

Poland increases military spending

Sonja Bach**25 February 2015**

By 2016, Poland will reserve two percent of its GDP for its defence budget, thereby fulfilling NATO's minimum military spending requirement, Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz announced last week. As a close ally of Germany and the United States, it is evident that this military build-up is directed, above all, against Russia.

In total, an additional €33.6 billion is to be invested. Already in 2012, a plan for the technical modernisation of the armed forces from 2013 to 2022 was adopted. At that time, the increase was to be €25 billion.

The announcement of the increase came during talks over the latest ceasefire in Ukraine. President Bronislaw Komorowski told journalists on February 12, "The possibility of a lasting peace still remains remote." In spite of the Minsk agreement, government officials declared that the risk of the conflict in eastern Ukraine heating up remained.

The additional billions will be used to purchase a missile and air defence system, armed drones, armoured vehicles and submarines armed with cruise missiles. A total of €2.5 billion alone is to be spent on the purchase of 70 military helicopters. Three producers are competing for the contract, the American manufacturer Sikorsky, Europe's Airbus Helicopters and the British-Italian concern AgustaWestland.

Since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the Polish ruling elite has been pushing ahead with the country's militarisation. Only a few days after the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Yanukovych, the US stationed 12 F-16 fighters and 300 US troops in Poland at the request of the government. In April 2014, then Prime Minister Donald Tusk demanded NATO troops be sent. At the end of last year, it was decided to relocate the focus of the country's military to its eastern border.

The Polish government's claim that the military build-up is taking place on account of an alleged potential

threat from Russia is a lie. In the first place, the plans to modernise the armed forces go back to 2012. Secondly, Poland bears considerable responsibility for the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis.

The government at the time, in particular Foreign Minister Radoslav Sikorski, backed the right-wing opposition of Vitaly Klitchko, Arseniy Yatseniuk and the fascist Oleg Tyahnybok. Prior to this, the Polish government was heavily involved in the drafting of the Association agreement between Ukraine and the European Union. Yanukovych's refusal to sign the agreement became the trigger for the Maidan protests.

With the assistance of right-wing paramilitary groups like Right Sector, and with the backing of the imperialist powers, a pro-western government came to power in a coup a year ago. Since then, Kiev has been leading a bitter struggle against its own population in the east of the country and provoked conflict with Russia. A law was drafted to remove Russian as the country's second official language.

Like its NATO allies, Poland seized on the crisis it helped provoke as a pretext to build up its military forces. At the NATO conference in Wales last September, a detailed action plan was presented. The centrepiece was the creation of a so-called spearhead, a rapid deployment force of between 3,000 and 5,000 soldiers, to be sent to a crisis region within hours. These troops will be commanded from NATO's headquarters in eastern Europe, situated at NATO's multi-national northeast corps in the Polish port city of Szczecin. Poland leads the corps, together with Germany and Denmark.

At this year's Munich Security Conference, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced an increase in NATO combat forces from around 13,000 to 30,000 in eastern Europe. Six command-and-control units are to be established in the three Baltic states, along with Poland, Bulgaria and Romania.

At the same time, Stoltenberg warned all European governments of the need to increase their defence budgets to two percent of GDP. He said, “Last year, there was a further decline of about 3 percent. So the fact is that our security challenges are increasing. But our defence spending is decreasing. This is simply not sustainable. We cannot do more with less forever.”

It is no surprise that Poland has met Stoltenberg’s request so rapidly. Its government has supported every initiative taken by US imperialism and its partners. In 2003, Poland supported the invasion of Iraq. Last year, it was revealed that torture prisons of the CIA had been established and run on Polish territory with the agreement of the Polish government. Today, Poland fully supports the aggressive policy of the United States against Russia.

Defence minister Tomasz Siemoniak recently gave his support to supplying Ukraine with weapons. In comments to the *Financial Times* on February 9, he said, “Russia must take into account that the US, or the west in general, can make a decision to arm Ukraine and that it is a card that is held by the West, that can be used in the future, if not today. ... The Polish position is that we should not say this card will never be played.”

In May 2014, the army decided to strengthen its reserves by up to 10,000 volunteers. From March 1, the first men and women will be able to register to receive military training. In 2016 and 2017, a further 15,000 volunteers are to be recruited.

Based on its aggressive policy towards Russia and its military build-up domestically, the Polish government is hoping to regain its role as a regional power. At the same time, its reactionary programme is encouraging right-wing extremist and nationalist forces.

In December 2014, the extreme right-wing Alliance for a National Movement (ruch narodowy) announced it planned to regroup as a party. The alliance is notorious for its anti-Semitic and anti-Russian agitation. On November 11, the day of Polish independence, the group provoked violent clashes in which 50 people were injured.

In the process, the rightists chanted slogans calling for the revival of “Greater Poland,” a concept that draws on Poland’s territorial power in the 17th century, when the country controlled the Baltic states and large sections of Belarus and Ukraine in partnership with the grand duchy of Lithuania.



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