

# **NATO Force Integration Unit: The Permanent Bridge Between NATO and Lithuania's Armed Forces**

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Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and other security challenges called for an adaptation for NATO. As a response to the increased tension and crisis, the Alliance decided after the Wales



*Photo by MAJ Jean-Paul Dijkshoorn*

NATO summit in September 2014 to establish new units located on the eastern flank. Today, there are 8 NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) stationed in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia. These countries saw a need to increase their capabilities, and it was decided that small, joint and multinational units be permanently present for this purpose. By establishing the NFIU's, the Alliance sent a clear message that it takes its collective defence responsibilities very seriously.

The NATO Force Integration Units are small command and control headquarters. Their key mission is to facilitate the rapid deployment of the NATO Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. All the NFIUs have undertaken challenging tasks since they became fully operational, including, for the Baltic States and Poland, aiding the host nations during the planning and deployment of rotational troops.

Communications and messaging are an important part of NFIU's daily role and further enhance NATO's ability to send a clear signal to any potential aggressor that provocation or attack against a member state would be met with a united and forceful response.

Danish Colonel Peter Nielsen has led the NATO Force Integration Unit Lithuania for almost three years.

**Colonel, in Your experience, do You think the purpose or role of the NFIU has changed since it was launched in 2015?**

*Yes, and no. The second Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 forced NATO to change its strategic concept from deterrence to defense. After the approval of the new regional plans during the Vilnius Summit and the further development of the tactical plans, the NFIU has received new tasks. Our role will still be related to reinforcements, but now much more with the sustainment of all the forces in the country after arrival. We are currently in the planning phase in close coordination with all relevant military authorities in Lithuania and NATO on how this will look.*

*On the assurance side, we continue to do what we always have*

*been doing: showing as many international and NATO flags as possible all around the country to assure the Lithuanians that we, NATO, are here to stay as a permanent factor.*

**What is NFIU's role when it comes to logistic assets in Lithuania?**

*"The NFIU's logistics branch is a vital link between the Lithuanian National Armed Forces and the forces of other NATO allies. We work effectively with the Host Nation to identify logistics networks, transportation routes, and support infrastructure to ensure NATO forces can rapidly deploy into the country",* says lieutenant-colonel Angelo D'Ulisse, head of the logistic branch at NFIU Lithuania. He points out that the success of the NATO mission in the area depends on our ability to operate jointly with the Lithuanian authorities effectively, adopting adequate logistical solutions.

NATO has adapted a new strategy, the concept of deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area, or, in short, Deter and Defend. It's a set of plans that ensures NATO is ready for any challenges in Peace, Crisis and War. The biggest advantage of this new strategy is that the plans are interconnected in all domains and that national plans are interlinked with NATO plans.

**In the new plans, do You foresee a different role for the NFIU?**

*"Our primary job remains to ensure that NATO and Lithuania continue to talk to one another, sharing plans and understanding intentions",* says lieutenant-colonel Steven Brown, head of operations branch within the NFIU. *"The real change is that we are putting serious consideration into how we will perform our function during conflict when executing the newly regional plan. Communication is key in assuring the quick deployment of military formations from the European depth as well as their ongoing sustainment."*

Lithuania's military capabilities will be strengthened in the upcoming years with the planned deployment of a German brigade. According to agreement with Germany the brigade will be fully functional in 2027.



*Photo by MAJ Jean-Paul Dijkshoorn*

**Colonel Peter Nielsen, how do You see the future for the NFIU after the German brigade comes to Lithuania? Will it be less or more important as a facilitator?**

*The NFIU will still be the hub of information and the forward coordinating or command element on the operational level. And we will still be operating from the sub-political level down to the tactical level.*

*Remember, we are creating a much bigger reaction force in NATO, and to support that force, a huge rear area needs to be established, and the NFIU will play a key role in this. As I see it, the main role will still be to act as this vital link between NATO and the Lithuanian Armed Forces.*