

German government to increase its military budget

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The German government wants to raise the defence budget starting in 2017 and massively expand the armed forces. Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble made the announcement in an interview that appeared in the Sunday edition of *Bild*. “Naturally, in light of the crises and instability in the world, we will have to shoulder higher defence costs in the coming years,” said Schäuble, adding “in the short term, that is, in the coming year, we can only do very little to raise the defence budget, because industry cannot accommodate such a large arms project so quickly.” Starting in 2017, however, the defence budget will be raised, he said. Additional funds must be made available for development and domestic security.

The finance minister’s announcement that the defence budget will be increased and a “large arms projects” set in motion is the next step in the implementation of plans by the ruling elite to rebuild the military and prepare to wage war, in the face of overwhelming popular opposition. More than a year after the German government announced the “end of military restraint” at the Munich Security Conference 2014, and after months of campaigning by the media for more weapons and more military engagements abroad, the time has come to put this plan into action.

The first concrete step came Wednesday, when the German parliament (Bundestag) approved a multibillion-dollar contract with Airbus to supply 168 military helicopters to the German army, at a cost of €8.7 billion. Both the Christian Democratic Union and the Socialist Democrats backed the purchase. The opposition parties, which normally support military spending, voted against the deal, but only because the cost has increased significantly.

In an interview with the official magazine of the armed forces, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen

(Christian Democratic Union, CDU) repeated her demand for a massive arms programme in line with the government’s new aggressive military doctrine.

She told the magazine that last year “the question justifiably arose repeatedly whether there is adequate deployable manpower and equipment.” The armed forces must “permanently modernise themselves and adapt to keep pace with changing parameters,” von der Leyen said.

“If one looks at the entire process of building up the armed forces, we’re talking about a total cost of 200 billion euros,” said the defence minister. Everyone can see “billions are needed every year along with continual planning in order to maintain and renew our inventory.” Her perception is that “the army has built up an enormous deficit in investment with regard to modern working conditions and equipment. We have to work on this.”

In the course of the interview, von der Leyen made it clear what she meant. As a NATO framework nation and in other alliances, the army must naturally “always maintain an appropriate breadth of military capabilities, such as for example as NATO spearhead, or in the leadership of the education missions in northern Iraq or in Afghanistan.”

It is important to her “that the armed forces is not just good on paper, but also that it can put its ability to achieve into practise and prove itself.” And this of course has “a lot to do with readiness.”

In other words, the armed forces needs more new weapon systems and must modernise the equipment already available. “The equipment that is available to the troops for practise and operations on the ground has clearly already been reduced in the past,” the minister complained. The army cannot be permitted to “slip into a state of bad management that increasingly

undermines basic operations and training.”

Von der Leyen once again conjured up the catastrophe scenario that has been repeated tirelessly by a complicit media for months. News stories about the dilapidated equipment of the armed forces have appeared over and over again.

The minister pledged to “stop this downward trend. She questioned both the cap on the number of troops and the ceiling for “large equipment” with the corresponding estimate of 225 Leopard 2 battle tanks and 350 Puma armoured personnel carriers in 2011. And she announced concrete measures.

With regard to the tank battalions, for example: “instead of discarding and scrapping functional Leopard 2 tanks, we should consider whether we can integrate the available equipment into existing structures.”

At the Bergen army camp in Niedersachsen, a demobilised tank battalion is to be reactivated. Concretely, that means that after the withdrawal of the British armed forces in 2016, at least a thousand soldiers and 44 Leopard tanks of the tank battalion 414 will be stationed in Bergen. All together, the armed forces currently have more than four other active and another demobilised tank battalion at its disposal.

Von der Leyen drew a connection between the strengthening of the tank battalions and the mobilisation of NATO forces in eastern Europe for confrontation with Russia: “With the rapid spearhead, for example, we will have to make it possible to be ready for deployment in between two and five days. That is totally different from the 180 days time-frame we used to have.” For this reason, we need “more equipment, for example in the case of the tanks,” which have to be “available immediately.”

The infrastructure of the armed forces is also, according to von der Leyen, “literally a huge construction site.” Up to €4 billion will be invested in it already by the end of 2017. There is “an immediate action programme for the renovation of barracks, which will take care of the worst and most urgent inadequacies.”



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