

Germany leads the way, as Europe rearms

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Europe is responding to the growing conflict with the US by massively rearming. The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, yesterday presented the assembled heads of state and government of the European Union with a plan to “rearm Europe,” which she said would raise an additional €800 billion over four years for military equipment, military support for Ukraine and the development of a European defence industry.

Facilitated by a relaxation of EU debt rules and other incentives, €650 billion is to come from the member states themselves. The EU intends to provide a further €150 billion in a fund.

“We are in an era of rearmament. Europe is ready to massively increase its defence spending,” said von der Leyen, explaining her initiative. It was about both “the short-term urgency to act and support Ukraine” and “the long-term need to take much more responsibility for our own European security.”

In a televised address to the French people on Wednesday evening, French President Emmanuel Macron reiterated his offer to extend France’s nuclear umbrella to Germany and other European countries. He would “respond to the historic appeal” by future German Chancellor Friedrich Merz (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) and talk about an extended nuclear deterrent, Macron said. However, the decision on the use of nuclear weapons will always remain in the hands of the French president.

In contrast to von der Leyen, who kept a low diplomatic profile, Macron attacked the US directly. Unlike in the past, “our ally in America” can no longer be relied on, he said. “We must strengthen our defence. In this respect, we remain linked to NATO, but we must strengthen our independence. The future of Europe must not be decided in Washington or Moscow.”

Macron accused Russia of having “become a threat to France and Europe for years to come.” No one can believe “that Russia will stop after Ukraine.”

Germany is blazing the trail in Europe’s rearmament programme. On Tuesday evening, the leaders of the CDU, Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democrats (SPD), who are negotiating a coalition government, appeared before the press and announced a rearmament programme that hardly anyone could have imagined just a few days ago. At around €1 trillion, it is 10 times greater than the special fund that Olaf Scholz’s government adopted three years ago, which he described as a “new era.”

All defence spending that exceeds 1 percent of economic output (around €45 billion) is to be exempt from the debt brake, which sets strict limits on new government borrowing. Originally, a further special fund of €400 billion had been under discussion. With the regulation now proposed, military expenditure can be increased far beyond this. Experts estimate it could rise by at least €500 billion.

Special fund for infrastructure

In addition, the CDU/CSU and SPD have agreed on a special fund totalling €500 billion, which is also not subject to the debt brake. This is to be used to finance the expansion of infrastructure. However, this is not—as the SPD would have us believe—about repairing schools and investing in hospitals but about direct and indirect preparations for war.

In addition to the rearmament and expansion of the Bundeswehr (German Armed Forces), which is financed from the defence budget, achieving “war readiness” requires the development of a huge arms industry that is independent of US imports and the expansion of war-related infrastructure. This is the purpose of the special fund.

The project is reminiscent of Hitler’s infamous Autobahn construction, which was also presented as a civilian project but in reality served in the rapid transport of troops. Today, the issue at stake is also the transport of troops. President of the IFO think tank Clemens Fuest, who proposed the fund together with other economists, told the *F.A.Z.* newspaper that it should be used to “invest in civil defence and in the military upgrading of infrastructure, stable bridges first and foremost.”

The fund will also focus on digitalisation, reconnaissance satellites, secure communication, drones and other weapons technologies that are crucial for modern warfare and in which Europe lags far behind the US, as well as independence from supply chains and the supply of raw materials and energy.

A background paper written by the President of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Moritz Schularick, who, like Ifo head Fuest, is part of the group of economists who proposed the huge special fund, is revealing. The paper also bears the signatures of two leading defence industry executives, Thomas Enders, the former CEO of Airbus and current president of the think tank DGAP, and René Obermann, Airbus supervisory board chairman. Airbus is the second largest defence company in Europe.

The paper makes clear that the gigantic arms build-up is not for defence, as claimed, but to escalate the war against Russia with vast quantities of modern weaponry and to prepare for further wars.

The paper’s core is “an appeal to direct defence billions specifically towards creating an ‘asymmetric superiority’ in the event of war,” writes the *F.A.Z.*, which has access to the text. Overall, the proposals are aimed at “superiority on the modern battlefield, and less on support or logistics aspects of defence.”

Germany must initiate a “SPARTA” project (Strategic Protection and Advanced Resilience Technology Alliance) for European defence, the economists and defence industry executives demand. This means “the immediate launch of major armaments programmes with a focus on new technologies and sovereign intra-European procurement.”

Today, superiority on the battlefield is achieved through mass, in combination with technological excellence, as the war in Ukraine shows.

