North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Remarks

by Ambassador Hans-Dieter Lucas, German Permanent Representative to NATO, and by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall
2019-11-06

(As delivered)

HANS-DIETER LUCAS [German Permanent Representative to NATO]: Secretary General, colleagues, generals, admirals, ladies and gentlemen, a warm welcome to all of you at this commemoration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, thirty years ago. The 9th November 89 was one of those defining moments in history which changed the world. That is why watching footage of that night when the Wall fell is still so moving for all of us today.

Probably very few of us who lived with the Wall as a hard political reality would have thought that it would be torn down within our lifetimes. But that one night, 30 years ago this Saturday, it actually happened. East German border police opened crossing points in the Berlin Wall, allowing East Berliners to stream through, unhindered, to West Berlin. They crossed the border with incredible joy, amazement and tears. They danced on, below and beside the Wall.

It was the beginning of the single most dramatic and positive transformation of the political map of post-war Europe. It marked the beginning of the end for the division of Germany and Europe, as well as for the Communist regimes.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was unexpected, but it did not happen without reason. It would have been unthinkable without the decision of the then-Hungarian government to open its border to GDR refugees in September 89. And it is essentially thanks to courageous people in the GDR, Poland, Czechoslovakia and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe that the barriers at the border between the two German states were finally opened.

On 10th November 1989, a day after the Wall had fallen, the then-NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner said in a statement, “We look to a process of peaceful, evolutionary change, consistent with the overwhelming desire of people throughout Europe and indeed the world. These events once again demonstrate the persuasive power of the democratic ideals for which this Alliance stands.” And indeed, in contrast to 1953 in East Germany, 1956 in Hungary, 1968 in Czechoslovakia and 1981 in Poland, people’s longing for freedom and self-determination could no longer be crushed, neither in East Germany nor anywhere else in Europe. The human desire for freedom turned the division of Europe and the Cold War into things of the past.

On this special anniversary, we also remember all the victims of this Wall and the political system it stood for. All those who were killed trying to escape to West Berlin, as well as those who were captured and ended up in jail in their longing for freedom.

We also should not forget that November 9th condenses more German history of the 20th Century. It was on that day in 1918 that the German Empire ended, after four terrible years of the First World War. And in 1938, on 9th November, the Nazis set fire to synagogues, plundered Jewish homes and businesses, detained and murdered Jewish fellow citizens. Only 1989, with the fall of the Wall, did November 9th, become also a joyful date in German history.

Many of us enter this building every day by passing this memorial consisting of two original blocks of the Wall. Along with the 9/11 memorial, it is a symbol of what this Alliance stands for, a symbol of Alliance solidarity.

NATO Allies opposed the Wall from the beginning. In December 1961, just a few months after construction of the Wall had started, NATO foreign ministers and I quote, “reaffirmed the determination to protect and defend the liberties of West Berlin and ensure to its people the conditions for a free and prosperous life.” We all still recall President Kennedy’s famous “Ich bin ein Berliner”, one year later.

During all those years, the Cold War, NATO kept up the vision of a peacefully united Germany and Europe. It was thanks to the solidarity of our Allies that West Germany and West Berlin were safe and able to prosper. And for this, we remain eternally grateful.

It could therefore not be more fitting to commemorate the fall of the Berlin Wall together among Allies here at NATO headquarters. Today, more than 900 million people in the Euro-Atlantic area of 29 – and soon 30 – Allied countries live together in freedom and peace under the security umbrella of NATO. We will need to stand together if you want to preserve for future generations the promise of democracy and freedom, the promise of that day 30 years ago when the Berlin Wall fell. Thank you for being here. I will now hand over to you, Mr Secretary General.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]:

Ambassador Lucas,

Ambassadors,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you for joining us to mark this momentous occasion.

And standing here today in front of these pieces of the Berlin Wall,

is the time to remember how far we have come.

Together.

In just a generation.

A city,

a country,

a continent,

our transatlantic Alliance,

transformed.

29 friends and Allies standing shoulder-to-shoulder.

United in defence of freedom and democracy.

To preserve the peace.

And protect our almost one billion citizens.

The Berlin Wall was a scar on the face of Europe.

Through gun towers and guard dogs,

it tried to keep people in,

and ideas out.

But it failed.

Because our vision and values were stronger.

Freedom, democracy, and human dignity.

The same values that unite us today,

inspired ordinary people,

30 years ago,

to achieve something extraordinary.

From the shipyards of Gdansk,

to the peaceful protests in Dresden and Leipzig.

From the pan-European picnic on the Austrian-Hungarian border,

to the ringing of keys in Wenceslas Square.

And in the human chain that ran all the way from Vilnius, to Riga and Tallinn.

