

The German 'Brigade Lithuania'

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On 18 December in Vilnius, Boris Pistorius and Arvydas Anušauskas, the defence ministers of Germany and Lithuania, signed the so-called roadmap for the deployment of a German brigade in Lithuania ('Brigade Lithuania'). Its headquarters will be set up in Lithuania in 2024, and most of the units will be deployed in 2025–6. The brigade is expected to achieve full operational readiness by the end of 2027 and will ultimately number 4800 soldiers and 200 civilian personnel, who will be stationed on a permanent basis (with their families), and not rotationally. The Lithuanian side is to provide infrastructure for the soldiers and their families.

The 'Brigade Lithuania' is to include the 122nd Mechanised Infantry Battalion from Bavaria (around 600 soldiers and 44 Puma infantry fighting vehicles) and the 203rd Tank Battalion from North Rhine-Westphalia (around 600 soldiers and 44 Leopard 2A7 tanks), which are planned to be transferred from Germany. The NATO battlegroup already deployed in Lithuania, currently numbering 1400 soldiers (including 850 German troops), which is set to be transformed into a multinational battalion in 2026, will also become part of the brigade. The plan is to station the brigade in two locations: Rudninkai (two German battalions) and Rukla (where the NATO battlegroup is deployed). The 'Brigade Lithuania' will be subordinated to the German 10th Armoured Division ('Division 2025'), which will be the first of three German divisions to be fully equipped and operational as part of its contribution to the NATO's defence planning.

Commentary

- The establishment and deployment of the brigade in Lithuania is Boris Pistorius's flagship project, which is intended to show that the German *Zeitenwende* is being implemented in security policy. Germany wants to regain its credibility as an ally in this way after being harshly criticised for its slow arms deliveries to Ukraine in the first year of the war and its insufficient defence spending. In recent months both countries have announced that the so-called roadmap would be signed by the end of 2023. This is an important step, although it should be borne in mind that it is still optimistic to think the process will be completed by 2027, and its implementation will depend on Lithuania's progress in developing its military infrastructure and on Germany both increasing its defence spending for the deployment of the brigade and finding personnel who are willing to be relocated. The new brigade is to be plugged into NATO's regional defence plans which were approved during the Vilnius summit in July this year. However, the fact that it is formally subordinated to the German division may complicate the command structure in the region, which is based on the multinational division commands in Elbląg,

Poland (MND NE), Ādaži, Latvia / Karup, Denmark (MND North) and the command of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin, Poland (MNC NE).

- The so-called 'roadmap' is a continuation of the process launched when President Gitanas Nausėda and Chancellor Olaf Scholz signed a joint communiqué in June 2022 in which the parties agreed that Germany, in addition to being the framework nation of the NATO battlegroup, would assign a brigade to defend Lithuania. It turned out in the following months that the parties had different interpretations of the joint statement: Berlin insisted that most of the brigade would be stationed in Germany, while Vilnius argued that German forces should be deployed in Lithuania. The dispute ended in June this year, when Pistorius declared that Germany was ready to permanently deploy the brigade in Lithuania under certain conditions. However over time, the concept of forming a brigade separate from the NATO battlegroup was abandoned, most likely due to problems with assigning at least three German battalions with support units, as well as the lack of sufficient infrastructure in Lithuania.
- If the deal with Germany comes to fruition, Lithuania will most likely be a country with the largest NATO military presence. The NATO battlegroup stationed in Latvia is to be expanded to brigade level, although only on a rotational basis and involving a combination of elements deployed in Latvia and Canada (framework nation). Ottawa has committed to increasing its presence in Latvia from 1000 up to 2200 soldiers. Canadian military personnel are now part of the NATO battlegroup, numbering approximately 1700 in total. When Sweden joins the Alliance, the planned brigade will most likely be reinforced by a Swedish contingent. It will be subordinated to the HQ of the Multinational Division North (MND North), and thus to the Corps HQ in Szczecin (MNC NE). Estonia is the only Baltic state where there are no plans yet to scale up the NATO battlegroup to a brigade. According to the bilateral arrangements made in July this year, the UK will regularly exercise the deployment of the UK brigade assigned to defend Estonia, scale up the NATO battlegroup HQ to brigadier level and support Tallinn in the process of forming Division HQ, which is ultimately to be included in the NATO Force Structure and have a similar status to the Division HQs in Elbląg and Ādaži/Karup. The UK brigade will be aligned to the Estonian Division and will be integrated into Estonia's national defence plan.