

Distinguished Colleagues and Honored Guests; it is a pleasure to be here today for this ceremony. This morning we recognize the Bulgarian Armed Forces and their accomplishments in the NATO Accession and Integration Program.

Since 2004, JFC-Naples has participated with you to ensure the program's success. Today marks a day when dedicated NATO assistance and training for your Declared Forces and Force Goals are no longer necessary. You have demonstrated the requisite operational capabilities necessary for inclusion in the NATO Force Structure and Integrated Air Defense System. We are honored to sign the "Declaration on the Bulgarian Armed Forces' Integration into NATO."

Your achievement comes at an opportune time. As the world becomes more complex and interdependent, NATO's leadership in global affairs will become increasingly important.

Bulgaria's leadership in political dialogue and regional initiatives has already shown a strong commitment to NATO's future. Affirmed units are demonstrating a high degree of professionalism and accomplishment in NATO operations and exercises.

- Bulgarian forces have served with distinction in Afghanistan.
- Your own annual Exercise BREEZE has improved interoperability among NATO units in the Black Sea and prepared you for real-world operations.
- The deployment of a frigate to support the United Nations mandated embargo of Libya directly contributed to NATO's success in Operation Unified Protector.
- Strategically, your decision to embark upon this journey towards full NATO membership has been positive influence on the Alliance's expanding membership in Eastern Europe.

NATO is very pleased with the progress your Armed Forces have made in the integration process. Their ability to operate in the modern security environment is an impressive achievement. We are confident that the affirmation of Bulgarian units and their addition to the NATO Pool of Forces will increase the Alliance's operational capability and significantly contribute to regional and global security.

We look forward to working with you as you strive to meet your Capability Targets and offer new declared forces.

I would like to conclude by reaffirming JFC Naples' commitment to Bulgaria as we stand ready to work side-by-side in your nation's continued efforts. Thank you all for allowing me to share this very important occasion with you. It has been a true privilege to be here today and I thank you all for inviting me to speak at this ceremony! Congratulations!