



# 5 years after the NATO Warsaw Summit

Achievements,  
changes, challenges

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INSIGHT

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# Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

July 8 will mark five years since the summit of NATO leaders in Warsaw, which approved landmark decisions on deterrence and defence against the threat of Russian attack on neighbouring Alliance countries. This was a turning point in NATO's approach to its role.

Multinational battalion groups were established and deployed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, and a multinational brigade was also established in Romania. It was decided that the battalion groups would be headed by: United Kingdom (Estonia), Canada (Latvia), Germany (Lithuania) and the United States (Poland), with contingents sent by more than 20 countries.

One of the conclusions of the summit was the establishment of a permanent, rotating, forward-deployed NATO military presence, which was intended to reassure the allies most exposed to Russian aggression of the readiness of the Alliance countries to undertake collective defence in the event of an attack. This step tied the security of the countries admitted to the Alliance after the Cold War even more closely to that of the large Western countries. NATO also decided to expand regional command structures at division and corps level and increase the intensity and scale of exercises.

The Warsaw summit also signed a declaration on enhanced cooperation with the European Union in the area of cyber security, maritime surveillance, combating hybrid threats and the resilience of critical infrastructure, which emphasised the role of joint civil-military responses to hostile Russian activity. The document marked the beginning of a new phase of cooperation between these organisations - it has never been better.

The adopted lines of transition were continued and reinforced at subsequent Alliance summits in Brussels in 2018, London in 2019 and again in Brussels on June 14, 2021. Indeed, Russia did not change its aggressive policy, and in the meantime more members joined the Alliance: in 2017 - Montenegro, and in 2020 - North Macedonia.

At Polityka Insight we have decided that the fifth anniversary of the Warsaw summit is a perfect occasion to recall the significance of the decisions taken at that time, sum up the progress made in NATO, outline the state of the Alliance's relations with the European Union and Russia and discuss the development of the Polish armed forces. We devote an online conference on June 23 and this publication to these topics.

PI's partner in these projects is Lockheed Martin.

I would like to invite you to read our publication!



