

After Deniz Yucel's release, Turkey pursues 1000 tank deal with Germany

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Turkish Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said in an interview with the German Press Agency on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference that he wanted German participation in the planned construction of the Turkish main battle tank "Altay". Such cooperation would benefit both sides.

Yildirim defended in this context the use of German battle tanks of the type "Leopard 2" in Syria. The participation of these tanks in the controversial Turkish offensive against the Kurdish militia YPG was "granted", he said and criticised the refusal of the federal government to retrofit the tanks with mine protection.

Order for Rheinmetall subsidiary

The Turkish government plans to build some 1,000 "Altay" battle tanks worth an estimated seven billion euros. According to the German Press Agency report, the Turkish truck and bus manufacturer BMC, with whom the Düsseldorf-based Rheinmetall Group founded the joint venture RBSS in 2016, offers the first tranche of

about 100 to 200 tanks. Company headquarters is in Ankara. Rheinmetall holds a minority of 40 percent. The decision on the contract will be followed in early 2018.

The headquarters of the defence company Rheinmetall in Dusseldorf

But without the approval of the Federal Government, the participation of a German company in tank construction in Turkey is not possible. Already last year, however, the federal government had cut export permits to a low point due to tensions with Ankara. After the start of the Turkish offensive against the Kurdish militia YPG in Syria's Afrin, they were practically stopped entirely. Yildirim argues: "We are a NATO member, Germany is a NATO member, and in our region, we are protecting the NATO borders."

Lifting the travel warning to Turkey

Despite all the travel warnings, tourism from Germany to Turkey has declined less than expected. "This year, reservations are up by 50 percent," Yildirim said. "I think (...) there will be more tourists with the cancellation of travel warning."

The Foreign Office had tightened the travel warnings last July after the arrest of German human rights activist Peter Steudtner. Since then, there have been warnings of arbitrary detentions that could occur in all parts of Turkey, including "touristy regions". Steudtner was released in October. According to the Foreign Office, there are still five other political prisoners in Turkey who have German citizenship.

Erdogan is coming, Merkel is coming

The Turkish Prime Minister also announced a visit to Germany by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan - after swearing in a new federal government. "Of course, when the government is formed, there will be high-level visits." President Erdogan will come "and Mrs Merkel, the Chancellor, will come to Turkey".