



LATVIJAS VALSTS PREZIDENTS

**Address by the President of Latvia at the opening ceremony
of the enhanced Forward Presence
in Ādaži on 19 June 2017**

Secretary General, Excellencies, Ministers, Generals, Soldiers of the Multinational Battlegroup in Latvia;

Today is a historic day. Latvia joined the NATO Alliance in 2004. At that time, thirteen years ago, we, Latvians, were developing our own self-defence capability. We were convinced that this - backed up by NATO membership, would be enough to guarantee our security in the future. Events have proved otherwise. The world has become less secure and less stable during the last decade.

Russia has shown that it is prepared to use force for political objectives. The cyber-attacks on Estonia in 2007, the occupation of parts of Georgia after the brief war in 2008, and, most recently, the occupation and annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas, have awakened old fears.

This September, the massive Russian Exercise Zapad 2017, will be held near the borders of the Baltic States, showing how we could be cut off from NATO reinforcement.

Membership of NATO on its own is no longer enough. That is why our Alliance has acted swiftly and with determination to improve the self-defence capabilities of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia with the enhanced Forward Presence, the eFP. I warmly welcome our reliable Allies from Canada, Albania, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and Spain who are here today to form this historic, Canadian-led multinational battlegroup in Latvia.

The eFP is historic in another sense: this is not simply a training mission, but deterrence in operation. More than 20 NATO Allies, including a crucial contribution from the United States, are part of the eFP in our four front-line states. That is a very powerful message of solidarity.

It demonstrates NATO's determination to defend every one of our Alliance's members. It also proves that we understand that a threat to any one Ally is a threat to us all, a threat to the principles and values that our Alliance is based upon and that we hold dear.

That is why Latvia and the other small Baltic countries have participated in the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. We have contributed to the missions in the Mediterranean, in Mali, and off the coast of Somalia. We are ready to continue to fight terrorism within the Global Coalition against ISIL.

Let us be clear: none of us wants to return to the Cold War. For this reason, NATO has decided to combine deterrence with dialogue. Dialogue with Russia must not be at the expense of sufficient deterrence and defence. But without dialogue, we will not build a better, secure, and predictable relationship with Russia in the long term.

Latvia extends a warm welcome to you all, soldiers of our trustworthy Allies. Be assured that we, in our turn, will fulfil our responsibilities. In January, our defence spending will reach 2% of GDP. We will continue to improve our military capabilities, as you will see. In the meantime, thank you for being here and enjoy your time in our beautiful country - Latvia.