
BULGARIA APPROVES MAJOR MILITARY OVERHAUL

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Bulgaria's government approved three investment projects to modernizing the countrys navy and air force worth over 2.4 billion leva [around 1.2 billion euro] on Wednesday.

The projects concern buying new fighter jets and multi-functional patrol ships, as well extending the lifespan of a minimum of ten MiG-29 fighter jets.

We have put an end to concerns that the Bulgarian military aviation will be downed, Defence Minister Nikolay Nenchev said on Wednesday, adding that today is a historic day for the Bulgarian army.

The planned investments are in line with the governments program for updating the armed forces, which was adopted in 2015.

The governments decision still needs to be approved by parliament in accordance with the Defence and Armed forces Act.

The acquisition of new types of armament is extremely important for national security and the defence of the country, as well as for fulfilling the mechanisms of the collective defence of NATO and the common security and defence policy of the EU, the government said.

The project for buying new fighter jets will be carried out in two stages and foresees buying 16 planes by 2023.

Since 2013, when the ex-defence minister Anyu Angelov announced his plans to modernize the air force, the main competitors for the deal have been the Swedish company Saab's Gripen fighter jets, US-made F-16, and the Eurofighter Typhoon.

The purchase of new armaments for the air force is aimed at overcoming a gap in the armed forces capabilities to neutralize a spectrum of aerial, ground and marine threats, the government explained.

By extending the life of its Soviet-era MiG-29s, Bulgaria is aiming at covering the transition period until the new fighter jets are acquired and enter combat readiness. The MiGs will be renovated in 2016-2017, the Ministry of Defence explained on Wednesday.

Currently, Poland is renovating six engines of the Bulgarian MiGs, following an agreement between two countries from 2015.

In terms of the navy, two patrol ships will be purchased and built with the purpose of participating in various marine operations of NATO and the EU.

The project will be carried out over five years, due to the significant financial burden, the government explained.

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