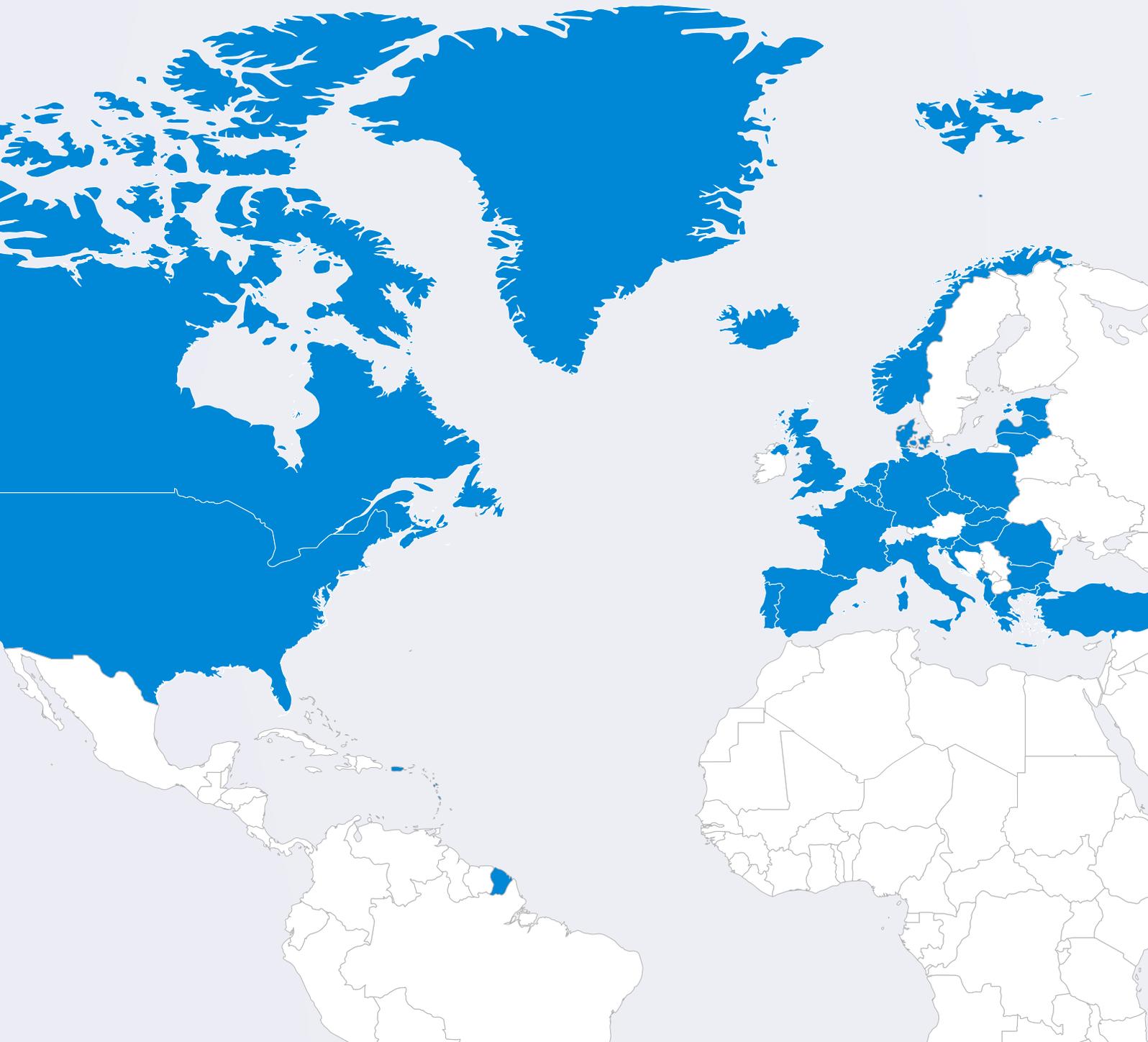
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# Table of contents

<b>Enlargement of NATO</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>How NATO has changed since the Warsaw summit</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>How NATO troops operated on the eastern flank</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>How NATO interacts with the European Union</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>What is the state of NATO-Russia relations</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>How the Polish armed forces changed</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>What challenges await NATO</b>	<b>15</b>

# Enlargement of NATO



# How NATO has changed since the Warsaw summit

The Alliance has returned to its role as a bulwark against the threat from the east. This has allowed closer cooperation with the US and strengthened defence in Europe.



## **Deterrence and defence against Russia overtook other tasks.**

After the collapse of the USSR in 1991, NATO's role as Europe's defender gradually diminished - at the turn of the 20th and 21st century the Alliance established closer cooperation with Russia and even formulated demands for its admission to the organisation. During this time, NATO conducted interventionist (e.g. 1999 in Kosovo) and stabilisation (e.g. ISAF) operations. After the aggression against Ukraine in 2014 NATO realised that the risk of war with Russia was real. The failure of the Minsk process to settle the Russian-Ukrainian conflict made policymakers realise that this threat was permanent. It took the Alliance two years to lay the foundations for a deterrence and defence mechanism with a forward military presence on Russia's borders - after the Warsaw summit, the mission to defend against Russia became NATO's unquestioned primary task.

## **The Alliance's military involvement has shifted to eastern Europe.**

Around 6,000 troops from 23 NATO countries are involved in the mission of multinational battle groups on the eastern flank and in Romania. These troops create transport and supply corridors, familiarise themselves with the region of responsibility and the theatre of operations, integrate with the host countries' armed forces and assess the potential opponent's forces and capabilities. In the tactical level commands (expanded and created from scratch) of the North-Eastern Corps in Szczecin, South-Eastern Corps in Sibiu, multinational divisions in Elbląg, Adazi and Bucharest (the fourth is to be in Hungary), over 1,000 officers are serving, who are in constant contact with the combined commands in Naples and Brunssum and the SHAPE Headquarters in Mons.

