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Germany Moving in to Keep Russia out: Implications and Challenges of the Bundeswehr's Permanent Deployment in Lithuania

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Abstract: The paper analyses implications and challenges of Germany's upcoming military deployment in Lithuania. A permanent stationing of brigade-sized military unit on NATO's Eastern frontier represents a major change in its force posture and a significant shift in Germany's defence policy. Despite the official German position that the implementation of its military commitments is contingent on Lithuania's timely improvement of its host nation support infrastructure, the paper suggests that the speed, quantity, and structure of Germany's deployment also depends on the progress made in rearming the Bundeswehr and its defence policy priorities.

Keywords: NATO, Bundeswehr, Forward Defence, Lithuania, Germany

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Introduction

Three days after Russia began a full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, Federal Chancellor Olaf Scholz initiated changes in German foreign and security policy. In the historical 'Zeitenwende' speech, the Chancellor, among other things, called for enhancing German contribution to NATO's collective defence efforts (defending every square metre of NATO) and pledged to rearm the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces) for such purpose (Scholz 2022a). In June 2022, German Ministry of Defence operationalized Chancellor's guidance by committing a division for NATO's new force model and a brigade for defending Lithuania. One year later, Germany clarified its intentions by proposing to permanently station a brigade in Lithuania if it provides adequate host nation support.

A permanent German military deployment in Lithuania contributes to implementing ambitious changes in NATO's force posture (defending forward) initiated during the Madrid Summit and represents a significant shift in its defense policy, which previously opposed stationing large military formations on NATO's Eastern flank (Gotkowska 2022). In addition, Germany became the first NATO European member to offer a permanent brigade level deployment on NATO's Eastern frontier (the US was first to announce the stationing of a permanent force in Poland). Even though researchers previously stated that the 'Baltic states would be uncomfortable with the idea of putting their security in the hands of Germany [...]'

 (Rostoks 2022, p. 113), there is a broad political consensus in Lithuania that the upcoming German military deployment will substantially enhance its national security. To accommodate the German brigade, Lithuania considers the improvement of its military infrastructure a top priority.

It is not to say, however, that the permanent stationing of a German brigade comes without challenges and political risks. Researching the literature on German defence and security policy, one finds a plethora of publications describing instances when Germany failed to implement its stated defence policy goals (Gotkowska 2022; Hellmonds, Schütz and Mölling 2023a; Schütz and Mölling 2023b; Raik and Quencez; 2023; Major and Mölling 2021; Matlé 2022; Frisell 2021; Lucas, Hodges and Schmiedl 2021). For example, the three trend reversals (material, personnel and

funding) initiated by the then Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea achieved a limited progress by 2022. During a research visit in Germany on October 2021, interviewed German security and defence experts were firmly assured that Germany was already backtracking from commitments to secure the two percent spending by 2024 and fully-source three divisions by 2032. One expert noted that the best Germany can do is to prepare one division after ten years with the current funding (Interview 1 2021), while the other claimed that German officials were already looking for ways as to how to communicate its looming failure to NATO allies (Interview 2 2021). Indeed, the 'Traffic-light' coalition agreement published in December 2021 deprioritized defence and security policy, failing to secure necessary funding for the development of German Armed Forces (Dare more progress 2021).

Even though the announcement of the *Zeitenwende* altered the previous assessments, many researchers eventually criticized its implementation. Deni (2022) stated that it remains unclear when Chancellor's political rhetoric about *Zeitenwende* will be implemented as Germany continues to be 'the last to do what is necessary'. Matlé (2022) highlighted the resemblance between the first three months of the proclaimed turning point and the Munich Consensus of 2014, when Germany pledged to assume a greater role in international security and under delivered. Koenig (2022) characterized the turning point as a *sluggish start*, negatively affecting Germany's self-image of a reliable partner. Tallis (2022) noted that the content and pace of a turning point in German foreign and security policy is being imposed by external pressures as opposed to being facilitated from within, exposing the lack of changes in Germany's 'strategic culture, mindset, or posture' (Fuhrhop 2023). Fuhrhop later assessed that Germany's progress in defence was rather humble (2023). That being said, however, new German National Security Strategy and recently updated Defence Policy Guidelines clearly prioritise strengthening national and collective defence over other objectives, a defence policy trajectory unseen since the end of the Cold War.

The paper contributes to the debates on Germany's security and defence policy by providing a case-study scrutinizing the German brigade deployment in Lithuania. Aiming to identify the implications and challenges of the upcoming German

deployment, the paper proceeds in three steps. First, it overviews how Germany's role in NATO altered over time, identifies factors driving the change, and reviews its current and planned contributions to NATO's deterrence and defence. The study continues by establishing key features of the upcoming German military deployment in Lithuania: chronology, agreements, organization, timetable, uncertainties, etc. Finally, it compares Germany's commitments to Lithuania and NATO against the progress made in Bundeswehr's rearmament progress. The study is based on semi-structured interviews with German security and defence experts, analysis of official documents, statements, and secondary data.

In the end, the paper argues that the tempo, quantity and structure of Germany's deployment depends on the progress made in rearming the Bundeswehr. On the one hand, the results clearly show that the rearmament of the German Armed Forces is behind schedule, lacks funding and exposed to political risks which might manifest themselves during the next political cycle. On the other hand, Germany remains more than capable to gradually scale-up its forces leading the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) multinational battlegroup in Lithuania to a brigade-level if such an endeavour receives priority in terms of material and personnel. Despite the observed shortcomings, Germany so far has pledged the largest in-place military commitment to Lithuania when comparing respective Canadian and British commitments to Latvia and Estonia, giving a much-needed boost to Baltic States' defence.

Germany's Role in NATO: Back to the Roots?

