PISM POLSKI INSTYTUT SPRAW MIĘDZYNARODOWYCH
THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

BULLETIN

No. 11 (861), 5 February 2016 © PISM

Editors: Jarosław Ćwiek-Karpowicz ● Anna Maria Dyner ● Aleksandra Gawlikowska-Fyk
Dariusz Kałan ● Patryk Kugiel ● Sebastian Płóciennik ● Patrycja Sasnal ● Marcin Terlikowski
Katarzyna Staniewska (Managing Editor)

The Potential for Polish-Lithuanian Cooperation in Security

Kinga Raś

Poland and Lithuania, regardless of tensions related to the situation of the Polish minority, are intensifying security sector cooperation. The main reason is the Ukraine-Russia conflict, which changed the geopolitical conditions in the region. A notable example of such cooperation is the creation of the Poland-Lithuania-Ukraine brigade, which will reach full operational capability in 2017. Poland and Lithuania also have common interests concerning the upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw, especially with regard to strengthening the Alliance's presence on the eastern flank. However, this will require the involvement of both countries in other dimensions of NATO activity.

Security as a Priority in Relations. Polish and Lithuanian cooperation on security has become more dynamic as a result of the aggressive steps taken by Russia against Ukraine. This cooperation takes place, among other things, on the basis of security and crisis-management agreements concluded in 1993 between the Polish and Lithuanian ministries of defence, and includes, among other things, joint exercises and training. An example of effective cooperation occurred in 1997 to 2008, with the Lithuania-Poland Peace Force Battalion (LITPOLBAT) that was intended mainly to participate in peacekeeping missions carried out on behalf of the UN, NATO and the OSCE. Soldiers of this battalion were deployed on missions in Kosovo, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. The Multinational Corps Northeast NATO headquarters in Szczecin currently plays an important role in joint Polish and Lithuanian operations.

Poland also provided expert assistance in the restructuring of Lithuania's armed forces, which in the last two years has introduced significant changes in its security policy. Regular conscription has been re-introduced, and the defence budget has been increased to almost 1.5% of GDP, with a target of 2% by 2020. Furthermore, Lithuania decided in 2014 to purchase Polish Grom mobile anti-aircraft missiles, in a deal worth more than €34 billion. Poland has implemented and is accelerating the modernisation of its own army and defence system. According to latest estimates, expenditures on the technical modernisation of the armed forces from 2013 to 2022 was 137 billion PLN, of which 70% is to be allocated to the purchase of modern weapons in the framework of the priority operational programmes. At the same time, both Poland and Lithuania are planning to strengthen their air defence systems. Additionally, Poland intends to obtain submarines equipped with missiles, which is in line with Lithuania's goal of retrofitting the military in order to enhance its defence capabilities and operations on the Baltic Sea coast. Moreover, Poland is, in the framework of NATO, involved in the Air Policing mission to protect the airspace of the Baltic States. From January to April 2015, the Polish Military Contingent Orlik 6 was on duty as part of NATO's 37th rotation, strengthening the Italian component at Lithuania's Siauliai airport (Poland supplied MiG-29 fighters for the sixth time). At the same time, within the rotation of the Polish Armed Forces, the airport in Malbork was made available to the Belgian component. Moreover, Poland and Lithuania jointly implement the provisions of the Wales NATO summit, involving the strengthening of the eastern flank in response to Russia's aggression in Ukraine and its annexation of Crimea. In 2015, the two countries were among those taking part in the Noble Jump exercises, the scripts for which were adapted to take into account the current situation in the region. These exercises were designed to assess the degree of preparedness of NATO's rapid reaction forces.

Poland and Lithuania have also enhanced their interest in actions relating to the security dimension in the Baltic region, for example by taking part in the BALTOPS naval exercises under NATO auspices. In addition, both countries participated in the 2014 SUCBAS (Sea Surveillance Cooperation Baltic Sea) initiative, aimed at exchanging information between armed forces. Furthermore, concerned about the increasing number of Baltic Sea incidents involving Russia, Lithuania decided to increase the readiness of its armed forces, based primarily on two battalions of infantry (mechanised and motorised).

