

# German parliament agrees to €1 trillion for war

**Peter Schwarz**  
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In a historic turning point, the German parliament has authorised €1 trillion in new loans.

Officially, it is being justified with the country's defence and security needs as well as the renovation of ailing infrastructure. But this is empty propaganda. It is not a defence programme, but a war programme.

The real purpose of the gigantic armaments package is to transform Germany back into a major military power that can free itself from American control, dominate Europe and take on other great powers—Russia, China and the US—in the battle for the violent redivision of the world. Eighty years after the capitulation of Hitler's Wehrmacht (Army), German militarism is throwing off the last shackles that were imposed on it because of its war crimes.

No one should harbour any illusions. The price for this massive rearmament offensive will be borne by working people and especially the youth in the form of falling wages and social benefits, the reintroduction of compulsory military service, the suppression of democratic rights and ultimately war and destruction.

While the parties of the incoming grand coalition, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), with the support of the Greens, are releasing unlimited sums for rearmament, they are also insisting on intensifying cuts in social and pension spending as well as in the public sector. Chancellor-designate Friedrich Merz (CDU) has already announced further cuts to *Bürgergeld* (welfare payments) and other social spending.

Moreover, the “special fund for infrastructure,” which accounts for around half the new borrowings, is not being used to renovate dilapidated schools and hospitals—as has been widely reported—but to expand roads, bridges and other facilities to make them fit for war.

SPD leader Lars Klingbeil has stated that huge investment in infrastructure was “central to a strong Germany in a strong Europe that takes on more responsibility for security.” The “White Paper” on defence policy, presented by EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen on Wednesday, lists “military mobility”—a network of land corridors, airports and seaports for the transport of troops and material—and the development of new technologies for electronic warfare as central components of European rearmament, alongside the production of modern weapons systems.

Added to this are the enormous costs for interest and loan repayments, which have to be financed from the regular budget. The total debt of federal, state and local government will rise from the current €2.5 trillion to €4.2 trillion within 10 years as a result of the rearmament loans.

The undemocratic means by which the package was whipped through the Bundestag (parliament) already show that the implementation of this huge rearmament programme requires dictatorial methods.

During the Bundestag election campaign, neither the CDU/CSU nor the SPD came clean with the electorate and announced that they wanted to invest a trillion euros in armaments. For years, both parties have paraded the constitutionally enshrined “debt brake,” which places a strict limit on

new borrowing, like an untouchable holy relic in order to justify unprecedented social cuts. The outgoing coalition government of the SPD, Greens and Liberal Democrats (FDP) fell apart over this issue, and Merz had claimed during the election campaign that the debt brake would be observed.

But as soon as the polling stations closed, the CDU/CSU and SPD recalled the outgoing Bundestag to decide, together with the Greens, on gigantic borrowings for their war programme, since the incoming government lacks the necessary two-thirds majority in the new Bundestag required to pass such legislation.

## End of the transatlantic alliance

If you read the papers of the relevant think tanks and the commentaries in leading German media, the real purpose of the gigantic arms offensive becomes clear. Three goals are being pursued: Breaking free from military dependence on the US, the sustained weakening and imperialist subjugation of Russia, and German dominance in Europe.

Jörg Lau writes in *Die Zeit* that Donald Trump's renewed assumption of office marked “the end of an era of transatlanticism in German foreign policy—an era in which governments of all colours took it for granted that the alliance with America would secure Germany's security and prosperity.”

Putin's attack on Ukraine had revealed “the frightening extent of Europe's dependence on the USA,” said Lau. Now, “Merz must design a German foreign policy that in case of doubt, could function without the USA as a benevolent partner (or even with the USA as an opponent).”

*Der Spiegel* was jubilant about the “European spring in security policy.” A detailed article by seven authors states: “A NATO without the USA—that would be a task for the century, a historic turning point. But that is exactly what is now being seriously considered.” Possible outlines of a “Europeanised NATO in which Washington plays little or no role are already emerging. A new, flexible alliance could reach from Van in Turkey to Vancouver in Canada—and in the best-case scenario, count on the battle-hardened Ukraine.”

The news magazine accuses the Americans of having “deliberately organised NATO in such a way that not much works without it. The alliance has always been a vehicle for controlling the allies.” High-resolution satellite images, transport aircraft and US intelligence had held NATO together. Many European countries had bought US weapons that were dependent on American spare parts and software updates. In the meantime, Europe is puzzling over whether the Pentagon might even have built a kind of “kill switch” into the F-35 stealth jet—a mechanism that would render the aircraft unusable if necessary.

The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) echoes this

sentiment. “There is no longer a transatlantic alliance as we know it and the cohesion between Europe and the USA is eroding further every day,” writes its Eastern Europe expert Stefan Meister. “Trump is not only serving up Ukraine to Putin, but also Europe, which cannot defend itself without US security guarantees.” The costs of the “German and European denial of reality over the last decade” are now becoming brutally visible.