Germany's role in NATO changed considerably over the last three decades. Once a cornerstone of NATO's forward defence against the Warsaw Pact, Germany started reforming its force structure after the Soviet Union collapsed. With its major security threat removed from the map and external borders secured by NATO's eastward enlargement, Germany deprioritized, defunded, and downsized the Bundeswehr, gearing towards international missions and operations during the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast to the Cold War, when West Germany refused to participate in crisis management, the Bundeswehr was deployed in various out-of-area operations, including the ones in Kosovo and Afghanistan (please see: Glatz et. al. 2018), but eventually became too weak to offer significant capabilities to

NATO's deterrence and defence. In 2014, Germany acknowledged the need to strengthen conventional defence capability after Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and subsequently increased its contribution to NATO's deterrence and defence posture, albeit trying to strike a balance between deterrence, crisis management and cooperative security (Gotkowska 2022). In 2022, the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine brought the German defence policy back to its roots, focusing its efforts on ensuring NATO's collective defence, even offering to permanently station a brigade in Lithuania.

As this chapter will show, Germany returns to its traditional role in NATO with significantly smaller capabilities with most of its offered contributions remaining in development. The first section will provide a brief historical summary of Germany's shift from forward defence to out-of-area operations from its reunification to the first Russian land-grab of Ukrainian territory in 2014. The second section will overview how Germany eventually returned to the primacy of collective defence between 2014 and 2023.

From Forward Defence to Out-of-Area Operations

During the Cold War, the Bundeswehr was the backbone of NATO's deterrence and defence efforts. Fielding 12 Army divisions with ample heavy equipment stocks and high readiness levels, German Armed Forces played a crucial part in NATO's forward defence arrangements (Bundeswehr undated a). At that time, West Germany was situated on the NATO's Eastern flank and its strategic position was reflected in its defence spending, which fluctuated between 4.9% and 2.5% as of its GDP, a stark contrast to meagre defence spending levels observed during the last decade (less than 1.5%; Macro Trends 2023).

The end of the Cold War and NATO's subsequent eastward enlargement brought unprecedented levels of security to the reunified Germany, diminishing the political case for having large and capable Bundeswehr tasked with defending NATO's eastern frontier (itself). It needed a new purpose and Germany started reorganizing its Armed Forces to conduct out-of-area operations. It was a major conceptual, mental, and legal change as Germany refused to deploy its troops in international missions and operations during the Cold War. On the one hand, West Germany

justified such a position by drawing attention to its division across different sides of the Iron Curtain, negative public opinion about deployments abroad and the historic legacy of its military operations conducted during the Second World War. As Kamp bluntly summarized, ‘The sight of German tanks in the deserts of Africa or in South-East Asia might have brought back unpleasant memories’ (1993, p. 165). On the other hand, Germany consistently maintained throughout the Cold War that its Basic Law prohibits the Bundeswehr from participating in international missions and operations, ‘exceeding common self-defense within the NATO or the Western European Union’ (Börner 1994, p. 1).

However, international conflicts have not disappeared after the Soviet Union disintegrated and Germany found itself under increasing pressure to contribute to maintaining international security since the early 1990s. Moreover, most of its previous arguments against the participation in out-of-area operations, including legal obstacles, eventually lost their validity. On the request of the Social Democrats (SPD) and the Free Democrats (FDP), the Federal Constitutional Court clarified on 12 July 1994 that the German Basic Law permits the deployment of the Bundeswehr outside of NATO territory because of Article 24.2,¹ allowing Germany the entry to collective security systems (Bundeswehr undated b). The clarification of the Federal Constitutional Court, diminishing conventional threats and raising demand for crisis management paved the way for Bundeswehr’s reform. On 24 August 1994, German Defence Minister, Volker Rühle, summarized the case for Bundeswehr’s modernization in the following way:

Today, the Bundeswehr is still best prepared for the most unlikely case - an aggression against NATO. It is least prepared for the most likely case - the new tasks associated with international crisis management. For this reason, the German government has initiated a fundamental reform of the German armed forces [...] The main emphasis of the reform will be the build-up of highly professional reaction forces with a high degree of readiness and availability, and able to cover the entire spectrum of crisis management tasks. (Börner 1994, p. 6).

¹ ‘With a view to maintaining peace, the Federation may enter into a system of mutual collective security; in doing so it shall consent to such limitations upon its sovereign powers as will bring about and secure a lasting peace in Europe and among the nations of the world’. Please see Federal Ministry of Justice (2022).

The 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon in 2001 enhanced the demand for crisis management capabilities and further diminished the case for maintaining forces designed to fight a conventional war. Germany, like other major NATO allies, continued to dismiss the probability of conventional military threats. For example, German Defence Policy Guidelines of 2003 argued that:

The security situation calls for a security and defence policy that is geared to the prevention and containment of crises and conflicts. [...] At present, and in the foreseeable future, there is no conventional threat to the German territory [...] Traditional national defence against a conventional attack, which previously solely determined the structures of the Bundeswehr, no longer corresponds with the actual security policy requirements. The capabilities that had been kept available solely for this purpose are no longer required. (BMVG 2003, p. 4).

Despite the summary provided above, crisis management scenarios became the basis for planning only in 2011 (Kunz 2018). Regardless of the infamous Putin's Munich Speech in 2007 and subsequent Russo-Georgian War in 2008, renewed German Defence Policy Guidelines emphasized threats emanating from failed states, terrorism, criminal networks, climate, migration, and pandemics. Given the prolonged ignorance of conventional military threats in German defence policy, the guidelines also suggested suspending conscription as it was deemed unnecessary for conducting expeditionary operations (BMVG 2011, p. 1, 11, 12). Germany's focus on crisis management contributed to the reduction of military equipment, especially enabling the phase-out of older military platforms designated for the purpose of territorial defence (Gotkowska 2012, p. 17). The Bundeswehr considered its units fully equipped if they had 70% of their original material as focus on international missions and operations permitted borrowing the remaining 30% from other elements, not engaged in deployments or exercises (Kunz 2018). Such arrangements further eroded Bundeswehr's capability to contribute significant capabilities for deterrence and defence, let alone fight a conventional war against a peer competitor (Gotkowska 2022).

