

German Army Association Demands Massive Armaments Increase

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Against the backdrop of the Ukraine crisis, leading German politicians and military leaders are demanding a massive rearmament of the army.

On Sunday, the president of the armed forces association, André Wüstner, attending the Munich Security Conference, declared: “Whoever wants freedom must be ready for war.” He has precisely the same view as the German government, namely that the conflict in Ukraine cannot be solved militarily, but that the army must prepare itself for any emergency.

The past year has shown “how quickly risks can turn into dangers,” said Wüstner. The situation in Ukraine, Syria and Iraq is dramatic, he said.

“For us, that means insisting that the army should be fully equipped—equipment caps passed by the previous legislature must be abolished! That begins with the weapons system and goes all the way to the personal equipment of the individual soldier.”

“To achieve complete preparation of the army for deployment”, he added, “we must raise the defense budget step by step in the next few years. Otherwise, we risk losing the trust of our allies that we have only just won back.”

Wüstner was referring to “global challenges” and the German role in NATO. Germany has a “payback responsibility” with regard to the army and NATO.

The lieutenant colonel complained, “Since 1990, the budget was restructured to save money at the expense of the army,” and demanded: “It is time for that to end—there have to be credible assurances of funding for deterrence and security!”

This year’s defense report raises similar demands and read like a blueprint for the rearmament of the army. In the forward, the parliamentary defense commissioner Hellmut Königshaus (Free Democratic Party, FDP) describes the year 2014 as “the year of truth” for the army. It is being rebuilt into an army capable of intervening worldwide, but is “stretched to the limit of its capacity.”

The first part of the report creates the impression that the German armed forces are a chronically underfinanced scrapheap in need of redevelopment and in urgent need of a massive increase in budgetary allotments.

In nearly all units, there are personnel problems: the anti-aircraft missile unit stationed in

Turkish territory, the speedboat squadron, the U-boat squadron, the tactical air force squadron, the marine planes and the signals division.

With regard to large military equipment, the report says there are massive “inadequacies and deficits.” It mentions, for instance, the Eurofighter, the transport helicopter NH 90, the transport airplane Transall and the marine mine warfare systems. There are not enough armored personnel carriers, and barracks are dilapidated. Replacement parts for military equipment and adequate ammunition are also lacking. And the main gun used by the army, the G36, does not shoot accurately.

Wüstner and the defense report demand what the German government and NATO have wanted for a long time but have previously only formulated cautiously because of widespread popular opposition.

Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) said in her opening speech to the Munich Security Conference last weekend that Germany is working “very hard to bring the army’s weaponry and equipment into a condition that will allow us to maintain our role as enduring alliance partners.” NATO wants this to take place immediately. The military alliance has long demanded of its members that they raise their defense budgets to at least two percent of GDP. Recently, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg insisted that Germany set a good example.

Stoltenberg held talks with Chancellor Angela Merkel, Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and Defense Minister von der Leyen about increasing military funding during his inaugural visit to Berlin in January. He also presented his plans to the parliamentary committees for defense and foreign policy.

Germany is a “key country” on the continent and has an important leadership role to play, said Stoltenberg. Therefore it must set an example for other NATO countries with its military. The security situation is changing “and we must adjust ourselves to that,” the NATO secretary general said.

Like Wüstner and von der Leyen, Stoltenberg directly related his plans for armaments with Russia’s “confrontation course”. NATO must stock up its arsenal, because only on the basis of a “position of strength” is a dialog with Moscow possible.

However, the most important reason for the demand to build up the army is not the NATO insistence, but the end of German restraint in matters of foreign policy announced by President Gauck and the German government a year ago. In order to be able to intervene worldwide to defend German economic, geopolitical and security interests, they need an army that is well equipped and prepared.

The complaints of the defense report about the bad condition of the army evoke historical parallels. In 1933, minister of the army of the Reich, Werner von Blomberg, prepared a memorandum in which he called the state of the German army “hopeless.” Like the current defense report, Blomberg’s memorandum complained that there were inadequate personnel reserves, military equipment and ammunition. Not even the equipment guaranteed by the Versailles treaty was available to the marines. Armoured ships were not delivered and the air force was almost nonexistent.

The dramatic development that then followed is well known. At the end of the same year,

the Nazi regime began a rapid rearmament of the army. Within a short time, the German weapons industry, which had shrunk dramatically in accordance with the Versailles peace treaty, became a powerful fighting force that began the Second World War in 1939, left large parts of Europe in ruins and led a brutal war of destruction against the Soviet Union.

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