



**Speech by
Federal Minister of Defence
Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer**

**on the occasion of the Grand Tattoo for
Dr Ursula von der Leyen**

Bendlerblock

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Dear Ursula,

Tonight is a very special night for you. You have often stood in this very place when others were honoured with a grand tattoo. Tonight, the highest military ceremony is held in your honour – we are paying our respect to you for your service to the Bundeswehr and our country.

And it is a special occasion for another reason, too: This is the first time that we bid farewell to a female minister of defence in Germany. You literally made history – and not for the last time, either: you will be the first woman to head the European Commission in Brussels.

Dear Ursula,

A lot has been written about you and your term as minister of defence in the past years. One of the particularities in the business of politics is that achievements do not feature prominently in media reporting. But it is exactly your many successes that I want to talk about tonight. And I want to start by saying that the Bundeswehr and our country owe you a great deal.

You took office as minister of defence in December 2013. Just five days later, it was time for the traditional Christmas visit to Bundeswehr troops on deployment – in Afghanistan. A visit to a country where Germany, together with its partners, is taking responsibility for peace and security. A visit to our servicemen and -women, whom you had just taken responsibility for. All this is easily said, but it means so much!

In your last bulletin you wrote: *“I found the office of minister of defence to be my most challenging task politically.”* A challenging time, during which you left a lasting mark. Let me give just three examples.

First: You contributed decisively to the image of Germany as a reliable ally. In January 2014 at the Munich Security Conference you expressed clearly what was to be your steadfast attitude throughout your time in office: *“Indifference is never an option for a*

country like Germany – neither from a security perspective nor from a humanitarian perspective.”

And you followed words with deeds. In the fight against ISIS, by providing training and equipment to the Kurdish Peshmerga and later with the Counter-Daesh operation in Jordan and Iraq. After the Russian annexation of Crimea, by providing reassurance measures for our Eastern allies – with enhanced Air Policing, the enhanced Forward Presence and the VJTF. By strengthening the Bundeswehr’s engagement in Mali, as part of MINUSMA, after the terrorist attacks in Paris. In the relief operation in response to the Ebola epidemic. With highly professional assistance from the Bundeswehr in support of refugees in Germany. And in sea rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea.

And you never shied away from domestic discussions. Quite the contrary, you actively sought dialogue and were ready to convince sceptics in politics or the general public with your arguments. In doing so, you decisively contributed to greater public awareness of the Bundeswehr as a tool in security policy. And that is a good thing!

In the political circles in Berlin, you insistently advocated that Germany stand firmly by the side of its partners and allies in difficult situations, that it must do so to preserve the coherence of our Alliance. It is not without reason that you enjoy the greatest respect amongst your colleagues in NATO and the EU. Your opinion carries weight with our partners. Because you stand for partnership and trust. For our country being a reliable ally, now and in the future. The fact that the Deputy Secretary General of NATO and many European colleagues are here tonight is living proof of that.

Second: You set the Bundeswehr on a new track towards the future. You never lost sight of the goal: to position and equip the Bundeswehr in such a way that it can fulfil its evolving responsibilities and its politically mandated tasks – to make sure that we actually have the necessary capabilities and equipment.

After 25 years of cutbacks, the Bundeswehr is growing and modernising again. That is true for all areas. Trends are positive for personnel, materiel, and funding. The defence budget clearly illustrates just how positive these trends are: it has increased by 40 % from 2014 to 2020. These funds were fully spent every year.

You focused on key issues for the future, from employer attractiveness to digital transformation, and made them your top priority. Let me cite just one prominent example: With the German Cyber and Information Domain Service, you established a separate major military organisational element. The Bundeswehr took a pioneering role here, also internationally. You built on innovation and chose less conventional approaches – as demonstrated by the Cyber Innovation Hub, the Cyber Agency, or CODE at the Bundeswehr University in Munich.

Comprehensive modernisation of a large organisation such as the Bundeswehr is a mammoth task. You approached it with great determination and on the basis of careful analysis and with a precise idea of what you wanted to achieve. You laid down conceptual foundations with previously unknown consistency: the White Paper, the Bundeswehr Concept and the Bundeswehr Capability Profile are all cast from one mould. In addition, we now have the Guidelines on Tradition and the Cultivation of Tradition in the Bundeswehr as well as a future Strategy of Reserve Forces.

You also asked uncomfortable questions, demanding a transparent organisation with clear targets – thus allowing your political work to be benchmarked. And even when you were facing strong headwinds, you stayed on course. You weathered the storm!

With charisma, and a fair bit of fighting spirit, you convinced others of your approach and overcame quite a few obstacles along the way. In the parliamentary realm, too, the prevailing belief by now, although this may not be shared to an equal degree by all party groups, is that we need ready forces for the entire spectrum of capabilities. And that once again we need to do and invest a lot more than before in order to achieve that goal. With this great dedication you have made a big difference in the Bundeswehr and for the Bundeswehr.

Third: You advanced European unification during a very difficult time for Europe. You took the initiative for more cooperation, to do more together in the area of defence.

It was you who woke up Europe's sleeping beauty, PESCO. You did not stop at thinking about specific projects in theory, you also realised them in practice. As seen, for example, in the mutual assignment of troops to armoured units or air defence, in

projects with the Netherlands. As seen in armaments cooperation, especially with France, in order to develop fighter jets and battle tanks for the future. As seen in the launch of the European Defence Union. And as seen in deepened cooperation with the United Kingdom, especially now, with Brexit drawing nearer.

Dear Ursula,

It is no secret that Europe, and European unification, are topics very close to your heart. You were, in your own words, a European first before identifying German, with roots in Lower Saxony. You know how to reconcile one with the other. This will serve you very well in your role as the bridge-builder who is needed at the top of the European Union.

You let the European idea of 'unity in diversity' guide you at all times, even when you were minister of defence. Just like the strong belief that we can only master global challenges together in a strong Europe. 'Remain transatlantic, become more European' – that was your wisely chosen guideline.

Now you are faced with a challenging task once more. A task that you will approach with all your heart. A task where you will continue to work with all your strength for a confident and strong Europe – also in the field of security and defence.

Dear Ursula,

Often the Bundeswehr and the ministry of defence are described as ossified, paralyzed by bureaucracy and short supplies. These tropes are unfair and not justified. Thousands of dedicated men and women serving as civilians or as military personnel prove every day just how ready and capable our Bundeswehr is. That they can do so is also to your credit.

Let me personally thank you for this on behalf of the Bundeswehr. I wish you all the best for the task ahead, and God's blessing!