

German army plans recruitment of EU foreigners

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The German Ministry of Defence plans to recruit tens of thousands of foreigners from the EU into the Bundeswehr. The plans for this are “more concrete than have been known so far,” *Der Spiegel* reported last week on Thursday. According to a confidential ministry study submitted to the news magazine, Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (CDU) wants to recruit mainly young Poles, Italians and Romanians for the German army. According to the paper, there is “quantitative potential” for the Bundeswehr among young men coming from these countries.

According to *Der Spiegel*, the ministry has already “calculated this potential more precisely.” According to the study, about 255,000 Poles, 185,000 Italians and 155,000 Romanians between the ages of 18 and 40 live in Germany. Together, this group represents about half of all EU foreigners in Germany. If at least 10 percent of this targeted population showed interest in the German army, the Bundeswehr would come up with “more than 50,000 possible new applicants for the force.”

The inspector general of the Bundeswehr, the highest ranking German military figure, also confirmed the plans. The recruitment of EU citizens for special activities is “an option” that is being examined, Eberhard Zorn told the newspapers of the Funke Media Group. People talk about “doctors or IT specialists, for example,” he said. In times of a shortage of skilled workers, the Bundeswehr had to “look in all directions and strive to find the right young talent.”

The plans of the Ministry of Defence and the official debate about them show how aggressively German imperialism and militarism are re-emerging despite Germany’s historical crimes in two world wars. Having caused a social catastrophe in Southern and Eastern Europe in particular with its austerity measures, Berlin is now using the lack of prospects and sheer desperation of young people to recruit cannon fodder for the German war

policy.

Since leading government representatives officially announced the return of German militarism at the Munich Security Conference in 2014, the government and the Ministry of Defence have been working to increase the Bundeswehr’s troop strength, however, with rather moderate success so far. Since Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) announced the expansion of the army on May 10, 2016, the Bundeswehr has hardly been able to record any significant growth despite aggressive advertising campaigns. In November, the Bundeswehr officially comprised 180,997 active soldiers, just under 1,000 more than in 2015 (179,633).

The plans of the Ministry of Defence have been worked out behind the backs of the population for a long time. The 2016 White Paper on German security policy and the future of the Bundeswehr stated: “Last but not least, opening up the Bundeswehr to citizens of the EU would not only offer potential for wide-ranging integration and regeneration and thus strengthen the personnel base of the Bundeswehr, it would also send out a strong signal for a European approach.” According to *Der Spiegel* the state secretary responsible for Bundeswehr personnel, Gerd Hoofe, signed off on the concept in August.

The German initiative is aggravating tensions within the European Union. Poland’s Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz is “surprised by the advance,” writes *Der Spiegel*. For his government, he urged “rapid clarification in Brussels.” The opening of the Bundeswehr for foreigners without consultations in the EU, “would not be appropriate behaviour,” *Der Spiegel* quotes Czaputowicz. “If Germany were to introduce such a law without consulting Poland beforehand, that would not be good. Of course, Germany has more to offer to workers and probably also to soldiers.”

There are similar concerns in Bulgaria, Italy, Romania

and Greece. In talks with German military attachés, for example, the Bulgarian government had made it clear that 20 percent of the positions in the Eastern European country's armed forces could not be filled today due to staff shortages. If Germany now opened its army with significantly higher salaries, this would have "catastrophic consequences."

Berlin's efforts to increase its own armed forces with foreign mercenaries go hand in hand with the German government's plans to create a "real European army" (chancellor Angela Merkel). With both projects German imperialism is pursuing the goal of expanding its dominance in Europe and asserting its geostrategic and economic interests in competition with the other great powers worldwide. In this process the ruling class is increasingly openly returning to the German-European power politics of the German Kaiser and of Hitler.

"Germany's destiny: Leading Europe in order to lead the world" was the title of an essay published by an official website of the German Foreign Ministry four years ago. Since US President Donald Trump's announcement that he would withdraw US troops from Syria and that "the United States cannot continue to be the policeman of the world," leading German foreign policymakers have been stepping up their calls for more German leadership in Europe and internationally.

"We must now put our own house in order and be more prepared ourselves—in our own interests and for our own sake," Norbert Röttgen (CDU), chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the Bundestag, stated in an interview. It was now necessary to "consolidate the progress we have made in this area, i.e., to increase the military budget every year so that the Bundeswehr becomes fully operational again and is able to make its contribution." Germany is "being required" because "without Germany nothing works either, that is also part of our responsibility, at least in Europe."

Social Democratic Foreign Minister Heiko Maas made similar comments in an interview with the news agency dpa. "Our responsibility is growing. The expectations of us are higher than ever before," he explained. Germany is already "assuming massive responsibility ... but the more old partners withdraw from international cooperation, the more the eyes are on us."

Maas indicated that the ruling class was preparing a massive escalation of its war and great power offensive in the coming year. With its membership of the Security Council beginning on January 1, Germany is "moving politically even closer to crises and conflicts. Our vote

will gain even more weight in the Security Council. We will not be able to duck away from difficult decisions," the foreign minister stated.

He was particularly concerned about "the situation in the Middle East—with the conflicts in Syria, Yemen and the struggle for a Middle East peace settlement." Germany would have to "be even more committed there than before," and would also have to "assume military responsibility."

The return of German militarism is also supported by the Left Party and the Greens. Their current silence on the recruitment plans of the Bundeswehr can only be interpreted as a tacit approval. Only recently, Dietmar Bartsch, the leader of the Left parliamentary group in the Bundestag, called on the German government "not only to talk" about the proposals of French President Emmanuel Macron regarding the construction of a European army, but "rather take genuine action." And Green leader Annalena Baerbock demanded in an interview: "In a dramatically changed situation, the EU must be able to make world politics."

If there is criticism of the defence ministry's advance, it comes from the right. The recruitment of EU foreigners is "no solution for our personnel problem," CDU defence official Henning Otte told the *Westfälische Rundschau*. "If we have difficulties in winning Germans for service in our own troops, then the attractiveness of the Bundeswehr must be increased."

Rüdiger Lucassen, the spokesman for defence policy of the AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag, stated that "German citizenship" was the "basic prerequisite for service as a soldier" along with "identification with our German culture, values and norms." He regretted that von der Leyen, despite various advertising programmes, "had not been able to fill the armed forces with the necessary personnel."



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