

Germany's stance on NATO support for Turkey

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On 4 December, the NATO ministers of foreign affairs declared their solidarity for their fellow NATO-member Turkey in deterring threats it is facing and defending it in the context of repeated violations of Turkey's territory. The ministers granted Turkey's motion of 21 November for augmenting its air defence capabilities by deploying Patriot missile batteries along its south-eastern frontier. Pursuant to previous intergovernmental talks, Patriot missile batteries in Turkey will be deployed by the United States, Germany and the Netherlands. As regards Germany, the federal government made its official approval on 5 December, it must be however additionally approved by the Bundestag. Since the beginning of the discussion on NATO support for Turkey, the German government has officially taken a positive stance in principal, while unofficially it has been making attempts to reduce the scope of its assistance. At the same time, the issue of backing Turkey has provoked a heated debate and various reactions in Germany.

Turkey is asking its allies for support

On 21 November, following the recurring Syrian air-raids against the insurgent forces close to its border, Turkey requested NATO to augment Turkish air defence capabilities border in order to defend the population and territory of Turkey. The Turkish motion was accepted during the meeting of NATO ministers of foreign affairs on 4 December. Officially, Ankara has voiced concerns about the possible bombardment of its frontier lands and missile attacks with the use of chemical weapons. However, the real overriding goal seems not only to be to deter Syrian air-raids on the frontier but also to increase NATO's involvement in this conflict on its south-eastern peripheries. The Turkish motion concerned the deployment of Patriot missile batteries undertaken within the framework of the NATO Integrated Air Defence System supported by NATO's airborne early warning and control system (E-3 AWACS aircraft). Turkey has been engaged in talks with NATO member states who have the system in its latest PAC-3 upgrade, i.e. the USA, Germany and the Netherlands. It is being taken into consideration that two German (including personnel of approximately 160 soldiers), one or two Dutch and probably two US Patriot missile batteries will be used in support of Turkey. According to the Turkish motion and NATO's decision, the system will be deployed solely for defence purposes and will not contribute to any possible attempts to create a no-fly zone over Syria or to any offensive operation. The deployment of Patriot

missile batteries in Turkey will be temporarily rather of a symbolic nature and will demonstrate the solidarity of the allies. The reason for this is that the Patriot missile system is unable to counter mortars, which have so far been fired from Syrian territory. Syria, Iran and Russia have expressed their opposition to the deployment of the system in Turkey.

Patriot is a mobile surface-to-air land-based system designed to counter short- and medium-range ballistic missiles as well as aircraft, helicopters and drones. The system is used to protect the theatre of operations, troops, military installations and population centres.

German reactions

Turkey's appeal for support addressed to Germany and NATO has provoked a heated debate in Germany. The Federal Foreign Office and the Federal Ministry of Defence reacted positively to the enquiry, drawing upon the solidarity of allies and – for internal needs – stressing that a rejection of the Turkish request would be a grave political mistake. Furthermore, the Minister of Defence, Thomas de Maizière, in response to criticism from Russia regarding the consequences of the deployment of Patriot missile batteries for escalation of the conflict stated that the Bundeswehr can become engaged in any tasks within NATO territory. However, as part of previous German-Turkish talks, Germany stipulated that in the official Turkish motion to NATO the role of the Patriot missile batteries be restricted to the defence of Turkish territory and that the system be controlled by NATO. According to unofficial information, Germany also pressed for a reduction in the number of batteries to be deployed in Turkey.

Another issue under discussion was also the Bundestag's participation in the decision-making process. It was primarily the opposition who demanded a parliamentary vote in this case. The German Ministry of Defence made the form of parliament's participation dependent on the results of the legislative audit. The audit covered the German constitution, the act on parliament's participation in decisions concerning the Bundeswehr's foreign operations and verdicts of the Federal Constitutional Court. Finally, it was agreed that a vote at the Bundestag was necessary. This vote is most likely to take place already in December this year.

At the same time, the parties represented in the Bundestag presented various stances on the issue of supporting Turkey. Representatives of the governing coalition CDU/CSU and FDP unequivocally backed the support for Turkey. In turn, the Green Party warned that Germany could become involved in the Turkish-Syrian conflict. It also voiced concerns that the German Patriot missile batteries could become a target of a Syrian attack or be used by Turkey in an attempt to support a no-fly zone over Syria or a possible offensive action. Green Party MPs warned against Germany's and NATO's engagement in Syria without obtaining a mandate from the UN Security Council and also against confrontation with Russia. The SPD expressed similar concerns, but finally decided to vote in favour of the government's motion regarding this issue in Bundestag. The Left Party does not believe that Turkey is under any military threat and is of the opinion that the deployment of Patriot

missile batteries could strengthen its possible desire to interfere with internal affairs in Syria, since it will be protected from retaliatory actions.

In public opinion polls carried out by Infratest Dimap for ARD (of 23 November) in response to the issue as to whether the German Patriot batteries should be deployed on the Turkish-Syrian border, 59% of the respondents were against and 36% of them supported it. The belief that Germany could become involved in a possible Turkish-Syrian conflict was at the forefront of German public opinion. According to information from the German media, the electorates of all the political parties are opposed to the government's decision. Even most of the electorate of the CDU and the CSU challenged the official stance taken by these parties.

Conclusions

- The government is considering the deployment of the Bundeswehr in Turkey not only in the context of the NATO's solidarity, but also recalling its decision concerning Libya in 2011. Germany learned a lesson from the damage to its image resulting from it abstaining from voting at the UN Security Council (alongside Russia and China) and its refusal to take part in the NATO-led operation. At present the German government, despite the negative assessment of military support for Turkey being prevalent in German public opinion, was generally favourably disposed to the Turkish request. However, it was making efforts to ensure that the system would play only a defensive role, and to reduce the number of Patriot missile batteries to be deployed in Turkey.
- Public opinion sees the deployment of the system in Turkey as another foreign intervention by the Bundeswehr. Even though the government has been emphasising that the system will be deployed in Turkey as an expression of support for an ally and for defensive purposes only, German public opinion (and part of the political class) sees this as another crisis management operation rather than assistance offered out of solidarity to an ally within NATO's territory. In the German public the fear of becoming involved in a conflict in the Middle East outweighs the desire to support an ally.
- The public are even more deeply entrenched in their opinion due to the fact that each operation of the Bundeswehr requires the mandate of the Bundestag. As the legislative audit has revealed, this mandate is required not only for out of area crisis management missions but also in the case of any military operation within the NATO territory. This is the case because it is possible that German soldiers could actively participate in military actions, which – according to a verdict by the Federal Constitutional Court – requires consent from the Bundestag.
- This situation is causing speculation about Germany's stance on support for its allies in conflicts which are evaluated unambiguously (which cannot be defined beyond any doubt as "military aggression" under article 5) within the NATO territory in the future, especially in a situation where Germany would be governed by a less pro-Atlantic coalition, where the functions of the ministers of foreign affairs and defence would be entrusted to

representatives of the SPD, the Green Party or the Left Party, and where public opinion would be opposed to this. Germany's stance could also be affected by planned local or federal elections.