



Interview with General Hans Jesper Helsø, Danish Chief of Defence.

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Anna Galyga: Sir, there is an article about transformation on the official website of Defence Command Denmark, what does this transformation refer to, what is being transformed?

General Hans Jesper Helsø: We are transforming Danish military force from the Cold War situation into a deployable, mobile, self-sustained military force in all three services, which means that we are moving into a new structure that is going to be used for today's and tomorrow's operations. At the same time we are changing the way we organize the defence structure – procurement, leadership, economy, and personnel. Thereby we have also developed a different division of labour and responsibilities between the services and the centralized headquarters. It gives us some savings that we can put into operational units because what is important today is that you can deploy your units and not keep them back home.

This transformation is foreseen to take five years and we are in the third year of the process already. We are following the plan but of course it is an ongoing process, there are challenges and we are always analyzing if we made the right decision.

Does this transformation influence Danish membership in NATO?

Not at all, quite the opposite, because we can stand up the marks that the Alliance has stated. And it says that 40 % of any national force structure should be deployable and every nation should have minimum 8 % deployed at any time. We have 75 % of our units deployable and something between 10 and 11 % of the Danes actually deployed so we are at the top mark.

What are the priorities and main challenges for Denmark in terms of defence policy?

The Danish defence policy is actually based on four pillars – United Nations, NATO, European Union and OECD. And the main issue for Danes is to stay relevant. If you are not on a continuous basis updating your whole structure, looking into the future, changing your organisation to be ready to take up tasks or challenges, you will not “buy” the politicians and the population and you will not be considered as relevant. When you are not relevant then you become irrelevant and nobody wants to use you. If nobody wants to use you – what do you actually use the money for? Therefore the keyword for me is a never-ending analysis of institution in order to stay relevant. If things or tasks in those four pillars change – then it is our task to adjust our organisation or to use it in a way so we stay relevant.

How does Danish participation at the Headquarters help to realize this task?

The Headquarters should also stay relevant which means training activities, multinationality, updated Command and Control Information Systems, deployability, maximum flexibility. Therefore you have to accept that the future is not a given thing and having everything concrete is not achievable. Things will always demand a high degree of flexibility and readiness for changes and that is exactly what this Headquarters is doing.

Is Denmark going to change the number of soldiers serving at HQ MNC NE?

HQ MNC NE is important for two things – first of all, for being used for actual operations and deployments, and here I would put more emphasis on deployments. And secondly, for being an integration vehicle for a lot of nations. Therefore there is no intention from the Danish side to take a Danish flag from Szczecin. Let us take one step at a time as it is now – there is no intention to reduce the number of soldiers in Szczecin either.

Last year the MNC NE personnel served in Afghanistan. How would you assess the participation of Danish soldiers who were part of this mission?

Well, I am not going only to cover the Danish officers, I am taking the Corps as a whole. I consider deployment of the people from the Headquarters to be a success. In comparison to the size of the Headquarters in Kabul – 1500, 1600 people – soldiers from Szczecin were very few in number but we know that this small number made a huge difference because they were

properly trained to go into the Headquarters in Kabul. They came as a unit, they knew each other, the contacts were already established and they went through an educational process so they knew the Headquarters; a lot of other people also knew the Headquarters but they were not trained together. And when you have the same knowledge at the same time among a lot of people, it gives much better effects.

Sir, did the Corps draw any public attention in Denmark during the mission time? Is it a known formation in Denmark at all?

There are two force structures that are known in Denmark, one in a Headquarters in Szczecin because of a lot of media attention given for the Corps when it was established, developed and deployed. The second is a British Corps which has also been in ISAF in Afghanistan so what I say here is – those Headquarters that are known or visible are those Headquarters that are deployed. And that goes back to the relevance, if a headquarters is not used, it will be not known.

How did the situation change when the Corps was deployed?

The Corps was known more at the political and military levels, it was not known among the population. Because of the deployment, there is more knowledge about the Headquarters in Szczecin but I would not say there is a tremendous 100% coverage of that knowledge but among those who are dealing with military security matters, there is a common understanding that there is a Headquarters in Szczecin. And for me it is the most important.

Thank you for talking to me.