

# German defence minister announces massive increase in military budget

Johannes Stern  
18 February 2017

On Thursday, a guest column by Germany's defence minister, Ursula von der Leyen, was published in a special supplement of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on this year's Munich Security Conference. Under the title "Von der Leyen answers the USA: we have understood," the column announces a massive increase in the military budget.

Three years ago, von der Leyen and President Joachim Gauck and his successor, at that time Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, announced the end of military restraint at the Munich Security Conference. Von der Leyen is now exploiting new US Defence Minister James "Mad Dog" Mattis' demand that the Europeans play a larger role in their own defence to—in her words—allow "words to follow actions."

Von der Leyen writes, "[w]e Germans and most Europeans have stood for far too long on the broad shoulders of our American friends when it comes to security. And yes, we know that we must share a larger part of the burden for our common Atlantic security." In Europe, the readiness to do this is "greater than ever before," she states. The European armed forces have "learned in numerous common deployments in the past decades to trust the military ability and caution of others," she adds.

The defence minister attests to the importance of NATO at the end of her article and states that Berlin "should shape this growth into more responsibility for security in a European way." However, her statements leave no room for doubt that the German elite really wants to increase its political and military weight on the continent with the help of the EU.

"Germany has shown security policy initiative in the past few years," boasts von der Leyen. She mentions the "Minsk Ukraine agreement," "the nuclear agreement with Iran," the "building of new, rapid

response NATO spearheads," the "fight against the IS terror," the interventions in Mali and Afghanistan, the fight against smugglers in the Mediterranean and the Aegean, and "our considerable presence in the Baltics, currently in Lithuania."

"All of this speaks for itself" and "Germany will continue in this way," she adds almost threateningly. This goes "also for the defence budget." We have "the firm will" to achieve the NATO requirement of two percent of GDP "in the next few years," she writes.

What was once unthinkable is now official policy: the federal government is determined to double the defence budget, which currently stands at approximately €37 billion (1.2 percent of GDP). In an interview with the Berlin newspaper *Tagesspiegel* that appeared on Saturday, the chairman of the Munich Security Conference, Wolfgang Ischinger, demanded an arms budget increase to 3 percent of GDP, or more than €90 billion.

These plans make it clear what awaits workers and youth in the coming months. The ruling class wants to bleed the population so that it can carry out an aggressive foreign and great power policy. It wants to use the working class as cannon fodder for new wars and to subject workers to massive social cuts so that it can shift funding to the military. The police will be heavily armed so that an aggressive foreign policy can be pursued in the face of massive popular opposition.

Von der Leyen's comment leaves no room for doubt that the German ruling class is once again pursuing its old program of military domination over Europe, the larger aim of which is to play a leading role in the world and to promote its own economic and geopolitical interests at the expense of the other great powers.

"In addition to war deployments," it is also necessary

to “strengthen national and alliance defence once again,” wrote von der Leyen. “For this reason, we must grow in Europe, become more powerful and develop key capabilities on our continent at the very least,” she added.

She continued: “A smart instrument for this” would be the “framework nation concept: because we know that we have capability gaps in Europe, which a middle-sized European power can scarcely fill alone, we join forces.” Germany is “taking the lead in many areas and is making it possible for other nations to participate. We are filling gaps, are becoming stronger as Europeans in NATO, and reducing redundancies that we thought we could afford in the past because of national conceitedness.”

This is a quite explicit statement of the current strategy of German imperialism. It is obvious that Berlin’s aim is to establish the German army as the so-called “anchor army” for European NATO countries, to heavily arm NATO in Europe and to subordinate it gradually to the command structure of the German army.

One must think “once again in terms of larger alliances,” said von der Leyen. “To that end, as Europeans, we want to build deeply integrated divisions that are well-equipped and trained and bring together up to three countries at a time. Similarly to the way it is already done in France and the Netherlands, we are inviting Romania and the Czech Republic to join a federation with units of our army,” she said. She has already signed agreements to this effect with her counterparts in these countries.

“The additional value of this collaboration” is already showing itself today “on the eastern border of NATO. Germany leads a multinational battalion, which signals its readiness to defend the alliance. It is also training intensively with the Lithuanian armed forces. If the partner troops arm themselves with German technology, this is also in our interests.”

Furthermore, she and the French defence minister “initiated the building of a common transport wing, for example for special forces deployments.” With the Netherlands, Belgium, Norway and Luxembourg, the German army is building “a common fleet for in-flight refuelling.” And “following the same logic,” she is also offering “to build a multinational federation for military air transport in Germany with Germany’s

southern neighbours.”

The immediate aim of these efforts is a “European defence union” dominated by Germany. It is about “improving the armament process with a European Defence Fund, bringing the planning processes of NATO and the EU closer together, and creating interlocking leadership structures in order to make EU civil and military missions more successful, for example in Africa.” The instrument for this “was laid down in the treaties of the EU long ago: the ‘permanent structured cooperation.’” One must “only activate” it.

What “instruments” will be “activated” if necessary is made clear by the shocking debate over German and/or European nuclear weapons. An article in the current edition of *Die Zeit*, entitled “Atomic power Europe... Does the EU need the bomb?” expresses genuine regret that the German army does not have “free access” to the American atomic weapons stationed in Germany, but can only “deploy them... if Washington gives the green light.” Some Europeans can now “imagine their own deterrence, independent of the USA.”

The German elite knows one thing with certainty. After the 20th century’s two terrible world wars, with millions of dead and unspeakable crimes, the great majority of the people are not prepared to become involved once again in the murderous plans of German imperialism.

“It is politically impossible to apply the label ‘atomic power Germany’ at home,” remarked *Die Zeit* with obvious disappointment. “Germany, as every minister knows, is a pacifist country, the population rejects the participation of the army in international military deployments. Atomic weapons are discussed here only if we are getting rid of them,” the newspaper complained.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**