## **There has been a military return of America to Europe.**

Faced with a security crisis and in response to NATO's increased defence needs, the US has begun to increase its military presence in Europe, despite having withdrawn troops and equipment from Europe until 2013. Since 2017 the Americans have reinstated the presence of armoured troops, and since 2020 resumed annual large-scale exercises (Defender Europe) combined with the redeployment of US troops. US reconnaissance aircraft and drones patrol the NATO-Russia border almost all the time, strategic bombers make overflights directly from the US and are dispatched to European bases, and the US Navy makes trips to the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea several times a year. Equipment in advanced arms depots is being replaced with new ones, and the Pentagon is also investing in existing military bases or signing agreements to build new ones, as with Poland in 2020.

## **The member states' defence spending increasing.**

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has calculated that since 2014, Canada and European countries have increased defence spending by a combined USD 260 billion. Most of this increase has occurred since 2017 and coincides with the pressure on Europe from US President Donald Trump. During this time, the required minimum of 2 per cent of GDP has been reached by nine European countries, including most of the so-called Eastern flank. Greece, the UK, France, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania and Poland exceed the minimum. The country most criticised by Trump - Germany - already spends noticeably more on the military than France and has started an intensive modernisation of the armed forces.

## **NATO armies are exercising more and raising their combat readiness.**

Increasing the number and scale of exercises was part of the strengthening of the Alliance's defence capabilities agreed in 2014 at the Wales Summit. After the establishment of multinational battle groups on the eastern flank in Warsaw, they began to be the "destination points" for maneuvers of allied and host nations' armed forces. Readiness is enhanced by the rotating exchange of national contingents in eFP and tFP (forward presence) battalions and the annual VJTF rapid reaction force duty introduced in 2015, which reached its full size of 5,000 troops in 2018. The largest NATO exercise conducted in recent years was Trident Juncture 2018 with 50,000 troops, 250 aircraft and 65 ships.



### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

The changes that have taken place in NATO in recent years mean that the Alliance is returning to the role it played for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century - a military barrier against the threat from the east and one of two rival political-military blocs. This trend of military reinforcement will continue, as the Alliance must complete the construction of its defence structures, and the member states must invest in their armed forces. However, another profound change could come from the new strategic concept if NATO agrees in it to take on global tasks and actively oppose China.

# How NATO troops operated on the eastern flank

Multinational battlegroups on NATO's eastern flank operate as a well-oiled military mechanism. The problem is who should order them to fight.



## **NATO commanders are adapting better to their tasks in the east.**

The permanent presence of multinational battlegroups means direct and long-term contact with the conditions of operations in Central Europe and Russia's combat capabilities. The awareness of commanders and policymakers has increased as countries that participate in the mission deploy their own reconnaissance units. This leads to improvements in the equipment and weapons used by troops potentially exposed to attack from the east – as a result, the US motorised infantry stationed in Europe and deployed as a battlegroup to Poland has been replaced by armoured and mechanised units of the National Guard. On the other hand, the UK periodically send missile artillery and combat helicopters to the battlegroup deployed to Estonia. Lighter American units in Orzysz are testing new equipment: Stryker vehicles armed with 30 mm cannons.

## **The level of readiness and cooperation of the host countries' brigades has increased.**

The contingents from strong, well-armed and well-commanded NATO armies that have been included in units made up of the armed forces of smaller and weaker countries improved the mechanisms of cooperation and procedures required if, for instance, action is performed under the pressure of time or threat. Activities aimed at improving interoperability have been stepped up, and the fact that foreign troops rotate every six months has forced intensive training with high repeatability of tasks. Recently deployed units must reconnaissance the terrain, get used to the weather, and exercise manning battle stations under alert. As a result, brigades, which were extended to include multinational battalions, became tactical units with the highest degree of readiness, increased responsiveness, improved supplies and the best personnel.

