

Germany reviews arms shipments to Turkey amid row

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Berlin: Germany said on Friday it was reviewing all arms sales to Turkey amid a bitter row between the NATO partners that has sharply worsened since Ankara arrested several human rights activists.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel (R) welcomes Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as he arrives to attend the G20 summit in Hamburg, northern Germany (AFP)

Berlin stepped up its travel advisory for Turkey yesterday and warned it would review state guarantees for foreign investment there - measures which Ankara labelled "blackmail and threats".

As part of Germany's sweeping overhaul of bilateral ties, the top-circulation Bild newspaper reported that Berlin was also "freezing all planned and ongoing arms deliveries to Turkey".

The economy ministry told AFP that the "overhaul" of relations announced by Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel "covers all sectors, including defence exports policy".

"Therefore all requests for defence exports are being reviewed," it added in a statement.

"Ongoing developments and especially respect for human rights are given particular importance in defence export decisions - and this also applies for Turkey." Chancellor Angela Merkel's right-hand man, Peter Altmaier, warned in a ZDF television interview that "we will at any time consider whether further measures are necessary".

Relations between Turkey and Germany, home to three million ethnic Turks, have been badly strained, particularly since a failed coup a year ago against President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

In the months after the July 2016 coup attempt, Germany already blocked 11 separate arms export shipments to Turkey, including handguns, ammunition or weapons components, according to media reports.

Relations sharply deteriorated after a Turkish court Tuesday ordered six rights activists should remain in custody for allegedly aiding a "terror" group, among them German citizen Peter Steudtner.

German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble compared Erdogan's Turkey with the former communist German Democratic Republic (GDR).

"Turkey is arresting people arbitrarily and not respecting even minimal consular standards," said Schaeuble.

"It reminds me of the way it was in the GDR. When you travelled there, you knew, if something happens to you, nobody can help you."

Altmaier also confirmed that Berlin would urge Brussels to freeze 4.45 billion euros (USD 5.2 billion) in EU funds theoretically earmarked until end-2020 for Turkey, a long-term aspirant for membership to the bloc.

Meanwhile, two German television news channels, n-tv and N24, said they had stopped broadcasting a commercial clip advertising Turkey as a business destination amid the sharply heightened tensions.

"Even though we draw a clear distinction between programming and commercials, it is important to us not to irritate our viewers in light of the latest developments," said N24 in a statement.

- Zee News