“National and Alliance defence, international crisis management, missions abroad, emergency and disaster relief, the dangers posed by hybrid warfare and cyber threats: the range of tasks dealt with by our parliamentary army is huge. At the same time, a great deal is happening in terms of the European Security and Defence Policy. It is important for Parliament to examine, constructively and critically, the possibilities and opportunities of Permanent Structured Cooperation. We will also continue to focus on ensuring that the members of our armed forces receive the best possible training and are properly equipped, and on enhancing the appeal of the military profession.”

Wolfgang Hellmich, SPD
Chairman of the Defence Committee
The German Bundestag’s decisions are prepared by its committees, which are established at the start of each electoral term. Four of them are stipulated by the Basic Law, the German constitution: the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Defence Committee, the Committee on the Affairs of the European Union and the Petitions Committee. The Budget Committee and the Committee for the Rules of Procedure are also required by law. The spheres of responsibility of the committees essentially reflect the Federal Government’s distribution of ministerial portfolios. This enables Parliament to scrutinise the government’s work effectively.

The Bundestag committees
The German Bundestag sets political priorities of its own by establishing additional committees for specific subjects, such as sport, cultural affairs or tourism. In addition, special bodies such as parliamentary advisory councils, committees of inquiry or study commissions can also be established. The committees are composed of members of all the parliamentary groups, reflecting the balance of these groups in the German Bundestag. The distribution of the chairs and deputy chairs among the parliamentary groups also reflects their relative strengths in the plenary. In the current electoral term, the committees have between nine and 49 members.

The committees discuss and deliberate on items referred to them by the plenary. They also have the right to take up issues on their own initiative, allowing them to set priorities in the parliamentary debate. When necessary, they draw on external expertise — usually by holding public hearings. At the end of a committee’s deliberations, a majority of its members adopt a recommendation for a decision and a report, which serve as the basis for the plenary’s decision.
The Defence Committee is a special committee in several respects: it is prescribed by the Basic Law, it always meets in closed session, and it can constitute itself as a committee of inquiry to carry out more in-depth investigations. There are good reasons for this special role. From a constitutional perspective, the armed forces require particularly intensive oversight by Parliament and its Defence Committee due to the power they could potentially wield. Furthermore, the topics discussed by the 36 Committee members, chaired by Wolfgang Hellmich (SPD), are often highly sensitive. After all, they can involve Germany’s security and that of its military allies, as well as the interests of Bundeswehr personnel on active service.

The Defence Committee
This is particularly true with regard to the missions abroad carried out by the German armed forces within the framework of international security policy. This issue is increasingly dominating the Defence Committee’s agenda. In 1994, the Federal Constitutional Court underlined the special character of the Bundeswehr as a “parliamentary army”, assigning the German Bundestag a pivotal role in approving missions abroad. Since then, all missions abroad have required parliamentary approval: in other words, the Bundestag’s consent is necessary for the Bundeswehr to be deployed as envisaged by the Federal Government. Although the Committee on Foreign Affairs is the lead committee in preparing the draft resolution on a mission abroad, the vote of the Defence Committee, as a committee asked for its opinion, carries considerable weight.

The Defence Committee is the counterpart at parliamentary level of the Federal Ministry of Defence, the Bundeswehr and the Federal Defence Administration. In the process of democratic oversight, it plays an important role in the adoption of the defence budget and the procurement of equipment and materiel for the Bundeswehr. The Committee is closely involved when the Budget Committee discusses the budget for the Ministry of Defence and for the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces – who also plays an important role in ensuring parliamentary oversight. The Defence Committee’s recommendations are generally heeded by the Budget Committee. Moreover, the Federal Ministry of Defence must also submit all procurement projects requiring an outlay above 25 million euros to the Defence Committee for discussion. In other words, the Bundestag and the relevant committees have a great deal of influence over the armed forces.

Number of members: 36
Chairman: Wolfgang Hellmich, SPD
Deputy Chairman: Prof. h.c. Dr Karl A. Lamers, CDU/CSU
A special right – the Defence Committee acting as a committee of inquiry

Committees of inquiry are the Bundestag’s most powerful instrument of parliamentary scrutiny. They allow Members of Parliament to question witnesses and experts, and obtain files and documents from public bodies and private organisations. A decision by Parliament is needed to establish a committee of inquiry. The Defence Committee is different: it is the only committee which has the right under the Basic Law to constitute itself as a committee of inquiry. This means that the Committee members meet twice in weeks when the Bundestag is sitting: as the Defence Committee on Wednesday and as

In addition to examining military issues, the Committee members also receive reports on the everyday experiences of service personnel and the consequences which missions abroad can have. In order to gain an impression of the situation on the ground, the Committee requests information from the Federal Government or sends delegations to the mission areas to ensure effective parliamentary oversight. In short, the Defence Committee is one of the most important bridges between the armed forces and the Bundestag.
National and Alliance defence, missions abroad, military service and internal leadership – the Committee’s work in practice

