

Narrator: (Silence)

Welcome to Brussels Forum 2020. We are pleased to introduce Vice President at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff.

Thomas Kleine-B...: Welcome back at Brussels Forum. My name is Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff. I'm a Vice President at the German Marshall Fund [inaudible] Berlin office. The Brussels Forum is the signature event of the German Marshall Fund. Usually it takes place in June on two days in Brussels. This year, it is a series of virtual meetings across the month of June. Terrific programming, a lot of people from the policy world and the world of ideas.

We could not do such high-level programming without help, without partners, and I want to specifically thank them. I want to thank our founding partner, Daimler. I want to thank the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Belgium, our Brussels Forum partner Deloitte, and all of our other supporting as well as intellectual partners.

This morning already, we had a session about China and its COVID-19 help in Europe and the United States. This afternoon, it is my pleasure to welcome German Minister of Defense, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, who also is the leader of the mainstream Conservative party in Germany, which is the Christian Democratic Union. Also at the German Marshall Fund is Fred Pleitgen, who is a CNN correspondent here in Berlin, who will moderate the session. And without further ado, Fred, take it away.

Fred Pleitgen: Thank you very much. We are here at the German Marshall Fund in the context of the Brussels Forum. We've got a very special guest here with us, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, German Federal Defense Minister and also leader of Germany's center-right CDU party. Thank you very much for being here. I just want to say at the outset, we're at a perfectly appropriate distance for the social distancing rules so that we can talk comfortably and see each other. So thank you very much.

It's often the case in this sort of conversation that news events dictate the topics, and so we've got reports that are still a bit unclear that the USA wants to withdraw many of their troops from Germany. That's the Trump administration. What's your reaction to that? Can they do that? And what would that say for the United States under president Trump as a reliable partner in NATO?

Annegret Kramp-...: First of all, there's no official confirmation of these plans. The story has only been published in one media outlet. And as long as we don't have an official confirmation, no reaction is needed. We are, of course, in close communication with our partners at all levels, especially with the Pentagon. For us, it is quite clear that presence of American troops is important for Germany. It is important for NATO. It is of course important for the United States' own security. This has

always been an asset to the White House policy, and so far nothing has changed.

Fred Pleitgen: It's just that even in discussions, the question comes up again and again. How dependable is the Trump administration? There's also essentially the threat from president Trump that he possibly wants to leave NATO if he wins a second term. You've got to plan for that, haven't you? Or try to plan for that at least.

Annegret Kramp-...: We assume the loyalty of all NATO partners. There's no question about that. And we see some common interests that still apply. These are the interests that the Ministry of Defense and the Pentagon in particular both share. We participate jointly in numerous missions, for example in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the world. And of course, we always have discussions on the question of burden-sharing, and also discussions on questions like, how is the world changing? How do we react to it as NATO? This is something that is legitimate for each state to discuss on their own. As long as we do it with good partnership with NATO, it's not a problem.

Fred Pleitgen: And the way this kind of information comes out makes it rather difficult, doesn't it?

Annegret Kramp-...: Yes. We can see at the moment that the election campaign is gaining momentum in America. And this is also a time of some very special domestic political discussion at the moment in the US.

Fred Pleitgen: Exactly. It doesn't make it easy here, does it? Because for example, there was a discussion with your coalition partners about the storage of nuclear weapons by the USA. And I read from some politicians on the left that the US could withdraw their troops and take their weapons with them at the same time. So it's difficult to continue to receive something like that from a domestic politics point of view.

Annegret Kramp-...: Yes, it's absolutely clear that there's such reactions. For this reason, we should always be aware that the separation between foreign and domestic policy doesn't really exist. As a matter of fact, what is discussed in domestic policy always influences how it is perceived by others. We must be conscious of the fact that there is an election campaign going on. This is a special situation. And this is why the American side, our partners also need to know, regardless of what other parties may think about it, that we have coalition agreements that make it very clear that we stand by our commitments.

