

Lithuanians are against the expansion of military training grounds

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Lithuania keeps up policy of militarization of the country, increasing the total area of military training grounds to 1.2 percent of the territory of the country.

Unfortunately, the Lithuanian leadership did not manage to avoid a conflict with the residents of the Jonava region in Lithuania, where the Gaižiūnai military training ground is located. There is one of the largest continental dunes in the Dumsiai forest. This is a unique place with a unique landscape and vegetation, a natural nature trail with a length of about 2 km has been laid where an observation deck has been installed.

According to the Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania, the dune in the Dumsiai forest is located in the center of the territory of the future training field. It is not possible to exclude it from the territory of the training field.

Residents of Jonava expressed concern about the dune and took part in the protest action.

"Many residents of Jonava expressed concern about the dune and took part in the protest action. People need answers. The goal of the municipality is to find a common solution for the army and society, and to achieve it, act by official methods," said mayor of the district Mindaugas Sinkevičius.

In order to reassure residents, the administration of the Jonava district hastened to announce that the dune in the Dumsiai forest will be open to visitors in the future as well. The basis for this statement was the assurance of the Ministry

of Defence.

“In order to preserve this object and make it accessible to the population, the territory of the dune will be designated by the decision of the commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces; there will be no military exercises. This dune will not enter the security zones of the shooting range,” the Ministry’s letter was quoted by the municipality.

According to the Ministry, all information regarding the military exercises and maps of the training fields will be published at the entrances to the Gaižiūnai training ground.

Earlier, former Defence Minister Raimundas Karoblis said that the existing military training area in Pabradė is sufficient for U.S. and NATO Enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) exercises, but that leaves less space for Lithuanian troops. Therefore, there are plans to up investments into the Pabradė and Gaižiūnai training grounds.

We must confess that all military facilities of NATO and the United States in Lithuania are located near military training grounds (Pabradė and Gaižiūnai). The territory of Gaižiūnai training ground in the Jonava district, central Lithuania, will be enlarged from 52 to 125 square km to accommodate company-sized units with support elements. Meanwhile, the area of the Lithuania’s largest General Silvestras Žukauskas training ground near Pabradė, eastern Lithuania, should go from 85 to 176 square km. The total price of the training ground expansion project is around 81 million euros.

Public discussion of the territorial planning document is scheduled for June 2 in the municipality of Jonava region. However, the development project of the Gaižiūnai landfill in Rukla is recognized as a project of national importance, it is planned to be completed by 2022. Therefore there is concern that the voices of locals will never be heard.

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