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Defence Minister talks with Lt. Col. Víctor Manuel Garrido, commander of the 'Paznic' detachment, and Major José Manuel Molina, commander of the 'Tigrú' detachment.

# VISITING THE DETACHMENTS IN ROMANIA AND TÜRKIYE

Margarita Robles thanks Spanish soldiers for their participation in the air defence of NATO's eastern flank

**I**n February 2025, Defence Minister Margarita Robles visited three of the contingents taking part in NATO's operation Persistent Effort to monitor and protect NATO's airspace on the eastern flank. On 12 February 2025, she travelled to Mihail Kogalniceanu air base in Romania, where she met with her Romanian counterpart, Angel Tilvar, and members of the 'Paznic' and 'Tigrú' detachments.

One week later, on 19 February, she travelled to Incirlik air base in Türkiye, where she met with members of the 'Patriot' anti-aircraft battery.

In Romania, Robles expressed her satisfaction with our Armed Forces' contribution "to NATO and to the security of the countries under threat", and praised the "professionalism and dedication" of the members of these detachments, thanks

to whom Spain's commitment is "a reality and a source of pride".

The two defence ministers stressed the excellent collaboration between their respective armed forces, both bilaterally and within NATO, as part of the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the Kingdom of Spain. They also agreed on the main challenges affecting European security, both as a result of Russia's war

against Ukraine and the threats coming from the south.

Angel Tilvar explained that in his country, which borders Ukraine, the conflict is felt "at close quarters". This is why the support of Spanish military members is so important for the Romanians. "We want them to remain here", said Tilvar, who presented Robles with the badge of honour of the Romanian Armed Forces in gratitude for her contribution to the strengthening of bilateral Romanian-Spanish defence relations.

After the meeting, Margarita Robles toured the installations where the 175 men and women of the 'Paznic' detachment, commanded by Lt. Col. Víctor Manuel Garrido, carry out their work. On 6 February 2025, this detachment incorporated an A400 aircraft from the 31st Wing, equipped with in-flight refuelling capability. This has increased the radius of action and flight time of the six Eurofighters of the 14th Wing, as well as the number of military personnel deployed. Another milestone was the assembly by the Second Air Deployment Support Squadron (SEADA) of two deployable aircraft shelters, which has improved operability in adverse conditions.

The mission of the current 'Paznic' contingent began at the end of November 2024 with the arrival of the first troops from the 14th Wing. They relieved the 12th and



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Eurofighters are capable of taking off within a maximum of 15 minutes in response to an airspace violation or an aircraft flight trajectory deviation.

15th Wings, which had been conducting the air policing mission since August. Initially, the detachment had six Eurofighters from the 14th Wing and some 140 military personnel from up to 17 different Air Force and Space units, including support controllers stationed at the air and tactical control centres in Bucharest.

Since the operation began, almost 400 flight hours have been flown in some 200

missions, including day and nighttime air-to-air and air-to-ground missions, some of which involved in-flight refuelling. During its deployment, the 'Paznic' detachment has collaborated with up to eight nations.

Spanish fighter jets frequently fly joint sorties with Romanian fighters. In fact, the day after the Defence Minister's visit on 13 February 2025, two Eurofighters of the 'Paznic' detachment and other aircraft of the host nation were scrambled following the detection of a nighttime intrusion into Romanian airspace, after radars had identified a possible drone on the Ukrainian border.

The 40-member 'Tigru' detachment, commanded by Major José Manuel Molina, is located 60 kilometres south of Mihail Kogalniceanu air base. The detachment is in charge of the AN/TPS/43M air surveillance radar of the Mobile Air Control Group (GRUMOCA), which exceeded 18,000 operating hours monitoring NATO airspace on Europe's eastern flank. It has a very high operational capability and range, allowing it to monitor from Moldova to the Turkish coast.

Also on Romanian soil, specifically at Cincu military base, there is a company-size task group of the Spanish Marine Brigade, with more than 200 troops and some 40 vehicles. This contingent is integrated in a French-led multinational battle group, one of the eight deployed along



EMAD

The GRUMOCA's AN/TPS/43M radar, sent to Romania in October 2022 and operated by the 'Tigru' detachment, reached 18,000 hours of air surveillance in February 2025.

## INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

### A total of 21 contingents, with some 3,000 troops, have participated in the mission to support Türkiye in the past ten years

the eastern flank to help deter the Russian threat in this allied territory.

#### ANTI-MISSILE SYSTEM

At Incirlik air base, Robles highlighted the “dedication” of the 138 military personnel participating in NATO operation Support to Türkiye. Spain has a ‘Patriot’ anti-missile battery deployed there to protect the civilian population of Adana, a city with two million people located 120 kilometres away from the Syrian border. The members of the 21st contingent, from the Army’s Anti-Aircraft Artillery Command, have been stationed there under the command of Lt. Col. Fernando García-Reparaz since 20 December 2024.

The Spanish Defence Minister considered this mission to be “fundamental” for both NATO and the Turkish Army, since “it is not only about air defence, but also about sharing experiences and carrying out exercises that allow for constant learning and training”. The operation in Türkiye “acquires a very special importance from the bilateral point of view”, she added.

While visiting the Spanish contingent’s living area, Robles held an emotional reunion with the Yılmaz family, who were res-



The ‘Patriot’ anti-missile battery protects the population of the city of Adana against potential threats from Iran and Syria 24-7.

cued by the Military Emergency Unit (UME) after the earthquake that struck south-eastern Türkiye in February 2023, in a difficult operation that lasted around 30 hours. Support to the population was provided by personnel of operation Support to Türkiye

and the ‘Dédalo 23’ Expeditionary Strike Group, which was sent to the Turkish coast to assist the victims of the disaster.

On 30 January 2025, twenty days before the Defence Minister’s visit, a military ceremony, presided over by Spanish ambassador to Türkiye, Cristina Latorre, commemorated the mission’s tenth anniversary. During the event, she was accompanied by representatives of allied nations, such as the United States, which deploys its 39th Wing at Incirlik air base, Poland and Türkiye, and NATO’s Deployable CIS detachment.

The ‘Patriot’ battery has been permanently stationed at Incirlik since January 2015, when the Spanish troops joined NATO’s mission in Türkiye. Spain worked closely with Türkiye to choose this site, in close coordination with the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), which holds the operational command of the mission and delegates operational control to the Allied Air Command, located at Ramstein air base (Germany). This is the first operation in which Spain has deployed a ballistic missile defence system abroad, and over the past ten years, 21 contingents and nearly 3,000 troops have taken part in this mission.

**Santiago F. del Vado**



Reunion of UME members with the Yılmaz family, whom they rescued after the devastating earthquake in Türkiye in 2023.