In the short term, the paper calls for, among other things, an “extensive drone wall over NATO’s eastern flank” with tens of thousands of combat drones. In the medium term, technical improvements such as a “European Multi-Domain Combat Cloud for the decentralised, networked use of data on the battlefield” are to be developed.

Constitutional amendment at breakneck speed

The CDU/CSU and SPD are seeking to adopt their huge rearmament programme with tremendous haste, ruthlessly disregarding election promises and democratic procedures.

They have agreed on the funding before the actual coalition negotiations on the joint programme of the new government, which will not be elected until mid-April at the earliest, have even begun.

In order to obtain the necessary two-thirds majority, the voted-out Bundestag will be convened once again to pass the necessary constitutional amendments in the third reading on March 17 at the latest. They are to be approved by the Bundesrat, the upper chamber of parliament, on March 21. The new Bundestag will then convene for the first time on March 25.

This unprecedented procedure, which ruthlessly tramples over the election results, was chosen because the SPD and CDU/CSU, together with the Greens, have the required two-thirds majority in the old Bundestag. In the new Bundestag, they would have to rely on support from the Left Party or the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD).

The Greens are still reluctant. They are offended because they were not consulted at an earlier stage. However, they have already made it clear that they will vote in favour of the constitutional amendment if the words “climate protection” are inserted somewhere in the text.

Chancellor-designate Friedrich Merz vehemently spoke out against relaxing the debt brake during the parliamentary election campaign. Now, in less than 10 days, he has done a 180-degree U-turn and is in favour of a rearmament programme that would increase the national debt from the current 63 percent to 90 percent or even 100 percent of annual economic output within a short space of time.

Merz justified his new stance by saying that Europe must grow up in the face of new international challenges. “Whatever it takes” must now apply to defence, he declared. The phrase was coined by former European Central Bank chief Mario Draghi, who used it during the financial crisis to announce support for the banks to the tune of around €500 billion.

The scale of the rearmament programme that is now being introduced is reminiscent of the early years of the Nazi dictatorship. The share of the military budget in the German national product rose from 1.5 percent in 1932 to 5.5 percent in 1935, the third year of Hitler’s rule. As financing from tax revenues was no longer possible, armaments were financed by state-backed loans. The higher the debts rose, the more inevitable the war became. Germany would have been bankrupt if Hitler had not invaded Poland in 1939 and later the Soviet Union and started the most brutal campaign of plunder in history.

Dominate Europe to become a world power

Sums on a similar scale are involved this time around. And the German ruling class is going down the same path again. It is trying to dominate Europe in order to become a world power.

Back in 2014, Ursula von der Leyen (then German defence minister) and the current Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (then foreign minister) announced that Germany must once again play a role in world politics that is commensurate with its economic weight. Since then, the country has massively rearmed and played a leading role in the war against Russia in Ukraine. Now those in power see an opportunity to free themselves from American domination.

An editorial published in *Der Spiegel* on March 6 expressed this with remarkable candour. Under the headline “America is now our adversary,” Mathieu von Rohr wrote: “The Western alliance is broken. Europe must now become strong itself—or it will perish.”

According to *Der Spiegel*, the significance of this fundamental shift for Germany cannot be overemphasised. The Federal Republic was in many respects an American creation, the US was a big brother. “That is now over.”

Von Rohr wrote almost triumphantly: “Dramatic events can awaken forces. Nobody strengthened Nato like Putin when he invaded Ukraine. ... There is no reason why 500 million Europeans cannot defend themselves against Russia alone. They are economically strong enough to be able to do so—and they will have to now.”

It is particularly important that “Germany, which has been so hesitant militarily in the past, must now take a leading role as the most important European nation.” Lifting the debt brake on defence spending can only be the beginning, he continued. Europe needs “strategic autonomy” and also requires nuclear armament.

One can find dozens of similar comments. Former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Greens), for example, called for the reintroduction of compulsory military service and a European nuclear umbrella in an interview with *Die Zeit*, arguing that “the West is finished” and that “Europeans and Germans must now think about our own security.”

In its election statement, the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) wrote that the response of Germany’s ruling class to Trump’s “Make America Great Again” was “*Deutschland über alles*.” It is “responding to Trump by rearming at a pace not seen since Hitler.” This is now being stunningly confirmed.

Only the working class, which has to bear the costs and consequences, can put a stop to this war madness by uniting internationally and combining the fight against social cuts and exploitation with the fight against war and capitalism.



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