

New Lithuanian division: unjustified decision

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On January 23 Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda called a meeting of the country's State Defence Council.

Public was informed that during the meeting, members of the State Defence Council got acquainted with the strategic threat assessment by the country's intelligence services and discussed the principle structure of the national defense system.

The SDC also assessed economic and financial models for acquisitions needed for the development of an infantry division.

As we know, Lithuania plans to establish an entire light infantry division by 2030, a unified force with enablers that would be more potent than its constituent brigades as independent formations. Although this division would admittedly be light, Lithuania is also seeking to transform one mechanized infantry battalion into a tank battalion. It should be said, the country has never fielded a military unit such size.

The council also agreed that in addition to the division, a division-level artillery regiment would be established, while air defence and engineering battalions would be raised to regiments.

In the naval forces, a harbour and coastal defence service is being set up. There is also the addition of a Cyber Defence Board and other changes.

Lithuania's State Defence Council agreed also to buy German Leopard 2 tanks for the country's planned new army division.

Honestly, this decision looks more like a deal with Germany in exchange for the deployment of a German brigade in Lithuania from next year, rather than the urgent need to equip a new division. Germany made a number of difficult demands in exchange for its brigade's deployment. This decision is too expensive for Lithuania.

It is not clear why the authorities do not bear in mind that it will require a lot of money because a division is not a divisional headquarters, a division is a unit that commands several brigades, usually three, all of which are capable of going to war. According to experts, these changes would require additional funding of around 0.4-0.5 percent of GDP, on top of the 2.52 percent of GDP currently agreed by political parties.

One of the ways ministers are now looking into is the introduction of a defense tax. However, some politicians are skeptical about such a potential tax. Taxpayers will not be happy at all with such decision.

So, establishing of a division is completely unreasonable both financially and politically.

The more so, there is insufficient manning of the existing military units of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Lithuania will have to find young people to man a new division. In case Lithuanian authorities do not find the necessary number of conscripts, they have to repeat Latvia's plans to permit foreigners to serve in the National Armed Forces.

The Latvian Ministry of Defence has already prepared amendments to the Military Service Law, which provides for the possibility to accept foreign citizens in military service. Amendments to the Military Service Law of Latvia provide that nationals of a Member State of the European Union, a Member State of the European Free Trade Association, a NATO Member State, Australia, Brazil, New Zealand, or Ukraine may

volunteer for military service in the National Armed Forces. It is intended that during the performance of the service the foreigner will perform active service and have the status of soldier. This means that he would receive the monthly salary set for soldiers and the social guarantees provided to soldiers and members of their families, with the exception of the right to a retirement pension.

Need to mention that Lithuania is already conducting training for Ukrainian military and easily can involve those who are ready to volunteer for military service in Lithuania in military exercises and courses. So, the realization of all these plans will demand huge funding, solving problems of manning new military units under conditions of growing discontent and economic crisis.

So, decision to form a new division, to buy expensive Leopard2 tanks, to change conscription and military training system in Lithuania is absolutely useless and thriftless. Taking into consideration the words of Kęstutis Budrys, a presidential advisor, who said after the meeting of State Defence Council, that Lithuania is not facing a military threat in the near future.

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