
ROMANIA TAKES KEY ROLE AS NATO PREPARES TO FACE OFF WITH RUSSIA

-

18.10.2017

Euronews, 18 Oct 2017

Earlier this month, Romania took centre stage as NATO launched a new multinational brigade headquartered in the city of Craiova, designed to counter Russias mounting threat to the region.

Addressing the 300 MPs from 29 NATO member countries gathered in Bucharest for the 63rd Annual Session of NATOs Parliamentary Assembly, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said NATO is to increase its land, air and naval presence in Romania and that the brigade stationed there is part of NATOs answer to increased Russian presence in the Black Sea.

The Kremlin was quick to respond, warning that it could send Iskander missiles to its base in Kaliningrad to counter NATO building up its military presence in Romania.

Designed to deter the ex-Soviet Union from attacking Western Europe and the United States, NATOs eastern border remains its most volatile. In the wake of Russias illegal annexation of Crimea, NATO deployed four battalion-sized battle-groups to Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to help secure its eastern flank.

Romania has become the latest piece in this security puzzle as its role is to complete the defence line stretched alongside NATOs eastern borders. Starting in the north, where Poland and the Baltic states ready themselves to fend off any potential Russian land attack, the defence line meets the Black Sea in the south, where Romania has to keep at bay any enemy incursion in the region.

Recent events in Ukraine compelled NATO to take into account the increased strategic importance of the Black Sea and Romanias role as a key diplomatic and strategic player in the region. NATOs Annual Session in Bucharest ended with a resolution underlining the importance of the Black Sea region for Euro-Atlantic and global security.

The strategic importance that Romania has for NATO holds clear benefits for this ex-communist state. As a NATO member state and a US ally, one of Romanias key military bases underwent full modernization. A massive 50 million euro investment is carried out at Mihail kogalniceanu military base, near the Black Sea port of Constanta. Several hundred US troops with tanks and military equipment are currently stationed there and the number is set to rise. The US army has also used this base to support its military operations in Iraq.

The NATO missile defense system at Deveselu is another \$800 million (680 million euro) major military investment in Romania, which Russia believes is aimed at its own military capabilities.

Dan Dungaciu, an international affairs expert, told a local newspaper that Romania benefits from a strong and coherent Alliance that offers the best security guarantee that a state can hope for.

These benefits come at a cost. Romania stepped up its military spending by tens of millions of dollars to join just five other NATO countries that earmarked 2 percent of GDP for defense. The move was recently praised by the head of the Alliance who held the country as an example for other member states.

Aside from the human cost of NATO missions and increased military budget, Romanias involvement with the transatlantic alliance might come at a high price.

Claudiu Saftoiu, a defense specialist, former adviser to the president and director of the Romanian Foreign Intelligence Service, wrote in an op-ed for Libertatea newspaper that Romania risks military retaliation from Russia.

Romania is in Russias cross hairs as NATO puts a bullseye on its chest, he warned.

Kaynak/Source: