



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

January milestone in the supply of weapons to Ukraine



At the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace was very suspicious of the idea of sending British tanks to the Ukrainian army. "Just providing British tanks wouldn't really work", Wallace said last March to The Mail. He believed that there was not enough time to train Ukrainian soldiers to operate modern tanks and that it was a much better idea to help Ukraine with Soviet and Russian-made weapons, because they could be immediately used in battle.

The UK is now leading a broad allied action to send Ukraine a series of state-of-the-art Western-made tanks, as this is what Ukraine's defence needs most. Even before the start of the Russian aggression, the UK has been a leader in sending modern weapons to Ukraine. Over the past 10 months, it has been a training centre for Ukrainian soldiers in handling modern weapons, including six types of armoured personnel carriers it has delivered to Ukraine so far.

The German barrier is about to fall

There is a high probability that the Western allies will soon cross the barrier and start supplying Ukraine with modern tanks. Developments indicate that important decisions could be made in the last week of January. A new meeting of the Ramstein contact group of western defence ministers, which coordinates military aid to Ukraine, has been announced for January 20. The 50-member coalition led by the US could make a breakthrough and decide to send tanks. Just two days later, the Franco-German summit on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty will follow.

These two meetings will, with combined effect, have the power to open a new phase in sending military aid to Ukraine, and tanks are their central issue. Germany is the central obstacle in making new decisions, because its Leopard tanks are badly needed by the Ukrainian defence, particularly due to the

prospect of a new Russian offensive. Despite this, Chancellor Olaf Scholz and part of his government are reluctant to send aid, ultimately because they do not want to make that decision alone. In the meantime, the pressure has become very strong, both from NATO allies and from Germany itself. Scholz has few arguments left to defend further delay.

Last week, France broke through the barrier by announcing that it would send a contingent of AMX-10 RC armoured fighting vehicles to Ukraine, which was the trigger for the US president to convince Chancellor Scholz to follow the French example. He previously announced that he would send about 50 Bradley armoured vehicles to Ukraine.

Last Thursday, under this pressure, Germany decided to send up to 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine. Armoured personnel carriers were an important obstacle that has been overcome, and now Germany needs to be "broken" in connection with the tanks. That role has been taken by the UK, announcing that it will be the first Ukrainian ally to send tanks. Sources cited by Sky News are talking about 10 Challenger 2 tanks, enough to equip a squadron. If that happens, Germany will hardly be able to keep the ramp down with regard to 2,000 Leopard tanks produced so far, which are part of 13 European armies and whose final use is decided by Germany, as the producing country.

Ukrainian urgently needs modern weapons

This German barrier could be removed by the end of January, thanks to significant pressure from European allies who have Leopard tanks in stock, and have no problem with sending them to Ukraine, but until now they have been prevented by the German veto on exports. Poland is one of them, and its Deputy Foreign Minister Paweł Jabłoński said that they encourage "other countries to form a broad coalition for the transfer of more modern tanks to Ukraine, such as Leopard tanks".

According to the estimates of the commander in chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, Gen Valeriy Zaluzhny, presented at the end of 2022, Ukraine needs 300 tanks and 600-700 fighting vehicles to succeed in defeating the Russian aggressor. It is a sign that the combat performance of the Ukrainian army has improved, and its needs are slightly smaller than six months ago.

Mikhail Podalyak, adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, said that an additional 500 tanks and 2,000 armoured vehicles, in addition to other weapons, are required for victory. As an example of scale, Ukraine had at least 3,200 tanks and armoured vehicles before the Russian attack, of which more than 90% were Russian and Soviet-made, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

Ukraine has lost at least 1,000 tanks and armoured vehicles in the fight so far. This is a huge loss of heavy military equipment, the size of one third of the total arsenal. But at the same time, it captured from the enemy and put into use about 500 infantry fighting vehicles, which somewhat mitigated the total losses, Ryan Brobst and Bradley Bowman of the Washington-based Foundation for Defence of Democracies concluded in their analysis.

A long list of donors

There are no clear announcements about the number of modern Western tanks that could be delivered to Ukraine. The figures could be more precisely discussed soon, as consultations among the allies have apparently been coming to an end. The stocks of modern tanks, primarily with the European allies, and particularly their willingness to send them to Ukraine when they receive Germany's approval, are so large that Ukrainian demands seem realistically attainable.

Poland alone, for example, has about 200 German Leopard tanks, and due to its previous large role in supplying Ukraine with weapons, it may be ready to deliver a large number of tanks to Ukraine. There are also Finland, the

Czech Republic, Spain, the Netherlands and other European owners of German tanks, whose support within the coalition is also certain, as is the support of the UK and the US, as leaders in the supply of Ukraine.

Western allies expect an important shift, possibly a turning point in the war in Ukraine, given that supplying Ukraine with weapons is considered a prerequisite for its military success, and that success as a prerequisite for its good position in future negotiations. "We need to provide support to Ukraine now, including military support, because that's the only way to convince Russia that they have to sit down and negotiate in good faith and respect Ukraine as a sovereign independent nation in Europe", said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the recent Security Conference in Sälen, Sweden.