Germany's role in NATO was also influenced by its policy approaches to European security architecture and Russia. German researchers emphasized that Germany

sought to include Russia in European security architecture as its decision makers assumed that ‘security in Europe is only possible with Russia’ (Puglierin 2023) or that Russia is ‘difficult but indispensable partner, without whom there would be no solution to the conflicts in and around Europe’ (Speck 2022). For example, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle once made a case for security cooperation with Russia in the following way: ‘Without a close partnership with Russia a European security architecture is, at best, incomplete. Germany’s security is best guaranteed if there is comprehensive security from Vancouver to Vladivostok. It is for this reason that cooperation with Russia is so important’ (German MFA 2010).

However, security partnership with Russia was not the sole factor influencing Germany’s role in NATO as Germany measured its activities in the Alliance against the objectives of *Ostpolitik*. Meister and Jilge (2022) explain that Germany defined its post-Cold War East policy by prioritizing Russia’s interests and deprioritizing legitimate security concerns of the CEE NATO allies. At the same time, the primacy of *Ostpolitik* also meant that Germany’s policy towards Russia generally emphasized its economic interests at the expense of its own national security. Such Germany’s stance translated into a cautious approach towards NATO enlargement (Banka 2019), not to mention the scepticism about deploying military capabilities on its Eastern flank. For example, the Luftwaffe took part in NATO’s Air Policing in the Baltic States on several occasions, but Germany was unwilling to go further before Russia’s first land grab in Ukraine. As Raik and Quencez summarized in their recent paper, Germany at that time ‘did not see credible defence and deterrence *vis-à-vis* Russia as a stabilizing factor in European security’ (2023).

To be fair, German reluctance about stationing military capabilities in the Baltic States reflected a diminishing relevance of collective defence across the Alliance. For example, Urbelis recounts that NATO allies have not seriously considered establishing forward defence with large military formations potentially stationed in the Baltic States. He explains that the discussion was more about how to anchor the collective security guarantees in NATO’s rapid reinforcement capability or how to utilize its technological supremacy, prioritizing the usage of the US air power and precision strikes to immediately retaliate against a potential aggression, not requiring constant commitments of sizable land forces (2003, p. 16, 17). In a similar vein, Kramer points out, the discussions about the conventional capabilities for

defending the aspirant CEE countries looked rather out of place as the Alliance institutionalized its relations with Russia (NATO-Russia Founding Act, NATO-Russia Council, etc.) and became an international peacekeeper whereas territorial defence was increasingly understood as an outdated Cold War concept (2002).

From Out-of-Area Operations to Defending Every Square Meter of NATO Territory

Germany's role in NATO started changing again after Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, but it was only after Russia's full-scale military invasion to Ukraine when Germany significantly altered its security and defence policy. Gotkowska (2022) maintains that Russia's military and hybrid operations against Ukraine since 2014 persuaded Germany that Russia became a challenge to the European security order, however, not yet a direct military threat. Following such a threat assessment, Germany initially sought to strike a balance between strengthening NATO's collective defence and maintaining selective cooperation with Russia. The change in Germany's perception allowed for a gradual, albeit limited, growth of its defence budget, return of collective defence in its planning scenarios and more active engagement in NATO's deterrence and defence efforts.

For example, Germany synchronized the development of its Armed Forces with pledges for NATO Defence Planning Process. Accordingly, Germany planned to field three fully sourced divisions by 2032 (one brigade by 2023 and one division by 2027 were partial milestones; Gotkowska 2022). Mustering such a force would enable Germany to regain its previously held significance in NATO's deterrence and defence. At the moment of writing, however, German military modernization goals remain behind schedule despite additional financial resources provided, for example, the 100-billion-euro special fund for defence (please see a more detailed discussion in the third chapter).

Changes in German threat perception also revitalized its engagement in NATO's deterrence and defence efforts. Once the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) was established as a spearhead component of NATO's Response Force during the Wales Summit of 2014, Germany was the first country to lead the initial

formation of the VJTF in 2015 (Major 2015). Germany has twice repeated its role as a lead nation in 2019 and 2023, albeit with difficulties. In 2019, the persistent shortages of equipment meant that 30 000 items, ranging from heavy weapon platforms to individual soldier's kit, had to be transferred to the designated lead unit for the VJTF at the expense of other elements of the Bundeswehr, downgrading their readiness as follow-on forces. In 2023, the shortages were not so severe, but the same principle applied: to source the lead unit of NATO VJTF (37th Panzergrenadier Brigade), material had to be transferred from other elements of the Bundeswehr (Wörmer and Dienstbier 2022, p. 21).

Frisell's study illustrates the difficulties Germany faced in executing its obligations to NATO. In 2020, she estimated that the Bundeswehr could only muster 1 000 additional soldiers (including the special forces) from the rapid deployment division (Division Schnelle Kräfte) in three days, while additional 2-3 air-mobile infantry battalions, together with 3-4 mechanised battalions, would be available for deployment in one week. After three months, Germany could deploy six brigades, but only one with full combat capability (2021, p. 102-106; also, please see: Lucas, Hodges and Schmiedl 2021). Even if Frisell's findings are at least three years old, they do show how slowly Germany was adapting its military to the deteriorating international security environment since 2014.

Despite sluggish military modernization, Germany played a significant role in strengthening NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) on its Eastern frontier, even if it was opposed to stationing larger formations before 2022. In 2016, Germany agreed to lead a multinational battle group in Lithuania, while the US, Canada and the UK assumed respective responsibilities in Poland, Latvia, and Estonia (NATO 2016). The first German military contingent was deployed to Lithuania as part of the multinational battlegroup in 2017. Initially, the size of German deployment fluctuated around 500 soldiers, but later, just a few weeks before Russia began its full-scale military invasion of Ukraine, Germany decided to add additional 350 soldiers, representing broad capability spectrum (Bundeswehr 2022). According to the German MOD, approximately 1000 of its soldiers currently take part in NATO eFP battlegroup deployed in Lithuania (BMVG 2023a). Combining the elements of German, Dutch, Belgian, Norwegian, Czech, Luxembourgian and Croatian militaries, the eFP battle group in Lithuania is

currently composed of roughly 1600 soldiers. Lithuanian MOD reports that over 15 thousand troops have been rotated to the NATO eFP battlegroup Lithuania since its first deployment in 2017 (Lithuanian MOD 2023a).