Fred Pleitgen: So this discussion is no longer an issue?

Annegret Kramp-...: Definitely. We have a coalition agreement. Nothing else is written there. And whoever wants to change this underlying architecture and access, not only for Germany's security but also for NATO as a whole in Europe, whoever wants to

change this concept of deterrence has to address it during the election campaign, and this will have to be debated.

Fred Pleitgen: So what sometimes happens, what we might call discord between NATO member states, which are probably seen favorably in Moscow. How can Germany, in this situation, project more strongly for other NATO partners against the Russian Federation, which especially ... yeah, in the last few years, especially since president Trump has been in office, has seemed stronger and stronger along its western border, NATO's eastern border?

Annegret Kramp-...: We could do this in particular by leaving no doubt in Germany that we stand by NATO, and that we're also fulfilling our responsibilities. This means that we deliver our capabilities we have pledged to NATO, which were expressed in the two percent. This means that we deliver these capabilities also in times where public budgets are difficult because of the Corona crisis. But we also must make it very clear that we play a role within NATO as well as in Europe. And what has always set us apart is that we're a link and a hub between east and west, for example with regards to the particular threats perceived by northern Europeans, the Baltic states, eastern Europeans, and possibly there's another perception, another interest on the southeastern flank.

In Germany, we should also be the ones in NATO who make it clear that NATO has a 360 degree approach, and this must be applied. This means that we must also take all these different threats into account.

Fred Pleitgen: So what does that look like in concrete terms for eastern European states? I think you yourself said that countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, belong to western Europe. How can we generate some reassurance there, especially in the context of Germany's presidency of the council of the European Union, which is soon to begin, as Germany takes a more leading role?

Annegret Kramp-...: First of all, the public in Germany should understand that their Russia and the threat from Russia is perceived differently, fundamentally differently than here in Germany. These states experience airspace violations at the borders on a daily basis. They experience serious disinformation campaigns. We must ensure in Germany and bilateral relations, in bilateral cooperation, armament cooperation within NATO, that we take issues such as the plan for the northeastern flank very seriously. That must be implemented, especially since us Germans are always suspected of pursuing a special path with regards to Russia.

Fred Pleitgen: Not [crosstalk].

Annegret Kramp-...: That we're not doing it, but that we also stand by the security requirements of our partners, and that we support them.

Fred Pleitgen: Was there the idea from president Trump to possibly invite Vladimir Putin to a special G7 summit? I think that was pretty much denied by European states, wasn't it?

Annegret Kramp-...: There was a unanimous opinion, which I also very much welcome with regard to the annexation of Crimea and eastern Ukraine, that the behavior was contrary to international law and must be rectified. And until it is rectified, Russia cannot take on the international role that it had before. And this excludes equal participation in the G7 summit.

Fred Pleitgen: Are there concrete measures within the context of the Council presidency to promote defense issues a little bit within the EU?

Annegret Kramp-...: Yes. We have set ourselves the goal of pushing this to [inaudible] compass further forward. And of course, it must now be adapted once again from the point of view of hybrid threats. What can we learn from Corona? How resilient are we? What structures do we need to build in the EU against this threat? At the same time, we must be very cautious to avoid a ruinous competition with NATO, because it has structures from which we have received support. And our task must be to find a way of linking them skillfully together.

Let me give you an example. We know that the negotiations on the EU's medium term financial plan will be tough. But if we take issues like military mobility truly seriously, then the investment in infrastructure, for example, serving seamless military transports can also serve as infrastructure projects for the civilian sector. They generate economic growth, they generate jobs in Europe, and therefore serve two purposes so to speak. These are the approaches that we're pursuing with military innovation.

Fred Pleitgen: If I can just ask you then, what's the situation with regard to military innovation? Because you hear a lot about the USA-Israel elsewhere. But in Europe, we're sometimes lagging behind rather.

