

**Statement by H.E. Piotr Wilczek, Ambassador Extraordinary and
Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Poland to the United States of America
before the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations,
State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify before the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations, State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Subcommittee. It is an honor to be here and I am pleased to be able to provide the view of my government on Russia's policy in Europe and the challenges originating from it.

Let me start by briefly outlining Russia's policy goals. Following that, I would like to highlight four points for you to consider.

The Kremlin has a chief strategic objective: restore the superpower status lost after the fall of communism. The way to achieve this goal seems straightforward: altering the security architecture in Europe, thus impeding post-soviet countries from integrating with the Euro-Atlantic community.

First. The current situation.

While pursuing its foreign policy objectives, Moscow largely relies on force, intimidation and economic extortions, trying to impose on other countries an

autocratic and oligarchic form of government. Russia invaded Georgia, harassed Moldova, meddled in the Nagorno Karabach conflict and violated international law by annexing Crimea. Finally, the Kremlin masterminded and keeps fueling the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Although Moscow signed the ceasefire agreements – Minsk I and Minsk II – it did not withdraw from the region what is the point of departure to achieve the political solution. Even worse, during the last weeks we have seen increasing military clashes in the Donbas.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine ended the period of a post-Cold War stability. Moscow decided to undermine the European security architecture, enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act.

All these actions have been heralding the course of President Putin's Russia. Having left the path of dialogue and democratic change sparked in the early 1990s, it evolved into a dark residue of the Soviet menace. Yet again, military power became the Kremlin's chief tool for pursuing its policy objectives.

Second. Russia is a growing military threat.

President Putin embarked Russia on a large-scale modernization of its armed forces. The introduction of new types of equipment was coupled with the reform of the military doctrine. The threshold for the usage of nuclear weapons has been lowered. Newly created military units have been deployed to the western parts of the country.

Kaliningrad, bordering Poland and Lithuania, became the most militarized region in Europe. Russia equipped the exclave with anti-access/area-denial capabilities. This A2/AD “bubble” relies on a combination of sophisticated anti-aircraft, anti-shipping and electronic warfare systems. It aims at limiting NATO’s freedom of maneuver and action on Allied territory. It covers an area spanning from North-Eastern Poland to the Baltic states.

Moreover, Kaliningrad is equipped with “Iskander” systems. These short-range ballistic missiles are nuclear-capable and able of hitting targets in Estonia, Latvia, Poland and even in eastern parts of Germany.

Moscow conducts large-scale snap exercises with openly aggressive scenarios. The last snap military drills took place in Kaliningrad this February. We also observe an unprecedented number of military incidents provoked by Russia with Russian airplanes and warships violating Allied airspace and waters.

But the most alarming issue is Russia’s ability to take prompt and deceptive actions. We saw that in Crimea.

Third. The hybrid dimension.

The challenges posed by Russia’s actions go beyond the conventional military realm. We see them in the cyber, informational and energy domains.

Russia deliberately employs hybrid means to act below the threshold of a military conflict. Moscow often acts by exploiting national vulnerabilities and

sensitivities. This might involve actions in the cyber domain, frequently backed by a fierce propaganda effort. Ukraine is the case in point.

Take energy. Russia largely relies on oil and gas sales for its exports revenues. This is a simplification. In 2013 oil and petroleum products were responsible for 54% of the Russian gross exports sales. Gas accounted for 14%. These are all EIA figures. From the Russian perspective, it was not only easy, but also not so costly to use gas as a political weapon.

Nowadays countries in Central Europe largely rely on Russia for their energy imports. Moscow uses energy resources as a tool in foreign policy. Countries cooperating with Russia benefit from large discounts on their energy bills. Those seeking integration with the West end up paying high prices or are threatened with being cut off from supplies. Just look at Ukraine.

Today, while countries in Central Europe try to diversify their import routes, Russia promotes the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, creating divisions among EU member states. Should this project go ahead, Russia could effectively hinder the diversification efforts of the whole region. Increased gas supplies from Russia would inevitably affect the economic viability of LNG projects in Central and Eastern Europe.

Fourth. Our response.

We have been living in a changed security environment for more than three years. Two words - uncertainty and insecurity - best describe the current security situation we operate in. Such conditions and challenges call for an adequate answer. NATO is the best platform to provide it. It is a unique force multiplier.

Deterring all those threats and challenges requires a swift and full implementation of the decisions taken at the Summit in Warsaw. Furthermore, my government believes that the Special Meeting of Heads of States and Governments scheduled to take place in Brussels later this year should be an important milestone in the process of adapting the Alliance's defense and deterrence posture.

As the challenges we face are here to stay, the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) of Allied troops on the Eastern flank of the Alliance should have a long-term character. Poland is very grateful for those actions. It would be impossible to achieve the Warsaw's Summit decisions without American leadership.

In this context I would also like to thank you for the deployment of your troops to our region under the NATO flag. A long-term American commitment to the eFP is absolutely essential. I would like to add that the presence of American soldiers in Poland as part of Operation Atlantic Resolve is of equal and paramount importance. Further congressional support for the European Reassurance Initiative would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee,

Before concluding allow me to underline that we take our commitments seriously. A fair burden-sharing among Allies is a must. Poland meets the two percent defense spending target along NATO guidelines. More than 20% of our 2017 military budget will be spent on military equipment. Our soldiers serve in missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo. Poland contributes to collective defense. A Polish tank company has been deployed to Latvia under the framework of the eFP. Our vessel commands the Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 operating on the Aegean Sea.

Poland has always been ready to deal with the terrorist threat. Polish and American soldiers were brothers-in-arms during the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Altogether, more than 40 thousand Polish troops took part in both operations. Nowadays, Poland is an active member of the Global Coalition against Daesh. Our F-16 fighter-jets are flying over Iraq.

Moreover, our efforts go beyond the military domain.

Together with our Danish and Norwegian partners we are working on a big-scale diversification project: the Baltic Pipe. A natural gas pipeline linking the Norwegian fields with Poland via Denmark. It would allow direct imports of natural gas from Norway to Poland. It could also be used to ship re-gasified LNG from Poland to Denmark.

Last year saw the opening of an import LNG terminal in Poland. It could become a gateway for US-made LNG destined for clients in Central Europe. Delivering gas supplies to Ukraine via Poland would send a powerful political message, whilst providing business opportunities for American firms.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee,

Moscow orchestrated the conflict in Ukraine and Moscow has all the means to end it. It signed ceasefire agreements, Minsk I and Minsk II, but does not respect their provisions. Moreover, Russia decided to recognize the documents produced by the so-called Donbas republics.

Is it a proof of good will?

To sum up, taking into account Russia's actions, we see no ground to ease the sanctions or to change our policy vis-à-vis Moscow. Congressional support for maintaining transatlantic unity and solidarity on this issue is indispensable.

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee,

A couple of weeks ago gen. James Mattis said at the NATO HQ that "Europe and North America need to work together stronger than ever in times of turmoil and unpredictability" – I couldn't agree more with his statement. I firmly believe that the political and military engagement of the US is necessary for preserving peace and stability in Europe.

Let me stress that we remain open to dialogue with Moscow. However, such dialogue needs to be conditional on Russia changing its current policies and its stance towards international law.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to taking your questions.