Once Russia invaded Ukraine, Germany deployed more capabilities on NATO's Eastern flank. On 25 February 2022, Germany publicized its plans to send an infantry company to Slovakia as part of a new NATO multinational battlegroup under the framework of Enhanced Vigilance Activities (EVA). The deployment was later strengthened by Leopard 2 A6 MBTs, Patriot air defence systems and combat support elements (Bundeswehr 2022a). Also in February 2022, the Luftwaffe deployed combat aircraft to Romania as part of NATO's Enhanced Air Policing South (Bundeswehr 2023a). Despite the controversy over the Poland's initial refusal to host German Patriot air defence systems in Autumn-Winter 2022, Germany has eventually deployed an Air Missile Defence Task Force in Zamość, near the Polish-Ukrainian border, following the invitation of the Polish President on 13 January 2023. The deployment consists of 350 German soldiers armed with Patriot air defence system (Bundeswehr 2023b).

However, the most significant German contributions to NATO were made in mid-2022. On 7 June 2022, the Federal Chancellor showed leadership by becoming the first NATO head of state from Europe to offer large military units (a brigade to Lithuania) and announcing it before the adoption of the new NATO Strategic Concept which called for forward defence 'with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces' (NATO 2022). In a similar vein, Germany became the first NATO member to offer troops for NATO's new Force Model (Gotkowska and Tarociński 2022). German Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht announced on 29 June 2022 that Germany is going to provide a division consisting roughly of 15 000 soldiers, and 65 combat aircraft, 20 warships and special and support units in addition (BMVG 2022). The Inspector of the German Army later clarified that the designated division will be combat-ready by 2025 (Spiebold 2023). In addition to NATO commitments, Chancellor Scholz also pledged to provide a 'core troops' for the EU's 5 000 soldier-strong European Rapid Deployment Capacity in 2025 (Scholz 2022b).

Germany's comeback to collective defence is not only visible from its recent commitments to European defence and political rhetoric. Its return is now also anchored in new strategic documents. In the first national security strategy, Germany clearly defines that 'Today's Russia is for now the most significant threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area' and envisions the Bundeswehr as the 'cornerstone of collective defence in Europe' (National Security Strategy 2023, p. 12, 32). Moreover, the document clearly argues that national and collective defence is the 'core task' of the German military, while all other tasks are 'subordinate to this task' (National Security Strategy 2023, p. 32). In November 2023, the new German Defence Policy Guidelines further clarified that all structures and processes will be geared towards building the warfighting capability of the Bundeswehr as Germany and NATO once again faces a direct military threat from Russia. The Bundeswehr, as the guidelines puts it, must be ready 'to deploy and fight on a sustainable basis at any time' (BMVG 2023d, p. 9). In this framework, the deployment of a German brigade in Lithuania is understood as a 'beacon project' of the *Zeitenwende* (BMVG 2023d, p.13).

German Brigade for Lithuania: Assigned or Deployed?

Germany's intentions to participate in the formation of a new brigade-sized NATO military deployment in Lithuania were first declared on 22 April 2023, during a bilateral meeting between Lithuanian and German foreign ministers (Lithuanian MFA 2022). A few months later, Chancellor Olaf Scholz clarified the German position by issuing a joint communique with his Lithuanian counterpart, President Gitanas Nausėda. According to the document, Germany committed 'to lead a robust and combat-ready brigade in Lithuania dedicated to deter and defend against Russian aggression' (President of the Republic of Lithuania 2022). The bilateral communique explicitly clarified that such a German military contribution is intended to complement its military forces already stationed in Lithuania as part of eFP battlegroup, not to replace them. The parties have also agreed that initial German military deployment in Lithuania will begin from stationing a Forward Command Element, giving Lithuania time to improve its host nation support arrangements. Other important details, such as brigade's organization, its deployment timeline and potential location, were not clarified by the communique,

delegating these matters to the respective MODs (President of the Republic of Lithuania 2022).

Germany and Lithuania quickly implemented the first step of their bilateral agreement. Germany deployed 41st Panzergrenadier Brigade's Forward Command Element to Lithuania on 4 September 2022, a few months after the German-Lithuanian communique was published (Lithuanian Armed Forces 2023a; Lithuanian MOD 2022). The first exercise of the so-called enhanced Vigilance Activities Brigade and Lithuanian Armed Forces took place as early as October 2022, when the Forward Command Element and elements of the German Infantry Battalion 413 participated in the bi-national Operation Fast Griffin (Lithuanian Armed Forces 2023b).

Despite smooth military cooperation, further political negotiations eventually became bogged-down due to diverging interpretations of the brigade's location. The political controversy began on 10 October 2022, once German MOD Christine Lambrecht clarified that the brigade is going to remain in Germany for the time being, albeit on a high readiness to redeploy to Lithuania in 10 days (LRT 2022a; Gibadlo and Hussein 2023). Lithuanian political elite generally perceived such a statement as a divergence from the bilateral communique and the official statements issued after Lambrecht's visit made clear that Lithuania aims to reverse Germany's position (LRT 2022b). Since Lithuanian media already reported about Germany's upcoming military deployment, Lambrecht's message on brigade's assignment was received rather negatively by Lithuanian society as well as political elite and the academia. For example, German ambassador to Lithuania Matthias Sonn acknowledged that he reported back to Berlin that his country 'had lost a degree of trust in the Lithuanian political spectrum, in the media and in the public' (LRT 2022c).

Further Lithuanian – German negotiations were characterized by ambiguity and a degree of political friction. In Lithuania, a debate erupted about imprecise language of the high-level communique with some calling to renegotiate its text with Germany, while others maintained that it already clearly states a German commitment to deploy a brigade in Lithuania (15min 2022). At the same time, the

issue was scandalized in Lithuania and two out of three Lithuanian vice-ministers for defence resigned from their post few months after Lambrecht's statement was made. Despite internal scandal, Lithuanian institutions were rather united in their bid to continue persuading Germany regarding brigade's deployment in the country.

