

The Bundeswehr's problems with military equipment

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At a meeting of the Bundestag's Defence Committee held on 24 September the German Ministry of Defence presented a list detailing the operational readiness of the Bundeswehr's most important military equipment. According to the media, the number of systems that are combat ready is much lower than the number of the systems that the Bundeswehr has in its possession. This applies mainly to the Air Force (Tornado and Eurofighter fighter jets, Transall and A310 transport aircraft, CH-53 transport helicopters, Patriot air defence systems), the Navy's (Sea Lynx, Sea King) and the Army's (Tiger, NH90) helicopters. The Committee's convened the meeting due to the Bundeswehr's recent problems with sending Transall aircraft with arms to Iraq; with dispatching frigate helicopters to the EU's Operation Atalanta; and with maintaining the Patriot air defence systems in Turkey in combat readiness. It was the first time that German public opinion received information about the large scale of the problem. The subject of the Bundeswehr's combat readiness has provoked heated debate in Germany.

Commentary

- Several factors have come together to bring about the materiel problems in the Bundeswehr. Firstly, the problems are due to the intensive use of transport aircraft and helicopters (Transall, CH-53) in the operation in Afghanistan and the missions in Africa. Secondly, they are the result of savings and the withdrawal of a section of the military equipment which were introduced as part of the reform of the Bundeswehr begun in 2011. Thirdly, these problems have also been caused by the difficulty in implementing large armament projects. There have been many years of delays in supplying new systems as well as defects with the new equipment. As for the key systems, the Bundeswehr has been in a transitional period for the last two to three years. It will also continue to have problems with the equipment in full combat readiness over the next three to five years.
- The revelation of these problems has prompted a serious discussion in Germany about the condition of the Bundeswehr since they call into question the credibility of Germany's security policy in two aspects. They prove that the announcement which defence minister Ursula von der Leyen has made about increasing Germany's military involvement in global crisis management, even within the UN, does not match the Bundeswehr's real capabilities. The information also casts doubt on the declared full participation of the Bundeswehr in NATO collective defence operations. According to von der Leyen, the

Bundeswehr is not in possession of the number of combat ready military aircraft and helicopters it has declared in the NATO Defence Planning Process in 2014.

- No increase in the budget of the Ministry of Defence should be expected, though. In 2014 it stands at 32.44 billion euros, which is 1.2–1.3% of German GDP (by comparison, the budget of Polish Ministry of Defence for 2014 is approximately 7.6 billion euros). Politicians from the CDU/CSU are favourable to an increase in military spending starting from 2016, while the SPD and the Green Party are opposed to it, demanding better management of projects and finance in the Ministry of Defence. What may be expected is the introduction of intermediate solutions. Proposals enabling more flexibility in allocating unused funds allocated to large projects are being considered. It is also possible that military equipment will be leased for a fixed period of time in order to eliminate deficits; for example transport aircraft may be leased for operations in conflict free zones.