

Iskander ballistic missiles on NATO's borders

Andrzej Wilk

On 14 December the large circulation German daily *Bild* published information that Russia had deployed 9K720 Iskander short-range ballistic missiles (NATO code SS-26 Stone), which a range of operation of up to 500 km, in the Kaliningrad Oblast near the border with Poland and along the border between Russia and the Baltic states. Deployment of the missiles was set for 2013. *Bild* made reference to classified satellite photographs and also stressed that Iskander missiles could carry nuclear warheads and that their range of operation covers not only the entirety of Polish territory but theoretically also Berlin. The deployment of the missiles is supposedly Russia's response to plans for the construction of the European anti-missile shield.

On 16 December the spokesman for the Russian Ministry of Defence general Igor Konashenkov while commenting on the information published by *Bild* said that Iskander ballistic missiles were part of the equipment of the Western Military District and the areas of their deployment do not infringe on international agreements.

Commentary

- The 152nd Missile Brigade ([Chernyakhovsk](#)) stationed in the Kaliningrad Oblast has not yet officially been rearmed with Iskander missiles. Their standard equipment is older generation 9K79 Tochka-U missiles (SS-21 Scarab). The first Iskander missiles which can be treated as the beginning of the rearmament of the 152nd Missile Brigade may have found their way to the Kaliningrad Oblast from the 26th Missile Brigade (Luga, Leningrad Oblast) in 2013 as part of manoeuvres and have remained in place. The 26th Missile Brigade was rearmed with Iskander missiles in 2011 and in 2013 it was set to be supplied with the modernised version (including an extended range), which would make it possible to transport part of the Iskander missiles which had earlier been received in Chernyakhovsk in a relatively covert manner. The satellite photographs which *Bild* refers to may concern the introduction of the missiles which are part of the equipment of the two brigades as part of manoeuvres (the 152nd and 26th Brigades are part of the Western Military District) to combat positions, which could have happened in September this year.
- Iskander missiles were introduced to the Russian army in 2006. At first they were sent to training units. Under the State Armaments Programme 2011-2020 all ten Russian missile brigades will be rearmed with Iskander ballistic missiles. In 2013 this process has been accelerated and it can be inferred from budget plans that this trend will continue in

coming years. The process will be completed in 2018 at the latest. By December 2013 three brigades have been rearmed with Iskander missiles, including the two brigades which are deployed in the European Russia. Another two brigades (including one from European Russia) will receive the missiles in 2014. The 152nd brigade was not mentioned among them but its rearmament should be considered as predetermined, as is the case with the remaining brigades, irrespective of the progress made in the deployment of the components of the anti-missile shield in Europe.

- Whether tactical nuclear weapons are present in the Kaliningrad Oblast remains an open question. It is most likely that they have been there since Soviet times. Confidential information coming from Russia (passed on to Western experts) may either be evidence of this or a deliberate attempt at disinformation.