Germany, on the other hand, maintained its position and justified it by citing inadequate Lithuanian host nation arrangements for deploying the unit in the country. Some of Lithuania's infrastructural limitations regarding German deployments as part of NATO's air policing and eFP multinational battlegroup were already highlighted by the German Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces before the beginning of the official negotiations on the brigade (German Bundestag 2022, p. 90-92; German Bundestag 2021, p. 102). Despite Lithuania's rapidly increasing investments in barracks, training areas and other host nation support facilities (Lithuanian expenditures on infrastructure increased substantially between 2020 and 2023; please see Lithuanian MOD 2023a), Lithuanian military infrastructure indeed faced difficulties in accommodating its enlarging Armed Forces with additional equipment, such as PzH 2000 and IFVs 'Vilkas', and growing allied military presence since 2014. The infrastructural issues largely stem from the austerity measures initiated after 2007 global financial crisis and the suspension of Lithuanian military draft in 2008. After a period of underinvestment, Lithuania's ability to prioritize host nation support was constrained by competing priorities of urgent rearmament and reintroduction of the military draft once defence expenditures began to grow rapidly since 2014.

Interestingly, the position of the German Government diverged from the one of its security and defence experts. The German ambassador to Lithuania expressed dissatisfaction over the Lithuanian assertion that a German brigade ought to be deployed on its soil. For example, he claimed that 'Any idea that by expressing discontent Germany could be pressured or bullied [into deploying a brigade], and that is a confident prediction, will not bring one single additional German soldier to Lithuania' (LRT 2022c). However, pressure to deploy German military brigade came not only from outside, but also from within; Matlé called for 'improving the defense capability of the Alliance area by permanently stationing the brigade committed to the defense of Lithuania on Lithuanian soil' (2023). A similar position was heard during the author's research visit to Berlin in November-December 2022,

with 7 out of 8 interviewed German security and defence experts supporting fully stationing one of the Bundeswehr's brigades in Lithuania. For them, deploying a brigade in Lithuania mostly resonated with Germany's image as a reliable and capable partner, which was already challenged by its prolonged debates about wherever to send certain types of military equipment to Ukraine and protracted inability to secure adequate defence spending (Mölling, Schütz and Hellmonds 2023).

Even though it is not the purpose of the paper to explain how diverging interpretations (deployment vs assignment) of German – Lithuanian military cooperation emerged, it is obvious that both parties agreed on notions which could not be implemented quickly. Neither in 2022, nor in 2023 was Germany able to deploy a 'combat-ready' brigade in Lithuania and execute other international military commitments at the same time. According to the German timeline provided for NATO's Defence Planning Process, Germany planned to have one combat-ready brigade only by 2023 which was supposed to function as a framework unit for NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. However, Germany was late in equipping such a brigade irrespective of the Chancellor's announcement of *Zeitenwende* on 27 February 2022 and provision of additional resources. This is not to say, however, that Lithuania has fared better in terms of host nation support in mid-2022. The best Lithuania could accomplish at the time is to quickly build make-shift facilities to accommodate German soldiers without ensuring ample opportunities for their training and exercise.

Despite the material difficulties described above, German – Lithuanian talks continued throughout Spring 2023. With the Vilnius Summit approaching, Lithuania continued to push for German military deployment, while Germany maintained that it is not backtracking from the bilateral communique. For example, after the Lithuanian President met with the German Chancellor on 27 April 2023, he told the journalist that they have reached an agreement on the gradual German military deployment, conditional on the Lithuanian progress in improving host nation support. The Chancellery, however, has not publicly endorsed the statement of the Lithuanian President (Gibadlo and Hussein 2023).

After a prolonged period of ambiguity, the brigade controversy ended just as unexpectedly as it began. On 26 June 2023, when German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius announced during his visit to Lithuania that Germany is ready to permanently station additional 4000 troops with their families in Lithuania by 2026 if two conditions are met (Lithuanian MOD 2023c). Firstly, Germany expects Lithuanian investments in its military infrastructure to fit a brigade sized deployment (building barracks, logistical facilities and areas for training and exercises) and create good conditions for the families of German soldiers stationed in Lithuania (assuring access to kindergartens and schools as well as proving work opportunities). Secondly, German military deployment in Lithuania should expand on step-by-step basis, seamlessly integrating it in NATO's defence planning. In the end, the German minister emphasized the gradual nature of the upcoming Bundeswehr's deployment in Lithuania without providing additional details (BMVG 2023b) and his statement better reflected the facts on the ground (additional time needed to rearm the Bundeswehr and strengthen host nation support in Lithuania).

At the moment of writing, Lithuanian – German talks are focused on the practical implementation of a permanent German military presence. Germany and Lithuania are working on determining an implementation plan, which should be agreed by the end of 2023. For its part, Lithuania has announced its plans to spend 1.1 billion euros on host nation support arrangements with the upcoming stationing of the German brigade taking a priority (Lithuanian MOD 2023d). Moreover, the implementation of Lithuanian commitments is anchored in rapidly growing defence spending. In 2019, Lithuania reached the two percent benchmark and its defence spending reached 2.58% as of GDP in 2023. Additionally, Lithuanian Parliament introduced Temporary Solidarity Law, which secured additional funding for projects needed strengthening host nation support and military mobility, raising Lithuanian defence spending to 2.76% (Lithuanian MOD 2023e; President of the Republic of Lithuania 2023). Next year, Lithuania plans to spend at least 2.71% with various options considered for enhancing regular defence budget. For example, talks are underway on adopting defence tax to further enlarge the defence budget (LRT 2023).

