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Abstract

This Info Flash is aimed at outlining the current motions in the extremely sensible relationship between the European Union (EU) and Ukraine. The current developments are very much centred on Germany and Poland's cooperation that is becoming more and more expressive with some of the particular military aid that these countries plan to send to Ukraine. Poland and Germany have determined that Ukraine deserves more profound military help and support from the EU and its members states (Radford, 2023). However, this hot topic about the Leopard tanks is debatable and controversial because of its urgency, and equally because of its importance in terms of its effects on EU-Russia relations.

The Issue at Hand

On the 22nd of February 2023, Germany's Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock stated that Germany would not stop Poland from delivering Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine (as cited in Radford, 2023). In essence, these two EU members expressed willingness to further provide aid to Ukraine with arms in addition to the already existing economic and security assistance (Radford, 2023). Ukraine as a regional strategic partner, had already undertaken significant efforts to modernise its military and increase its interoperability with NATO, something that will bring it closer to membership and enhance its ability to use the munitions stockpiles of the West. Indeed, because of the strategic alignment, aid for Ukraine remains an urgent security priority for NATO and the EU, especially the aid that is going to help Ukraine defend itself in this strenuous war (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2023).

How are the European States, and the EU Community, Currently Helping Ukraine?

When talking about EU's member states or the European Community (EC), there is an obligation to help their partners, even when referring to domains such as economics, security assistance as well as any other fields related to this (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, 2012, Art. 4). One of the EU's primary legal frameworks regulates these specific duties of the member states. To be precise, Art. 4 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)[1] regulates when the EU can sustain and help Ukraine and in which particular domains the EC can intervene. It is on this legal basis that the help aimed at rebuilding Ukraine has been given, help that has reached more than €18 billion (EC, 2022).

Why Should Poland send its Leopard 2 Tanks to Ukraine?

The Leopard 2 tank is a world-class weapon used by more than a dozen countries (Radford, 2023). Following Zelenskyy's declaration in January 2023, it can be seen that these tanks are seen as something much needed for the defence of Ukraine from all future Russian offensives. What makes these tanks special is the fact that two-thirds of them are situated and produced in Europe, so the delivery to Kyiv should be easy and fast (Radford, 2023). Moreover, each tank contains a 120mm Smoothbore gun as well as a 7.62mm machine gun and can reach speeds of 70 km/h, or 50 km/h when off-road, making manoeuvrability one of its key features. According to its German manufacturer Krauss-Maffei Wegmann, the Leopard also has all-round protection from threats, including improvised explosive devices, mines and anti-tank fire (Chernova, 2023).

As the story was developing, it became clear that Germany had not yet been approached by Poland about the delivery of their tanks to Ukraine (Kappler, 2023). What's more, the progressively unravelling position of the German government even stated that if this was the case, they would by no means turn down Poland's initiative (Kappler, 2023). In order to comply with German public security laws (War Weapons Control Act, 2022), and its international obligations, Germany must actually consent to the delivery of the tanks from Poland. Put bluntly, it was Poland, which is one of the strongest allies of Ukraine, that has been pressing Germany hard to send its Leopard 2 tanks for a long period of time (Charlish, 2023). In an interview last year, Polish Prime Minister, Mateusz Morawiecki, said that "right now, we are ready to send 60 of our modernised tanks", something that proves the country's hard commitments on tanks even before the current debates with Germany (CTV News, 2023).

With all of this in mind, even with the agreement of Germany and the departure of the tanks towards Ukraine, the route and the means of delivering the tanks to Ukraine will, as always, have to be carefully considered (Kappeler, 2023). From this development, however, President Zelenskyy appeared to go not much further than usual in his appreciation of the help of the member states and, as a result, posted a tankful but not too expressive public message on his Twitter account: "I am sincerely grateful to (German Chancellor) Olaf Scholz and all our friends in Germany!" (Zelenskyy, 2023).

The Recent Developments

On the 27th of January, Germany declared that European allies and its partners will plan to send 80 vehicles to Ukraine as soon as possible, a number that has only increased since then (Burchard et al., 2023). Moreover, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision in sending tanks to Ukraine marked a decisive moment in Western support for Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression (Burchard et al., 2023). And as the cooperation of the member states increases, so does the number of states that joined the new pledges. In particular, other countries such as Spain, Norway and Finland have equally promised and will likely send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine (Burchard et al., 2023). Another big push will also come from the US, which is similarly promising to send tanks to Ukraine, an act that is more of a political statement rather than practical (Burchard et al., 2023).

So What Else is Coming Into Motion?

The Russian war in Ukraine is all about the economy, territory and politics. However, many indirect problems stem from this war, some of which for the very community that is helping, namely the EC. Reports say that migration patterns have been affected on the territory of the EU, which has experienced a 15% increase on a yearly basis (EUAA, 2022). According to the EU Agency for Migration and Asylum, this mass migration has been caused by the current war in Ukraine, the exact place where the pledged Western tanks are heading (Burchard et al., 2023; EUAA, 2022). As a result, it can be said that the military help towards Ukraine has emphasised and strengthened cooperation and interoperability between EU member states, but is at the same time very likely to produce other unintended negative effects on EU security.

Footnotes

[1] Art.4 TFEU, JOUE 2012.

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