

Speech by
Parliamentary State Secretary
Thomas Hitschler
on the occasion of the reception aboard the Gorch Fock
29 August 2022

Esteemed colleague Ms Sumuvuori,
Excellencies,
Attachés,
Admirals and Generals,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for allowing me to be with you in Helsinki today.

It is an extraordinary pleasure for me to be able to speak to you today aboard our “ambassador at sea”, the GORCH FOCK.

And thank you for welcoming our sail training ship so warmly and for coming to this reception in such large numbers.

Finland is an extremely important partner to us, not only in the context of European security and defense policy in Northern Europe, but also as regards our bilateral cooperation.

The close ties with Finland, Sweden, and other Nordic countries will become even more important in the not so distant future.

Chancellor Scholz made this clear mid-August at a meeting with the heads of state and government in Oslo and Stockholm.

We need joint action more than ever before, because we have seen in recent months that Russia’s war of aggression in Ukraine has brought fundamental changes to global security and defense. We have seen that stability and security cannot be taken for granted. No – We have to keep working for it, preserving it, and paying for it.

We are facing a transformation in our European security order. Chancellor Scholz coined the term “Zeitenwende”. Now, we have to reorient ourselves quickly and consolidate and further expand our alliances.

The situation in Ukraine remains dramatic. The recent events, the course of the war, Russia’s war crimes, and the humanitarian crisis touch us deeply every day.

However, Ukraine keeps standing firm - which demands our respect - and international support is unwavering.

And so, Putin faces an even more united European Union and NATO.

Our solidarity with Ukraine and our unity within NATO and the European Union show that Putin will fail with his absurd visions for reorganization of the European security architecture.

This has also set the scene for the historic decisions in Finland and Sweden. After many years of military independence, both countries decided to join NATO - a defensive alliance.

We greatly welcome this step and congratulate you on it.

The membership applications of Finland and Sweden must now be ratified quickly. Germany has already done so and wants to accelerate the accession process.

Finland and Sweden are already close partners for us and their capabilities will strengthen our Alliance significantly both vis-à-vis Russia's aggression and in the systemic competition with China.

The mutual reassurance of Article 5 is at the heart of NATO. And so it is with joy and confidence that we look to a future in which, with 32 member states, we can defend our Western values more strongly than ever before.

Because there is one thing we have to be honest about:

The war in Ukraine is already having a massive impact on the global security order: Just think of the food crisis with its dramatic consequences for Europe's southern neighborhood. Or think of old international fault lines that are suddenly re-emerging.

Our overriding goal remains the preservation of the rules-based international order. This means that we must continue to contribute to national and collective defense and that we contribute our fair share to international missions with mandated operations in order to take responsibility for international security and the rules-based order.

I am confident that our friends in Finland and across the Alliance will rise to the challenges together.

I look forward to continuing our intensive cooperation. Let me therefore take this opportunity to assure you once again:

We stand firmly by your side - today, tomorrow, and beyond!

Thank you very much!