

Denmark: breakthrough on defence spending

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On 30 April, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen's government (a coalition of the Social Democrats, the liberal Venstre party and the Moderates) and the majority of the opposition reached a landmark cross-party defence agreement to raise defence spending to 2% of the country's GDP as early as this year. In 2024–28, these expenditures will increase by 35.2 billion kroner (€4.72 billion). This document updates the main Defence Agreement covering the 2024–33 period (see '[Denmark: higher spending on defence and military support for Ukraine](#)'), which states that the defence budget would only rise to 2% of GDP in 2030. The additional funding will mainly be used to purchase infantry fighting vehicles of the CV90 family and short- & medium-range air defence systems, and to acquire anti-submarine capabilities. The parties also agreed to include women in conscription from 2027. In addition, the number of people called up for compulsory basic military service will rise from around 4700 to 7500 per year; the length of this service will be extended from 4 to 11 months.

Commentary

- The decision to allocate 2% of the country's GDP to defence six years sooner than originally envisaged means that Denmark will meet the 2014 NATO Defence Investment Pledge at the last moment. This is a breakthrough in the policy of this country, which in the last quarter-century has made up for its low defence spending with a substantial involvement in out-of-area crisis response operations alongside the US, as well as an emphasis on its military presence in the Arctic. According to NATO estimates, Denmark spent 1.65% of its GDP on defence in 2023 (around €6.3 billion), compared to around 1.3% in the preceding years. Its decision to provide more funding to its armed forces was influenced by the adverse developments on the Ukrainian battlefield, the upcoming NATO summit to be held in Washington in July, and the possibility of a victory for Donald Trump in this year's US presidential election. For Denmark, the US is a key ally in the area of security and defence; this was demonstrated by the bilateral agreement on defence cooperation that the two countries signed in December 2023 (see '[Finland, Sweden and Denmark: Defence Cooperation Agreements with the USA](#)').
- Due to the long-standing underinvestment in the Danish armed forces, the current plans to boost spending will not translate into any significant increase in their capabilities in the near future. The additional funds will only make it possible to fulfil the commitments to develop the land forces that Denmark made back in 2014. It will finally be able to equip its sole brigade with the adequate amount of military matériel, but its air defence capabilities will have to be developed virtually from scratch (see '[Safe skies? Air defence](#)

on NATO's northern, eastern and south-eastern flank'). Two opposition parties, the Denmark Democrats and the Liberal Alliance, successfully pushed for more funding to purchase one medium- and two short-range air defence batteries. The country will most likely acquire one Patriot and two IRIS-T SLM batteries. However, it will still face the problem of insufficient numbers of combat aircraft (it has purchased only 27 F-35As) and surface vessels (five frigates). These do not meet the country's operational needs in the air and maritime domains over a vast area that stretches from the Baltic Sea, through the North Sea, to the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

- Denmark will increase the number of conscripts it trains annually in order to expand its army brigade and boost its trained reserve. Formally conscription in Denmark is universal for men, but in practice it is voluntary. In 2023, all those performing basic military service (4700 people, a quarter of them women) were volunteers. Recently, the issue of introducing full gender equality in conscription has sparked a major political dispute. The Denmark Democrats and the Liberal Alliance opposed this, mainly on ideological grounds. Ultimately, the parties agreed on a compromise to delay the introduction of conscription for women by one year. That means this will only happen after the next general election, which opens up some room for renegotiating this decision in the future. Opinion polls have shown that more than half of the public supports gender equality in conscription, while a third opposes it.