DGAP has published over a dozen articles urging faster rearmament and a more aggressive German foreign policy. The headlines alone speak for themselves: “A Europeanisation of NATO is indispensable.” “For a militarily strong Germany,” “Franco-German defence cooperation: now or never,” “Germany must once again become a driving force in EU trade policy,” “Cyber defence is not enough against China and Russia’s cyber aggression” and “The time for naivety is over”—to name just a few.

DGAP is the authentic voice of German imperialism. Founded in 1955 by leading representatives from politics and business—including Hermann Abs and Robert Pferdemenges, both leading bankers under the Nazis—more than two thirds of its funding still comes from the private sector. Its current president, Thomas Enders, was for many years head of Airbus, the world’s largest aircraft manufacturer and Europe’s third-largest defence company.

## Warmongering against Russia

The swan song for the transatlantic alliance goes hand in hand with hysterical warmongering against Russia. Germany and other European powers are reacting to Trump’s attempts for rapprochement with Putin with a crazy plan to bring the world’s second-largest nuclear power to its knees on their own.

*Der Spiegel* cites a retired British general who was convinced “Europe alone can stand up to Russia.” According to him, European NATO members would have to spend 3.5 percent of their economic output, or around €250 billion a year, to replace American capabilities and troops.

Economically, according to *Der Spiegel*, “the Europeans have a clear advantage in the arms race.” Russia only has one-tenth of the economic power of all European NATO states. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk put it in a nutshell: “500 million Europeans are asking 300 million Americans to protect them from 140 million Russians.”

European weapons production is being massively ramped up. The €150 billion that the EU is making available for this purpose should “explicitly not be used to buy American weapons” because there was “no strategic autonomy without European preference,” *Der Spiegel* quotes a French minister as saying.

In order to prevent the war plans being blocked by EU members such as Hungary, a “coalition of the willing,” which also includes non-EU members such as the UK, Norway and Turkey, should be formed to create a European NATO.

“Turkey controls access to the Black Sea and maintains a 400,000-strong army, the second largest in NATO,” says *Der Spiegel*. “Its defence industry can quickly deliver weapons, combat drones and artillery shells.” Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan has already promised to participate in a new European security architecture.

According to *Der Spiegel*, future cooperation with Kyiv is just as important. “Nobody knows better than Ukrainian soldiers how to fight with drones. The Europeans can benefit enormously from this knowledge.” A German manufacturer is already producing them together with Ukrainian kamikaze drones: “Anything that keeps Putin in check helps.”

DGAP is in favour of forcing regime change in Russia by escalating the war in Ukraine and further expansion of the EU. “It is an illusion to

believe that Putin will stop the war against Ukraine and the West in return for any kind of concessions,” writes Stefan Meister. “The Putin system must be weakened in a sustained manner so that political change from within becomes possible.” It remained “crucial that Russia realise the limits of its military power in Ukraine.”

The madness of this strategy cannot be exaggerated. Regime change in Moscow would probably bring a faction to power that would be much faster than Putin to deploy nuclear weapons. Figures like the late Alexei Navalny, who are completely in the service of NATO, have hardly any supporters in Russia. The memories of the German war of annihilation, which cost the lives of 28 million inhabitants of the Soviet Union, are too vivid for that.

The claim that Russia will conquer the whole of Europe if it is not defeated in Ukraine is absurd. The country lacks all the economic and military prerequisites for this, as well as a political motive. Putin’s invasion of Ukraine was a reactionary response to the advance of NATO to its borders, which Moscow—as today’s war hysteria confirms—rightly perceived as a threat. Precisely because Russia lacks the necessary means to wage a conventional war against a highly armed Europe, the danger of it resorting to nuclear weapons is particularly high.

## Longstanding rearmament plans

Trump’s attacks on the European Union, the imposition of punitive tariffs and the attempt to reach an agreement with Putin on a Ukraine deal over the heads of the Europeans have accelerated Germany’s rearmament plans. But these go back much further.

The German ruling class has never come to terms with the fact that it had to take a back seat militarily after the failure of Hitler’s war of annihilation. What held it back from becoming a major military power again was the mistrust of the victorious powers and, above all, the resistance of the working class.

When NATO was founded in 1949, its task was to “keep the Americans in, the Russians out and the Germans down,” as the first NATO Secretary General Lord Ismay put it. Initially, the post-war Federal Republic of Germany had no armed forces of its own and was only admitted to NATO six years later, with the escalation of the Cold War against the Soviet Union. Although the Bundeswehr’s troop strength was soon relatively high at just under 500,000 conscripted soldiers, it was primarily used for territorial defence and was never deployed in active warfare before 1999.

