

Germany: New recruiting drive by the Bundeswehr

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Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen wants to increase the size of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and recruit thousands of new soldiers in the coming years.

In a video statement last week, she announced the new “human resources strategy of the Bundeswehr.” “This is the very first time in the history of the Bundeswehr that we have such a modern, open and very wide HR [human resources] strategy,” she explained. “What does that mean? We are planning ahead, we are looking at the next seven years and are saying in detail whom we need. We need the best in the Bundeswehr ... whether [in the field of] cyber operations, whether it is [for] the navy, army or air force.”

According to the official order of the day from the Christian Democrat defence minister: “As a modern, competitive and attractive employer, we want women and men with the right skills, at the right time and right place. In this way, we ensure the commitment of our human resources in a wide, varied range of operations and make it possible for Germany to carry out an appropriate security role.”

By the year 2023, some 7,000 new posts have been planned. But that is just the beginning. Von der Leyen’s strategy refers to the “need for a continuous, common Bundeswehr strategic planning of entire staff needs” and calls for “expanding the base for recruitment.” For this reason, the Bundeswehr aspires to “open up to other target groups”: for example, for people over age 30 and applicants without high school or vocational qualifications. Moreover, “the Bundeswehr [will] consider the possibilities of opening up for EU citizens as soldiers.”

To break the deeply rooted popular resistance to war and militarism, due to Germany’s history, the government and army are employing ever more

aggressive methods. For several weeks, a provocative advertising campaign for the Bundeswehr has been running nationwide with posters at railway stations, on the subways, and even at universities. A multimillion-euro Bundeswehr reality show—“The Recruits”—is aimed primarily at young people, who are needed as cannon fodder for future combat missions.

The recruitment drive is part of the foreign policy turn, which President Joachim Gauck, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democratic Party) and von der Leyen herself proclaimed at the Munich Security Conference in 2014. Now, the federal government is using the election of Donald Trump as US president as a pretext to advance its own plans for a German-dominated European foreign and defence policy, and the massive rearmament of the Bundeswehr.

Only last week, the Bundestag (federal parliament) passed the military budget for the coming years containing an increase of several billion euros. Last Wednesday, the European Commission presented plans that would mean a massive increase in military spending and stronger European coordination in the research and production of armaments. Von der Leyen announced a greater military role for Germany and the EU shortly after the US election, in a speech to the Atlantic Bridge organisation on November 11 in Berlin.

“Europe too, and the EU must do more in the field of security and defence policy. And Europe can do more—especially being more efficient,” the defence minister said. “Together, we have a troop strength of 1.5 million soldiers; and if all national defence budgets in Europe were put together, we arrive at the princely sum of €200 billion. All things considered, there are many places we can increase our own output!”

Among other things, “We Europeans in the EU must

be more capable of acting, because the EU is called upon in issues and regions where I do not see NATO. Like in Africa, where the economic, demographic and security problems of many regions in this neighbouring continent concern us very directly.”

Von der Leyen directly justified her call for a more independent European war policy with Trump’s election victory: “The kernel of the worldview of Donald Trump is described by the formulation: America First. Whether international trade, international relations or negotiations—the only proviso is whether it serves American interests. This is legitimate—but can this be the only benchmark?”

In response, the German government is stressing the consistent representation of its own interests with military means. In the 2016 White Paper of the Bundeswehr, Germany’s official foreign policy doctrine, which foresees more foreign missions and the deployment of the Bundeswehr at home, it states bluntly: “[O]ur capacity to act in the international—particularly, European and transatlantic—alliance is [based] on a clear national positioning.”

Von der Leyen’s recruitment drive explicitly pursues the goal of translating the “2016 White Paper” into an “overarching strategic personnel goal.” This has far-reaching consequences. More than 70 years after the end of World War II, the German elites are again seeking to create a powerful army, able to enforce their geostrategic and economic interests, if necessary, by military means against their post-war allies.



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