On 11 October 2023, German MOD Boris Pistorius further clarified the state of planning by giving a series of interviews on his visit to Bundestag's Defence Committee. Firstly, German military deployment in Lithuania is now defined as an integral element of its previous commitment to provide a division for NATO's New Force Model by 2025. In Summer 2022, Germany separately announced providing a brigade for Lithuania and a division for NATO, indicating that they might be different commitments in the framework of NATO (Gotkowska and Tarociński 2022; BMVG 2022). However, Pistorius explicitly stated that a brigade for Lithuania will not be added on top of NATO's division, which will be constituted of three brigades: one deployed in Lithuania and two stationed in Germany (Tagesschau 2023).

Secondly, the size of the brigade remains unclear. On the one hand, Pistorius made clear that the brigade is going to absorb current German deployment in Lithuania (eFP framework deployment, roughly German 800 soldiers). Consequentially, Germany is interested in building a brigade with international partners, especially ones whose soldiers contributed to the eFP multinational battlegroup Lithuania. To this end, Germany has already started talks with the Netherlands and Norway (BMVG 2023b). In a more recent statement, German MOD specified its decision to deploy 203 Panzer Battalion and the 122 Panzergrenadier Battalion in addition to the soldiers already in place as part of multinational eFP battlegroup (DBwV 2023). On the other hand, Pistorius indicated that Germany intends to deploy additional support elements (logistics, medical and IT units, etc.), potentially enlarging the overall size of the deployment (Tagesschau 2023). As mentioned before, Germany originally planned to station a brigade in Lithuania on top of the eFP battlegroup already in place, not to integrate it into a larger military unit.

Thirdly, aiming to enhance the appeal of the upcoming German military deployment in Lithuania, Pistorius suggested deploying a brigade close to Lithuanian major cities, namely Kaunas and Vilnius. By deploying closer to Lithuanian urban centres, German MOD aims to ensure better access to civilian infrastructure, such as schools, day-care centres, and leisure activities, for its soldiers. To boost the appeal of the deployment in Lithuania, German MOD also intends to provide flexible military service opportunities, opening spots for a longer

three-year military deployment in Lithuania and as well as shorter rotations (Krämer; Tagesschau 2023). Most probably, the multinational eFP battalion will offer shorter term service opportunities while other two battalions would opt for longer service. Recent statements from the Lithuanian MOD shows that German soldiers are indeed going to be stationed close to Lithuania's largest cities (Jokūbauskas 2023). It seems that German and Lithuanian interests coincide as Bundeswehr's deployment near Vilnius is favourable to Lithuania as large combat-capable formations are not currently stationed close to the city.

Finally, the brigade will deploy in phases. The German MOD intends to deploy first soldiers in 2024. In the first half of the year, Germany would deploy a preparation team, while the deployment organizational team would arrive during the second half. Pistorius expects that gradual relocation of 'a low three-digit number' of soldiers will begin by the end of 2024. The new brigade will enter service in 2025 but it will not have a full operational capability with Pistorius hoping to achieve it by 2028 at the latest (Jungholt 2023). The information provided by the Lithuanian MOD indicates that the majority of German soldiers are planned to arrive in Lithuania by 2026 (Lithuanian MOD 2023f). Thus, the data available indeed shows a projected gradual build-up of German Armed Forces in Lithuania.

Comparing Germany's International Commitments against National Capabilities

Despite the growing German contribution to NATO's deterrence and defence, one finds a mismatch between military commitments and lagging rearmament of the Bundeswehr. As it was underlined in the previous chapters, Germany increased its contribution to NATO's defence and deterrence by providing lead units for the VJTF and Lithuanian eFP battlegroup as well as making various smaller deployments on NATO's Eastern flank. The rearmament of the German Armed Forces, however, lagged behind the political ambition. Notwithstanding the trend reversals in material, personnel and funding initiated by Ursula von der Leyen in 2016 (Pointer 2017), the Chief of German Army, Lt. Gen. Alfons Mais, stated on 24 February 2022 that the Army is 'more or less bare' with 'extremely limited options' it can offer to the Alliance (Mais 2022). One year later, the Parliamentary Commissioner of the German Armed Forces, Eva Högl (SPD), concluded in her

yearly report that ‘not a single cent from the special fund made its way to our servicewomen and -men in 2022’ (German Bundestag 2023, p. 6). Adding fuel to the fire, German newspaper ‘Bild’ reported on 11 April 2023 that the Chief of the German Army allegedly expressed doubts about Germany’s capability to muster a combat-ready division by 2025 even if the Army concentrates all its assets in the promised unit in an internal report (Rinaldi 2023).

This section analyses how the mismatch between German international commitments and Bundeswehr’s rearmament tempo might affect its pledge to permanently deploy a brigade in Lithuania. There are few caveats to the analysis. First, the German requirements for Lithuanian host nation support arrangements are unknown at the moment of writing. Due to this reason, the paper lacks data to objectively evaluate Lithuanian progress in advancing its military infrastructure against the German requirements and will focus on Bundeswehr’s rearmament effort instead. However, it is clear that building adequate military infrastructure is a top priority in Lithuania across the party lines, and it is already reflected in financial planning and *de facto* spending. Second, the German political cycle and the outcome of Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine might affect the continuity of German defence policy. On the one hand, recent polls indicate the growing popularity of political parties on the extreme right and left of Germany’s political spectrum (Alternative for Germany and the newly established Union of Sahra Wagenknecht) which advocate for normalization of Germany’s relations with Russia (ARD-DeutschlandTrend; Welt 2023). On the other hand, certain elements of Germany’s current ruling elite, especially in the SPD, remain opposed (albeit less vocal) to Germany’s rearmament effort and interested in re-establishing a degree of political and economic cooperation with Russia once the circumstances are favourable (Speck 2022; Interview 2022 3). With the next composition of the Bundestag unclear, these factors are known unknowns, which can influence the development of German defence policy going forward.

