

Norway: more investment in national defence and support for Ukraine

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On 21 June, the Norwegian parliament adopted an amendment to the 2024 budget law, which increases defence funding from 91 to 104 billion Norwegian kroner (€9.14 billion). This will enable Norway to reach its defence spending target of 2% of its GDP two years sooner than previously envisaged (defence budget is expected to reach 2.17% of its GDP this year) and to boost its military support for Ukraine from 7.5 to 13.5 billion Norwegian kroner (€1.18 billion). A week earlier, the parliament approved a multi-year plan to develop the country's armed forces between 2025 and 2036. Norway plans to spend a total of 611 billion kroner (€61 billion) on military modernisation and strengthening its defence capabilities by 2036. Its priorities in this area include expanding its military infrastructure and materiel reserves, increasing the number of conscripts trained annually from around 9,000 to 13,700, strengthening its air defence, expanding its land forces from one to three brigades, raising its situational awareness through purchases of satellites and UAVs, and replacing almost all of its warships.

Commentary

- As a country that has traditionally sought to enhance collective defence and deterrence and has been engaged in close military cooperation with the United States (see '[USA–Norwegia: wzmacniona obecność wojskowa USA na północnej flance NATO](#)'), Norway could not afford to neglect its commitments ahead of NATO's anniversary summit – especially in view of Donald Trump's possible victory in the upcoming US presidential election. Over the past decade, Norway's nominal defence spending has grown steadily from 48 billion Norwegian kroner in 2014 to more than 100 billion in 2024. In 2020, the country was close to reaching the defence spending target of 2% of GDP. However, as hydrocarbon prices surged and demand for Norwegian oil and gas rose in the following years, the country's GDP grew rapidly. Consequently, the previously budgeted military funding relative to its GDP decreased.
- The new multi-year plan to develop the armed forces is ambitious and its implementation will provide a significant boost to Norway's defence capabilities, particularly in terms of its ability to conduct operations in the High North. The defence regiment for Norway's northern region of Finnmark will be upgraded into a mechanised brigade and provided with more heavy armaments and military equipment. This means that the government will use the option to acquire 18 additional Leopard 2A8 tanks (in addition to the 54 it ordered last year – see '[USA–Norwegia: wzmacniona obecność wojskowa USA na północnej flance NATO](#)') and purchase new CV90 infantry fighting vehicles and

potentially more K9 self-propelled howitzers (Norway currently has 24 of these and is awaiting delivery of a further four). The land forces will receive their second battery of the NASAMS short-range air defence system while the air force will increase the number of its NASAMS batteries from three to six and acquire two medium-range air defence batteries. A reserve infantry brigade will also be established, which makes it necessary to expand conscription. The brigade's task will be to support and cover allied reinforcements in Norway in times of crisis and war. However, the most ambitious project involves the transformation of the Norwegian Navy. The four frigates currently in service (a fifth sank when it collided with a civilian ship in 2018) will be replaced by five new vessels; there are plans for 23 corvettes, patrol vessels, mine hunters and Coast Guard cutters to be replaced by a total of 28 new vessels with a common hull but different equipment adapted to the specific tasks they will perform. Moreover, two more German-made U212CD submarines will be ordered in addition to the four already purchased (see *'Niemcy–Norwegia: nowa jakość współpracy marynarek wojennych'*) with the view to replacing all six Ula-class submarines currently in service. These crucial investments in the Navy aim to enhance Norway's ability to safeguard sea lines of communication its cooperation with allied navies in the Barents Sea and to secure critical oil and gas infrastructure on the Norwegian continental shelf. At the same time, Norway is in the process of implementing its earlier orders for 52 F-35A multi-role aircraft and five P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft.

- Norway's military support for Ukraine is relatively modest compared to its Scandinavian neighbours. This mainly stems from its inadequate defence budget and the scarcity of armaments and military equipment that the Norwegian Armed Forces have had at their disposal and thus have been able to provide to Ukraine. In 2022-23, Norway's military aid to Ukraine amounted to €1.34 billion out of a total of €7.46 billion it provided through all forms of support. In comparison, Denmark contributed around €4.4 billion and Sweden around €2.35 billion over the same period. However, the weapons that Norway has pledged or delivered include advanced systems such as four fire units of the NASAMS short-range air defence system, 23 M109A3NG self-propelled howitzers, eight Leopard 2A4 tanks, 11 M270 Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (these were delivered to the UK so that it could provide its own units to Ukraine) and up to 12 F-16AM/BM multi-role aircraft. In addition to its arms transfers, Norway has contributed to the UK-managed International Fund for Ukraine and joined forces with Denmark to purchase 155 mm artillery munitions for Ukraine. Additionally, Norwegian instructors have been deployed to Poland to train Ukrainian soldiers in operating Leopard 2 tanks.