

German soldiers on a peacekeeping mission in Ukraine: a test of public support

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Following a meeting of European leaders with Presidents Volodymyr Zelensky and Donald Trump in Washington (see '[Washington summit: a tactical success for Ukraine](#)'), Friedrich Merz declared Germany's readiness to participate in providing security guarantees for Kyiv. This statement injected new momentum into political and public debate on the potential deployment of German troops to Ukraine. The Chancellor did not rule out the Bundeswehr's involvement, but stated that a decision would be made only 'in the event of a peace agreement', following consultations with European states and the United States, and in alignment with coalition partners and other parliamentary groups in the Bundestag.

The topic remains highly controversial in Germany, with divisions cutting across party lines. Many Christian Democrats support Merz's position, but figures such as Michael Kretschmer, the CDU Minister President of Saxony, firmly oppose Germany's participation in security guarantees for Ukraine. Among the Social Democrats, the Chancellor's stance is shared by Vice-Chancellor and Finance Minister Lars Klingbeil, together with Defence Minister Boris Pistorius. However, politicians on the SPD's left wing remain sceptical, advocating instead the deployment of a UN or OSCE force rather than a European military mission. This position is echoed by The Left. The AfD is categorically opposed to any deployment of the Bundeswehr. The Greens avoid making explicit statements, but they support European security guarantees for Kyiv. Public opinion polling on the issue is becoming increasingly frequent. Most respondents remain opposed to German military involvement in Ukraine.

The deployment of German troops abroad is subject to the approval of the Bundestag. Public and political support for Germany's potential participation in a Western peacekeeping mission in Ukraine will depend on the operation's mandate, the involvement of allies – particularly the United States, France, and the United Kingdom – and the government's determination to convince the public of the mission's legitimacy. Current discussions are part of a broader effort to prepare society and the political elite for the possible deployment of the Bundeswehr to Ukraine after the war has ended.

Commentary

- **Merz's statement reflects Germany's ambition to assume a leading European role in supporting Ukraine and to position itself as a key player in the peace process and the shaping of European security.** Had he chosen not to make this declaration, Germany's standing would have weakened within the E3 format, which it co-chairs with the United

Kingdom and France. Both countries are spearheading efforts within the Coalition of the Willing to develop a concept for deploying Western support forces to Ukraine after the end of hostilities (see *'The Coalition of the Willing on security guarantees for Ukraine: less ambitious, more concrete'*). At this stage of the war, however, the Bundeswehr's declared readiness to participate in a potential mission does not yet entail any commitments for Germany. Should such a mission ever be launched, Merz has already outlined several conditions for German participation, allowing him considerable flexibility in making any final decision.

- **At present, Berlin is primarily focused on supporting Ukrainian forces by purchasing weapons and military equipment from the United States and supplying components for production in Ukraine** (see *'German military aid for Ukraine: a new model of support?'*). In August, it announced funding for a second package of ammunition and military equipment from the US, worth \$0.5 billion, under NATO's PURL initiative for preferential procurement on behalf of Kyiv. During a visit to the US on 26 August, Klingbeil expressed Germany's readiness to deepen cooperation between the German and Ukrainian defence industries. Should a final decision be made not to deploy the Bundeswehr, the government is likely to justify this by citing Germany's distinct form of engagement, together with the 'overstretch' associated with the permanent deployment of a brigade to Lithuania. That unit is expected to reach full operational readiness by the end of 2027 and ultimately **comprise** around 4,800 soldiers and 200 civilian staff (see *'The German Brigade Lithuania'*). This line of argument is already being **advanced** by some experts and politicians, including Foreign Affairs Minister Johann Wadephul (CDU) and the Bundestag's Defence Commissioner Henning Otte (CDU).
- **Most of the German public opposes sending the Bundeswehr to Ukraine.** According to an INSA poll conducted on 21 August, 56% of respondents opposed such a move, while only 28% support it. The proposal is rejected by voters of all parties, except for supporters of the Greens. A regional divide is also evident: residents of western federal states are more receptive to the idea, whereas those in the east remain strongly critical—mirroring attitudes toward Germany's broader support for Ukraine. These divisions are not new. In 1999, during NATO's bombing campaign in Kosovo, 64% of western Germans supported the action, compared with only 39% in the east. After the 11 September 2001 attacks, 71% of Germans expressed 'unlimited solidarity' with the United States and backed the deployment of German forces to Afghanistan. Relatively high public support for foreign missions has often been linked to the belief that Germany should play a more active role in ensuring security in Europe and globally. Politicians are expected to draw on this argument during any future campaign to probe and then build support for potential Bundeswehr involvement in Ukraine. Without public backing, the government will struggle to secure the Bundestag's necessary approval for sending troops abroad in this case.