

German government increases defence budget and plans massive rearmament

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On Wednesday, the German cabinet adopted a four year budget plan that would dramatically increase spending on the military, police, and intelligence services.

German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble (Christian Democrats, CDU) did not mince words at a press conference Wednesday, declaring, “The central points of this budget and finance plan are of course the internal and external security of our country.”

In an overview on the finance ministry’s official website, it states on the key point of external security, “Given the variety and changing nature of the tasks of the German army, as part of international coalitions as well as alliance and national defence, the defence budget will be in the new finance plan by a total of around €10.2 billion.”

Specifically, the defence budget is to rise from €34.3 billion to €39.2 billion in 2020 (an increase of 14.3 percent). The majority of funds will flow into the rearmament of the army, for which fully €9.4 billion is to be set aside. The second-largest category is “international deployments” with over €1 billion.

Along with the German army, the intelligence agencies and security apparatus are being significantly strengthened. According to the finance ministry, “the spending on internal security [...will be] increased by around €2.1 billion by 2020, an above average increase.” Key points would be “the new programme to strengthen the security agencies as well as the federal police.”

The interior ministry (BMI), bragged on its official website that its budget would surpass €8 billion for the first time. In its 2016 budget, the government provided an additional 750 employees for the security services and equipment worth €328 million by 2019. In addition, 3,000 new positions with the federal police

have been created. The BMI would be continuing along this route with the 2017 budget. Among the items decided were “further strengthening of the security agencies with an additional security package of equipment totalling €630 million by 2020.”

In reality, spending on internal and external security is even higher. The €10 billion officially made available to “overcome the challenge of the refugee influx” will be available for, among other things, combatting the “causes of flight”—the new euphemism for the army’s interventions in North Africa and the Middle East. The federal police and ministry for migration and refugees will also receive additional funds from the “refugee pot” so they can increase personnel.

While the government is spending billions on internal and external security, other areas are being cut. “Budget discipline also means critically examining the efficacy and efficiency of measures and programmes,” the budget agreement states. Among other things, so-called spending reviews will be conducted “in the areas of housing funding and funding programmes in the sphere of energy transition and climate protection.”

It is already clear that the increases for the interior and defence ministries are only the beginning of a more comprehensive rearmament programme. In January, defence minister Ursula Von der Leyen held out the prospect of an additional €130 billion for the military by 2030 and presented a paper to the defence committee in the Bundestag calling for the purchase of hundreds of tanks, artillery pieces, naval helicopters and other large items of military equipment.

Defence policy spokespeople from the governing and opposition parties criticised the increased spending as inadequate. Florian Hahn, defence policy spokesman for the CSU, told *Die Welt*, “the scale is nevertheless

unsatisfactory.” The “investment package demanded by the minister” was “not covered” and the insufficient injection of funds was the “wrong signal” and left “doubts among the troops whether we are confronting the shortages with sufficient seriousness.”

Rainer Arnold, the defence spokesman for the Social Democrats, went even further and described the benchmark figures as “disappointing.” The defence budget was increasing, “but given the lack of equipment and the requirement for increased personnel in the army” it “fell far short.” The adopted increases were “utterly inadequate” and “particularly given the lack of equipment, a real blow.” With an army “which in part only functions on paper”, Germany would “not be equal to the rising security policy demands.”

Green parliamentary deputy Tobias Lindner, who is a member of the budgetary and defence committee in parliament, sounded a similar note. He criticised the fact that “the defence minister’s wish list [is] much larger than the extra means allocated to her by Wolfgang Schäuble.” In addition, “the majority of the spending [is] for the period after the current electoral cycle,” and this meant it was “completely unclear whether Von der Leyen would be in office and a new government will continue this course.”

Interior minister Thomas de Maizière, who has been pushing for strengthened internal security for years, announced in a statement that by the finalization of a draft budget, he would “agree” with Schäuble “on a significant increase of personnel, particularly for the authorities concerned with combatting terrorism.” The issue was to make “the security agencies as ready to strike as possible.” For this, they would need “good protective equipment, the newest technology, weapons and vehicles.”

While politicians and the media are trying to portray the militarization of German foreign policy and the building up of a police state as a response to the recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels, these measures have been long planned and have been the government’s goal from the outset.

The coalition deal between the CDU, CSU and SPD titled “Framing Germany’s future” identified these goals in the autumn of 2013. These included “strengthening the federal police as a competent and effective criminal police force,” “modernising the federal police’s operational equipment” and a “better

cooperative relationship between the security agencies.”

In the section “Responsibility in the world,” it stated, “We support a strong defence force with modern and capable armed forces. ... The Bundeswehr is an intervention army. With its new direction it will also be directed at the changed security policy conditions of the 21st century. We will firmly continue this reorientation and lead it to success,” which will require “a broad spectrum of military capabilities.”



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