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Slovakia to deliver howitzers to Ukraine – Denmark, Germany and Norway are paying

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On 2 October, Slovak Defence Minister Jaroslav Nad' signed an agreement for the local state company Konštrukta-Defence to produce 16 Zuzana 2 (155mm calibre) self-propelled howitzers which Slovakia will deliver to the Ukrainian army. The cost of their manufacture – €92 million – will be borne in equal proportions by Denmark, Germany and Norway. The agreement is the largest foreign contract in the history of the Slovak arms industry. The guns will be manufactured in Dubnica nad Váhom near the Czech border and the manufacturing process will last at least a year. The chassis will be supplied by the Czech company Tatra, which is part of the privately-owned Czechoslovak Group – CSG.

The agreement follows up on the commercial contract for the sale of eight Zuzana 2 self-propelled howitzers, which Konštrukta-Defence signed in June with the Ukrainian company Ukrspecexport. According to the media, its estimated value was €40–50 million. The first four guns arrived in Ukraine in August, with the remainder expected in autumn. Ukraine was said to have expressed satisfaction with their mobility, accuracy and range (40 km). Bratislava is also currently negotiating subsidies with its Western allies for the construction of a second production line in Dubnica nad Váhom, which would double the production capacity of the howitzers (currently at 20 per year).

Commentary

- The agreement is another example of Slovakia's success in exploiting political and military support for Ukraine in order to improve its own security and provide contracts for its domestic arms companies. This is also relevant in the context of the reluctance and concerns of a significant part of the population regarding military aid for Ukraine (cf. '*Slovakia: strategic dilemmas after the Russian invasion of Ukraine*'). By means of compensation for handing the S-300 air defence system over to Ukraine in April, Slovakia negotiated an additional free-of-charge (fourth) battery of the Patriot missile system, operated by the Americans (the other three belong to Germany and the Netherlands). In turn, at the end of August, Slovakia announced that "in the coming weeks" it would provide Ukraine with 30 BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles of Soviet design using the reserve stocks of its own army. In return, it will receive 15 used but fully operational Leopard 2A4 tanks with ammunition from Germany (at least one this year and most of the remainder next year), with a much higher market value. It is also negotiating the sale or transfer of (presumably ten) MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine. By taking them out of service at the end of August, it has secured free airspace patrolling by Poland and the

Czech Republic until the delivery of US-ordered F-16 fighters in 2024. In addition, Slovakia supplied Ukraine with, among other things, a Božena mine sweeper, five helicopters (four Mi17s and one Mi-2), ammunition for Grad rocket launchers, aviation fuel and small arms. According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW Kiel), Slovakia ranks fifth in the world in terms of military aid to Ukraine relative to GDP and fourteenth in terms of the absolute value of support (€192 million).

- The joint acquisition of Slovak howitzers by Germany, Denmark and Norway is the first multilateral purchase of this kind by Western European allies. With the Ukrainian counter-offensive underway, they are facing pressure from their own public and the US regarding further deliveries of heavy equipment to Kyiv. At the same time, they do not want to deplete the artillery used by their own armed forces. The ordering of howitzers from Slovakia is most likely due to its ability to produce them quickly. Other manufacturers of this type of equipment in EU and NATO countries are unlikely to be able to take on additional contracts in the short to medium term. Germany's KMW will be executing a contract for 100 PzH 2000s for Ukraine in the coming years. Poland's Huta Stalowa Wola is executing a Ukrainian order for 54 Krab systems, and the French company Nexter, which manufactures Caesar howitzers, is executing contracts with Denmark, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Belgium and Morocco. Sweden's BAE Systems is most likely to have spare capacity, and at the end of August the Swedish foreign minister mentioned the exploration of the possibility of supplying Archer gun-howitzers (for the time being from Swedish army stocks). However, after the Swedish parliamentary elections, the Social Democrats, who are temporarily holding the reins, are unlikely to make ground-breaking decisions on the possible supply of howitzers, leaving it up to the emerging new centre-right coalition.