

German Christian Democrat leader Kramp-Karrenbauer to become new defence minister

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A rapid change in personnel has taken place in the German Defence Ministry. Immediately after former Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen was elected Tuesday night as president of the European Union Commission, German government spokesman Stefan Seibert announced that she would be replaced by Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer. On Wednesday, Kramp-Karrenbauer was formally appointed at Bellevue Palace by Deputy German President Michael Müller, the mayor of the city state of Berlin. Müller was standing in for President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who is currently on holiday.

Both personnel decisions are part of a shift to the right characterised by a vast programme of military rearmament, the creation of a European army, and the establishment of a police state to suppress popular opposition to militarism and war.

In her six years as defence minister, von der Leyen imposed the largest military spending increase since German reunification. Annual military spending rose from €30 billion to €45 billion. In a brief statement after her appointment, Kramp-Karrenbauer praised her predecessor and vowed to continue and intensify military rearmament.

Already following her election last year as Christian Democratic Union (CDU) leader, Kramp-Karrenbauer made clear she is an aggressive militarist. It is necessary to have “a Europe with a security council and an army that is not only capable of formulating but also enforcing its security interests,” she said at the time. She continued that it is not enough to write goals and intentions into a government programme, but to carry them out.

Germany must “leave its comfort zone in order to move from ‘we could, we ought to, we should’ to ‘we will do.’” Kramp-Karrenbauer added that she has learned how to lead during her political career and is now ready to take the next step. We intend “to tackle the changes courageously, even if it means that we break with habits

we have come to cherish,” she said in December.

With her assumption of the post of defence minister, it is clear that Kramp-Karrenbauer meant this statement to be taken seriously. The goal in the government’s coalition agreement to spend 2 percent of gross domestic product on defence is to be achieved through deep social spending cuts and austerity measures in all other areas of public spending.

Earlier this year, Kramp-Karrenbauer described the draft budget presented by Finance Minister Olaf Scholz (Social Democrats) during budgetary consultations as insufficient and stressed that Germany remains committed to its NATO obligations. She was “therefore extremely happy that the defence budget for 2020 will be increased once again, contrary to the original plan.”

Kramp-Karrenbauer also spoke out in favour of a relaxation of regulations for weapons exports. “Our strict regulations and our even stricter deployment of them are making joint European projects almost impossible at present,” she complained in *Der Spiegel*. She called for joint European regulations, which would “not be so strict as the German rules.”

When French President Emmanuel Macron released his European manifesto in March and appealed for close collaboration with Germany, Kramp-Karrenbauer raised the prospect of the construction of a joint German-French aircraft carrier. In a guest commentary for *Welt am Sonntag*, she wrote, “Germany and France are already working on a joint project for a European fighter jet of the future, and other nations have been invited to participate. We could take the next step in giving expression to the European Union’s global role as a power for security and peace by beginning the symbolic project for a joint aircraft carrier.”

Asked about the surprise proposal made by the CDU leader, Chancellor Angela Merkel said the following day, “I think aircraft carriers are good. I think it is right and

good that we possess such military equipment as a European alliance. I am more than willing to work towards that end.”

Much was written in the media at the time about the CDU leader’s “hare-brained schemes.” But in reality, preparations for a combat-ready navy have been in development behind the backs of the population for some time.

Last year, von der Leyen released new guidelines for the army. In the “Concept for the German Army,” it was stressed that as a “nation dependent on exports and raw materials,” Germany “relies heavily on unrestricted access to the sea.” Due to “Germany’s marine dependency, the army has a special role to play in protecting coastal waters, nearby marine areas such as the Baltic Sea and North Sea, the sea areas along NATO’s northern flank, and international sea lanes.”

If there is any difference between Kramp-Karrenbauer and von der Leyen, it is that Kramp-Karrenbauer intends to pay even less attention to the widespread anti-war sentiment in the population as she ruthlessly enforces the interests of German imperialism with a minimum of diplomatic niceties.

In the ZDF summer interview earlier this month, Kramp-Karrenbauer declared her support for sending German ground troops to Syria. Although this would be “a big leap for us, one must always remember that to a great extent, this is about our security interests in Germany and not just what the United States wants.”

The German Army Association welcomed the new appointment, saying it would support the defence minister with “constructive criticism.” The soldiers’ association website stated that federal chairman Lieutenant Colonel Andre Wüstner met for talks with Kramp-Karrenbauer when she was CDU general secretary.

His deputy, retired First Sergeant Major Jürgen Görlich, praised the new defence minister in an interview with Focus Online. Asked if he had noted the CDU leader’s previous statements on defence policy matters, including the joint aircraft carrier with France, he said, “Yes, and it is certainly positive that a party leader speaks so frequently about issues concerning defence policy and the army. However, we believe that the important and correct commitment to orient defence spending towards the NATO 2 percent target is much more significant than the proposal for a joint aircraft carrier.”

He identified the most important expectation for Kramp-Karrenbauer’s first 100 days as “the maintenance and intensification of the shift in course on personnel,

equipment and spending.” He added that her criticisms of a lack of spending on defence had encouraged high hopes in the army and that she would be judged according to such statements in the future.

Criticism of Kramp-Karrenbauer’s appointment came from the opposition parties, but this was from the right. They denounced Kramp-Karrenbauer for not being up to the job and having no experience of how to lead the army.

Green Party Security Policy spokesman Tobias Lindner told the *Passauer Neue Presse* that the new defence minister must “urgently repair the vexed relationship with the troops.” He questioned whether the CDU leader is the right person to do this. He added that it is important “that plans are not only made, but also implemented.”

The sharpest criticism came from the Free Democrats (FDP). FDP defence policy expert Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann accused the chancellor and CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) of “not being interested in the least about the army’s affairs. Otherwise, they would not play personnel games with the stricken army.”

FDP deputy parliamentary group leader Alexander Graf Lambsdorff attacked Chancellor Merkel, saying that the decision to appoint Kramp-Karrenbauer underscored her lack of interest in the army. Kramp-Karrenbauer’s appointment is an “imposition on the troops and our NATO allies.” Graf Lambsdorff, the descendant of a noble family from the Baltic, speaks for those sections of the officer corps who would prefer to be free from all civilian control.

Similar comments were made by the Left Party’s head of parliamentary affairs, Jan Korte. “Apparently in the CDU/CSU, you need to have had no experience with the Defence Ministry and related topics to become defence minister. The ministries are becoming shunting yards to regulate the CDU/CSU’s glaring personnel problems,” said Korte. Apparently, the Left Party politician would have preferred an experienced general to head the Defence Ministry.



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