

Germany: Grand coalition starts national armament programme

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Barely in office, Germany's grand coalition of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) and conservative Union parties (Christian Democratic Union, Christian Social Union) has commenced its programme of massive rearmament as laid down in its coalition agreement. A number of defence projects and military strategic plans have been announced in the past few days. They all serve one goal: to prepare Germany once again for war despite the catastrophic defeats in two global conflicts.

In order to accelerate rearmament and strengthen the domestic defence industry, the German government no longer plans to issue major arms contracts internationally. Instead, it plans to award major contracts based on direct agreement between the defence ministry and German industrialists.

Last weekend, the business newspaper *Handelsblatt* ran the headline "Germany rearms" over an article that listed the multibillion "shopping list" of the German army (Bundeswehr).

Warships: In order to quickly alleviate the "most urgent shortages in the navy," the last federal government commissioned five new corvettes for €2 billion last summer. Now, tenders have gone out for the construction of the long-planned large multipurpose combat ships (MKS-180), costing a total of €3.5 billion. The awarding of the contract is to be made this year, if possible.

The rearmament plans are even more massive and costly regarding **battle tanks**. According to Armin Papperger, CEO of Rheinmetall, the construction of a European battle tank agreed by Germany and France could "reach a total of up to 40 billion euros" and it can be assumed that "Europe's armies will need up to 2,500 tanks."

The coalition agreement also included proposals for a "**Euro drone**" which should now be "developed and

available from 2025 at the earliest." Costs of €1 billion are planned for development alone.

Further projects, which are now being undertaken, are the construction of a Franco-German **warplane** as successor to "technically completely outdated" Bundeswehr Tornados, the development of the tactical **air defence system** MEADS (about €5 billion) and the "Mobile Tactical Communication" project for the comprehensive equipping of the army with secure digital radio (€4 billion).

In order to be able to procure these and other arms projects, such as **submarines** and **transport aircraft**, more quickly and keep key technologies inside the country, the government plans to award major orders for weapon systems "primarily nationally," *Handelsblatt* reports.

The new government is "now returning to industrial policy: important weapons systems should be tendered in Europe only in exceptional cases." Instead, "in future experts from the Bundeswehr procurement office (Baainbw) are to directly negotiate contracts with the representatives of armaments companies and deliberately bring companies together for larger orders."

The new strategy aims to swiftly implement the armament plans. In order to accelerate the process, the coalition is examining "how we can make procurement easier and faster," *Handelsblatt* quotes the Social Democrat defence expert Thomas Hitschler. Germany's generals are also "relieved" by the grand coalition's plans to "return to industrial policy." In "confidential talks," the military said they were "hoping for an acceleration in procurement."

Another aim of the new strategy is to strengthen the German and European defence industries. This is considered an important prerequisite for the

development of an independent European and ultimately German military great-power policy.

The *Handelsblatt* notes, “To tell the truth, when it comes to purely market-oriented tenders, almost always US arms companies hold the better cards.” In Germany and Europe, however, “technological know-how would then be lost” and “the Bundeswehr and the long-term planned European army would become completely dependent on the USA.”

Bundeswehr leaders had already demanded a massive armaments programme from representatives of politics and industry at the Berlin Security Conference last November. Now, it is taking over its implementation. Last Thursday, Lieutenant-General A.D. Benedikt Zimmer, a former army commander, took over the post of defence secretary at the Defence Ministry. This marks the first time in the history of post-war Germany that a military figure heads what was always a civilian-run authority.

The pursuit of the “long-term goal” of an “army of Europeans” set in the coalition agreement, has also, however, increased military-political tensions among the different powers within the European Union. *Handelsblatt* quotes the CDU budget expert Eckhardt Rehberg, who declared: “I do not think that European tenders for defence requirements leads to good solutions in the national security interest. ... That’s why we should return to national procurement procedures.” After all, France and Italy “have never awarded a major armaments contract to the outside world.”

The type of conflicts for which the ruling class is preparing is indicated by a document recently published by the Army Command. The paper with the programmatic title “How should land forces fight in future?” reads as if the criminal history of German militarism never existed.

“The ability to successfully fight on land” was “crucial for secure access of our own forces into the area of operation, for freedom of movement in the area of operation and ultimately to be capable of confronting enemy forces in order to achieve rapid conflict resolution on favourable terms and in line with our own goals,” the document states in its introduction.

The section headed “Requirements for Land Forces” includes the passage: “German land forces must act with sufficient deterrence (especially for national defence), to open up and maintain credible possibilities

of action in line with Germany’s political aims”. This means “The main priority for land forces must remain the ability to take, hold, dominate and control populated areas, as well as critical infrastructure in order to impose a military outcome.”



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