

U.S. Ambassador to Germany Richard Grenell wants to 'empower' Europe's right



In an interview with ultra-conservative U.S. news website Breitbart, President Trump's ambassador to Germany, Richard Grenell, heavily criticized Berlin's defense spending, saying Germany is losing credibility. The U.S. envoy in Berlin also tasked himself with "empowering" the European right.

Grenell had already riled officials in the Bundestag (German parliament), despite only formally assuming the ambassadorship last month, by urging German companies doing in business in Iran to leave the country after Trump announced plans to withdraw the U.S. from the Iranian nuclear pact.

His remarks to Breitbart could make for an even more isolated figure in the German capital.

No 'credible threat of military action'

Addressing Germany's military expenditure, an often referred to gripe within the Trump administration, Grenell said:

- "(German officials) know you must have a credible threat of military action behind you if you're going to be successful in diplomacy," Grenell said. "That's one thing that's missing from the German diplomatic conversation — they right now don't have behind them a credible threat of military action."
- He says insufficient military spending has hampered the Bundeswehr's capacity to respond when needed. "German military officials know that the readiness issue is a serious problem, there are no working submarines, for example; they don't have a military that is currently ready."
- NATO allies could force Germany's hand by publicly shaming it.

- A change in culture inside NATO was necessary for the body to remain relevant.
- NATO members should be pushed to support their allies in a military intervention. “The US should not longer come to accept any excuses for not taking part in military intervention,” he said.

Based on growth predictions, Germany is set to spend just over 1% of GDP on defense in the next four years, well short of the 2% mark agreed on by NATO allies during the 2014 summit in Wales.

Germany’s military also faces several points of crisis. Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen has decried the army’s aged equipment. Meanwhile, last year, the Bundeswehr (German armed forces) also uncovered widespread right-wing extremism in several units.

Migration remains Berlin’s key issue

On Germany’s migration policy, which continues to dominate the political debate, Grenell said:

- The next big crucial issue facing German politics is migrant family reunification, commonly referred to in the U.S. as chain migration.
- “What does that mean now? Who else gets to come in, and are we checking them? These are challenges for Germany,” Grenell said.
- The U.S. envoy did praise Germany’s intelligence services for their role in cracking down on migrants seeking to settle in Germany under false pretenses.
- “We want to make sure we work with all of the different politicians here in Germany who are concerned about migration, the chain-migration issue, working with the proper intelligence and law enforcement officials so we know exactly who is here under false pretenses,” he said.

‘Empowering’ Europe’s conservatives

Grenell said he was excited by the rising wave of conservatism within Europe, adding that he saw his task as “empowering” Europe’s right-wing governments and budding leaders. He told Breitbart:

- “There are a lot of conservatives throughout Europe who have contacted me to say they are feeling there is a resurgence going on,” adding that the groundswell in conservative support could be tracked back to the “failed policies of the left.”
- Candidates able to articulate “consistent conservative” stances on migration, taxes and cutting red tape would continue to enjoy strong support from the so-called “silent majority.”
- Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz was among his favorite European leaders. Grenell described the 31-year-old head of state as a “rock star.”
- Kurz’s Austrian People’s Party (ÖVP) this year formed a governing coalition with the right-wing populist Freedom Party (FPÖ). Austria’s young government remains one of the loudest voices in Europe for securing the bloc’s external border.

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