## **The battalions became the target of NATO and bilateral exercises.**

Reliable defence requires forward battlegroups to work smoothly with the US aviation and Navy and the army and the rest of the European NATO members. As a result, the exercises include strike support from US and UK units and coordination of activities with NATO naval groups and air contingents sent to Lithuania and Estonia as part of airspace patrols over the Baltic Sea. Army battalions exercise guiding of attack aircraft, including US strategic bombers, and protecting the area of parachute drops and sea landing operations at least twice a year. In 2020, the transfer of NATO rapid reaction forces from Poland to Lithuania was exercised for the first time.

## **NATO has created new command structures to coordinate the battlegroups.**

The Alliance established a previously non-existent division level and increased the staff of the (superior) corps in Szczecin (only the headquarters of the combined operations in Brunssum is higher in the chain of command). The multinational division for Poland and Lithuania is based in Elbląg, and for Latvia and Estonia in Karup, Denmark (with an advanced post in Adazi). Both divisions report to the multinational NATO corps in Szczecin. A similar division and corps structure is being created on the southern stretch of the eastern flank: in Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia. The expansion of the command structures improved transnational cooperation and exercise planning. It has also made small units more visible to political and military decision-makers in Europe and the US.



### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

Five years after the establishment of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), the military mechanism is well established and functioning at the tactical level. It also engages politically the strongest countries of the Alliance to defend the most vulnerable and weakest ones. An unresolved problem is a complex chain of command that can delay and complicate decisions to use troops. Each battle group has commanders in the host country, in NATO and in its own armed forces, and the launch of collective defence takes more time than the use of armed forces in the national system or as a result of an agreement with a close political ally.

# How NATO interacts with the European Union

Civil-military coordination in Europe covers an increasing number of areas. The EU and NATO are beginning to complement each other, but in the future they might compete for military resources.



## **NATO and the EU widened the scope of cooperation.**

The declaration of the EU and NATO, signed on 8 July 2016, opened a new chapter in the cooperation between the two organisations, which had been in place since 2001 (previously between NATO and the Western European Union). In October 2016, new areas of cooperation were agreed upon, including hybrid threats, disinformation and cyberattacks, exercises and migration control in the Mediterranean Sea and the EU borders. NATO and the EU agreed to launch 42 joint projects (in 2017, the list was expanded to 74 items). In 2020, the previously agreed areas of cooperation were expanded to include the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Annual reports on the progress of that cooperation have been prepared since 2017; the most recent one was released on June 3.

## **Frequent, high-level consultations have become the norm.**

On the occasion of the summit in Brussels in July 2018, the EU and NATO signed a new declaration of cooperation, in which they stress the principle of non-competitive enhancement of their defence capabilities. Since then, political consultations have intensified and are beginning to cover topics relevant to the future of both organisations: the approach to China, the climate and new technologies. In December 2020, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg met for the first time with the College of Commissioners, and in February 2021 he participated in the EU summit. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy took part in the meeting of NATO MinDefs and MinFors.

## **The EU facilitates military mobility for NATO troops.**

During the deployment of troops, exercises and the analysis of the theatre of operations, NATO and US commanders learned that EU and national transport regulations of EU countries make it difficult to quickly perform large scale movements of columns of equipment and weapons. As a result, since 2017, an action plan to facilitate military transports in the EU countries has been in place, with NATO providing data that help update the procedures and standards in order to rebuild infrastructure. Under the influence of NATO, the Union agreed to US participation in these activities. The Alliance is also hoping to receive funding from the EU budget for double-purpose, civil and military investments.

## **NATO and EU technology agencies develop equipment and weapons.**

The European Defence Agency cooperates with the NATO Science and Technology Organisation; there is also the NATO-EU Capability Group. Their largest joint project is the construction of a family of unmanned aerial vehicles for maritime surveillance (OCEAN2020). The EU coordinates PESCO projects with NATO and the development of its own defence capabilities through the participation of Alliance representatives in CARD defence reviews. Both sides stress that they do it to complement each other, not to compete with one another.

