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Lithuania Reintroduces Military Conscription Amid Concern Over Russia

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Lithuanian parliamentarians overwhelmingly voted in favor of returning compulsory military service to the country in light of current geopolitical tensions over the Ukraine crisis, the Baltic state's Defense Ministry said in a statement Thursday.

Defense Minister Juozas Olekas, who presented the bill on conscription to Lithuania's parliament Thursday, said that the measure was tied to current events in Ukraine, the Delfi.lt news site reported.

Lithuania, one of the harshest critics of Russia's alleged role in breeding strife in Ukraine, abolished conscription in 2008, four years after the country acceded to NATO. A total of 112 parliamentarians voted in favor of its return, Delfi.lt news site reported. Three lawmakers voted against the initiative, while another five abstained.

Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite warned in February that the country would reintroduce conscription for a five-year period in light of the "new geopolitical circumstances."

"It [conscription] will allow Lithuania to complete the manning of its army in 2015-16, to fully build a sufficient military reserve over the next 18 months and to ensure that its citizens are properly prepared to defend their country," Grybauskaite's statement read.

A statement published Thursday on the website of Lithuania's National Defense Ministry said that 3,000-3,500 men between the ages of 19 and 26 will be annually enlisted in the army for nine-month terms. The first draft is expected to take place later this year, according to the statement.

Grybauskaite said in February that the number of conscripts would represent 1.7 percent of the men eligible to be drafted into the military.

Lithuanian authorities said Wednesday that NATO had intercepted Russian jets over the international waters of the Baltic Sea.

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