



Game On

Interview with **Paweł Bejda**, Secretary of State at the Polish Ministry of National Defense



The technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces will cost hundreds of billions of zlotys. Will it benefit companies in both the private and the state sector of our defense industry?

I am sure everyone will benefit. The ambition of the Ministry of National Defense is to keep as much of the funds allocated to the modernization as possible within the Polish defense industry, and we treat state-owned and private companies equally. It often happens that companies from both sectors participate in the execution of the same programs. A good example is the Homar-K missile system. The Koreans want to launch the production of 80-km range missiles for this system in Poland, in cooperation with WB Electronics, a private company which already supplies the automated Topaz fire control system for Homar-K. Meanwhile, Huta Stalowa Wola (HSW), which belongs to Polska Grupa Zbrojeniowa (PGZ, Polish Armaments Group), is the system integrator and the supplier of the Jelcz chassis. HSW will produce launcher modules, while Wojskowe Zakłady Lotnicze Nr 2 (WZL2, Military

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Aviation Works No. 2) in Bydgoszcz will develop transport and launch containers for 122-mm missiles.

We often procure products of foreign origin. How can the Polish defense industry and economy benefit from that?

When we purchase equipment abroad, we do everything in our power to ensure that the related technologies are implemented in Polish defense plants in the largest possible extent. That's why, before signing the contract for AH-64E Guardian helicopters, we sat down with Boeing representatives and negotiated the offset. The talks were difficult, but successful thanks to our determination. We obtained the possibility to service engines used in various helicopters.

Wojskowe Zakłady Lotnicze Nr 1 (WZL1, Military Aviation Works No. 1) in Łódź will be responsible for repairing and servicing the entire AH-64 fuselage. These matters are extremely important, because usually the purchase cost of equipment is only a fraction of the subsequent expenses related to its use spread over several decades.

What kind of defense investments can we finance with funds from the EU? We know there are time limits, because the money from the SAFE (Security Action for Europe) program must be spent by 2030. Another requirement is that at least 65% of the cost of components for the procured equipment must be spent in countries belonging to the European Economic Area, that is within the EU and

the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, or in Ukraine.

It is a complex process, which is why we have appointed a ministerial representative for the SAFE program to coordinate these activities. The structures within the ministry that report to me, in cooperation with the Armament Agency, have prepared a comprehensive list of needs to make good use of the 120 billion zlotys at our disposal and not

the vessel is to be agreed upon, but it must sail under our flag. The final choice of offer may also be influenced by other accompanying proposals that we might find attractive.

What else can we gain from this transaction?

An interesting proposition for us could be the possibility to build a second or third ship in Poland, but this is not a prerequisite. Bidders can increase their

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waste a single zloty. The needs related to the modernization of the armed forces are so great that it is quite easy to identify programs that meet the above conditions.

Which countries are Poland's best partners when it comes to cooperation within SAFE?

Definitely Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. We are interested in joint purchases of not only foreign armament, but also weapons produced in Poland. Unfortunately, the limited production capacity of our defense plants is a frequent challenge.

Are we considering using EU funds to purchase submarines?

This may be difficult due to the equipment delivery deadlines adopted for the SAFE program.

In what format will the agreement be signed then?

The purchase of submarines will be based on an intergovernmental agreement, and we will select a supplier who not only offers a good price, but can also make the vessel available to us during the transitional period, so that our sailors have something to train on. The form of providing such access to

chances of success by presenting attractive financing terms, providing us with access to the production technology for other armament systems we are interested in, but also by placing orders with our defense industry. We are still waiting for an offer that fully satisfies our expectations, not only operational but also industrial.

The finally signed second executive agreement for K2 tanks had raised a lot of emotions for months. Why did the negotiations take so long?

Let's start with the fact that the framework agreement signed in 2022 for 1,000 K2 tanks, just as any other similar document, was only a declaration of intent, without any legally binding obligations for either party. Before signing the second executive agreement, we, as the Ministry of National Defense, set a condition that the production of the Korean tanks was to ultimately be launched in Poland. This affected the time of its conclusion, as the final date depended on the result of business negotiations conducted between the Polish Armaments Group and the Koreans, which lasted longer than anticipated.

With this agreement, we had to mitigate the unfavorable effects of the first executive agreement, under which we

purchased only tanks, without support vehicles, such as recovery vehicles or joint assault bridges. That's why the agreement signed this year, in addition to 180 K2s, including 64 in the K2PL version, also covers the delivery of 81 support vehicles, including 25 engineering vehicles, 31 recovery vehicles, and 25 joint assault bridges. These vehicles, as well as 61 K2PLs, will be produced at Zakłady Mechaniczne Bumar-Łabędy (Bumar-Łabędy Mechanical Works) in Gliwice. The first batch of 30 tanks produced in Poland will be delivered in 2028. I want to emphasize that this agreement is just a step on the way to restoring tank production capacity in Poland. In the future, we intend to increase the number of key components manufactured in Poland, including engines.

