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**BULGARIA WILL NOT CONTRIBUTE TO NATO'S BATTALIONS ON EASTERN FLANK**

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For the time being, the plans do not foresee Bulgaria to make contributions to the four NATO battalions which will be deployed in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. This was stated by Bulgarian Defence Minister Nikolay Nenchev on the second day of the NATO summit taking place in Warsaw on Friday and Saturday. Nenchev is part of the Bulgarian delegation which is headed by President Rosen Plevneliev.

The defence minister said that the issue of the forward presence has not been raised and at present there was no outlook for Bulgarian participation in it. He explained that the framework states have the leading role in this respect. Nenchev also commented the concern expressed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and other participants in the summit over the lack of balance in the Black Sea. According to him, this will be the topic of discussion at the next meeting of NATO which is scheduled to take place in October. As regards the opportunity for enhanced presence of NATO in the Black Sea, he reminded that according to the provisions of the Montreux convention foreign ships can not be present in its territory for more than 21 days.

This means that if such an initiative is to take place it will be conducted on rotational basis. Commenting the measures on consolidating NATO's presence on the eastern flank, Nenchev assured that Bulgaria will strictly comply with the common programme adopted by the member countries. He explained that the plans of NATO are discussed towards the end of each year, meaning that in October-November the Alliance decides on its plans and programmes for next year. Nenchev reminded that according to the agreement between the governments of Bulgaria and the USA on cooperation in the area of security, up to 2500 US troops can be present in Bulgaria at any time. With an order of the defence minister, their number could be doubled to 5000 without sanctions from the government or parliament.

The defence minister revealed that Bulgaria's balanced stance on the threats coming from the east has not been criticised at the summit and the partnering nations have showed understanding. In his words, Bulgaria was one of the countries to have reported the greatest progress at the summit, including on the Readiness Action Plan. Furthermore, Bulgaria had fulfilled the commitments made at the previous summit in Wales. The country had also already decided to increase its military budget and had adopted programme and plan for the development of its defence capabilities as well as projects on modernisation of the Bulgarian army. The establishment of the NATO Force Integration Unit in Bulgaria was positively assessed. Among the topics to be discussed on Saturday are NATO's involvement in Afghanistan and Ukraine.

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