## **The EU and NATO help their neighbours to create security structures.**

Both organisations cooperate on projects implemented in Ukraine, Moldova, Kosovo, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jordan and Tunisia. NATO and the EU have different tasks there, but the coordination of advisory services helps create transparent and efficient military and civil security institutions with improved interoperability at the European and transatlantic level. The EU's advisory role and NATO training mission work hand in hand to exchange information on threats and make some savings in areas where their tasks and competencies overlap.



### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

The deepened cooperation between the European Union and NATO, initiated in Warsaw, takes the shape of a strategic partnership and cogs that turn into a single mechanism. The fight against the pandemic has demonstrated the effectiveness of the use of military capabilities in civilian crisis management, and the coordinated response to the unpredictable behaviour of Russia and Belarus has strengthened the joint message of the EU and NATO as an institution of the democratic West. However, in the future, a possible area of conflict might also emerge, particularly when the EU increases "hard" defence capabilities, and begins to compete with NATO for military assets of its member states, as well as a result of US pressure to make NATO a platform for global political influence.

# What is the state of NATO-Russia relations

Russia is strengthening its military presence on NATO borders and conducting provocative exercises. The freezing of NATO-Russia political dialogue brings back the spectre of the Cold War.



## **Institutional dialogue is frozen, leaders rarely talk.**

Practical cooperation between NATO and Russia was suspended on April 1, 2014. Established in 2002, the NATO-Russia Council has met eight times since then, at the ambassadorial level (including after the NATO summit in Warsaw), and the last meeting was held in July 2019. Phone calls and meetings between NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and the Russian Chief of General Staff are sporadic. The NATO-Russia dialogue has shifted to the level of diplomats, representatives of the armed forces and leaders of the member states. The European leaders of France and Germany are the most active, while the US president remains the most important interlocutor for Russia. The most recent Joe Biden-Vladimir Putin meeting took place on June 16 in Geneva, two days after the NATO summit, but produced no breakthrough.

## **Russia is strengthening its military presence at NATO borders.**

The Kaliningrad Oblast, which borders the Baltic Sea, Lithuania and Poland, had enjoyed a strong Russian presence even before the aggression in 2014. Since then, the Russian army deployed there has reached the size of a division and received new equipment: modernised tanks, new ships, anti-ship missiles and Iskander ballistic missiles. Russia is carrying out similar investments in the Crimean Peninsula, seized from Ukraine – in the spring of 2021, it relocated a parachute and helicopter unit to Crimea, and is also expanding the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol. In 2021, Russia has also created a separate military district using the units from the Northern Fleet and those deployed in the Arctic in response to the presence of NATO and US troops on the Alliance's northern flank. This year, twenty new units are to be created in the Western Military District.

## **The Russian army often holds exercises after combat alarms.**

The so-called 'readiness tests' are of particular concern to NATO as they do not have to be notified in advance, and their scale depends only on Moscow's decision. Russia is able to manage several thousand such tests and exercises per month (4,000 of those were conducted in April). In the Baltic, North and Black Sea regions, Russian aircraft and ships carry out simulated bombing missions, often without turning on their transponders. In 2020, NATO planes registered 350 cases of Russian aircraft being intercepted near the borders of the Alliance. The Zapad exercises, based on war scenarios with NATO (the next edition will be held in September), are a form of strategic communication of Russian capabilities. A warning signal for NATO was also the concentration of 100,000 Russian troops near the Ukraine border this spring, which Moscow described as "exercises".

