

German foreign minister demands aggressive assertion of great power interests

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Exploratory talks on forming a new government between the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) have been long and drawn out because all three parties know full well that their plans for increased militarism, strengthening the repressive state apparatus and further social attacks are broadly despised among the population. However, even though these parties have agreed to not speak publicly about the state of the talks and to draft the new government's programme behind the backs of the population, a clearer picture is emerging.

While the CSU demanded a massive military rearmament at the end of last year, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) set the tone in the new year in an interview with *Der Spiegel* last Thursday. He advocated a great power policy for Germany, directed against Russia and China in particular, but also the United States.

The combination of his aggressive language and absurd attempt to pose as a victim, recalled nothing so much as the argument of "enforced self-defence" used by Wilhelm II to justify to the Reichstag Germany's entry into the First World War. Gabriel stated, "Vegetarians have it tough in a world full of carnivores," and bluntly called for rearmament and a militarist policy.

Germany could no longer depend on "France, Britain and especially the Americans enforcing our interests around the world," Gabriel declared. The assumption that the US would come to Germany's aid in the event of war should not be overstretched, he continued. "In an uncomfortable world, we can't afford as Europeans to take it easy and wait on the US," he said.

The entire world is already taking advantage of Germany, he added. "In reality, Moscow, Beijing and

Washington also have something in common: they don't value the European Union at all, they abuse it," Gabriel insisted. Authoritarian states were making fun of the EU because its member states were failing to place their own national interests above those of the international community.

The portrayal of a moral, integral "vegetarian" EU, which has to assert itself in the shark-infested waters of global politics, is obviously nonsense. Germany and other EU states are pursuing an aggressive foreign policy, waging brutal wars in Afghanistan, Syria, and Mali, and menacing Russia with a major build-up of troops on its borders.

Gabriel's rhetoric is aimed at initiating a further escalation of German militarism and freeing Berlin from any restrictions. Europe was "not adequately" projecting "strength, technology, and political and military influence," according to the Foreign Minister. It had to therefore rearm and extend its influence: "We have to show that those who view us in such a way have made a mistake, that we can agree, that as a community of democratic and free states, we are economically successful and are gaining influence politically. For this, Europe also has to project its power."

For example, Europe should challenge China in Africa, and Russia in the Balkans. "China is steadily gaining so much influence in the south and east that some European states no longer dare to take decisions against Chinese interests. It is noticeable everywhere: China is the only country in the world with a real geopolitical strategy."

Gabriel wants to counter this with a major European military build-up, under German leadership. Although he criticised the CSU proposal for Germany to unilaterally increase its defence budget to 2 percent of

GDP, he called for the same policy to be pursued in cooperation with France. This was the only way for Germany to make its voice heard on the world stage.

According to the Foreign Minister, such a policy should not be based on values, but oriented towards interests. “To date we have frequently defined European values, we are much too weak with the definition of common interests,” he said. Under these conditions, Germany could not be successful “in a world of loud, tough-talking states representing their interests.”

In a keynote foreign policy address in December, Gabriel declared that “there is no longer a comfortable place on the sidelines of international politics” for Germany. In the speech, he warned against a “fixation on law as the form for overcoming political challenges.” He called for “political-strategic thinking,” whose gaze did not drift “to the horizon of moral norms and imperatives.”

In his speech, as in the recent interview, Gabriel referred explicitly to the political scientist Herfried Münkler. The professor at Berlin’s Humboldt University has become the most important spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry. In his new book about the Thirty Years War, Münkler calls for “the placing of morals under the guardianship of strategic thinking.” Prior to that, he called for Germany to become Europe’s hegemon and “disciplinarian.”

The consequences of such policies, which are based on Germany’s imperialist interests, were summed up by Münkler’s colleague, Jörg Baberowski. The professor for Eastern European history at HU stated in October 2014 at a discussion on “Germany: an interventionist power,” referring to the war in Syria, “if one is not willing to take hostages, burn villages, hang people and spread fear and terror, as the terrorists do, if one is not prepared to do such things, then one can never win such a conflict and it is better to keep out altogether.”

The right-wing extremist professor, who came to prominence not only for such glorifications of war, but also due to his downplaying of the Nazis’ crimes and agitation against refugees, was explicitly supported last year by SPD politician and HU president Sabine Kunst and defended against criticism from students.

The militarist and inhumane agenda, developed by professors like Münkler and Baberowski, is now

official foreign policy. This confirms the warnings made by the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE), which has systematically resisted right-wing and militarist ideology at HU in recent years. The youth organisation of the International Committee of the Fourth International has organised meetings, written articles and distributed leaflets which have pointed to the significance of the work of Münkler, Baberowski and others for the revival of German militarism.

In the foreword to the book “Scholarship or war propaganda,” which has documented the conflict at the HU, we wrote two and a half years ago that the book dealt with “the relationship between scholarship and politics in periods of militarism, mounting international conflict and growing social tensions. It focuses on the question: Will the universities remain centres of scholarship and free criticism? Or will they once again become state-directed cadre-training centres for right-wing and militarist ideologies, as previously in German history?”

The ruling elite, which confronts mass opposition to its war policies, is very conscious of the significance of this conflict. In the interview with *Der Spiegel*, Gabriel expressed disappointment that there were an insufficient number of such cadre-training centres, stating, “Unfortunately, we have no experience and no real structure for strategic considerations: there is not a think tank culture here. One of the tasks of foreign policy will be to develop this intellectual capacity in Europe and Germany.”

Gabriel’s plans for a German great power policy not only vindicate the IYSSE’s struggle at the HU. They underscore the necessity of constructing the IYSSE as an international youth movement for socialism, uniting youth and young workers around the world in a struggle against capitalism and war.



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