

Baltic countries plan joint infantry force

Defence ministers from the three small Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania met in Birstonas, Lithuania, Thursday to discuss plans to pool their armed forces and create a joint infantry battalion.

Jaak Aaviksoo of Estonia, Vinets Veldre of Latvia and Juozas Olekas of Lithuania met keeping with their schedule of twice-yearly joint meetings.

A joint statement released at the end of the meeting said the ministers 'underscored that cooperation rather than merely coordination between Baltic and Nordic countries could become an effective and visible tool in countering contemporary threats in our region and further afield.'

Aaviksoo said that it was important to have closer cooperation between the Baltic countries in the sphere of joint procurements in order to save money for taxpayers.

'In addition to the economy of resources, equipment bought in joint procurements will also simplify other cooperation projects,' he said.

The creation of a joint infantry unit would not affect the Baltics' commitment to NATO, the ministers stressed. All three Baltic republics are full members of the organization.

The ministers also agreed to establish a joint staff course at the Baltic Defence college on an annual basis and were briefed on plans for the creation of a 'joint air space security solution' after current arrangements end in 2018.

At present other NATO members send planes on a rotating basis to a base in Lithuania, from where they patrol all three Baltic states. However, this is a costly solution. The long-term solution could be to establish some form of joint Baltic air force to take over the role.

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