The fact that the armed forces face major challenges in performing their duties in Germany and abroad is shown by the large number of items on the Defence Committee’s agenda. Currently, the Crimean crisis has resulted in national defence becoming more of a focus for defence policy, alongside Alliance defence. A particular priority in the Committee’s work in the current electoral term will be the further development and structuring of European and bilateral cooperation, and especially the implementation of the new initiative introduced by the EU heads of state and government to deepen cooperation in the field of security and defence and to implement concrete measures (Permanent Structured Cooperation, or PESCO).

the committee of inquiry on Thursday. The Defence Committee most recently made use of its special right to constitute itself as a committee of inquiry with the Kunduz Committee on Inquiry (which investigated a German air attack in Afghanistan in 2009 that resulted in civilian casualties) and the EURO HAWK Committee of Inquiry (which examined a controversial Bundeswehr drone project).
Difficult questions often feature on the Committee’s agenda. For example: what framework is provided by German security policy? What have been the effects of the updated Defence Policy Guidelines? What form is recruitment taking following the suspension of compulsory military service? What can be done to make service in the armed forces more appealing as a profession in general? And how can service in the military – and the inevitable reassignments and frequent relocations – be made more family-friendly?

Then there is the plan governing which military bases should be retained and which closed. The use of training areas is also regularly an issue, for example when the interests of people living nearby or environmental issues must

Further progress is to be made on gearing the Bundeswehr’s internal structure to its missions abroad. The Committee therefore spends a great deal of time engaging with the ongoing process of restructuring and transforming the armed forces. Its focus is not only on ensuring that soldiers are well trained and equipped when they are deployed; the question of how they are reintegrated into the Bundeswehr and society on their return is equally important – in particular if they are suffering from post-traumatic stress.
be considered. The role of the armed forces in society is another subject which features regularly on the Committee’s agenda, as does the balance between soldiers’ civil rights and military duties – a subject closely related to the concepts of “citizens in uniform” and “internal leadership”, which encapsulate the Bundeswehr’s system of values. Particularly in the case of such issues which affect society as a whole, the Committee members can build on the work of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces. The Commissioner assists the Bundestag in exercising parliamentary oversight over the Bundeswehr, and investigates potential violations of the fundamental rights of service personnel or infringements of the principles of internal leadership. The Commissioner produces annual reports setting out his or her assessment of the current state of the troops, and they are regularly discussed by the Committee.
Committee members

The 36 members of the Defence Committee

Wolfgang Hellmich, SPD
*Chairman*
Executive,
b. 5 May 1958
in Welver-Meyerich;
married;
three children.
Bundestag Member since 2012

Prof. h.c. Dr Karl A. Lamers, CDU/CSU
*Deputy Chairman*
Lawyer,
b. 12 Feb. 1951
in Duisburg-Hamborn.
Bundestag Member since 1994
Dr Reinhard Brandl, CDU/CSU
Industrial engineer, b. 1 Aug. 1977 in Ingolstadt; unmarried. Bundestag Member since 2009

Ingo Gädechens, CDU/CSU
CDU/CSU spokesman on the Committee Former career service member, b. 30 July 1960 in Lübeck; married. Bundestag Member since 2009

Eckhard Gnodtke, CDU/CSU Lawyer, b. 7 Jan. 1958 in Lüchow; married; three children. Bundestag Member since 2017

Florian Hahn, CDU/CSU Electronic marketing specialist, b. 14 Mar. 1974 in Munich; married; two children. Bundestag Member since 2009


Henning Otte, CDU/CSU CDU/CSU spokesman on defence policy Authorised legal officer, lawyer, b. 27 Oct. 1968 in Celle; married; four children. Bundestag Member since 2005


Ingo Gädechens, CDU/CSU CDU/CSU spokesman on the Committee Former career service member, b. 30 July 1960 in Lübeck; married. Bundestag Member since 2009

Eckhard Gnodtke, CDU/CSU Lawyer, b. 7 Jan. 1958 in Lüchow; married; three children. Bundestag Member since 2017

Florian Hahn, CDU/CSU Electronic marketing specialist, b. 14 Mar. 1974 in Munich; married; two children. Bundestag Member since 2009


Henning Otte, CDU/CSU CDU/CSU spokesman on defence policy Authorised legal officer, lawyer, b. 27 Oct. 1968 in Celle; married; four children. Bundestag Member since 2005
Kerstin Vieregge, CDU/CSU
Business administrator, b. 6 Sep. 1976 in Rinteln; unmarried. Bundestag Member since 2017

Anita Schäfer, CDU/CSU
Employee, b. 9 July 1951 in Saalstadt; unmarried. Bundestag Member since 1998

Oswin Veith, CDU/CSU
Specialist in administrative law, b. 16 May 1961 in Ober-Wöllstadt; married; one child. Bundestag Member since 2013

Bettina M. Wiesmann, CDU/CSU
Business consultant, b. 20 Oct. 1966 in Berlin; married; four children. Bundestag Member since 2017

