

BALTIC COUNTRIES «FULLY SATISFIED»

WITH NATO PROTECTION AGAINST «THREAT FROM THE EAST»



DIAGONALS OF GOVERNMENT

Residents of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia said they were fully satisfied with NATO protection against "the threat from the East". There were responding to an ITAR-TASS question at a press conference in the headquarters of Steadfast Jazz military exercise held in November. The maneuvers focused on the use of NATO forces in repelling an invasion of Baltic countries by imaginary oil and gas-rich Bothnia.

"Yes, yes, yes", the presidents said in turn when asked whether NATO fully provides for their security. Since joining the alliance the Baltic countries have insisted on designing military plans to defend them in case of aggression.

AIR DEFENSE

In February 2012 the NATO Council decided to move the international air patrol mission for Baltic countries to a permanent basis. NATO partners of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have been implementing the "air policing" mission on their jet fighters from the

Lithuanian airbase Zokniai since 2004. The mission was launched by NATO instead of investing in the creation of own air force of the

ing systems for the interceptors of the North Atlantic alliance. Lithuania signed the agreement on behalf of the countries. "The project is of specific importance in the framework of the NATO mission to protect Baltic airspace as it considerably improves the conditions for its implementation and increases the efficiency of patrolling the skies of

Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia", said Lithuanian Deputy Defense Minister Mikolas Juozapavicius.

STEADFAST JAZZ EXERCISE

The NATO exercise took place in Poland and the Baltic republics on November 2-9. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said it was a "final exam" for rapid reaction



three republics. Since 2009 Riga, Vilnius, and Tallinn covered all expenses for the deployment in Lithuania of NATO flight and maintenance personnel and since 2010 - also personnel and hardware transportation costs.

In September 2012 Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia decided to buy for 6 million euro alert-

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Cold War echoed in Europe, the media commented.

Prime Minister of Finland Jyrki Katainen confirmed that NATO does not view his country as a potential enemy. He said NATO traditionally knows and values Finnish defense experience and skills. Suomi also holds exercises on the territory of NATO members and participates in joint operations to settle conflicts. It would be strange if NATO opinion on Finnish capabilities changes. However so far nobody can

explain the official version of NATO exercise which said security threat to Baltic countries and Poland comes from Finland and Sweden whose armed forces focus on self-defense rather than military aggression.

The designation of potential enemy at military exercises is a problem for both sides - Russia and NATO, said Dmitry Danilov, the head of the European security department in the Europe Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences. He stressed the North Atlantic alliance has never named Russia as a potential enemy at any exercise. Moreover, NATO and Russia stated at the Lisbon summit they pose no threat to each other.

Danilov believes by designating Finland and Sweden as potential enemies NATO makes it clear it does not want to press them to join the alliance. On the contrary, there is an understanding not to fan up the situation. NATO is satisfied that the Finns and Swedes do not want a formal membership but actively cooperate with the alliance at military exercises and in peacekeeping operations. At the same time Nordic and Baltic countries loudly voice

forces of the alliance. The major result was certification of the command and participating units of 28 NATO members and three partner-countries - Finland, Sweden, and Ukraine - for joining rapid reaction forces in 2014 rotation. The exercise engaged six thousand servicemen with three thousand of them deployed for field maneuvers, as well as 350 combat vehicles, 57 aircraft, and 11 warships and two submarines.

The NATO chief assured the exercise did not target Russia. "Poland and Baltic countries invited the alliance to hold an exercise on their territories and I am grateful to them. NATO holds exercises in various places. In 2015 the alliance plans large-scale maneuvers in Southeastern Europe: Spain, Italy, and Portugal", Rasmussen said.

concern over what they claim to be growing Russian military activity in the region which provokes retaliatory measures. Russia, in its turn, does not understand why NATO aircraft should patrol Baltic airspace. The situation shows a lack of trust and the danger of military activities of two mighty military mechanisms in Europe which continue to rely on mutual deterrence in military planning, Danilov said.

According to alliance leadership, the Steadfast Jazz exercise signals a new state in NATO history - resumed large-scale field maneuvers. In 2014 NATO will finally withdraw from Afghanistan. In 12 years of the war the alliance military acquired considerable combat experience. To keep it and maintain high combat readiness and interaction efficiency among allies NATO declared resumption of strategic maneuvers.

"I saw numerous soldiers, pilots, and marines of various nationalities during the exercise. They demonstrated a very high level of skills and valor", the alliance communique quoted NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe Philip Breedlove as saying. He said the opportunity for servicemen from 28 member-states and partners to train and work together was of immense significance. Breedlove said Steadfast Jazz demonstrated NATO ability to protect itself with a high level of skills and efficiency. The joint command ensured compliance with the necessary norms on several avenues and will be certified for potential missions of NATO reaction forces in 2014, the communique said.

Experts noted that NATO held its exercise a month after Russian-Belarusian West-2013 maneuvers which engaged over 22 thousand men from both countries and hundreds of hardware.

FIRST PERMANENT COMBAT UNIT

NATO rapid reaction forces became the first combat unit permanently deployed and subordinated to the alliance command. They were created in 2004. Before that NATO had no level readiness forces, but only command structures. For each mission member-countries created a special force which took several weeks or months.

At present NATO rapid reaction force comprises five major components - ground brigade of three combat groups, air and naval grouping, special forces and a unit to protect

against mass destruction weapons. They total 13 thousand men. The force comprises units from 28 member-countries which rotate every 12 months. Their mission is to independently carry out both humanitarian and combat operations in any part of the world upon a decision of the NATO Council. In case of major combat operation NATO rapid reaction forces have to ensure initial retaliation of the alliance before a special allied force is deployed for the operation. The declaration on Steadfast Jazz said the maneuvers should promote NATO capability to jointly operate on any territory of alliance members as well as in major crisis situations.

FINANCES

Director of the Center for world arms trade analysis Igor Korotchenko believes the aims of West-2013 and Steadfast Jazz are radically different: "Russia trained an anti-terrorist scenario, while there was a purely military scenario - training of rapid reaction forces close to Russian borders".

According to the head of US home and foreign policy department of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations at the Russian Academy of Sciences Fedor Voitlovsky, NATO leadership believes the withdrawal from Afghanistan will help save funds and finance other guidelines. Such large-scale exercises allow member-countries to demonstrate readiness to pay for NATO membership as most countries fail to comply with financial commitments and are reprimanded by the United States for that.

The Brookings Institute published a report in 2012 which said that in 2008 only five alliance members earmarked two or more percent of the GDP for defense while the United States bears the brunt of costs to maintain combat readiness of the alliance.

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