In the meantime, the plant in Gliwice is modernizing Leopard 2A4 tanks. Are there plans to extend the program to include Leopard 2A5?

Yes, but there is a huge problem with spare parts for Leopards. We are already politically urging our partners in the German government regarding this issue, as they are many months behind the agreed delivery deadlines.

To end the subject of tanks, are there plans to order more Abrams machines?

For the time being, there are no plans to order American tanks, but the MoND is not excluding this option in the future if strategic need arises. Now, we focus on creating service and logistics facilities for the already purchased Abrams. We are currently conducting talks with their producer, General Dynamics Land System, which is interested in cooperation with Wojskowe Zakłady Motoryzacyjne (WZM, Military Automotive Plant) in Poznań. Americans promise to make it the most important Abrams service station in Europe. Apart from Poland, Abrams tanks are used here by the US Army and possibly Romania in the future.

What about another South Korean product, the K9PL self-propelled howitzer?

The decision has already been made, and its production will be launched at HSW.

MSPO 2025



▶ AH-64

► Borsuk IFV



Photo: Waldemar Młynarczyk/Combat Camera DORSZ

This year, we have signed the first executive agreement for 111 Borsuk IFVs that are already being produced at HSW. What is the next step in this program?

The Armament Agency is analyzing the possibility of concluding a new executive agreement. The continuation of orders will depend on the MoND's budgetary capabilities and the contractor's production readiness. We are all aware that HSW's production capabilities, particularly in the first years, will be limited. However, we know that the company is making numerous investments in order to produce Borsuk vehicles on a large scale.

What is the situation with the Otto-kar-Brzoza tank destroyer program, which we are planning to execute in cooperation with Great Britain?

We are waiting for PGZ to submit the tender form to the Armament Agency. We want both the vehicles with launchers and anti-tank missiles to be produced in Poland. However, there are problems on the part of our British partner. If the issues cannot be resolved, we will develop a tank destroyer with some other partner, but I can assure you that it will happen.

What is the future of the heavy infantry fighting vehicle and the new wheeled armored carrier programs?

In the case of the heavy IFV, we will probably need to acquire a foreign platform on the basis of which we will develop a family of vehicles. I think the challenge here is the time necessary for PGZ to develop its own design, as we can only implement some solutions from Borsuk in this program. As for the wheeled carrier, we can obtain a license to produce it. Companies from several countries offer very interesting vehicles, but we left the matter of finding a business partner to PGZ. In this case, however, we are in a better situation, as we can also prolong the licensed production of Rosomak, but on more favorable terms than the current ones.

The program that has been stagnant for some time now is Homar-A, the Polish version of HIMARS on a Jelcz chassis. Why is this?

The Armament Agency is working to acquire system components available under the Foreign Military Sales procedure. The situation is similar to the one with the K2 tanks, where we have the framework agreement, but we still need to negotiate the executive agreement on terms

that are acceptable and favorable to us. The executive agreement will determine the amount of acquired equipment, delivery dates and cost. We are currently conducting talks on the possible launch of the GMLRS ammunition production in Poland. We are awaiting approval from the US authorities and Lockheed Martin for the technology transfer, which will also enable Poland to start the production of launcher components as well as transport and launch containers.

Americans are known for their reluctance to share military technologies. What if they don't accept our conditions?

It doesn't exclude the implementation of the program, as there are alternative solutions offered by other producers. I want to emphasize that when ordering equipment abroad, we avoid off-the-shelf purchases. We want every purchase to be accompanied by the most extensive possible transfer of technology and development of our domestic defense industry competencies. Our objective is to ensure that every order for military equipment provides a specific development impulse for our own defense sector. We want to build capabilities that will not only allow us to use



Photo: Marcin Łobaczewski

Paweł Bejda

Secretary of State at the Polish Ministry of National Defense, responsible for supervising the technical modernization of the Polish Armed Forces and the procurement of armament and military equipment. Member of Parliament representing the Polish People's Party (PSL).

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the procured equipment effectively, but also ensure Poland's military autonomy and resilience in crisis situations.

A good example of such attitude is the Narew short-range air defense program, which is very important for our armed forces and defense industry. What is the current phase of its implementation?

Just as a reminder – the program is being implemented based on a framework agreement for the delivery of components for 23 batteries, and currently the most important task is to integrate the effector system with the American IBCS command and control system. We have already signed executive agreements for project management and component integration, as well as the

delivery of, among others, CAMM-ER missiles with launchers and P-18PL preliminary target designation radars. On top of that, we are currently in the process of initiating the procedure to acquire mobile communication nodes, command shelters, passive location systems and the training and logistical packages. What remains is to conclude executive agreements for the delivery of the Sajna multifunctional fire control radar stations, special vehicles, optoelectronic sensors and elements of camouflage and deception.

