

**Speech by the Minister of Defence, Kajsa Ollongren,  
Ceremony on the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NATO enhanced Forward  
Presence multinational battle group in Lithuania  
9 February 2022, Rukla**

Good afternoon, President Nausėda, Minister of National Defence Anušauskas, General Rupšys, Admiral Bauer, and good afternoon to all servicemen and women.

Today, amid *and despite* the current threats, we are celebrating 5 years of cooperation between our nations in the context of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence. We are hopeful that by means of this cooperation we can ensure a free, peaceful, and secure future for both our countries.

Mr President, your country has lived with hybrid threats for quite a while. The possibility of conflict is literally close by, as you share a border with Belarus and Russia. It's quite a different story for my country. Perhaps we have taken the long period of peace for granted. But that has changed in a big way. Like many other allies, the Netherlands is now investing more in Defence.

We need to protect what is dear to us: our common values of freedom, democracy, and the international legal order. These values should not be taken for granted; we must strive to protect them every day, together with our NATO allies and EU partners.

When our alliance is threatened, we call for dialogue and diplomacy and we call upon our armed forces. These instruments complement each other. Dialogue and diplomacy are possible because we know that so many men and women stand ready, day and night, to defend our countries and our alliance. People like you.

I am grateful for, and proud of your dedication and your service. The multinational battlegroup that you serve in provides a reliable deterrence and defence of NATO territory, especially when joining forces with the Iron Wolf Brigade.

I want to thank Lithuania for its hospitality to all nations, including the Netherlands. Over the past five years, almost 3,000 Dutch servicemen and women have served here in Lithuania as part of NATO enhanced Forward Presence. For the coming years, we remain committed to eFP and will increase the size of our troop contribution from 270 to 350 military personnel.

Our unity is our greatest strength. We are stronger together, as we counter the threat to peace. Because we have a duty to preserve this enduring peace and to pass it on to the next generation. Thank you.