Annegret Kramp-...: This is indeed the case. We have a different approach to the question, how these findings from military research are used. But we must nevertheless drive this issue forward above all. When we look at possible weapon systems of the future, it is important for us to develop the appropriate defensive measures. In the federal government's major economic stimulus package, we have just now set aside 500 million euros for the Bundeswehr University to be able to conduct research in precisely this security area.

Fred Pleitgen: Let's talk about the Coronavirus pandemic, which has rather overshadowed everything in the last half year pretty much. The Bundeswehr, the German armed forces, has been very visible. It's done a lot of positive work, and has really excelled itself transporting patients and equipment. So for example, what lessons can we learn from this crisis so far? What's gone well? What could've been done differently, or what could be done differently next time?

Annegret Kramp-...: It has been very successful with regards to the Bundeswehr. We worked for the first time with a structure to set up our own contingent of 15,000 soldiers, plus another 17,000 in the medical service. We have learned a lot about questions, how operational would our reserves be? How quickly can we collect the data? How quickly can we mobilize the men and women we need? And it has become very clear where we can provide support, including internal measures. This is always a special discussion in Germany, and it has worked seamlessly. What worked seamlessly was the coalition of the Bundeswehr under these special circumstances to maintain an international presence in the missions, but also to maintain operations in Germany. This worked really, really well on a one to one basis. It's an achievement of which everyone in the Bundeswehr can be extremely proud.

Fred Pleitgen: What about the learning process? Because there's always a learning process in medicine, of course. I'm sure you've got other guys who were always right from the beginning, but it's a learning process. Coronavirus is here, it's not going away.

Annegret Kramp-...: We have learned, for example, that suddenly masks can become relevant. We therefore need other concepts of stockpiling. Possibly there's also the question, what we in Europe and in Germany produce in an accessible manner. We have learned that digitalization is very helpful in such a situation, but what is needed is infrastructure. We need enough terminals, we need the appropriate connection infrastructure. There's more work left to do, not only in the Bundeswehr but also in the German society as such. But we have also seen what was suddenly possible very quickly in a very straightforward and pragmatic manner. And the lessons, we want to retain them, especially in the Bundeswehr. To us, the return to more normality should not necessarily mean a return to highly complicated and lengthy procedures.

Fred Pleitgen: If we look at infrastructure then, are there certain lessons? For example, air transport, is there enough capacity? Do we need to expand it? Transport helicopters are quite important in a pandemic when you've got to move quite a lot of things and people.

Annegret Kramp-...: In terms of positive experience, for example the fact that we are in the SALIS alliance. We have the big Antonovs, which help us a lot within NATO. Those help us a great deal bringing tons of material here from China, for example. For this reason, it's important that we can all fall back on this structure with our other NATO partners. We have seen the highest quality of our medical transport in flying intensive care units, which we keep available for missions but have also used for transport in Europe.

Fred Pleitgen: That was one of the most successful, wasn't it?

Annegret Kramp-...: This was one of the most successful ones, most successful opportunities. But we also see that countries like France, for example, have experimented with [TGE]

conversion. Very interesting project. And want to consider for the whole of Europe whether this structure should be rebuilt. It used to exist in the past during the Cold War. But I think that we've seen during the Corona crisis, it's good to have such structures in place.

Fred Pleitgen: One of the things we're reporting about internationally is that in Germany, the response to the Coronavirus crisis has been seen as rather successful. But you can be the victim of your own success. For example, whether we should've closed so much or let it get as far. Are you afraid that the question might be asked whether, in these times where money is tight, there have to be cuts in the future?

Annegret Kramp-...: There will be a debate for sure as far as the entire federal budget is concerned. And this won't be just an isolated discussion in Germany. I'm in close contact with many colleagues in the defense ministries all over Europe, and there is roughly the same debate everywhere. What we have seen during the Corona crisis is that, what it actually means that security or stockpiling of protective goods is seen as a cash position when reacting in a crisis. Security costs money, internally and externally, and it's quite clear that security is not just a question of cash position. And we must look for intelligent approaches to make it clear that behind every piece of equipment in the Bundeswehr, but also in every other army, there's always industrial policy above all, national industrial policy, and jobs which are significant in a period when we are trying to restart and to revive the economy, including the industrial economy. So it doesn't really make any sense that the public sector, including the defense budget, should be cut back first, and then puts it elsewhere.