LITPOLUKRBRIG. Plans for the Poland-Lithuania-Ukraine brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG), with headquarters in Lublin, were finalised in January. The genesis of this project dates back to 2007, when the Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian defence ministers met in Brussels and decided to form a joint battalion. The technical agreement, on the regulations and logistics solutions for the management of the brigade, was signed in July 2015. The brigade headquarters in Lublin is to host six Lithuanian military members, and the first exercises in preparation for full operational readiness will take place in February. Formally, the establishment of the brigade is not an element of the plan to strengthen NATO's eastern flank. However, it can realistically be assumed that the unit will in practice strengthen regional military cooperation, including helping Ukraine to reform its armed forces. Moreover, the brigade, subdivisions of which will be stationed in each of the home countries, is also to become the basis for the next EU Battle Group.

Before the NATO Summit. The July NATO summit in Warsaw is a challenge because of the need for an "adaptation strategy," which frames comprehensive reform that is intended to strengthen the Alliance's overall capacity to deter conventional threats. The summit will, therefore, address issues beyond the scope of the roadmap for preparedness (the Readiness Action Plan). Thus, the meeting in Warsaw is particularly important, because it will be the culmination of the first phase of implementation of the RAP, a clear response to the actions of Russia in Ukraine, adopted in Newport in 2014. From the point of view of Poland and Lithuania, a positive outcome to the summit would include the announcement of the operational readiness of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF, with 5,000 troops) and of the initial readiness of the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU), which will be responsible for the reception and logistics of VJTF. In Poland, NFIU will be based in Bydgoszcz, and in Lithuania, it will be in Vilnius.

In addition, the combat readiness of the command of the Multinational Corps Northeast, which is to fulfil a key role in the Central and Eastern Europe territorial defence mission, continues to increase. The assumption is that, by this year, it should be ready to command the VJTF forces if they are deployed, and to take responsibility for synchronising NFIU activities. By the end of 2018, this body should also be ready to lead combined operations of land, sea and air units. Lithuania has already drawn up plans to increase its staff at the Szczecin headquarters this year, to ten people. At the same time, both Poland and Lithuania aim to clarify the way in which the expanded NATO Response Force (from 13,000 to 40,000) will function. Moreover, both countries are particularly keen on long-term NATO adaptation, including, among other things, permanently increasing the capacity of conventional deterrence threats and increasing and consolidating the presence of allied troops in the region.

Perspectives. The Ukraine-Russia conflict has reduced the sense of security in Central and Eastern Europe, requiring Lithuania and Poland to strengthen their cooperation. Therefore, both countries should not only fulfil their own obligations arising from NATO membership but should also strive together to reinforce the eastern flank and work towards effective cooperation at the regional level. Both Poland and Lithuania advocate for change to the NATO structure, and, along with the other Baltic States, support reforms aimed at strengthening NATO's presence in Central and Eastern Europe. However, it is essential that both countries increase their own credibility among other NATO members if they are to achieve their goals. Therefore, Poland and Lithuania should demonstrate their commitment to all NATO activities, including those related to areas other than the eastern flank. Thus, they should seek to support stabilisation activities in Europe's southern neighbourhood, and security building initiatives (such as the Defence and Security Related Capacity Building Initiative) relating to NATO activity in, for example, Iraq, Libya and Syria. These topics should become an important element of the debate at the summit in Warsaw.

In this context, the efficiency of LITPOLUKRBRIG will be an important argument in support of the goals of Poland and Lithuania. This unit's engagement in NATO missions will play a key role in balancing the priorities of NATO countries, and would be beneficial even for a country with such limited defence potential as Lithuania.

At the same time the real involvement of Poland and Lithuania in support of restructuring the Ukrainian army, and more broadly in reshaping that country's entire security sector, can offer tangible benefits in regard to stabilising the region, and this is of particular interest to Warsaw and Vilnius. It would also give them the opportunity to influence reform of the Ukrainian security structures.

Moreover, by strengthening bilateral cooperation Poland and Lithuania, which would potentially be the first to have to react to Russian actions in the region, may consider coordinating and deepening work on defensive planning. In addition, in the process of creating territorial defence structures, Poland may take advantage of the long experience of the Baltic States in the supervision and organisation of such units.