

## Lithuanian-Polish Military Cooperation

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Successful Polish-Lithuanian military cooperation **is one of the most vivid expressions of strategic partnership between Poland and Lithuania**, and the Ministries of National Defense and Armed Forces of the respective countries are particularly proud of this fact.

**The significance of this cooperation** is manifold having a look from the perspective of the Ministry of National Defense. Military cooperation with Poland, a large friendly neighboring country, is a form of bilateral relations in the sphere of such a vital importance. At the same time it is the cooperation with a NATO country which has fresh and essential experience of joining North Atlantic Treaty Alliance that Lithuania could also profit from. In addition, it is the cooperation with a country that actively and strongly supports Lithuania's aspirations to become a member of NATO. Poland's acceptance to NATO was very useful for Lithuania because it strengthened future political support for Lithuania's membership inside the Alliance. Political support of Poland through bilateral Defense cooperation means becomes practical assistance for Lithuania in developing armed forces and implementing in it NATO standards and procedures.

The legal base of our Defense cooperation was started in 1994 when the Ministries of National Defense of both countries concluded mutual cooperation agreement. Polish-Lithuanian Inter-Governmental Agreement on Defense Cooperation replaced the previous agreement in 2001. This step raised the status of the agreement (from interdepartmental to interstate) and emphasized the political importance of the cooperation in the field of Defense that both countries share. New political realities are reflected in the text of the new agreement i.e. Poland's membership in NATO and its political support of Lithuania's wish to become a fully-fledged member. Annual plans of military cooperation including a wide spectrum of Defense activities are being composed from 1994 within the framework of the previously mentioned agreements. The scope and quality of this cooperation is intensively growing. The plan for the year 2001 foresees 63 bilateral cooperation activities and it is two and a half times more compared with the plan for 2000 (25 activities).

The legal base of military cooperation with Poland was extended in 1997 when the agreement on the protection of the exchange of classified information was signed as well agreeing to establish combined military unit LITPOLBAT (during the process of the implementation of the agreement a number of less important bilateral interdepartmental agreements were prepared). A mutual comprehension memorandum regarding the participation of Lithuanian infantry platoon in NATO-led peace keeping operation in Kosovo as a part of the Polish battalion of the international KFOR force, was concluded in 1999 based on the political will expressed by the parliamentarians of both countries.

As **the contents of such cooperation** is very broad I am going to emphasize only several priority trends.

The best known project of Lithuanian-Polish Defense cooperation is the combined **battalion LITPOLBAT**, assigned for the restoration and maintenance of international peace. The battalion is formed from the soldiers of national military units of the respective countries. Lithuanian Alytus Motorized Infantry Battalion sends its soldiers to LITPOLBAT. Joint LITPOLBAT Headquarters are located in *Orzysz*, Poland. The

combined battalion is formed from soldiers, equipped and prepared for the participation in international peace keeping operations according to a special program. The culmination of this year's preparations will be taking part in the multinational military exercise "Amber Hope 2001" that will be conducted in August-September in Lithuania. The combined battalion is very important because it is the only joint permanent military unit with a NATO country. Thus, it could have a significant role in involving Lithuanian Armed Forces into integrated NATO military structure.

The Ministry of National Defense is grateful for Polish direct military support which is being rendered to Lithuanian Armed Forces for many years. Poland donated surplus used Polish military materiel as well as completely new equipment in 2000: armored vehicles, weaponry, trench-mortars, ammunition, radio-stations and etc. The value of such assistance reached approximately one million US dollars during the last year. One more dimension of Polish military support to Lithuania is training of Lithuanian soldiers in Polish military training institutions.

One of the most successful achievements of Polish-Lithuanian military cooperation is the joint **participation of soldiers of both countries in NATO-led peace keeping operation in Kosovo** as a part of KFOR forces. 30 Lithuanian soldier platoon, which rotates every half a year, has participated in this mission as a part of the Polish contingent since autumn 1999. Currently Lithuanian platoon is integrated into a part of the combined Ukrainian –Polish battalion (POLUKRBAT) serving with the Polish KFOR mission. This cooperation is one of the methods of how Lithuania is trying to contribute to a common international endeavor to support peace in Europe. This contribution is quite modest but active and highly appreciated by our partners. In addition, it is very important for us that our soldiers take part in a real NATO mission in order to practice operational NATO standards and procedures.