## **Belarus supports Russia in accusing NATO of aggression.**

Over the past five years, Russia has accused NATO of being "surrounded" by military bases in Poland, the Baltic States and Romania, and allegedly provocative exercises such as Defender Europe. For over a decade, Russia has also claimed that NATO's missile defence bases can be used to fire Tomahawk manoeuvring missiles at its territory. After the US pulled out of the INF treaty which limited the missile range, Moscow accused NATO of provoking an arms race and its willingness to deploy missiles that could threaten the Russian capital. In the same vein, during the protests in Kiev, Russia and Belarus accused NATO countries (mainly Poland and Lithuania), the US and the CIA of inspiring pro-democratic protests in Belarus and trying to overthrow Alyaksandr Lukashenka.



### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

NATO's relations with Russia today resemble those from the Cold War. They are differentiated by a smaller scale of military involvement of both sides and the low risk of a nuclear clash of powers. It is unlikely that the tension will be discharged in the near future, as Russia does not intend to change its approach to its western neighbours, and a consensus on deterrence and defence continues in NATO. However, there are signals from Western Europe and the US that they are ready for dialogue and rapprochement with Russia, which is being replaced by China in the hierarchy of strategic threats. If such an agreement comes at the expense of military security, it will jeopardise NATO's credibility and sow distrust among Russia's closest neighbours about the intentions of the West.

# How the Polish armed forces changed

Five thousand allied soldiers are deployed in Poland and the country's armed forces are expanding and moving east. NATO appreciates Poland's investments and defence spending.



## **The allies strengthened the brigade on the border with Russia, Lithuania and Belarus.**

After the summit, a multinational battalion under the command of the Americans was deployed to Poland. The unit, composed of US, British, Romanian and Croatian troops (a total of around 1,100 soldiers), was included in the 15th mechanised brigade based in Giżycko, which is part of the 16<sup>th</sup> mechanised division (allied tasks are coordinated by the multinational NATO division in Elbląg). NATO forces are stationed in Bemowo Piskie, and they train at the training area in Orzysz and near the border. This is the area of the so-called Suwałki Gap, the only land passage between the Baltic states and the other NATO countries.

## **Poland is investing in the presence of American troops.**

The first American troops were sent to Poland in April 2014, following the Russian aggression in Ukraine. As a result of Washington's decision to redeploy American forces in Europe, conducted in parallel with NATO, an armoured brigade, helicopters and a logistics group (4,000 soldiers) have been deployed in Poland since 2017. In 2018, the Polish government proposed that large US units should be permanently stationed in Poland. The plan to deploy an entire division failed, but in 2018 the US moved the division command post from Germany to Poznań and in 2020 the forward HQ of the V Corps. The 2020 agreement on the expansion of military infrastructure will enable the deployment of up to 20,000 soldiers in Poland.

## **Polish soldiers are more active in NATO and in the country.**

Polish units joined two multinational battle groups created as a result of a decision at the Warsaw summit. The contingent in Latvia includes a tank company with logistical support (around 170 soldiers), and the Rosomak combat vehicle company (around 230 soldiers) is deployed in Romania. These missions are permanent, with no end date, and continuous – new soldiers arrive before the previous ones leave. Also, the exercises organised in Poland for five years are more engaging, realistic and on a larger scale. Units from the western part of the country move eastwards, covering even 800-1,000 km, camp in the open, performing river crossings using through floating bridges.

## **The eastern part of the country regained its military importance.**

In 2017, the Minister of Defence Antoni Macierewicz ordered the relocation of two battalions of Poland's most modern Leopard tanks to Wesoła near Warsaw. The decision renewed the historic dispute over the country's defence model and showed that the PiS government gave preference to defence at the borders. In September 2018, Mariusz Błaszczak ordered the creation of the army's new 18<sup>th</sup> mechanised division in the east of the country. It was created from two existing and one newly established brigade; stationed in garrisons scattered from Podlasie to Małopolska. Błaszczak also ordered staff and equipment reinforcement (unimplemented) of the anti-tank artillery regiment in Suwałki, which is to fight in the Suwałki Gap.

