

German media demands military buildup in response to US election

By Peter Schwarz
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In German commentaries on the foreign policy consequences of the American presidential election, a central theme has emerged: With the election of Donald Trump, the United States has departed from the community of Western politics and values, and Germany must therefore build itself up militarily, unite Europe under its leadership, and take on the international responsibility for the defence of “Western values.”

This is a thread which runs through every political camp. While some in the conservative media want to maintain close relations with the US under Trump, they combine this with the demand for military buildup and a common European defence policy.

Thomas Schmid, publisher of the *Welt* newspaper, considered it “reckless to now bid farewell to the US,” saying that Europe and America belonged together. “At the same time,” he added, “Europe should and must become something like a great power if it wants to assert itself in the world and on the side of the perhaps foundering United States.”

In the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), Berthold Kohler lamented “America’s turn away from the world,” and drew the following conclusion: “The divided Europeans will have to come together on the important questions and fortify themselves to look after their interests.” In the same paper, Holger Steltzner added: “The member states [of the European Union] will have to substantially increase their spending for domestic and foreign security.” Both Kohler and Steltzner are editors of the FAZ.

The arms industry has already recognized an opportunity. On Wednesday, the shares of arms manufacturer Rheinmetall registered at times an increase of 6 percent.

The loudest voices calling for an assertive German

and European foreign policy have not, however, come from conservative but rather the liberal papers. They are exploiting anxiety over a Trump presidency to campaign for the return of German militarism.

Deputy Editor-in-chief of *Die Zeit*, Bernd Ulrich, compared Trump to “the monarchical gamblers and fascist leaders,” which have led Europe “repeatedly into misfortune.” He described Trump as “a macho crazy” and the US as “an aimless world power in decline.” He concluded from this: “It is now time to leave behind Americanism, naïve Atlanticism, gullible dependence on America and assumed US avant-gardism.”

Ulrich goes on: “With the election of Trump, with the political freak out of the greatest and most powerful democracy in the world, there remains only one great power that can embody democracy and reason. That power is Europe. And the most powerful person in the world, who is neither an authoritarian nor crazy, is from this week forward Angela Merkel.”

One does not know whether to laugh or become angry over such an hysterical article. Ulrich declares Merkel, of all people, who, because of her brutal austerity policy and her reactionary refugee deal with Turkey, is detested in large parts of Europe as the embodiment of “democracy and reason.” Ulrich calls the European Union, hated by a large section of the population as a tool of the European great powers, banks and companies, the “best functioning democratic world power.”

Ulrich is a typical representative of that academically educated middle-class layer, which has gone from pacifism to warmongering and from social criticism to defending the status quo. This conscientious objector began his journalistic career with the anarcho-pacifist magazine *Graswurzelrevolution* [Grassroots

Revolution]. In his early years, he headed the office of the Green Party's parliamentary fraction. He then wrote for the *taz*, the *Frankfurter Rundschau* and other newspapers before landing at *Die Zeit*.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* makes arguments similar to those of *Die Zeit*. Its editor-in-chief Kurt Kister writes: "Those states in Europe that were previously among America's closest allies must now reposition themselves. ... The relationship between Europe and the US will not only be more competitive, but also more confrontational. For this reason, the EU—be it in a smaller circle of core states—must develop a strategy." This would begin with trade policy, continue with defence and would not stop with the intelligence services.

In the same paper, Stefan Braun remembers the speech by German President Joachim Gauck, who three years ago called for an end to military restraint and greater international responsibility. This will "finally become reality," writes Braun. "If Europe, the Europe of democrats, of human rights, liberality, wants to defend its values, it must defend them itself."

The "values" meant by this are revealed in the admission that the US had previously defended these "values." It apparently means 25 years of almost uninterrupted wars, in which the US and its allies have destroyed large parts of the Middle East, killed hundreds of thousands and turned millions into refugees. This is what the proponents of "international responsibility" propose to take up. This is not about "values," it is about imperialist interests—for strategic influence, raw materials and markets. Every imperialist war of aggression, even the most brutal, has been waged in the name of lofty "values."

Above all, the German economy is extremely nervous about the election of Trump. Should he make real on his announcement to protect the US from imports, Germany is threatened with the loss of its most important export market. In 2015, the US replaced France as Germany's largest trading partner after six decades. This year, German industry has exported goods valued at €114 billion to the US, 73 percent more than in 2010 and almost twice as much as was imported from the US. In addition to this, the US accounts for one sixth of all German direct investments.

Should these markets collapse under Trump, the

German economy will need a substitute. That is one of the main reasons for the return of German militarism and an aggressive foreign policy.

This course is receiving support not only from the governing parties, but also from the Greens and the "left" opposition parties. Left Party politician Stefan Liebich revealed this on the evening of the election with his extremely enthusiastic reaction to the prospect of a more aggressive German foreign policy.

Liebich declared that Germany and Europe must "in the future pursue a stronger foreign policy, independently and more confidently." The times when one oriented towards the US are over. "Now it is time to strengthen foreign and security policy," he said. "In the future, we will say 'no' louder and more clearly to what Washington wants. This is the end of soft pedalling."

These politics have nothing to do with the defence of "values." Less than 75 years after the worst crimes in human history were committed, the ruling class of Germany least of all has the right to lecture others about "values."

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