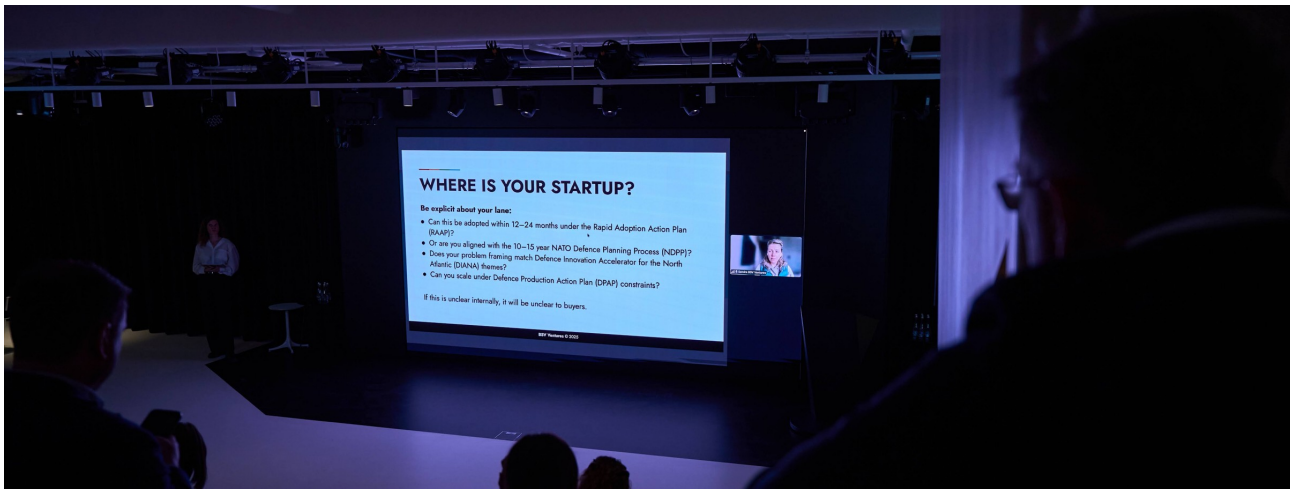
INVEST IN BRAVERY

INSIGHTS

NATO Procurement: what Ukrainian defensetech founders need to know

Key takeaways from the workshop by Sandra Golbreich, General Partner at BSV Ventures



At Invest in Bravery's 2026 summit in Kyiv, Sandra Golbreich, General Partner at BSV Ventures, ran a workshop on NATO procurement gaps for a room of founders and investors. Some key insights:

1. There is no centralized NATO procurement

Each member country sets its own requirements and needs and runs its own process, so you sell country by country. Traction in Estonia or Lithuania doesn't predict traction in Germany or France. Those are entirely separate sales processes.

> *"There is no such thing as centralized NATO procurement. Each country first of all has their own requirements. Secondly, each country has their own needs."*
>
> **Sandra Golbreich, General Partner, BSV Ventures**

2. Two hurdles catch founders off guard

Certification. NATO technical certification is a separate process, comparable to how a medical device needs a CE mark in Europe. Your product has to meet NATO standards at many levels, from security to the parts it's built from.

Clearance. This one is more politically loaded. Sandra called it a huge problem for Ukrainian companies. Her suggested workaround is to work with a prime that already carries the clearance.

3. Startups win by being cheaper and faster, not by replacing primes

Most procurement still runs on five-year cycles. The NATO Rapid Adoption Action Plan (12-24 months) is opening a faster lane. A solution 10-20x cheaper than the prime's can find customers in some countries.

The strongest areas she named:

- Low-cost detection and interception
- Tactical electronic warfare
- Secure communications
- AI-assisted decision support

Positioning matters:

> *“None of the MoDs would be willing to get the replacement. Talk about the integration - how you can be part of their existing system, instead of changing their existing system.”*
>
> **Sandra Golbreich, on how startups should position themselves**

4. Smaller NATO countries are the easier entry point

Procurement is generally faster and decision makers are easier to reach. Many countries on NATO's northeastern flank also can't afford large prime solutions. Germany, France, and the UK hold the biggest budgets, but procurement there is very political. Expect to need a partnership with an established prime rather than going it alone.

What this means

For investors: Don't let Ukrainian traction stand in for a real NATO go-to-market plan. Ask which countries the founder is targeting, whether they have a path to certification and clearance, and whether they position the product as an integration into existing systems rather than a replacement for a prime.

For founders: The pitch that works isn't “we'll replace the incumbent.” It's “we plug into your existing system and make it faster and cheaper.” Start with smaller NATO countries where procurement moves faster. Treat certification and clearance as a workstream from day one, not an afterthought once a deal is close.

Watch the full session

▶ **Watch on YouTube**

https://www.youtube.com/live/r5fMR_iSuVY?t=6540

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