## **A volunteer Territorial Defence Forces were established, operational troops are growing.**

In the wake of fear of Russian aggression and due to a greater interest in serving in the army, in 2016, the Ministry of Defence began to create Territorial Defence Forces (WOT). This separate, fifth, type of armed forces was subordinated to the ministry, and not to the general staff. It was originally assumed that the Territorial Defence Forces would have 53,000 soldiers by 2019. The plan failed, so the creation and training of brigades was extended until 2025 (today they number around 30,000 volunteers and professional soldiers). WOT has played a large role in the fight against the pandemic and is replacing civil defence. Parallel to that effort, the army is recruiting to operational units, which grew have taken on 10,000 new soldiers in five years.



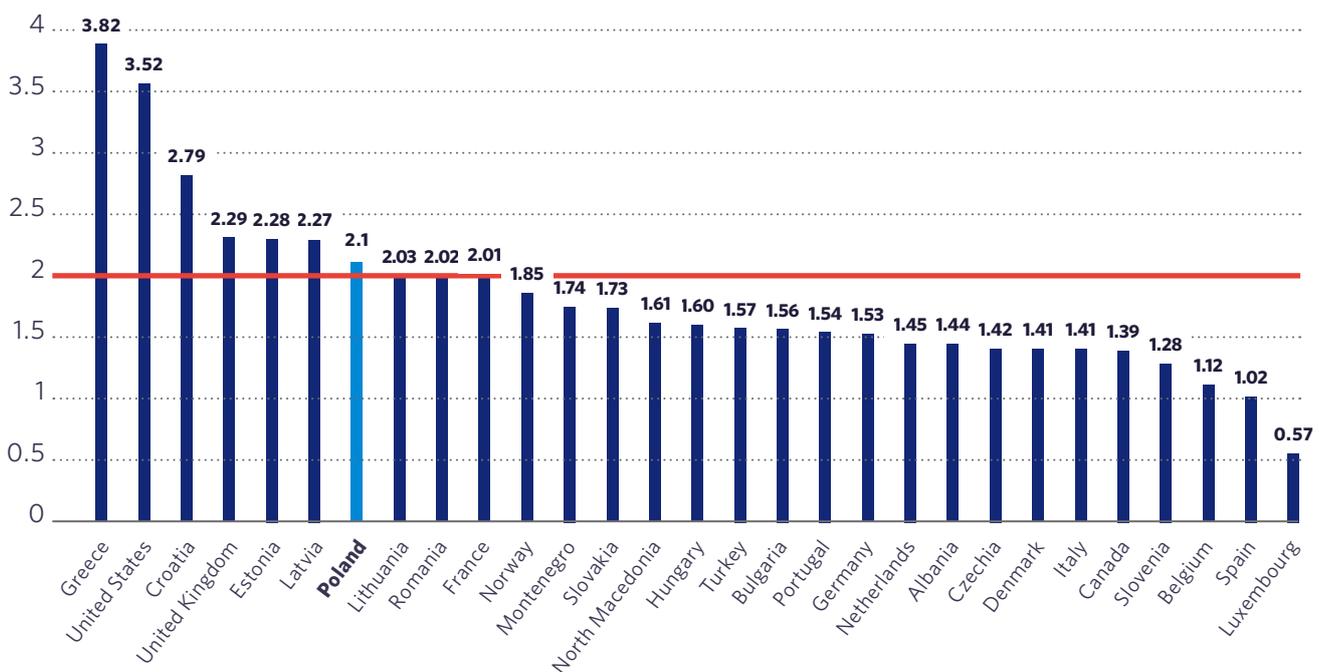
### **THE BOTTOM LINE**

For five years, Poland has been implementing three plans to strengthen its defence: allied (in NATO), bilateral (with the US), and also independently expanded and modernised its army. The summit in Warsaw improved cooperation with the allies, but investments in the army had been planned earlier. Poland has long been close to the required 2 per cent GDP (for the current year) on defence spending, and has reached that target since 2018 – today, it annually spends the equivalent of USD 12 billion on the military. This effort is appreciated in NATO, and although some allies criticise other aspects of PiS policy, Poland is considered a leader in defence matters.