Opposition to war and militarism was widespread in Germany. In the 1950s, millions protested, supported by the trade unions, against rearmament and efforts at nuclear armament. At the end of the 1960s, the protest movement against the Vietnam War was linked to a sharp rise in conscientious objection to conscription. And in 1982, mass demonstrations against the deployment of medium-range nuclear missiles on German soil led to the premature end of Helmut Schmidt’s (SPD) government.

With German reunification in 1990, calls for a German great power policy became louder. In 1993, then German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel (FDP) declared: “As a nation of 80 million people, as the country with the strongest economy in the centre of Europe, we bear a special, sometimes new responsibility, whether we like it or not.” Due to its central location, its size and its traditional relations with Central and Eastern Europe, Germany was “predestined to derive the main benefit from the return of these states to Europe.”

In 1998, the Bundestag voted in favour of the first deployment of German troops in the NATO war against Yugoslavia. As is the case today, the old Bundestag, which had already been voted out, was then

reconvened. The Greens, who had strictly rejected German participation in the war during the election campaign, voted in favour, paving the way for their entry into the German government, with Green leader Joschka Fischer as foreign minister. Back then, the decision in favour of war almost tore the party apart; today, the Greens are the worst warmongers.

In 2013, more than 50 leading politicians, journalists, academics, military and business representatives drew up the paper “New Power—New Responsibility,” which served as a blueprint for the foreign policy of the newly formed grand coalition of the CDU/CSU and SPD under Angela Merkel (CDU). Ursula von der Leyen, also CDU, now president of the European Commission, was defence minister at the time and Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (SPD) was foreign minister.

The paper claimed an international “leadership role” for Germany: As a “trading and exporting nation,” which lived from globalisation like “hardly any other country” and required “demand from other markets as well as access to international trade routes and raw materials.” In particular, “the increasingly unstable European environment from North Africa to the Middle East and Central Asia” was named as a target for German military operations.

## Escalation in Ukraine

This strategy experienced its baptism of fire in Ukraine. In February 2014, Berlin, together with the US, supported the coup by far-right forces, which helped a pro-Western regime to power and provoked the current war. David North, chairperson of the *World Socialist Web Site* international editorial board, said shortly afterwards in his speech to the 2014 international May Day rally:

For German imperialism, the confrontation with Russia is welcomed as a pretext for the repudiation of the constraints on militarism imposed in the wake of the unspeakable crimes committed during the years of Hitler’s Third Reich. In recent months, the German media has been engaged in an increasingly frenzied propaganda campaign directed against not only Russia, but also against the deeply rooted anti-war sentiments of the German working class. ...

Behind the propaganda stand definite economic and geopolitical interests. The German president has declared that his country’s weight in the world economy requires that it obtain the military force necessary to secure its broader geopolitical interests. As in the twentieth century, Germany is once again gazing longingly upon the Black Sea region, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Central Asia and the vast land mass of Russia.

Eleven years and several hundred thousand war dead later, this imperialist war policy is taking on new dimensions. In order to pursue its economic and geopolitical interests, German imperialism is not only investing huge sums in rearmament, but also accepting the risk of nuclear annihilation.

In doing so, it is following in its traditional footsteps. German imperialism already focussed on Russia and Ukraine in the First World War and the Soviet Union in the Second. And just like back then, it endeavoured to dominate Europe in order to achieve its goals. The same is true today.

Political scientist Herfried Münkler, who has long advocated a

strengthening of German militarism, regards this as one of the most important tasks of the rearmament programme. “Above all, the Germans must emerge with a relatively large amount of money in order to regain the leading position within Europe,” he said in a *Pioneer* podcast.

The confrontation with Trump is currently bringing the European powers a little closer together. French President Emmanuel Macron is also endeavouring to build a European army and has reiterated his offer to deploy French nuclear weapons to protect the whole of Europe—although the decision on their use should be left exclusively to him.

The UK is taking part in European meetings despite Brexit and wants to continue to support Ukraine in the war against Russia. And Poland is working closely with Germany and France on armaments.

However, the confrontation with the US, rival economic and geopolitical interests, the battle for lucrative defence contracts and growing domestic political tensions will inevitably cause the conflicts within Europe, which made the continent the scene of two world wars, to flare up again. Neither France nor Britain nor Poland, which was devastated by Germany in the Second World War, are prepared to accept the German “leading position within Europe” invoked by Münkler.

Only the working class can stop the relapse into war and barbarism. The objective conditions for this are developing rapidly. Europe is already being repeatedly shaken by violent class struggles and protests. But these require a perspective. The working class must free itself from the paralysing influence of the trade unions and pseudo-left organisations that openly support the war programme or steer resistance against it into the dead end of impotent appeals to those in power.

It must organise itself in independent rank-and-file action committees and unite across Europe. It must combine the struggle against social cuts, for better wages and for democratic rights with the struggle against war and its root cause, capitalism. The super-rich and large corporations must be expropriated, and the economy geared towards social needs rather than private profits. The goal must be the construction of a United Socialist States of Europe.

This is what the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party) and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting for.



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