
TRANS-EUROPE EXPRESS: THE FOUNDATIONS OF FORTRESS POLAND

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26.05.2017

EurActiv (26 May 2017)

On the eve of the NATO Summit, Polands parliament held a vote of no confidence against Defence Minister Antoni Macierewicz.

Despite creating a crisis with France over a cancelled helicopter deal, giving secret information to unauthorised persons, as well as several HR and car speeding scandals, MPs blocked the motion. Poles were not surprised, as Macierewicz's Law and Justice (PiS/ECR) holds a majority in the legislature.

Macierewicz accelerated his work to counterbalance the scandals. He initiated legislation doubling military spending by 2030 and finalised the debut of his darling militia, the Territorial Defence Forces (WOT). And this Tuesday, Macierewicz introduced his ministerial opus – the obtusely titled Concept of Defence of the Republic of Poland.

Whats the idea? To become a fortress of the West. How? By amassing deterrence and defence capabilities thanks to the accurate identification of threats, accepting that capacity is about both quality and quantity, and by raising defence spending to 2.5% of GDP by 2030.

Then Poland can effectively face Russia. The ministry also plans to support the countrys allies in the unstable neighbourhood of NATOs Southern Flank and cooperate with Warsaws allies to address terrorist threats.

According to preliminary calculations, even the doubling of defence spending (now \$12bn) will not cover the cost. Still, despite the fact that the numbers dont add up, the strategy shows the better side of Polands defence ministry.

And then there was Wednesday, the day when prudence got overshadowed by ideology. In the parliamentary debate preceding the vote against Macierewicz, both Premier Beata Szydło and the defence minister himself avoided addressing the charges. Szydło upped the rhetoric: We rebuild what our predecessors destroyed – our Polish safety.

Poland will be safe only with a strong army and public forces, she added, before seamlessly transitioning to the Manchester tragedy.

After another terrorist attack in Manchester, do you wish to agree to a defenceless Poland? she asked lawmakers, diverting her conventionally pompous sermon from defence to immigration and EU criticism.

And so Szydło spoke out against accepting migrants (the Polish government avoids the word refugee). Why? Because Poland will never agree to EU blackmail. We will not participate in any folly of Brussels elites.

After this cynical exploitation of the Manchester bombing, cue Macierewicz. He began by praising Szydło, as Jarosław Kaczyński did after she voted against to replace Donald Tusk. He eulogised what the PiS government did to improve Polish defence, contrary to the ministers predecessors.

To defend our motherland, its borders and independence, we need an army that is strong, founded on Polish patriotism and military capacity, Macierewicz opined. Could Europe ever dream of a better ally on its Eastern flank than fortress Poland? On paper, at least, it doesnt get any better.

THE INSIDE TRACK: EUROPE'S GROWING DEFENCE BURDEN

To coincide with this weeks NATO meeting in Brussels, Trans-Europe Express asked the EURACTIV Network to comment on the gathering – the first with US President Donald Trump.


Faced with Trumps demand for heightened defence spending from Americas allies, the network makes it clear NATO members intend to catch up with Washington.

The exception, of course, is Serbia, which, our partner in Belgrade reports, for obvious historical reasons, shows next to no interest in joining the organisation.

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic is still far away from meeting the NATO commitment of 2% of GDP in defence spending. On Thursday, the Czech government sent President Miloš Zeman to Brussels with a promise of fulfilling the requirement by 2025. It is also expected that the Czech parliament will soon approve sending 290 troops to the Baltic as a part of a plan to boost NATOs presence in Eastern Europe next year. However, will the American government and the NATO high command be satisfied? We will see. – Lukáš Hendrych

Greece

Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras noted that in an international environment with multiple security challenges, the Euro-Atlantic link must remain strong, through strengthening collective security, and ensuring peace and stability in the wider region. Athens agrees on the need for a more equitable sharing of the defence burden and said it would continue, despite the tight fiscal adjustment framework, to meet the 2% of GDP target for defence spending. 
Michalopolous

Romania

According to an official statement issued by the Romanian presidency, Bucharest will advocate for maintaining alliance unity with respect to Russia and a stable approach to offers of support for Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova. Representing the country at the summit, President Klaus Iohannis was expected to showcase Romania`s progress, as this year the country will begin contributing 2% of its GDP to the NATO budget. – Andrei Schwartz

Serbia

The NATO summit didnt attract much attention in Serbia. The lack of interest is in part expected, as an overwhelming majority of Serbs is against NATO membership. The alliances bombing of Serbia in 1999 is still remembered, and a survey by the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy in March showed that two thirds of Serbians polled are opposed to NATO membership. Only 9% would support such a move. As Montenegro is participating in the NATO summit for the first time, ahead of its formal accession in June, such developments are kept deliberately low profile in Serbian media. -Smiljana Vukojicic

Slovakia

As part of the strengthening of NATOs presence in the Baltics, the Slovak government approved the deployment of 150 soldiers to Latvia for one year, starting in June 2018. The government also announced that Slovakia will send 47 troops to train Iraqi specialists in demining and the maintenance of military equipment. President Andrej Kiska, who led the Slovak delegation to the NATO meeting, reaffirmed Slovakias commitment to allocating 1.6% of GDP to defence by the end of 2020. -Lucia Yar

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