

Bulgaria to Host US Missile Shield

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After his week-long trip to the **USA**, **Defense Minister Anyu Angelov** has confirmed Bulgaria's firm position that it will participate in the US **missile defense** in Europe, and that the shield must be a crucial project for the entire NATO.

"It was important for us to talk to our American partners about how Bulgaria can contribute to the setting up of a **missile defense** in Europe. One way to do that is by participating with funding but this is not significant. This refers to the period 2013-2015. We can also talk about locating elements of the **missile shield** on Bulgarian territory. In addition to enjoying security from the shield, our country must also contribute to it. There is a coordinated position for a gradual approach to setting up the **missile defense**. The first stage has to be completed by 2015, the second - in which we will most likely participate - in 2015-2018, and by 2020 this **missile defense** could be fully deployed," Angelov said speaking Saturday on the Bulgarian National Radio.

He has apparently referred to the stages of establishment of the US **missile shield** in Europe as described by US officials from the Obama Administration with the first phase consisting of locating sea-borne elements of the system in the Mediterranean, and the second phase being the potential locating of elements on land, most likely in Bulgaria and **Romania**. The Obama Administration has thus modified the plans of the Bush Administration for a **missile shield** allegedly designed to protect Europe from Middle East or Iranian missile attacks, which was originally to be stationed in Poland and the Czech Republic.

The **Defense Minister** has also announced that the United States has confirmed its plans for deploy its troops in Bulgaria and **Romania** in the so called **Joint Task Force East**.

"I was concerned about the joint military facilities because there has been little talk recently about the deployment of US troops in Bulgaria and **Romania**, and the preparations for that ceased. This is why I wanted to make sure what the situation is. I am now convinced that there are no substantial changes in the US plans," Gen. Angelov explained.

Under an inter-governmental agreement, the US will be able to use together with the Bulgarian Army four military bases on Bulgarian soil, with a total of 2 500 soldiers, to go up to 5 000 during one-month rotation periods.

The **Defense Minister** also explained that Bulgaria together with **Romania** planned to invite **Serbian** troops to participate in military drills at the **Novo Selo** Training Ground near Sliven, which is a major facility used by the US Army in Bulgaria.

"We can development **Novo Selo** as a center for training of officers and soldiers," said the

Minister.

He also declared that the Defense Ministry was not going to make procurement deals with individual defense companies as long as he is in charge.

“We have a strategic partnership with the **USA**, we also have contracts for procurement and modernization with many other countries. Our only inter-governmental agreement so far is with Belgium. Whenever there is lobbying for something, it is usually lobbying in favor of a firm. This is why I want to have all of our deals based on inter-governmental agreements,” explained Gen. Angelov.

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