

**Remarks by the ambassador of Denmark, Mr. Ole Egberg Mikkelsen, at the event at the Multinational Headquarters North East in Szczecin, 11 March 2019 on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of Poland's accession to NATO**

Mr. President, ministers, your excellencies, officers, soldiers, friends and allies.

I am deeply honored to address you this morning. Denmark is not only Poland's neighbor, friend and ally. Together with Germany, we are also your partner as a framework nation for the Multinational Headquarter North East. This is the reason why I have been given the honor to address you this morning, on behalf of the Danish minister of Defense, who was not able to be present himself. I wish to convey the minister's warmest greetings to you.

We are here today to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Poland's accession to NATO. It is of course a day of joy and celebration for Poland. It is however just as much a day of joy and celebration for Denmark. Because we are neighbors across the Baltic Sea.

The distance from the island of Bornholm to the Polish coastline is only 90 kilometers. During the Cold War, Denmark and Poland were on each side of the great divide in Europe. For many Poles at that time, Bornholm became the "Island of Freedom", because the island was the nearest point of the free world seen from Poland. Danes and Poles were never enemies, but we could have become military adversaries in an armed conflict. Military forces on each side trained for that event. At the same time, Danes were following Poland's courageous struggle for freedom, and every Dane is aware that the wave of liberty and freedom that swept away communist oppression from the nations of East- and Central Europa came from Poland. I am proud to serve in your country.

This historical background is the reason why today is also a day of joy and celebration for Denmark. Poland's accession to NATO was a crucial milestone in Poland's integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures. The next crucial step was Poland's membership of the European Union, which was decided at the European Council in Copenhagen in 2002.

This historic journey from Independence, Missouri, where Poland's NATO accession took place, to the European Council in Copenhagen, completed Poland's full integration in the very bedrock of European security and freedom: NATO and the European Union.

That is something to celebrate for all of us. For Denmark, the process has been of immense importance. We have gained a close friend and ally and a strong European

partner just across the Baltic Sea. Later on this year, we will be celebrating the centenary of the resumption of Danish-Polish diplomatic relations. There is no doubt that Poland's NATO accession and subsequent EU-membership are the two most important elements in Danish-Polish relations in those 100 years.

As NATO-partners, Denmark and Poland are contributing to global and regional security. Danish and Polish troops have been deployed in international operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Very often under difficult and challenging circumstances. On this day, I wish to pay tribute to those who are serving in international operations and to the veterans from Poland and Denmark and from all allied nations, who have been deployed in international operations.

Here in our own neighborhood, Denmark and Poland stand shoulder to shoulder, together with our NATO-partners. For twenty years, Denmark, Poland and Germany have been framework nations for the Multinational Headquarters North East.

I could not think of a more appropriate venue for today's celebration than right here at the Baltic Barracks in Szczecin. Let me take this opportunity to thank the men and women from Poland, Germany and Denmark, and other allied nations, who have been serving here in the past twenty years as a very concrete expression of NATO solidarity.

Just a couple of days ago, Denmark, Estonia and Latvia formally established the new Headquarters Division North in Latvia. Alongside the Polish-led Headquarters Division North East in Elbląg, the new Headquarters will be affiliated to the Multinational Headquarters Corps North East.

This is a strong statement of our continued commitment and partnership in the region. I expect close ties between these two multinational headquarters in the future.

Denmark and Poland are also close partners in the Enhanced Forward Presence, thereby living up the basic message from the NATO summit in Warsaw in 2016: If you are not safe, we are not safe. We need to be safe together.

Let me conclude by extending the warmest congratulations to Poland from your Northern neighbor. We share your joy and elation on this important day. We are proud to be your ally.

Thank you for your attention.