The importance of the cooperation in the field of **air space surveillance and control** is gaining momentum. It is connected with common efforts of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Western partners, to develop a regional air space surveillance system, BALNET, that has been recently established. This regional system as well as the Lithuanian national system has to be integrated into a common NATO air space surveillance and early warning system in the process of integration of the Baltic States into NATO. Technically and in geographical respect this is possible only via Poland and with its active participation. At present Polish and Lithuanian specialists together with professionals from the other two Baltic countries are working on technical and political aspects of this issue.

Since being accepted, Poland has shared its **experience on joining NATO** with Lithuania willingly. This experience more effectively helps Lithuania to look for its individual way into the Alliance. The Ministry of National Defense of Poland shares information about the specific tasks that had to be carried out by the Armed Forces before joining NATO and at the very beginning of membership in the Alliance: what kind of technical parameters had to be applied, how legal base had to be modified, how many and in which ways the personnel had to be trained for work in NATO and with international Headquarters. Poland explains to us how to plan national budget, how to protect classified information as well as shares what kind of mistakes have been made and what kind of difficulties have been met in this process. Knowing this information Lithuania may avoid many difficulties in the future.

Participation in **multilateral military cooperation forums** gives a special dimension to Polish-Lithuanian cooperation in the field of Defense. This participation as well as joint participation in NATO-led operations very convincingly shows how Lithuanian-Polish cooperation in the field of Defense develops beyond the borders of just pure bilateral cooperation and gains new significance in a much broader regional context. I would like to mention just one such forum – traditional Polish-Danish-German Defense cooperation triangle and the activities of BALTSEA group.

The main achievement of this trilateral Polish-Danish-German Defense cooperation, (which started in the middle of last decade) is the establishment of multinational (three countries) land forces Corps “NorthEast” which is within NATO framework. Its headquarters are located in Szczecin, Poland. This cooperation has successfully assisted Polish Armed Forces in meeting NATO membership-related requirements when Poland was aspiring for membership in the Alliance. Therefore, Lithuania (as well as the two other Baltic countries) got very early interested into the possibilities to take part in the activities of the triangle and use all the advantages of such cooperation. The political form of this involvement takes place in the form of the participation of the ministers of Defense of the Baltic States in regular meetings with their colleagues from Denmark, Poland and Germany. On the practical level Lithuanian, Latvian and Estonian officers participate in military exercises of the “NorthEast” Corps. Lithuanian officer undergoes training in the Headquarters of Corps as well as assuring the coordination of mutual participation in international exercises. Besides, the officers of the Corps Headquarters from Poland, Denmark and Germany plan to take part in the previously mentioned exercise “Amber Hope 2001”, which will be held to be in Lithuania.

The group, which is called BALTSEA (Baltic Security Assistance Management Group), was established in 1997 and it is the working forum of specialists from ministries and Armed Forces who are in charge of rendering military assistance of Western countries to the Baltic States. The forum consists of the three Baltic countries and fourteen countries that support them in the field of security and Defense. Once a year the officials from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs also take part in the forum. The network of work authorities that are in charge of separate fields of assistance and specific cooperation projects (for example, BALTBAT, BALTRON, BATNET and BALTDEFCOL) is also established. The activities of the group help to ensure that the rendered assistance of the countries that support Baltic countries does correspond to the planned needs, that the assistance is given to the spheres that need it most, that it is not overlapping; and how to use most effectively the resources that are being allocated and get the biggest profit. It is very important for us that Poland would be among those fourteen supporters and would directly and indirectly contribute to the implementation of cooperation projects of the Baltic countries in the field of Defense and ensure effective international support of our security.

Polish-Lithuanian military cooperation, which is very active at the given moment, has potential to develop further. As an example I would mention several perspective spheres where common work has already been started. They are as follows: scientific research in the field of Defense, Defense industry, joint procurement, international policy of weapon control, integration processes into the EU, with which our countries have started negotiations. Here I have to stress the significance of the development of European security and Defense policy as a part of common EU foreign and security policy.

Summarizing I can say that Polish-Lithuanian Defense cooperation is a significant element in the bilateral relations of both countries and in the strategic partnership. This cooperation is one of the ways of joining NATO looking at it from the political perspective as well as from practical readiness. Long time ago it became an important part of the broader regional security and the Defense cooperation network, which helps to ensure peace and stability in Europe.

Translated by Giedrė Matelytė-Garbačiauskienė