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Germany: the defence minister's plagiarism may turn out to be dangerous for the Christian Democrats and thwart the reform of the Bundeswehr

On 16 February, the newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* accused Defence Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (CSU) of including extensive fragments of press articles and Bundestag studies, without specifying their sources, in his PhD thesis published in 2009. If the accusations of plagiarism are proven, zu Guttenberg may be forced to resign. The resignation of this popular minister would mean a difficult reshuffle of the government and a drop in support for the Christian Democrat parties in a year of elections to local parliaments. This would also call into question the continuation of the reform of the Bundeswehr.

The plagiarism was revealed at the time of a routine checking of fragments of the PhD thesis before a publication of its review in the press. According to information from the media, zu Guttenberg in more than half of his doctoral thesis used press publications and two studies developed by the Reserch Services of the Deutcher Bundestag without quoting the sources. The Bayreuth University, which had previously evaluated this thesis as outstanding, gave the minister two weeks to respond to the accusations. Then it will decide whether to impose any sanctions. Chancellor Angela Merkel and other prominent politicians from the Christian Democratic parties, the CDU and CSU, have declared their support for zu Guttenberg. The opposition SPD and the Green Party however are calling for a parliamentary debate regarding the accusations of plagiarism and possible abuse of power by zu Guttenberg as a member of parliament. Zu Guttenberg has become one of the most popular German politicians since 2009, when he was nominated minister of economy in the previous CDU/CSU/SPD government. He was also seen as a potential Christian Democrat candidate for chancellor. The confirmation of plagiarism by the university will aggravate the problems of the Christian Democrats, who are losing support ahead of local parliamentary elections, and will cause friction inside the coalition. If the minister hands in his resignation, a reschuffle of the government will be necessary. This may also pose the risk of a discontinuation of the Bundeswehr reform since zu Guttenberg has been the main driving force of this reform. <zawil>