Unmanned systems, including loitering munitions, are becoming increasingly important on the modern battlefield. What are the plans for introducing them in our armed forces?

The process of building capabilities connected with unmanned weapon systems in our armed forces is dynamically progressing, although it is often less noticeable than other modernization projects. A good example is the contract concluded with Sieć Badawcza Łukasiewicz – Przemysłowy Instytut Automatyki i Pomiarów (PIAP, Łukasiewicz Industrial Research Institute for Automation and Measurements) for the delivery of nearly 100 mobile unmanned reconnaissance systems. We have also ordered various types of UAVs, such as MQ-9B Guardian, FlyEye or micro MayFly, we are procuring the Wizjer system and the Gladius unmanned search and strike system battery fire modules. This year, we have also concluded a framework agreement for the delivery of 972 Warmate loitering munition sets.

What about further plans?

We want to acquire the Gryf tactical medium-range UAV systems and the MALE Zefir operational UAV systems, as well as nano and micro UAVs. Based on the experiences gained from the war in Ukraine, we are analyzing the possibility of introducing UAVs that can carry mortar shells and grenades. We are also

► *F-16 aircraft in the arsenal of the Polish Armed Forces will be modernized.*



Photo: Piotr Łysakowski

interested in multirotor systems that can be used, for instance, in logistics.

Modernization of F-16 aircraft is an important project for our Air Force. Can you disclose any details?

The first thing is the conclusion of a contract with the US government on the modernization of our entire fleet, that is 48 F-16 aircraft. The whole process will be carried out at WZL2 in Bydgoszcz, working for the main contractor, Lockheed Martin.

In the first phase, we will modernize two aircraft which will then be tested in the USA. Meanwhile, we will successively modernize the remaining F-16. The modernization of the last machine is scheduled for completion in 2037.

There are also plans to procure 32 new combat aircraft. Is it possible to purchase additional F-16s?

It is unlikely, but there are two other possibilities. The first is ordering a new type of aircraft. In the last several years, the F-15EX and Eurofighter have been most promoted on the Polish market by their producers. The second option is to double the F-35A order, but in that case our condition would be for the producer to ensure the possibility of servicing and repairing the aircraft in Poland, which was not included in the first agreement.

As to our helicopter priorities, are training helicopters currently the most important for us?

They are. The military has identified training helicopters as a priority, because a pilot that is expected to execute

tasks on an AH-64, AW149 or any other Western helicopter can't be effectively trained on an Mi-2. We must create a modern training base to prepare pilots for new, advanced machines that we have already purchased or will purchase in the upcoming years.

Will these purchases include heavy transport helicopters?

Yes, they will. Here, the choice is limited and for that reason we are interested in the American CH-47 helicopters. We need them both for military purposes and emergency operations, during floods or wildfires, for example. We want to acquire them relatively quickly, so I don't rule out the option to order used machines, if such an opportunity arises.

To conclude, I want to ask about naval programs other than Orka. Which do you consider to be the most imminent and important?

We are considering modernization and rearming of ORP Ślązak to make it a full-fledged combat vessel. In the new configuration, it can be an interesting option for the Murena program, i.e., building new corvettes. There are also ongoing discussions on which armament systems should be used on ships and which to deploy on land, so that they can complement each other.

What about the nearest plans to build new vessels?

We will certainly start the development of hydrographic vessels. In 2024–2025, the Armament Agency conducted market consultations on the available solutions for both the ship platform and the

hydrographic equipment. Currently, we are in the process of determining requirements for such a vessel, which will be completed this year, including drawing up relevant documents. We also have plans for two fuel tankers, and we will soon start defining requirements for them. There is also a need to procure a logistics support vessel whose main task will be securing the operations of frigates. In this case, determining equipment requirements is planned to commence in 2027.

For some time now, there have been accusations that the technical modernization of the armed forces is slowing down. Why are we concluding fewer agreements than in the previous years?

Precisely, the reason is that over the last few years, Poland has concluded numerous agreements for armament and military equipment worth hundreds of billions of zlotys, with payments spread over many years. I understand the scale of needs expressed by the military, but we must act reasonably and responsibly, taking into consideration both budgetary capabilities and long-term consequences of the purchases made. It is necessary to develop appropriate infrastructure to effectively use and properly store this equipment. Obviously, we also need well-trained soldiers to operate it and service facilities to repair it. All this generates costs that we will have to bear for many years to come, and we must be fully aware of that.

Interview by Krzysztof Wilewski and Tadeusz Wróbel