# What challenges await NATO

NATO must find its place in the face of US-China rivalry and technological change. A new strategic concept will help, but much depends on the member states themselves.

DEFENCE EXPENDITURE OF THE NATO MEMBER STATES IN 2020 AS A SHARE OF GDP (%)



SOURCE: NATO.

## Determining NATO's role as the West's political-military alliance.

The key issue is whether NATO should focus on defending and maintaining the stability of its mandate area: the western part of the northern hemisphere, or whether it should step into the role of a global defender of the institutions, values and world order of Western democracy. In part, the Alliance has played such a role in the global war on terrorism, and domains such as space and cyberspace also necessitate action beyond traditional borders. In practice, however, what is at stake is NATO's involvement on the side of the US in a confrontation with China, which in time could lead to a crisis or armed conflict outside Europe. Countries that see NATO mainly as a defender against Russia will be opposed to expanding its tasks.

## Addressing defence spending deficit.

Over the next five years, the NATO countries will have to fulfil the commitment made at the Wales summit to spend a minimum of 2 per cent of GDP on defence in their annual budgets. Currently, 10 out of 30 NATO members meet this requirement, 13 countries spend between 1.4 and 1.6 per cent of their GDP, and three spend around 1 per cent. In practice, the chances of fulfilling this promise are slim, and the Alliance is unable to force an increase in national budgets. Failure to meet the spending commitment will result in NATO suffering an image defeat and losing some of its credibility. Leaving defence funding at its current level will also not maintain the Alliance's advantage over rivals such as Russia and China.

### **Introducing multi-domain defence and deterrence.**

The dominant view in a military doctrine is that modern warfare and hybrid actions that do not cross the threshold of conflict occur simultaneously on land, in the air, at sea, in space, in cyberspace and in the realm of information circulation. Modern armies are thus shifting from operations in the traditional three physical domains to multi-domain operations and adapting to them the shape of forces and commands, training, equipment and defence assumptions at all levels. Such a process also awaits NATO, and it will mean rebuilding and enlarging commands, strengthening the allied space and cyber component, and a stronger emphasis on information warfare and reconnaissance in communications networks.

### **Maintaining technological superiority in military and civilian spheres.**

In the last two decades, the West has lost its monopoly in state-of-the-art military technology. In order to compete effectively with China and Russia, NATO must undergo a technological revolution involving the sixth generation of multi-role aircraft, the proliferation of autonomous flying, maritime and land-based drones, and the application of artificial intelligence to reconnaissance, command and counterinsurgency. Since the war of the future may not be limited to military clashes, protecting and defending critical infrastructure (telecommunications, energy, transport, health, food) from physical and cyber attacks will be as important as the condition of the armed forces.

### **Finding new model of cooperation with aspiring countries.**

Ukraine, Georgia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Moldova have been seeking NATO membership for over a decade and there is no indication that they will join the Alliance in the coming years. The formally maintained open door policy is being met with resistance to further enlargement in the capitals of many important member states. Particularly problematic is the situation of Ukraine and Georgia, whose aspirations to join NATO are opposed by Russia, while Moldova has a Russian contingent stationed in Transnistria. Leaving the candidate countries in the eternal waiting room risks discouraging their societies and reducing the West's soft power in competing with Russia or China.



## **THE BOTTOM LINE**

Most of the above topics will be discussed in the course of the discussions on the new Strategic Concept to be adopted by the Alliance in 2022 at the Madrid Summit. Military issues are addressed in the cyclical process of defence planning and the related development of member states' armed forces. However, the scale of funding for defence tasks, investment in new technologies, the approach to global rivals or NATO enlargement are all issues that depend on the policies of NATO members and agreements between them. NATO will therefore meet the challenges of the future to the degree and pace that the decisions of its 30 members and their agreement allow.

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Warsaw, June 2021

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