

Munich Security Conference chairman advocates European rearmament

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Three high-level meetings scheduled to take place this week express the deepening conflicts and crisis within Europe following the election of US president Donald Trump.

The defence ministers of NATO are meeting in Brussels Wednesday and Thursday, the foreign ministers of the G20 will meet Friday in Bonn, and the 53rd Munich Security Conference will be held over the weekend. Participants from the US will include Vice President Mike Pence, Defence Secretary James Mattis and several senators.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel will also participate in the conference, as well as several dozen heads of state, 50 foreign ministers and 30 defence ministers from other countries.

In the lead-up to the meeting, Wolfgang Ischinger, the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, sharply criticised the new US president and called upon the European Union to show unity and begin a military build-up. The 70-year-old diplomat has 45 years of foreign policy experience behind him and is among the most influential voices in German politics.

“The US is unfortunately no longer suitable as the symbolic political-moral leader of the West,” Ischinger told the Berlin-based *Tagesspiegel* last Saturday. “The arrival of Trump means the end of the West, in which the US was the torch-bearer that the others sought to emulate. Europe’s task now is to replace this loss.”

In 40 years, Ischinger said he had never experienced such “a maximum destabilisation” as has emerged “since the US [called into question] the elements of world order, NATO, European integration.”

He added, “Until now, foreign and security policy was basically a static activity with firm guidelines and regulations. We are now dealing with new aggregate conditions, with a maximum degree of unpredictability.

That is extraordinarily dangerous.”

Ischinger proposed defending the “Western order of values” by means of a massive military build-up in Europe and particularly in Germany. He demanded in the *Tagesspiegel* that German military spending not merely be increased from its current level of 1.2 percent to the 2 percent called for by the US, but to 3 percent of GDP. This amount should incorporate the development budget, and diplomatic and humanitarian assistance, which would thus become part of the military budget. “This approach,” Ischinger said, “would not be opposed by all lefts from the outset.”

Ischinger told the press on Monday that such an increase in military spending was not in America’s, but in Germany’s interests. “The issue here is therefore not what some third-rank boy comes up with in the Pentagon,” he said. The issue was much more what was required by the Bundeswehr (German army) to protect the country.

To strengthen the strike capability of the German army, Ischinger is pushing for closer cooperation within the European Union in the areas of the military and armaments industries.

“If the EU members purchase their jets or weapons together, they would only pay half per piece,” he calculated to *Tagesspiegel*. “We have six times as many weapons systems than the US with just half as much spending, but our fighting ability is less than 10 percent.” With an end “of regionalism...connected with the ability to take decisions in foreign policy we Europeans would be a political-military power which would in fact make an impression.”

In contrast to other European politicians, who “would rather write off the US as an ally today than tomorrow,” Ischinger wants to drag out a potential open break as long as possible, as he wrote in a guest

piece for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on Thursday. “Instead of turning away decisively from the United States, we should cooperate with all of those interested in the retention of the Transatlantic community of values.”

Ischinger named potential partners as “Trump’s opponents in Congress” and “also members of the new government.” One had to try to “integrate the new US government as much as possible,” he said. “Integrate, secure influence—this is precisely the *realpolitik* now required.”

Ischinger is placing his hopes above all on Defence Secretary “Mad Dog” Mattis, Vice President Pence and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who unlike Trump have thus far expressed support for the EU and NATO.

The resignation of National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, who was also originally supposed to have attended the Munich Security Conference, was taken note of by EU supporters with relief. Flynn was seen as an opponent of the EU and an ally of Moscow, while many European politicians consider it necessary to pursue a course of confrontation with Russia in order to prevent a further breakdown of the European Union.

In his *Süddeutsche Zeitung* piece, Ischinger left no doubt about the fact that his policy of “integrating and securing influence” was about buying time to rearm the military. “In the short and medium term,” he noted, the Europeans could “not abandon the American security guarantee.” He evidently views this differently over the long-term.

At the same time, he drew red lines, “the violation of which would provoke a grave Transatlantic crisis.” First, he warned, “If there is in fact a new government policy under Donald Trump which views the EU as an opponent and hopes for its speedy breakup, and backs right-wing populists, that would be a disaster for mutual relations.” He had previously described such a policy as “a declaration of war without weapons.”

Ischinger named his second red line as a deal between Russia and the US at the expense of Europe, and the third as new sanctions against Iran, which Germany would not support.

Ischinger urgently called on the European states to show unity and act with self-assertion, because Trump would “hardly be able to realise his plans” against Europe. At the same time, he noted that “especially we Germans must significantly heighten our efforts in the

areas of foreign, development and defence policy in light of the fragile world situation.”

Ischinger’s advocacy of a huge military build-up demonstrates that his criticism of Trump and right-wing opponents of the EU in Europe has nothing to do with the defence of “a community of values.” Three years ago, the Munich Security Conference served as the stage for the German government to proclaim “the end of military restraint.” The then Foreign Minister and current President Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated at the time, “Germany is too large to merely comment on world politics from the sidelines.” He was supported by his predecessor, President Joachim Gauck, and Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen.

The rise of Trump, just like the return of German militarism, is the result of the insoluble crisis of global capitalism. The ruling class in every country has no other response to deepening social and economic tensions than to take up a bitter struggle for the global redivision of political and economic power. Germany’s attempts to reorganise Europe militarily under its leadership will also inevitably incite the conflicts within Europe that provoked two world wars in the last century.



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