

German grand coalition government passes war budget

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On November 14, Germany's grand coalition government—consisting of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD)—passed a bill that will increase the country's military budget by a massive 12 percent. German defence spending will increase by €4.71 billion to total €43.23 billion next year.

The budget marks a turning point in Germany's post-war history and is part of a comprehensive drive to rearm.

During its deliberations, the parliamentary budget committee, which includes all of the parties represented in the Bundestag (parliament) and is chaired by the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), added a further €327 million to the government's proposed military budget. The committee also significantly increased so-called commitment appropriations, which pave the way for accelerated rearmament in the coming years. Military spending is to increase by 32 percent to €35.49 billion next year. That is €5.68 billion more than originally planned in the draft budget of Finance Minister Olaf Scholz, a member of the SPD.

In her speech to the Bundestag, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) made clear that this is only the beginning. She said that “medium-term financial planning” does not reflect “what the future will actually bring.” Future commitments, she explained, should be measured “on the budget of 2020.”

The military budget would need to “continue to rise in order to reach the ambitious goal of 1.5 percent of GDP (gross domestic product) for the military and defence in 2024.” The “Union parties” (CDU and CSU) and the SPD agreed in their coalition mandate to raise defence spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2024, an annual increase of more than €75 billion.

Von der Leyen explained in detail what the huge sums are for: namely, rearmament and preparations for war. The additional “billions of euros for military procurement” would allow the Bundeswehr (army) to “continue ongoing projects,” she said. She stressed that “everything continues for many, many years” and added that it was now possible “to initiate additional projects, such as the Puma armoured infantry vehicle for the VJTF 2023.” The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force is NATO's High Commitment Task Force against Russia, which will be led by Germany next year.

In addition, “other major projects” could now be brought forward, von der Leyen boasted, singling out the “tactical air defence system, the MKS 180 and submarine cooperation with Norway.” There was also “more money for the Cyber squad—15,000 men and women—more money for education on cyber issues and innovational initiatives such as the Cyber Innovation Hub and the Cyber agency.”

She pointedly added, “We are doing all this to be ready for action... the foundation has also been laid for a heavy transport helicopter. ... A good day for the Luftwaffe (Air Force)!”

Also planned is the further development of independent European military structures. “A year ago,” she said, the “Sleeping Beauty” had been “awakened from the slumber of the Lisbon Treaty.” She was referring to the European Defence Union, which, she noted, “has lain dormant for ten years.”

This signified “an end to fragmentation and a powerful incentive to develop in unison.” She continued: “We want joint armed forces with national responsibilities, but so closely linked, armed and equipped that they can carry out actions together for missions such as the German-French brigade in Mali”

or what “the German-Dutch corps has done for many years.”

Von der Leyen added, “In this way the army of Europeans develops slowly from below. That’s our goal.”

Last week, Chancellor Angela Merkel (CDU) pleaded before the European Parliament for “a real European army” able to enforce the economic and geo-strategic interests of Germany and Europe worldwide.

The establishment of a European military union under German leadership is supported by the Left Party and the Greens. On Monday, Dietmar Bartsch, leader of the Left Party parliamentary group, called on the German government to “not just talk about it,” but “make it happen.” And the leader of the Green Party, Annalena Baerbock, demanded in an interview: “The EU must be able to conduct world politics in a dramatically changed situation.”

Von der Leyen’s speech makes clear that all parties represented in the Bundestag—from the Left Party and the Greens to the far-right AfD—are working closely together to ensure the revival of German militarism in the face of growing popular opposition.

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At the beginning of her speech, the defence minister thanked “on behalf of our Bundeswehr” the representatives of all political groups “for good and constructive cooperation” in the parliamentary committees. In particular, she thanked AfD representative Martin Hohmann, who was expelled from the CDU 15 years ago after giving an anti-Semitic speech.

The only criticism of the new war budget in the subsequent Bundestag debate came from the right. “I think the money we have budgeted for the defence sector should not be spent on unnecessary consultations, but rather should land where it is needed: in the armament and equipment of the Bundeswehr,” warned Social Democrat Siemtje Möller.

On behalf of the AfD, Hohmann demanded the further “inclusion of projects that are urgently necessary to maintain effectivity.” Examples included the STH heavy transport helicopter and a new assault rifle. In the case of the heavy transport helicopter, “the government had taken up this necessity at the last moment,” for which the AfD was “grateful.”

The deputy chair of the neo-liberal Free Democratic Party, Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann, said: “We are increasing spending. We are continuing to pursue the new path set. We are focusing on procurement for large projects, but despite all this, the operational readiness of the main weapon systems remains unreliable.”

Similar loyal criticism came from representatives of the Greens and the Left Party. Tobias Lindner, chairman of the Greens in the Defence Committee, stated: “The Bundeswehr faces great challenges; it has problems. But we Greens are convinced it does not help to pour more and more money into these dilapidated structures without altering them.” It is “dishonest” toward “our soldiers...to just put down some money in small quantities.”

“The armament projects take much longer and are becoming increasingly expensive,” complained Tobias Pflüger, who sits for the Left Party in the Bundestag Defence Committee. As part of a motion for a resolution, the Left Party faction tabled its own proposals for a more effective defence budget. Its role is to disguise the revival of German militarism by employing phrases about “humanity” and “development.”

Thus, the Left Party proposed to “reduce total expenditure in the current plan by 6 billion euros” and “redirect these funds to increase development assistance...humanitarian aid and civilian crisis prevention measures.”



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