Having said that, the chapter considers how the problems faced by the German Armed Forces might affect its planned deployment in Lithuania. As observed in previous sections, Germany has not managed to reach the first milestone of its military reform (one fully sourced brigade by 2023) while the timely implementation

of its second milestone (a fully sourced division for NATO by 2025, which was pushed forward from 2027 previously) remains uncertain. Despite the introduction of the 100-billion-euro fund for defence, the first major problem with German rearmament effort is insufficient and inconsistent funding. Even if it might seem counterintuitive, one finds a clear consensus among German defence experts and the military about persistent financial shortfalls after Russia launched its full-scale invasion against Ukraine. For example, Mölling, Schütz and Helmonds (2023) argue that ‘the *Zeitenwende* is failing due to the continuing structural underfunding of the Bundeswehr. German policy-makers are not providing enough resources on a sustainable basis for its existing and future tasks’. In a similar vein, the head of the Bundeswehr association, colonel André Wüstner, explained that German Armed Forces need at least 200 billion euro for implementing the stated objectives of its rearmament process (Bombeke 2022), not to mention additional funding to maintain the newly acquired equipment. Moreover, the purchasing power of the special fund is significantly weakened by external (inflation and higher international demand for military equipment) and internal (subtracting the capital costs from the 100 billion) factors (Bundesministerium der Justiz 2022).

Furthermore, it seems that the ‘Traffic-light’ coalition will not provide additional defence funding during its mandate as it gradually downgraded spending ambition and pushed the funding timeline later in time since Olaf Scholz proclaimed *Zeitenwende*. On 27 February 2022, the Chancellor pledged to immediately invest more than two percent into defence and introduce an additional 100-billion-euro special fund. It took the Federal Government only one day to clarify that the special fund is going to be used for reaching the two percent spending benchmark, not complementing increased Federal Defence spending, thus removing roughly 35 billion euros for defence per year from the equation (Bundesregierung 2022).² Such a situation was later reflected in Germany’s midterm financial planning. For example, the midterm financial plan of 2022 saw only a symbolic annual increase in federal defence spending (300 million) between 2022 and 2026 (Bundesministerium der Finanzen 2022). In 2023, the newly appointed MOD Boris Pistorius sought to

² German federal defense budget is around 50 billion euros. According to Schütz and Mölling (2023), Germany will need to spend at least 85 billion to reach the two percent target. Hence, difference in wording equals 35 billion per year.

increase the federal defence spending by at least 10 billion euros, but it received only 1.7 billion for 2024 (Bundesministerium der Finanzen 2023).

Such tendencies facilitated speculations that Germany is either not going to reach the two percent benchmark or it will reach the stated target only by 2025 (Burchard and Rinaldi 2022). It seems that these scenarios remain plausible as Germany's planned 2024 federal defence budget remains too small to reach NATO's benchmark, while its military procurement does not have sufficient capabilities to organize enough large equipment acquisitions to cover the shortfall (Schütz and Mölling 2023).

However, recent data suggests that Germany intensified its efforts to reach the two percent target by 2024. On the one hand, the German defence establishment tries to comply with NATO defence spending targets by allowing to finance the regular Bundeswehr's needs from the special defence fund, which was previously reserved only for major equipment acquisitions and research and development, critical for maintaining and strengthening its capabilities (Harbusch et. al. 2023). On the other hand, Germany is changing the way it counts defence spending. For example, now it will also include pensions for East German officers and other expenditure lines from different ministries as defence spending (Gebauer et. al. 2023). Counting certain budgetary lines from other ministries as defence spending is a common practice in Germany and other NATO allies, however, the proportion between the funds available for the German MOD and other ministries is set to change significantly: to reach the two percent benchmark in 2024, other German ministries would need to contribute 14 billion, while this figure was only 1.6 billion in 2014 (ifo Institute 2023).

Such a behaviour is likely facilitated by the approaching deadline agreed during the Wales Summit in 2014, when NATO members pledged to increase their defence spending to two percent by 2024. The Vilnius Summit Declaration has also added urgency by reformulating the two percent defence spending requirement as a minimum commitment (as a floor, not a ceiling), in many cases not sufficient to 'fulfil longstanding major equipment requirements and the NATO Capability Targets, to resource NATO's new defence plans and force model, as well as to

contribute to NATO operations, missions and activities' (NATO 2023, art. 27). Hence, the recent German push to comply to NATO's defence spending target by counting new expenditure lines as defence or using the special fund for fulfilling regular Bundeswehr's might not facilitate a breakthrough in capability development, while emptying the special fund quicker.

Finally, contemporary German defence spending arrangements paves the way for clearly articulated political risks. On the one hand, the Federal Government has not secured long-term funding for defence as the sustainability of the current model is limited to the financial resources available in the special fund, which was introduced by overpassing the debt-brake rule. According to the calculations, the German Government will use the bulk of the special fund by 2026, opening a yearly average defence budget shortfall of 25 billion (half of current federal defence budget) in 2027 (BDLI 2023). Such data suggests that the next ruling coalition will face a difficult dilemma. It could either suspend the debt brake again to secure additional funding for the Armed Forces or to increase the federal defence budget at the expense of other public spending (Mölling, Schütz and Helmonds). It is worth noting that Olaf Scholz has achieved the former but not the latter as the 'Traffic-light' coalition with the support of CDU/CSU has managed to provide additional funds to defence on the condition that other public spending lines remain intact (Interview 4 2022). Depending on the composition of the Bundestag after 2025 elections, however, bypassing the German debt brake for a second time might be no longer possible as it requires two thirds majority (Vallée, Setton and Buhl 2021).

The Federal Government is making limited progress in expanding Germany's military industrial base and does not have a viable strategy for mitigating the shortage of military personnel. The German defence industry is among the global leaders in terms of technology, but it can produce military equipment in limited quantities (Gaddy 2023). According to one interviewee, the relationship between the German defence industry and the Federal Government is rather complicated. The Federal Government encourages the defence industry to enlarge its production capacity by investing more in production lines. The industry demands long-term (10 years) orders to make its investments commercially viable or government support for expanding production capacities. The problems with German arms production

capacity are further magnified by difficult public procurement processes, making timely military acquisition difficult (Interview 5 2022).

