

Germany in NATO's missile defence system

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The defence ministers of NATO member states decided on 2 February in Brussels that the command centre of the missile defence system would be located at the Headquarters Allied Air Command Ramstein, Germany. The German defence minister, Thomas de Maizière, also announced that the German Patriot systems would become part of the NATO missile defence system. Germany granted its consent at the NATO summit in Lisbon in 2010 for the development of the NATO system – this is based on the US missile defence shield supplemented with systems of European NATO member states – on condition that an agreement with Russia was reached. The system is now fully supported by Germany despite the fact that talks with Russia have brought no effects so far and, furthermore, the NATO-Russia summit scheduled for May could be cancelled.

Commentary

- Germany has softened the stance it adopted in Lisbon and, despite the lack of progress in talks with Russia, will become fully engaged in the creation of the NATO system. This is not only an effect of the support from most NATO member states for this system; another major factor is the growing role of the German Ministry of Defence in the development of Germany's foreign and defence policy. This growth has been observed since Thomas de Maizière, former head of the German Chancellery and a trusted aide to Angela Merkel, was nominated defence minister. Thus, the viewpoint of the Ministry of Defence on missile defence issues and future threats related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction became prevalent over the Foreign Ministry's priority of avoiding tension in relations with Russia.
- Germany will be appealing for NATO to make a more extensive co-operation offer to Russia, including: broad political guarantees to Russia, actions to ensure the transparency of the system, and an exchange of information and experts. Germany will also use its good relations with Russia to soften the Russian stance and persuade Moscow of the need for co-operation and the possibilities this can bring about. The German Foreign Ministry has announced that NATO-Russia exercises in the area of missile defence are planned to be held in March in Germany. Furthermore, Germany will endeavour to build more trust between NATO and Russia by continuing its efforts aimed at nuclear disarmament – improving transparency and security, and the withdrawal of US and Russian sub-strategic nuclear weapons from Europe in the future. Germany is arguing that, with a functioning missile defence system created in co-operation with

Russia, sub-strategic missile weapons need not to be deployed in Europe. To achieve this goal, Germany will take action as part of work on NATO's Defence and Deterrence Posture Review. It will also back initiatives aimed at persuading international public opinion to accept this.

- It cannot be ruled out that in future Germany will decide to make a greater contribution in the NATO system than just the participation of its Patriot systems, for example by buying and integrating the SM-3 missile systems with the German F124 frigates. According to the development concept 'Luftwaffe 2020' formulated in 2011 by the Ministry of Defence, developing capabilities in the area of missile defence is to be among the Bundeswehr's priorities.