A generation of courageous men and women,

braved bullets and barbed wire,

linked hands, hearts and minds.

To live in freedom and democracy.

To follow their dreams.

They proved that no wall can withstand the strength of the human spirit.

And that peace and solidarity can overcome any opponent.

Later this week, I will take part in ceremonies in Berlin to mark the fall of the Wall.

A city that today stands proudly united.

In a country that stands at the heart of our transatlantic Alliance.

We are honoured to host these pieces of the Berlin Wall here at the entrance of the NATO Headquarters.

They serve as a symbol of hope,

and a solemn reminder to all those who pass by,

to never take freedom and democracy for granted.

We must defend them every day.

And we must continue to stand united.

Thank you so much.

And thank you again Ambassador Lucas.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: If you have any questions.

TERI SHULTZ [NPR]: Teri Schultz with NPR. In the United States, there has now been a change in the impeachment proceedings, which I know is not your lane, and the Ambassador to the EU has confirmed that the White House asked Ukraine for a quid pro quo to get military assistance. NATO spends so much time, so much effort trying to strengthen Ukraine. Are you not troubled by these developments?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I will not go into domestic US politics. The North Atlantic Council, I myself, visited Kyiv, Ukraine, last week. There we expressed our strong support, political support and practical support to Ukraine. And all NATO Allies continue to provide strong political and practical support to Ukraine. And we are actually stepping up our support. That's the message from NATO. I will not go into the process, which is now going on in the Congress.

TERI SHULTZ: But I asked about the implications on NATO. That is not just a US process, if Ukraine's military abilities are weakened by something like this.

JENS STOLTENBERG: But what we saw also when we visited Kyiv, Ukraine, last week, all the 29 nations together on a NATO visit, we saw that all Allies continue to provide strong support to Ukraine, because we stand in solidarity with Ukraine. The illegal annexation of Crimea is the first time since the end of the Second World War when one country in Europe is actually taking a part of another country. And that's also a reason why NATO has implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, and we continue to provide strong support to Ukraine. And all Allies do that, all the 29, of course, including the United States.

QUESTION: Is quid pro quo a NATO policy?

JENS STOLTENBERG: But again, I will not go into a process which is now taking place in the US Congress. What I will do is to make sure that all NATO Allies continue to provide support to Ukraine. And that's exactly what they are doing. We are actually stepping up after the aggressive actions against Ukrainian ships in the Strait of . . . in the Black Sea. We actually decided to also step up our presence in the Black Sea. So NATO Allies, including United States, prove every day that we stand in solidarity with Ukraine.

QUESTION: Secretary General, a question on Syria. US military officials have confirmed that ISIS is now regrouping in northern Syria. How concerned are you that Turkey's operation there is allowing space for them to regroup?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I have stated several times that I am deeply concerned about the risks of jeopardising the gains we have made in the fight against Daesh or ISIS. And that's exactly also the reason why, when we had the NATO defence ministers here a few days ago, they all agreed that we need to maintain the progress we have made in the fight against Daesh, and also that we need to look into what more we can do to step up our joint efforts in the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh.

OANA LUNGESCU: DPA do you have any questions?

QUESTION [DPA]: Yeah. You'll meet the German Defence Minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, in Berlin today. You've been talking about her plans for northern Syria at the

NATO Defence Ministerial a few days ago. Have you seen any progress, or do you have any expectations for this meeting?

JENS STOLTENBERG: What we have seen is, at least, a reduction in violence and that's something we welcome on the ground in northern Syria. At the same time, the situation is fragile, difficult. And we are also concerned about the risks of jeopardising some of the progress, or the progress we have made in the fight against ISIS or Daesh.

And I think what has happened over the last weeks in northern Syria just highlights the importance of supporting all efforts to find a political solution. We strongly support the UN-led efforts to find a political solution and I also welcome proposals, ideas from Allies to try to help and support such a political process. So that was my message when I met Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, here at the NATO headquarters during the NATO Defence Ministerial. And that's also my message when I go to Berlin later on today.

OANA LUNGESCU: NTV, last question?

QUESTION [NTV]: Well, I was going to ask about Kramp-Karrenbauer as well and Chancellor Merkel, you'll be meeting her. What main topics will you be discussing with her on Friday?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First of all, I think it's always a good thing to comment on meetings after they have taken place and not before. But of course, we will discuss a wide range of security issues which are relevant for NATO, for Germany. And that includes, of course, for instance, the situation in Ukraine, how to make sure that we are adapting NATO to a more unpredictable world, burden-sharing within the Alliance, and many other issues. But again, I think it's wise to comment on the content of meetings after we have had them.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you, thank you.

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