Germany: Grand coalition government discusses war budget

Johannes Stern
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The new budget presented by the Social Democratic Finance Minister Olaf Scholz was discussed yesterday by the cabinet. It is characterized by two things: it maintains the notorious “black zero” (balanced budget) of his predecessor, Christian Democrat Wolfgang Schäuble, which has made Germany one of the most unequal European countries, and it massively increases defence spending to pave the way for an aggressive foreign and great power policy.

While there is supposedly no money for comprehensive social programmes, well-paid jobs, secure pensions and decent medical care, defence spending next year alone is set to rise from today's 38.93 to 42.25 billion euros. By the end of the 2021 legislative period, an increase of 5.5 billion euros is planned. This will continue the “turnaround in the financing of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces),” according to the Ministry of Finance.

The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD) signed the coalition agreement, which included raising defence spending to two percent of gross domestic product by 2024, however, this is not preceding quickly enough for sections of the ruling class. The Ministry of Defence said it was indeed a “significant increase”, but the estimated amount was “still insufficient” given the “huge catch-up and modernization needs” of the army.

According to a report by tabloid *Bild am Sonntag*, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) is calling for the defence budget to be increased by as much as 12 billion over the next legislative period. If there was not significantly more money next year, the minister sees the billion-euro arms projects in danger, which the grand coalition has already decided. For this reason, the Bundeswehr Association is calling for an increase of the defence budget by 15 billion euros by 2021.

No matter what sum emerges at the end of the negotiations, it will be the largest German rearmament campaign since that of Hitler's Wehrmacht in the 1930s. Only a few days ago, the *Bild* newspaper published the “defence minister's secret order list”, containing 18 major orders, each exceeding the 25 million euro hurdle. These include combat drones, helicopters, mobile command posts, rocket launchers and articulated vehicles for transporting weapon systems.

At the weekend’s Berlin ILA air show, von der Leyen announced more billion-euro arms projects. In cooperation with France, Germany wanted to “develop a new generation of fighter aircraft, set to launch in 2035”. At the same time, both countries wanted to “jointly develop the next generation of armoured land combat systems over the next fifteen years,” and a “joint maritime reconnaissance craft to monitor large sea areas”. Such “joint projects” were about “optimally using the respective strengths of the industries of both countries”.

In Germany, these are the same arms manufacturers responsible for re-arming the German military before the two devastating world wars in the 20th century. Business daily *Handelsblatt* appeared last Thursday with the front-page headline, “New billions for tanks: The era of military disarmament seems over. The armaments company Krauss-Maffei Wegmann expects large orders from all over Europe”.

In an accompanying interview, Kraus-Maffei's boss Frank Haun provides an insight into the massive projects being prepared behind the backs of the population. Asked what the Bundeswehr needed for “its operations”, he answers: “Just to fulfil its obligations in the Alliance, Germany needs a new fully equipped

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mechanized division by 2027 and two more by 2032. That's nine mechanized brigades".

And in terms of the planned tank upgrade, he calculates, "Let's say: 5,000 new battle tanks are needed in the next 20 to 30 years ... 5,000 new tanks times 15 million euros, that's 75 billion. And if I talk about howitzers, that's nearly another 40 billion".

Four years after the German government announced the end of foreign policy restraint at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, there can be no doubt that the ruling class is again turning to war in order to pursue its geo-strategic and economic interests worldwide.

At the joint press conference with President Donald Trump last Friday, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) emphasized, "We are growing out of a role in which for many years after the Second World War, Germany was happy if it did not get involved too much because we had done so much harm through the Nazi era. But this time of post-war order is over, the war is more than 70 years ago, and we also have to learn to be more responsible as Germans".

Her government was "proud that Germany today is the second largest troop contributor in NATO". We have "taken important steps, and we will have to continue with these steps. When conflicts occur on our doorstep, we cannot rely on others stepping in and that we will not have to contribute". The German "contribution" would therefore have to grow in the next few years, "and that also has to do with military involvement". Germany must "learn to play its role as a large and economically successful country".

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