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Spain and Turkey strain NATO plans in Kosovo

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Spain and Turkey are straining NATO plans in Kosovo, by either planning to retrieve forces – the case of Madrid – or by putting limits on NATO-EU cooperation – the case of Ankara.

In Madrid, Spanish press reported that the government's need to retrieve its troops from international missions in order not to exceed the limit of 3000 soldiers outside the country could be an excuse for Spain's Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero to abandon the Kosovo mission, one of the most polemical ones in which Spain is taking part.

The problem to which Zapatero is confronted is that the troops are defending an independence that he doesn't recognize, as he explains it in a parliamentary response to the Spanish opposition.

"Spain did not recognize" Kosovo's sovereignty and considers that "the only source of legality concerning the situation of the Serbian province and the presence of the civil and military missions is the Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council". This text, which supports the Spanish presence, considers that the future Kosovo will be "inside" the Republic of Serbia.

And precisely, the fact that the UN resolution says that Kosovo is a part of Serbia – while NATO troops seem to support independence -- could be the point to justify Spain's departure.

The mission deployed in Kosovo counts over 600 troops.

Meanwhile, in Ankara, Turkey has been blocking a NATO plan to help launch and train a fledgling Kosovo security force, in the latest setback for troubled international efforts in the territory, diplomats say.

The dispute stems from Turkish concerns over NATO cooperation with the EU in Kosovo. Ankara fears this will mean sharing sensitive military information with non-NATO Cyprus, the island at the centre of decades of Turkish-Greek tension.

"We would like to get this resolved before defense ministers meet," one alliance diplomat said, adding that NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer was leading efforts to find a compromise before the June 12 meeting in Brussels.



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NATO officials stressed the dispute that the dispute related only to long-held alliance plans to take on new tasks there, chiefly military training.

That was due to entail NATO overseeing the dissolution of Kosovo's existing civil emergency force, the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC), and the creation of a 2,500-strong, lightly armed Kosovo Security Force (KSF) in its place.

Diplomats familiar with Turkey's position said Ankara was insisting a revised NATO operational plan refer explicitly to a six-year-old pact with the EU that allows only limited cooperation between the two bodies.

"They say we should respect the existing agreement," one diplomat said of Ankara's insistence that cooperation with the EU be guided by the "Berlin Plus" agreement of 2002, under which the EU can draw on NATO military assets in defined cases.