common security within the Alliance.

Thank you for your attention.