



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

NATO ministers in Turkey seek consensus between competing priorities



The informal meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Belek (Antalya), Turkey, **scheduled** for 14-15 May, is an important stage in the preparations for the Alliance's summit in The Hague at the end of June.

The host of the meeting, Turkish Minister Hakan Fidan, wants to **demonstrate** Ankara's ability to balance NATO membership and pragmatic relations with Moscow while trying to articulate Turkey's ambitions as a regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean.

The format of the meeting encourages an informal exchange of views without formal decisions, enabling ministers to explore the boundaries of compromise before confronting demands for final decisions at the summit.

The greatest **challenge** is the issue of burden-sharing. The United States, represented by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, will again insist on meeting the goal of at least 2% of GDP for defence, but he will also talk about increasing it up to 5%.

In his statements, Rubio is already repeating President Trump's **words** that every ally must "pay what they promised" and that failure to do so would lead to the erosion of the alliance's credibility.

European capitals, faced with high public deficits and a slow economy, are looking for more flexible deadlines and temporary deferral mechanisms, creating a gap between the austere American position and the reality of national budgets.

Terrorism, migration, Ukraine

Another topic at the top of the agenda is terrorism and migration. Ankara expects greater support in the exchange of intelligence on Kurdish and Islamist groups but would also like to see concrete steps taken to protect the alliance's southern border.

Turkey insists on an expansion of the mandate of NATO missions, particularly in the training of local forces and the strengthening of land

barriers along the border with Syria.

The issue of migration waves with humanitarian and security implications is also a priority, as hundreds of thousands of refugees are expected to be diverted to Eurasia if the escalation of the conflict in Syria turns into a new wave of violence.

Support for Ukraine is at the core of the discussion. The informal forum will also be attended by representatives from Kyiv, who will demand a clear guarantee for the delivery of advanced air defence systems and unmanned technologies as well as financial support for the reconstruction of critical infrastructure.

Strengthening the eastern flank is becoming an increasingly important issue

Although the main aid packages were transferred through European and American channels last week, Kyiv wants a clear timetable for deliveries before the next operational season on the frontline. In addition, Ukraine insists on political coordination within NATO to prevent possible attempts by Russia to exploit diplomatic rifts within the alliance.

Strengthening the eastern flank is becoming an increasingly important issue. The Baltic states and Poland are calling for the formalisation of a plan for the permanent rotation of land contingents and air units, with the possibility of establishing a permanent naval presence in the Baltic Sea.

At the same time, Poland is seeking additional anti-tank units and interoperability exercises with the US 82nd Airborne Division.

Relations between Turkey and Ukraine add a special dimension to the meeting. Ankara is sceptical about Kyiv's proposal that NATO should take control of the sea routes in the Black Sea, as it believes this would undermine Turkey's monopoly over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles.

In return for support for Ukraine, Fidan will make the accelerated abolition of tourist visas and joint energy projects at sea a condition. This kind of trade in political concessions points to a deep compensatory dynamic within the alliance, where regional priorities can take precedence over general principles of solidarity.

Financial worries

Financial instruments and costs are also a topic of discussion. Ministerial circles will discuss the establishment of a special NATO fund for emergency situations, which would supplement national budgets in the event of sudden crises – be it new waves of migration or military-political escalations.

There will be a proposal for the members with a surplus in their defence budgets to temporarily "lend" some of their capabilities to those who have not yet reached the 2% goal. This proposal, if adopted, could reduce tensions and avoid the justified fear of an American blockade of financial flows.

The sharp rise in inflation and interest rates in Western Europe could trigger a wave of postponements of defence commitments

The main risks include the possibility of Hungary and Slovakia refusing to support the joint declaration on Ukraine unless they receive an exemption from additional financial obligations and political conditionality from Brussels.

In addition, the sharp rise in **inflation** and interest rates in Western Europe could trigger a wave of postponements of defence commitments, as states would seek to extend payment deadlines, which could jeopardise the entire burden-sharing strategy.

Mechanisms for maintaining

unity

Despite the risks, several important conclusions for the summit in The Hague will come from Antalya. It is expected that the joint commitment to the medium-term goal of 2% of GDP will be confirmed, with precise mechanisms for reporting and mutual support.

The adoption of a declaration of support for Ukraine with a commitment to pass the aid package through national parliaments by mid-July will be a symbolic but also a practical gesture of unity.



There is a real chance that all countries will gradually harmonise their budgets so that they reach the 2% goal by the end of 2026

Most likely, Turkey will receive assurances on expanding cooperation in the region, paving the way for joint naval operations in the Black Sea and elsewhere, with the Turkish Navy remaining a leading partner.

With regard to the summit, two processes will therefore be of decisive importance. First, formalising the so-called "soft law" mechanisms – non-binding but politically important declarations that can bridge differences before they are reflected in formal treaties or resolutions.

Additionally, launching a test initiative for intergovernmental financial support within NATO could enhance solidarity and speed up response times during crisis situations. It is expected that this proposal, together with the declaration of support for Ukraine, will be included in the working reports for the

summit in The Hague.

Over the next six months, the Alliance will be faced with several possible development paths: on the one hand, the strongest members, such as the US, UK and Poland, could form a rapid intervention group, while other allies lag behind and temporarily delay their commitments.

On the other hand, there is a real chance that all countries will gradually harmonise their budgets so that they reach the 2% goal by the end of 2026, activating a new NATO fund that would serve as a safety net for members whose economies are in transition.

But it is also possible that internal pressures will lead to a breakdown of unity, with some of the countries calling for a permanent reduction in planned allocations or even exemptions, which would weaken American support and redefine the Alliance's role in the defence structure system.

In any case, the Antalya meeting should validate the Alliance's ability to navigate its own vulnerabilities and strike a balance between conflicting priorities.