Fred Pleitgen: And that was one of the main points of criticism by the Trump administration, that Germany spent too little on defense.

Annegret Kramp-...: We have made enormous efforts in recent years, especially since 2014. But since the occupation of Crimea and eastern Ukraine, a rethinking process has begun throughout the Alliance, and also in Germany. We are now on this path, and we want to continue along it.

It's not just about percentages here. It's also about some very specific military capabilities which we have promised to contribute to NATO. Our friends and our allies in this Alliance are relying on these capabilities.

Fred Pleitgen: So the target of 1.5% up to 2024 was specified. You're not wavering ... I mean this discussion will be difficult, won't it?

Annegret Kramp-...: It will be difficult above all because the capabilities behind the 1.5% are the ones that we have to deliver. It's not just a question of the percentage. Of course it will be difficult because of the time when you experience a massive slump in economic growth, you will reach 1.5% more quickly than before. But the crucial point is always, what is the capability behind it? And what is around

this capability that we have promised to achieve? For that, I need a certain amount of money, a certain amount of cash, of armament projects. And this is why this journey must continue.

Fred Pleitgen: And a relatively large investment is needed, as various military equipment is gradually aging. For example, multi-purpose warships, weapon system replacements, and then of course combat aircraft. There's a choice between the F-18 and the French-German project. What's the position on that?

Annegret Kramp-...: First of all, the sea multi-purpose combat ship of the future, MKS 180, we have now arranged everything in the tender, also all the participating companies, we arranged the budget submission, so this project is now really gaining speed. This is a good thing. And it's absolutely clear that we must decommission the Tornado fleet in the next few years, and they need to be replaced. In the meantime, until we have the new system in the future, the new fighter aircraft of the future, the FC air system together with France will be replaced by a renewal of the Eurofighters in particular, but also in a small role as far as electronic combat and nuclear sharing are concerned, also by American aircraft. At least that's what we are suggesting at the Department of Defense. Will it be accepted by the [Bundestag]? This will be decided in 2022.

Fred Pleitgen: Yes. So 2022, we can reckon on a decision then. And in the meantime, the FCAS project ...?

Annegret Kramp-...: The FCAS project is being driven forward very massively and very intensively, but it's something that will only take effect in the next years. And in the meantime, we need renewal so to speak, which will allow a smooth transition. And the mix we've now proposed, apart from the renewed Eurofighters, more advanced Eurofighters, and as I said American planes for these two special roles, is a mixture that does not endanger the FCAS and ensures a seamless transition. What we have reported to NATO, nuclear sharing and electronic warfare, we will continue to make available.

Fred Pleitgen: What I've been wondering in recent months, there are so many businesses in Europe and America which have had difficulty continuing. What does an alliance like NATO do in something like a Coronavirus crisis in order to continue functioning and to remain capable of fulfilling its duties? It must have to work very hard, almost overnight.

Annegret Kramp-...: We have canceled the big maneuvers, or ended them prematurely, but we still manage to lead and maintain all the operations as possible during Corona. Of course under restrictions also on site for one of the major paths, particularly in this mission, it was very important, especially during missions in underdeveloped regions where the health system is particularly weak, that we do not carry the virus with us, that we have special quarantine regulations and much more that it actually works. And the fact that it's also a very precarious situation in Europe for example, member states such as Spain have also turned

to NATO to help the SALIS structures. It shows that NATO is also a really well-rehearsed alliance that was also able to help in this situation. This is why it's absolutely right that we're currently under the leadership of the Secretary General giving further consideration to possible solutions. How are we prepared?

Fred Pleitgen: Exactly. Were there lessons learned from the first wave? Which ... well I mean as we've said, the pandemic's not going away, but lessons which could be taken onboard to fundamentally change the day-to-day work and cooperation?

