

Europe's 'Green' militarists

# German Green Party campaigns for Congo mission

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The days when the German Green Party opposed international military operations by Germany's armed forces, or at least criticized them, have long since passed. After seven years in government, the party has returned to the opposition benches, but it has by no means returned to its former pacifist positions.

The Greens are among the most avid proponents of a German military mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, one that could easily become the most extensive and dangerous foreign operation conducted by German soldiers since World War II.

To the extent that the Greens have levelled any criticism against the government, it is criticism from the right, not the left. For them, the plans of the Christian Democratic-Social Democratic grand coalition do not go far enough. While the government wants to limit the deployment of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) to the capital Kinshasa and its immediate surroundings, and set a time limit of four months for the operation, the Greens are pleading for a mission that is unlimited both in time and geographical scope.

On May 16, the day before the cabinet decided to send 780 Bundeswehr soldiers as part of a European Union mission to the Congo, the Green parliamentary faction submitted a resolution expressly welcoming the operation. The Federal Republic of Germany has "the interest and the obligation to make an appropriate long-term contribution to the stabilization of the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," the motion declared. It continued: "The troops being sent by the European Union are an important contribution to the security of the elections."

The motion was directed against the restrictions originally outlined by Defence Minister Franz Josef Jung (Christian Democratic Union—CDU) limiting the deployment of German troops to the Congolese capital. "The government should not impose any artificial restrictions on this United Nations mission," the Greens declared, adding, "The help provided by the Bundeswehr should not end at the Kinshasa city boundary."

While the government maintains the fiction that the Congo mission is one of limited duration on behalf of the UN, and is

merely to guarantee the smooth running of the forthcoming elections, the Greens regard the deployment of German soldiers into the heart of Africa as an integral part of a comprehensive foreign policy strategy. "Support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo should form part of a coherent and collaborative foreign, security and development policy towards the states of Africa, our southern neighbour continent," the Green Party motion stated.

The Greens are advocating a long-term military commitment throughout Africa. Their motion asks the government to ensure that the Congo mission include police training and army reform, supporting the UN troops "over the longer term with logistics and both civilian and military leadership personnel," strengthening their ability to "uncover weapons dumps and finally disarm the numerous militias..."

This boils down to the permanent stationing of German soldiers—and not only in the Congo. As part of their "coherent African policy," the Greens call for the German government to support "UN peacekeeping missions in Africa through financial means, civilian and military experts and logistics."

Before submitting the motion, Green Party parliamentary deputies Hans Christian Ströbele and Winfried Nachtwei had visited the Congo. Both followed their trip by submitting detailed reports in which they strongly advocated a Bundeswehr mission.

Ströbele's role is particularly worth noting. The 67-year-old attorney, a veteran of the 1968 protest movement and a founding member of the Greens, was for a long time considered to represent the left wing of the party and to be an internal party critic of Joschka Fischer, the Green leader who served as foreign minister in the previous Social Democratic Party (SPD)-Green Party government.

In the 2002 federal elections, Ströbele was not offered a safe place on the party slate, so he stood as a candidate in the Berlin Kreuzberg constituency, becoming the only directly-elected Green Party Bundestag (parliament) deputy.

In previous inner-party disputes over German military missions abroad, Ströbele usually led the "no" camp, generally capitulating at the last minute and urging the party to close

ranks. Now he is seeking to smother in advance any objections to the Congo mission.

The very first sentence of his Congo report reads: “European Union soldiers are not being sent to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to force Europe’s will upon the government or the population; nor are they being deployed to start and conduct a war, or finish one, and certainly not to seek to secure European or German business interests.”

Ströbele does not provide any evidence for these claims, which would be difficult to furnish. There is no lack of background reports (including in the German press) concerning the enormous natural wealth of the country. An article in *Internationale Politik* by German UN diplomat Albrecht Conze, whom Ströbele and Nachtwei met in the Congo, describes in detail how this wealth is being plundered by different great powers and their agents on the ground and taken abroad.

To say that Germany and Europe are not pursuing economic interests in this case is a fairy tale, which becomes more all the more improbable the more frequently Ströbele repeats it. “It seems to me,” he writes, “that the danger is negligible that the EU mission and that of the Bundeswehr will serve German economic interests and that a neo-colonial policy is being promoted.” What proof does he provide for this assertion? A “civilian interlocutor from Bukavu” answered this reproach by saying it was “stupid!”

Ströbele eagerly quotes such anonymous sources, according to whom German soldiers are not only welcome in the Congo, but yearned for. “The EU force, and in particular one with German participation, is regarded as particularly effective and neutral,” he writes. “The refusal to send EU troops, however, would be regarded as Europe and Germany displaying a lack of interest in the development of Africa.”

He justifies the expansion of the mandate to areas beyond Kinshasa in a similar way. “A mandate limited geographically to the capital Kinshasa and the airfield and to the task of evacuating election helpers and Europeans in the event of a crisis” would be little understood and “would be very difficult to explain to the Congolese population,” Ströbele writes.

Given the nature of the various groups that are contesting for power and influence in the Congo, it is no wonder that the plans for the Bundeswehr advocated by Ströbele and Nachtwei find enthusiastic support amongst them. The various warlords, militias and tribal chiefs who are at loggerheads are all striving for good relations with one or more imperialist powers. Without support from outside, they could not maintain themselves. In this regard, Germany is a particularly sought-after partner, first because it is quite rich, and second—in contrast to France and the US—because it has not yet aligned itself with any particular grouping.

The allegedly democratic elections will not change the catastrophic conditions in the country one iota. At best, they will determine which ethnic or political grouping of the

Congolese elite will in future plunder the population and enjoy preferential relations with the great powers.

In this respect, the Congo does not differ much from Iraq, where the alleged “democratisation process,” under the direction of the occupying powers, has led to an acute aggravation of tensions between the various ethnic groups.

No other Bundestag faction supports the Congo mission with such enthusiasm and unanimity as the Greens. There are substantial reservations among the Christian Democrats, the Social Democrats and the Liberal Democrats; the Left Party opposes the mission.

Many parliamentarians fear that the government may be embarking upon an adventure with an uncertain outcome. They fear that the Bundeswehr could become enmeshed in a conflict for which it is not prepared, either militarily or psychologically. Even if they endorse such operations in principle, they believe the German population is not yet sufficiently conditioned to accept military setbacks and high casualty levels.

The Greens have no such worries. They show the least regard for the lives and well-being of the ordinary soldiers they would send there, displaying a good measure of social arrogance. Many of these former pacifists exercised their right to refuse to perform military service as conscripts, undertaking civilian duties instead. Their children are rarely found in the ranks of the Bundeswehr. So it is not the lives of their loved ones that are being put at risk.

The Greens support a professional army, and therefore take the position that those who seek payment for being soldiers must be prepared to put their lives on the line. They display the same class conceit towards the Bundeswehr soldiers that they have for the unemployed, having overseen numerous welfare cuts while they were in office.

The transformation of the Greens is breathtaking. The one-time pacifists have shed their old skins to become unabashed proponents of imperialist military operations. In the past, the imperialists tended to send their missionaries first before dispatching the troops. Today, the Greens have taken on this role.



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