

## **Speech by Mr Krzysztof Soska, Vice Mayor of Szczecin at the official ceremony on the occasion of the Corps' 20th anniversary**

Once again the Multinational Corps Northeast celebrates an event important for the Corps itself and the region - here - at the enchanting and majestic Wały Chrobrego. 20 years ago, accompanied by a number of distinguished guests, we held the inauguration ceremony of the Corps. Ten years later the whole city joined us in celebrating 10 years of the Corps. And today we have gathered to celebrate 20th anniversary of this unit and to reflect on the achievements and significant accomplishments of the Corps. We have also met here to thank the Corps for several years of extraordinary cooperation.

Oftentimes both Szczecin and Poland has been the theatre of the major armed conflict. What is more, the biggest military conflict in the history of mankind - the 2nd World War - did not spare the capital city of West Pomerania. As a result, Szczecin was severely damaged and afterwards - thanks to the efforts and dedication of its citizens - rebuilt and filled with new energy.

Collective memory of us, Poles, preserves the images of despair and destruction brought about by the war. We yearn for freedom and we cherish it more than those who do not remember what is it like to fear and live under the constant threat. Our society values and understands the privilege of feeling no deep concern for our safety. A guarantee of security not only fosters people's well-being but, above all, facilitates the development of the country.

In 1989 Poland belonged to the Warsaw Pact - a military alliance of the Eastern Bloc countries which in reality was led from the Kremlin. Ten years later, after a profound political transformation, the Republic of Poland became a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Poland regained its place among the liberal democracies and joined the most powerful military alliance in the world. What is more, not as a marionette but as a sovereign state which is an equal partner.

Shortly after this groundbreaking event, the inauguration ceremony of the Multinational Corps Northeast based in Szczecin was held on 18th September 1999. Over the last 20 years the Headquarters has continuously developed. The scope of its tasks and its potential have been increased. Today more than 400 soldiers from 24 NATO countries and two partnering states serve here - and every year these numbers get more and more impressive. This Szczecin-based unit is already the most important NATO entity on the north-eastern flank. It wouldn't have been possible without the hard work of the soldiers, without their combat experience gained during the peace missions in the Middle East and their continuous strive to gain new competences and military expertise. The Corps' full operational capability proves its successful development and significance

for the defence of Poland and other states in the Baltic Sea Region. The Corps in Szczecin does not only boost the city's prestige but also substantially contributes to the sense of security among the citizens.

Szczecin and the Corps have developed symbiosis and common understanding - it helps them obtain mutual benefits and have positive impact on each other. Szczecin as tolerant and open city facilitating integration creates environment which is favourable for the soldiers and civilian employees of the Corps. Szczecin is a place where soldiers and their families feel comfortable and welcome by the citizens.

I would like to extend my gratitude towards the command group and all employees of the Corps for their active participation in the social and cultural life of our city. Thank you for joining us in important local events such as patriotic celebrations or charity events. I fondly remember our joint project a few years ago when we organised the celebrations of the Polish Independence Day combined with promotion of Szczecin and West Pomerania in the NATO Headquarters in Brussels.

Today celebrating this anniversary, I would like to wish the Corps a further dynamic development and its soldiers and employees - every success in your future - both professional and personal.