Annegret Kramp-...: So yes, surely this ... NATO, this question has also been raised by the home office, and how do we work together? And what role does mobile working play? We have learned a lot also about the topic, how does the isolation work, the medical care? But we have also just seen how important it is to have such structures and stockpiling at NATO level. This is precisely something that we in Europe must now discuss during our presidency of the Council. It must be recognized that we have had relatively little in the way of joint stockpiling, jointly coordinated measures in the health sector at European level, because the member states have always said that it's their business. And now the crisis has shown how important it would have been if Europe had been able to provide the aid quickly from a common pool.

Fred Pleitgen: Okay. So if we talk about stockpiling, there's the sense that we're perhaps rethinking our cooperation and our relationship with China, what it could look like in the future. What are your thoughts on that?

Annegret Kramp-...: The relationship with China is a highly complex one. China is of course a very important partner for us, also a trading partner, not just for Germany but also for Europe. This is an impressive country. But it is also one that stands for a different political system. And where at least my impression is at this time, that this political system is also being pursued more aggressively, both internally and externally. It is a system that perhaps guarantees economic freedom, but certainly not personal freedoms as we're used to in our western-based situation. This is why this question, how we deal with China, is a highly complex one, but one that has become even more acute as a result of the crisis.

Fred Pleitgen: Yes. And when it comes to China, could we be more restrictive? Could we do more ourselves? People often talk about medical supplies being produced within their particular country. They talk about stockpiling. These are fundamental questions, and it's only in a time of crisis that we've seen how important they are.

Annegret Kramp-...: That we become more self-reliant has less to do with the systemic issues in China. It has something to do with their reliability that is very much based on the division of labor, yes. But also, while it's very much based on the division of labor, it is of course clear when a pandemic and a value chain occurs, it virtually paralyzes a country like China.



Fred Pleitgen: Yes, and then you're dependent on who they sell to the first.

Annegret Kramp-...: We have just to find the right degree of national or European self-sufficiency, and at the same time maintain that we need a globalized system. Because no country benefits from open multi-lateralism as in the case of Germany and also in many other European states. The second question that arises is that question, how possibly that your political weights might shift? We are currently seeing at least a very tense situation between the United States and China. We see this in the Asian region, like-minded countries like Australia, Japan and others, they also see China's increasing aggressiveness and naturally feel even more strongly the need for good cooperation with the EU and NATO. In this respect, the balance will shift. And for us, this also means that we have to enter into even closer cooperation and partnership with these like-minded countries.

Fred Pleitgen: And how do you manage in a situation like that? You can't just cave in. If you look at the USA and China, it's a bit rocky. There's already an economic war. And you just wonder, what else could happen?

Annegret Kramp-...: For example, in the region that I have just mentioned, there's a constant exchange, for example, with the Australian colleagues also about the question of hybrid threats such as those with fake news, which with these campaigns we're currently having similar experiences with Russia. And there is scope for exchange of views. And the fact that together we are trying to uphold the values-based work order that unite us, because as we see, we are in a competitive system, and by no means all of us are convinced of the value of this value system. And it's not just a purely European affair. It is an affair in which we have to look for allies worldwide, and where we as Europeans, and this is also an important role that we could play as Germany, how to make it clear.

The question, how Africa is developing. Who has influenced that? It also has a question that is in Europe's direct interest, and that is why we should also be guided by our own values and become much more involved in Africa.

Fred Pleitgen: I know one of the things that's been really important for you is increasing the appreciation and recognition of our soldiers within society. How has the Coronavirus contributed to this or influenced [inaudible]?

Annegret Kramp-...: There have been some specific measures for a project allowing soldiers who wear the uniform to travel by train free of charge. One of the aims of this project was to show that soldiers who are wearing the uniform, that they're visible. And I was very pleased that many of the fears that existed before about possible aggression or negative reactions to the men and women in uniform didn't happen. Quite the opposite. The case was very very positive feedback, and it has now been strengthened once again by the Corona crisis, by the many achievements by the men and women from their work in retirement homes to nursing homes in many different areas.

