

# Germany: New defence minister demands more money, recognition for the armed forces

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The change at the top of the German Defence Ministry is linked to an intense campaign for military rearmament. After her swearing in at the Bundestag (parliament), the new minister of defence, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, made a short policy statement, calling on parliamentarians of all parties to support the Bundeswehr (armed forces) and its operations more strongly.

In times of considerable risks, “our Bundeswehr is one of the central instruments of our security,” she said. At the same time, she reaffirmed her demand for a higher defence budget “to continue building up the armed forces after years of austerity.”

The Bundeswehr is increasingly to be placed at the centre of society, become more visible and receive more recognition. At the same time, the widespread opposition to militarism and war in the population is to be opposed more sharply.

Kramp-Karrenbauer would continue and develop the many military upgrade projects in terms of personnel and recruitment, material procurement, equipment and training initiated by her predecessor. But above all, it was important that, with the change of Ursula von der Leyen to become head of the European Union Commission, plans for the establishment of a common European army be promoted more quickly and intensively, she said.

“The world is calling for more Europe. And the world needs more Europe!” she shouted at the deputies. “We want to make Europe strong—also in solid military capabilities.” The presidency of the European Union now provided the opportunity to “further develop the European Defence Union—as we have in the coalition agreement” with the Social Democrats.

What Kramp-Karrenbauer understands as “solid military capabilities” is well known. For example, the

defence ministers of France, Spain and Germany last month signed an agreement to develop a common European air combat system (Future Combat Air System, FCAS). This is not just a new combat aircraft, but an integrated system.

The massive arms project, costing more than €100 billion, is part of the efforts to transform the European Union into a major military power that can wage war independently of and, if necessary, against the United States.

In her policy statement, the new defence minister yesterday tried to reassure her US and NATO partners. “Germany remains firmly anchored in the transatlantic alliance, is and remains firmly anchored in NATO,” she said, stressing that NATO was “the guarantor of our security.” As a political and military alliance, it united the values and interests of all its members. The historical and cultural experiences and “our political convictions” were a firm bond of the alliance.

“We know on which side of the table we’re sitting,” Kramp-Karrenbauer said. Germany was a “reliable ally” who already shouldered a large part of the common tasks.

In this context, the minister reiterated the demand for more money for the army. Against all resistance, she held firm to not only strive for the “2 percent target” to which all NATO partners had agreed, but also to achieve it. This refers to the increase in defence spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product, which would mean close to a doubling of the previous budget.

In the ensuing debate, it became clear that all parties support increasing the capacity of the Bundeswehr and criticism comes only from the right. Thus, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Greens and the Left Party all emphasized in different ways that more money alone was not enough. It was necessary to clearly identify

and overcome the “structural problems” of the army.

Resistance to military rearmament and cuts in all social sectors with which the grand coalition of the SPD and Christian Democrats is financing increased defence spending is growing in the population. More and more people are asking who gives these government parties, which have massively lost votes in recent elections, the right to carry out this war policy.

Kramp-Karrenbauer made it clear in her brief policy statement that she will oppose this anti-war sentiment. She listed three main points of her work: Firstly, more money and no retreat when faced with criticism. Secondly, more “freedom of decision of the commanders,” which means a relaxation or abolition of any parliamentary reservations. And third, increasing the “visibility of the Bundeswehr in our country and in our society.”

In this context, she suggested “those in uniform should travel for free on the train” and encouraged the organization of more public swearing-in ceremonies for soldiers and military tattoos.

“Our soldiers come from the middle of our society,” she said. That is why the Bundeswehr belongs “in the middle of our cities and communities.” She had written to all the state premiers and suggested they conduct public swearing-in ceremonies “on the birthday of our Bundeswehr on November 12.” “That would be a strong signal and a strong sign of recognition for our soldiers.” In order to make clear the character of the “Bundeswehr as a parliamentary army,” she proposed to regularly conduct swearing-in ceremonies in front of the Reichstag (parliament).

By a so-called parliamentary army, Kramp-Karrenbauer does not mean control over the army by elected parliamentarians, but the subordination of parliament to the army, which dictates to the deputies what they need in terms of finance, recruits and social recognition. Since the time army officers participated in Nazi Party rallies, and the speeches of Hitler and Goebbels about the close connection between the people (Volk), the army and the Führer, no such adulation has been experienced in Germany.

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