Dr Karl-Heinz Brunner, SPD
Business administrator, b. 14 Mar. 1953 in Munich; married; two children. Bundestag Member since 2013

Karin Strenz, CDU/CSU
Special needs teacher, b. 14 Oct. 1967 in Lübz; married. Bundestag Member since 2009

Anita Schäfer, CDU/CSU
Employee, b. 9 July 1951 in Saalstadt; unmarried. Bundestag Member since 1998
Siemtje Möller,
SPD
Teacher,
b. 20 July 1983
in Emden;
unmarried;
two children.
Bundestag Member since 2017

Dr Fritz Felgentreu,
SPD
SPD spokesman on the Committee,
SPD spokesman on defence policy
Classical philologist, teacher,
b. 1 Sep. 1968
in Kiel;
mixed;
three children.
Bundestag Member since 2013

Dirk Vöpel,
SPD
Self-employed businessman,
b. 22 June 1982
in Landau;
mixed.
Bundestag Member since 2013

Josip Juratovic,
SPD
Car mechanic,
b. 15 Jan. 1959
in Koprivnica,
Croatia;
mixed;
three children.
Bundestag Member since 2005

Thomas Hitschler,
SPD
Political scientist,
b. 29 May 1971
in Oberhausen;
divorced;
one child.
Bundestag Member since 2013

Gabi Weber,
SPD
Employee,
b. 24 Mar. 1955
in Ebernhahn;
one child.
Bundestag Member since 2013

Thomas Hitschler,
SPD
Political scientist,
b. 22 June 1982
in Landau;
mixed.
Bundestag Member since 2013

Gabi Weber,
SPD
Employee,
b. 24 Mar. 1955
in Ebernhahn;
one child.
Bundestag Member since 2013
Jan Nolte,
AfD
Former soldier,
b. 30 Dec. 1988
in Bremen;
moved.
Bundestag Member
since 2017

Berengar Elsner von Gronow,
AfD
Sales manager,
b. 7 Jan. 1978
in Bad Godesberg,
Bonn;
unmarried.
Bundestag Member
since 2017

Gerold Otten,
AfD
Former colonel,
b. 7 Dec. 1955
in Lübbenstedt;
moved;
one child.
Bundestag Member
since 2017

Jens Kestner,
AfD
Undertaker,
b. 25 Dec. 1971
in Northeim.
Bundestag Member
since 2017

Dr Marcus Faber,
FDP
Political scientist,
b. 4 Feb. 1984
in Stendal.
Bundestag Member
since 2017

Rüdiger Lucassen,
AfD
AfD spokesman
on the Committee,
AfD spokesman
on defence policy
Business administrator,
former colonel,
b. 19 Aug. 1951
in Dollerupholz;
moved;
two children.
Bundestag Member
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Undertaker,
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one child.
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since 2017

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Political scientist,
b. 4 Feb. 1984
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Christine Buchholz,
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Education, social sciences and religious studies specialist,
b. 2 Apr. 1971
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mixed.
Bundestag Member since 2009

Matthias Höhn,
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Parliamentarian,
b. 11 Feb. 1980
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Dr Alexander S. Neu,
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The Left Party spokesman
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Political scientist,
b. 19 Mar. 1969
in Harmonie, Eitorf.
Bundestag Member since 2013

Dr Marie Agnes Strack-Zimmermann,
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Journalist,
b. 10 Mar. 1958
in Düsseldorf;
mixed;
three children.
Bundestag Member since 2017

Christian Sauter,
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Industrial engineer,
b. 11 Feb. 1980
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Alexander Müller,
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IT specialist,
b. 17 July 1969
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Tobias Pflüger,
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*The Left Party*
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Political scientist,
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Katja Keul,
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*Alliance 90/The Greens*
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on the Committee,
Economist,
b. 30 Nov. 1969
in Berlin;
mixed; three children.
Bundestag Member
since 2009

Agnieszka Brugger,
Alliance 90/The Greens
*Alliance 90/The Greens*
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on defence policy
Student
b. 8 February 1985
in Legnica, Poland;
mixed; one child.
Bundestag Member
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Dr Tobias Lindner,
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*Alliance 90/The Greens*
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Economist,
b. 11 Jan. 1982
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Bundestag Member
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Information online

The Defence Committee
www.bundestag.de/en/committees/a12

The Federal Ministry of Defence
www.bmvg.de/en

The Bundeswehr
www.bundeswehr.de

The Federal Foreign Office
www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en

The Center for International Peace Operations
www.zif-berlin.org/en

The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
www.bmz.de/en
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The German Bundestag takes decisions on what are at times highly complex and controversial bills and parliamentary initiatives relating to the entire spectrum of policy fields. The committees play a central role in parliamentary deliberations. They are the forum where the Members thrash out compromises and draw on expert advice before submitting their reports and recommendations for decisions to be voted on by the Bundestag as a whole.

www.bundestag.de/en/committees