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Defence Industry

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Turkey is considering an acquisition of 350 ex-German Army Leopard-2 MBTs. The Turkish team visited Germany at the beginning of September to inspect the vehicles.

According to the Shpigel magazine, Turkey is currently negotiating the price and delivery schedule. There is also a requirement to repair and retrofit all vehicles intended for export.

Delivery of the second-hand Leopard 2A4 is under consideration. Using the same model earlier, Germany handed over a considerable quantity of tanks to Greece at no charge and won the MBT tender in this country. More than two dozens of the same vehicles were delivered to Poland and are in service with this country now. It appears that the same model is attractive for Turkey as well, in spite of the fact that this decision has certain reverse effects.

Undoubtedly, the technical specifications of the Leopard 2A4 MBTs are still at the modern level, and an option of getting this vehicle almost at no cost is sufficiently tempting. But obsolete equipment is obsolete equipment, and considerable funds are to be allocated to service them. It is well known that Poland has already come across this problem, while the retaining of licenses for manufacturing of spares and services is considered by Germany to be even more important than the sales of the vehicles themselves.

At the same time, a representative of the German MoD refused to comment this information, having emphasized that "Presently, Berlin has no such a request from Turkey". In his turn, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoshka Fisher confirmed that "there are strict rules for deliveries of armaments to the Germany's partners in the European Union and NATO". "A complicated situation with human rights persisted in Kurdish areas in the South of Turkey during the recent years, therefore sales of weapons to this country were impossible, - emphasized the Minister. - If the situation changes, we'll have to reconsider the possibility of such deals".

According to Yoshka Fisher, "sales of tanks will be under consideration only when positive changes take place in resolving the "Turkish southeast problem"".

Nevertheless, the German Minister of Defence Peter Shtryuk said that he is going to reconsider the previous approach with respect of Turkey. He is ready to lift restrictions on sales of weapons to this country. In the near future, the delivery of several hundreds of the Leopard-2 MBTs to Turkey will be under consideration

by the Federal Security Council.

Reconsideration of the former politics with respect to Ankara is considered to be expedient by Berlin in light of the Brussels's decision to start discussions with Turkish officials about Turkish membership in the UE, specified Peter Shtryuk.

Apart of the above, the military and technical cooperation of Germany and Turkey included delivery of the Germany-built missile boats to the Turkish Navy. Submarines of 209 project were built by the Turkish shipyards under license.

Alexandr Raynhardt, the representative of the concern Kraus-Mafei Wegman, the Leopard producer, said that "he hopes very much for the change in the previous approach of Berlin to the export of weapons". "The fact that we did not see any MBT of the German origin in Iraq is a result of strict export restrictions that are in force in Germany", - mentioned the expert.

Presently, as Mr. Raynhardt informed, deliveries of weapons to the "crisis regions" are under a ban for the German producers. Lightening of the former export rules is vital for the country's Defense Industry.

Earlier, the official position of Germany as to deliveries of main battle tanks to Turkey was ambiguously negative, but it has become groundless now, after recommendations of the European Commission to start talks with Ankara about membership in the EU. "If leaders of countries and governments of the EU make a decision to start talks with Turkey about joining to the EU, this will have a decisive effect on the German Ministry for Foreign Affairs", - the newspaper of the Germany's Ministry for Foreign Affairs is quoting.

The official circles proceed from the point that the Foreign Office will not further resist the deal, the issue said.

In 1999, the dispute over the export of weapons to Turkey resulted in a severe crisis in the ruling coalition of social democrats and the Green movement. Scheduled deliveries of one thousand Leopard-2 MBTs worth about €7 billion were canceled because of resistance of the Green movement.