Regarding military personnel, their numbers have been stagnating over the last years. The desired size of the Bundeswehr is 203 000 soldiers, while it currently fields 183 051 military personnel, with reports of the German Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces exposing personnel shortfalls year after year. For example, by the end of 2022 18 692 of the 117 987 military posts above the junior ranks were empty, even if some improvements were made (in 2021, 20 412 respective posts were unfulfilled). The problem with personnel is twofold. First, the suspension of conscription limits Bundeswehr's ability to attract new soldiers to the service and expand its reservist base, but reintroduction of conscription is also not an immediate option. It would require additional investments in reestablishing the conscription infrastructure and additional material and reassignments of the already limited personnel from their present duties, such as preparing Ukrainian soldiers for war, to train the new recruits. Second, the Bundeswehr, as many other militaries, is competing with the labor market, constraining its ability to fill the ranks of certain specializations (medical staff, IT personnel, pilots, plane and other technicians, etc; German Bundestag 2021, 2022, 2023; Interview 4).

There were also speculations that Germany will not find enough soldiers willing to deploy in Lithuania voluntarily. The basis for such claims stems from an internal survey of German soldiers leaked to the media, allegedly showing that only 20% of the participants would like to volunteer for such deployment (Tagesspiegel 2023). However, it is not a general issue as the German Army is roughly 60 000 strong, leaving a pool of potential 12 000 volunteers. Even though problems might arise across different specializations, such a study shows that lack of volunteers is indeed not a major issue for the time being as further willingness to volunteer are likely to be influenced by the experience of the first soldiers serving in Lithuania. Moreover, it seems that German soldiers are going to be generously compensated for their service in Lithuania (Gebauer and Korbaki 2023).

The tendencies discussed above indicates that the German rearmament effort is facing difficulties but that does not mean that it will prevent Germany from

deploying a brigade in Lithuania. On the one hand, it is a question of German defence policy priorities. If Germany prioritizes the allocation of equipment and personnel to a brigade in Lithuania, it will be capable of deploying a promised military unit. For Lithuania, it is favourable that German deployment is a part of its larger military contribution to NATO (a division by 2025) which is currently the most urgent priority in the German rearmament effort. Given the fact that one of the division's brigades is going to be deployed forward, it should receive a priority. The statements of the German Defence Minister and the content of new German strategic documents on defence indeed points to that direction. On the other hand, Germany found solutions to compensate for the capability shortfalls in the past. For example, despite it failed to source a lead unit for NATO VJTF in 2019 and 2023, it compensated its shortcomings by providing additional material from other standing units of the Bundeswehr. Having said that, the effects of the upcoming Bundestag election on the continuity of the German defence policy are unknown. Even if political parties on the far ends of political spectrum will underperform, the next ruling coalition will face a major shortage in defence budget.

Conclusions

In June 2022, the bilateral communique between German and Lithuanian leaders regarding the deployment (as it was understood in Vilnius) of a 'robust and combat ready' German brigade in Lithuania raised high expectations and was much welcomed by security experts. For some, it was proof that Germany remains committed to implementing the *Zeitenwende* in defence and security policy, returning to its Cold War roots. For others, the announced provision of a German brigade to Lithuania's defence suggested that NATO force posture is indeed changing, slowly moving towards forward defence.

Both countries were quick to realise, however, that such an endeavour cannot be achieved quickly. Neither German brigades were fully sourced when the agreement was made, while Lithuania lacked adequate infrastructure to house thousands of additional German soldiers, let alone ensure ample opportunities for their training and exercise. The realisation led to rounds of negotiations, which resulted in reinforced German commitment to deploy a brigade in Lithuania permanently by gradually increasing German military presence. The end-result gives more time for Germany to better source its Army as well as for Lithuania to build its military

infrastructure. With the US deploying permanent forces in Poland, respective German commitment to Lithuania strengthens NATO's deterrence and defence on its Eastern flank.

The tempo, quantity and structure of Germany's upcoming deployment depends on the progress made in rearming the Bundeswehr and the continuity of its defence policy initiated after Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine. The paper shows that the major problems with successful rearmament process are inadequate and unstable funding, rigid bureaucracy, limited industrial capacity and lack of military personnel. All this suggest that the German rearmament effort will be subject to delays and material and personnel shortages, which can be mitigated by prioritizing its forward-deployment in Lithuania. German-led NATO VJTF already provides an example how the Bundeswehr can implement its commitments with insufficient resources. If that will be the case, however, building a combat ready brigade in Lithuania will come at the expense of its other units' readiness at least in the short-term perspective.

The upcoming Bundestag election in 2025 will provide another stress-test of Germany's commitments to Lithuania. One the one hand, it is the question of Parliament's composition. Recent polls suggest that parties on the extreme right and left of the political spectrum are gaining popularity and they are vocal about normalising relations with Russia, which considers NATO's military presence on its Eastern flank as a major obstacle (for an illustration, please see the Russian proposals to NATO and the US published in December 2021; Russian MFA 2021). With the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, members from the centrist parties have embraced their support to the 'Zeitenwende' and its critics are far less vocal. It remains rather unclear how tendencies will change once the War ends. In this respect, some experts warns that the support might weaken after the War (Speck 2022). On the other hand, the newly elected ruling coalition will have the power to either revitalize German rearmament effort or to stop it in its tracks as the special fund will mostly run out during its term, probably in the very beginning.

Despite the observed challenges, a lacklustre Lithuanian effort in developing its military infrastructure should not become one of them. Given that Germany made clear that its deployment is contingent on Lithuanian progress in providing sufficient military infrastructure and already criticised the adequacy of Lithuanian host nation support in the past; Lithuania must not provide an excuse for Germany to backtrack from its generous commitments, exceeding the ones made to other Baltic States. With Lithuanian military infrastructure expanding, it will be up to Germany to live up to being capable and reliable partner in defence. For its part, Lithuania has increased its overall defence budget and allocated additional funding on top for building military infrastructure, setting a positive dynamic which must continue for the years to come.

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