

20th Anniversary of State Partnership between IN National Guard & Armed Forces of Slovak Republic
May 17, 2014

Thank you Colonel Todd Townsend for your kind introduction. To Ambassador Peter Kmec, Lt. General Milan Maxim, to our own Major General R. Martin Umbarger, Major General Timothy Kadavy, Major General Martin Babiak, Indiana State Senator Tom Wyss, Consul of the Slovak Republic in Naperville, Illinois Mrs. Rosemary Macko Wisnosky, Colonel Eric Ebb, all distinguished guests, especially those in the uniform of the Indiana National Guard... is there any place as beautiful as Indiana in May? I am delighted and honored to be able to share for a few moments in this fitting celebration of the 20th anniversary of not just our State partnership between the Indiana National Guard and the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, but, we gather here today to celebrate a partnership between soldiers, between warriors, between people and, as Lt. General Maxim said to me, "The partnership between the Slovak Republic and the Indiana National Guard's armed forces is a strong partnership for 20 years, and may it ever be so." Thank you, General.

We also offer our congratulations today not just for the marking of 20 years for this strong partnership, but also our congratulations to the Slovak Republic for their first decade of participation in NATO and the European Union. We are delighted to welcome you to the Hoosier State and to be able to celebrate these moments with you on behalf all of the people of our state.

Such accomplishments by your people highlight the depth, history and success of our friendship and of your great nation. Having now, our relationship, thrived for two decades just one year after the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Slovakia, the Indiana-Slovakia partnership was formed to help further Bratislava's ambitions to become a partner in NATO. In 2004, this goal was achieved in addition to Slovakia gaining membership in the EU that same year.

Since then, our relationship has continued to flourish. Members of the Indiana National Guard and the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic, as we already heard today, deployed side-by-side as war fighters on the battlefields in Afghanistan even beginning in 2011, serving under the command of a Slovak Armed Forces officer and providing a logistical training team to the Afghan National Army during a ten-month deployment. In total, members have been deployed together four times for this same mission.

Our two militaries have also shared over two hundred joint events over the course of the last twenty years to include non commissioned officer development, flight training, fire support training, intelligence preparation of the battlefield training, and military decision making process training.

Our partnership has also reaped mutually beneficial rewards. From training best practices to achieving shared goals, the Indiana National Guard and the Armed Forces of

the Slovak Republic have grown exponentially as individual entities and as a resolute partnership.

And, perhaps most telling of our true partnership, as General Umbarger recited so eloquently, this partnership has allowed the people of Indiana to grow a greater appreciation for the rich heritage and history of your nation. The cultural exchange between our organizations and between our people has created and supported what I know will be a long-lasting comradery among service men and women separated by so many miles but sharing together in a joint mission for freedom and the defense of our two nations.

For these accomplishments among so many others, I extend my profound gratitude to the leadership of the Slovak Republic, so well-represented here by the Ambassador and to its Armed Forces, also so well-represented here, and our own leadership of the Indiana National Guard. Each of you have helped to strengthen the foundation of this bond, and, in that way, you've helped to strengthen the foundations of both our state, our nation and of your great nation, as well.

In twenty years of partnership, we mark ten years of NATO. Let me say, as Lt. General Maxim recited, as we continue to prepare and work in this partnership and protect freedom and democracy, we recognize that we live in uncertain times. In these times, we note the rise of aggression in Ukraine, instability in the Middle East, and so, on days like today, we renew our firm determination to recognize that NATO is first and foremost a defense alliance. It is an alliance on behalf of freedom, and now, perhaps more than ever, this alliance must be celebrated and renewed to ensure the freedom and democracy for all of our peoples. To ensure a whole and free Europe, we must continue to forge strong partnerships for surely we will find peace through strength.

In closing, here in the United States I say to our friends from the Slovak Republic, we are just days away from our Memorial Day and just days away from the greatest spectacle in racing. And we certainly hope that the Indiana National Guard will extend the hospitality to our friends from the Slovak Republic and take you to 16th Street to enjoy during your time in the Hoosier State the extraordinary images there. The great part about being in Indiana is that we never forget what Memorial Day is really all about. It is a day when we remember those who did not come home. Let me say to our partners in the Slovak Republic, you have chosen well to forge a partnership with the people of Indiana because here in Indiana we cherish those who serve in uniform, and here in Indiana we never forget the fallen or their families in this month or any other month. And so it shall ever be. May God continue to bless the good people and the brave warriors of the Slovak Republic. May God bless the Indiana National Guard. And may God bless the United States of America on this great day of celebration.

Thank you all. It's an honor to be with you.