And there is a new study just today, and it shows, which is quite interesting, that especially the younger generation in Germany would like the army to play a greater role in foreign policy. So there's a lot of support for the Bundeswehr as organization.

Fred Pleitgen: So since this is a politico-military aspect of this, I have to ask you. How do you view the events going on at the moment in American? Because the military has been deployed domestically in order to control demonstration, but that's come up against significant international criticism.

Annegret Kramp-...: This is true of the situation in the United States. First of all, this terrible murder, and that the demonstrations also show how tense the situation is in the United States. And I believe that it's an encouraging sign, or an important sign, that it's not just the images of the police action, or the images of police violence on the one hand, but also of the looters on the other that are now in our minds, but also the images of thousands of people who take to the streets throughout the United States to demonstrate against racism. The pictures of police officers kneeling down to show solidarity. And also the clear statement by the Minister of Defense and other military leaders that they're bound by the constitution and that they do not see a [inaudible] military action against demonstrators. This is also a very encouraging, important sign.

Fred Pleitgen: Yes, because it's a bit frightening, isn't it, to see a military convoy rolling into Washington. Those were remarkable pictures.

Annegret Kramp-...: I wouldn't say remarkable. Disturbing, as well. And the clear signals for the military are all the more important, whether from active or former military personnel. Very clear statement, very clear regarding the traditions of Lincoln and the American constitution. This shows what values actually underpin America, and these are the values that hold us together and that [inaudible] to remember in these times.

Fred Pleitgen: We've got some questions from our viewers, from our listeners now on our social media account. So they're in English, I'll obviously translate them. But how does the Bundeswehr deal with right wing extremism within the forces?

Annegret Kramp-...: We take a very clear position. Extremism of any form, especially right wing extremists, have no place in the Bundeswehr. This applies to the entire Bundeswehr, and that applies especially given the current events with the special forces command. We have reformed and strengthened the military counter-intelligence service. We are currently in the process of reforming the law so that it's possible to dismiss people more quickly. We set a clear message. We investigate the networks behind it. And there's a clear message for racists. Extremists have no place in the Bundeswehr.

Fred Pleitgen: The next question then, how do you see Germany's future role when it comes to NATO's nuclear deterrent?

Annegret Kramp-...: In my view, nuclear deterrence and above all the concept of deterrence behind it is one of the important cornerstones of our security architecture. We stand by this cornerstone without reservation. And this is why Germany wants to continue to play its part in nuclear sharing.

Fred Pleitgen: Now we come to an important question. What does a modern military, in terms of staff, equipment, tools, and technical skills, look like to you?

Annegret Kramp-...: First of all, it is important that the soldiers, that it's a military that come from the middle of society that also represents the entire society. And I also want to make clear that it's important that they really act on the basis of values, that they're very well trained, educated and of course equipped. And that means for us that we also not just look towards present, but to future threats. So for example, hybrid threats. What will the new weapon system look like? And other weapons, autonomous devices, and everything that we're developing today. What we procure today must of course also be considered from the point of view that it will bring security not only in two years, in three years, but also beyond that. This means that we must be up-to-date, that we must in fact always be one step ahead, and that must be our ambition.

Fred Pleitgen: But then the question, to what extent in society should the military be a driver of innovation? We see that in the USA, for example. Is it possible, is it desired, is it something we could implement or would want to implement?

Annegret Kramp-...: You certainly cannot just copy the US or Israeli system. Especially in Israel, the military and research and ideas, and the added value they generate, also make major contribution to Israel's prosperity. But I believe that we must also become more open here. Much of what is happening in terms of threats, and in particular in the defense against them will, for example, be happening in the future in connection with the issue of space. This is a very important point, and that's where we have to join forces. As I said, we have now, as part of our national package for overcoming the Corona crisis, the economic crisis, for shaping the future. Also try to research more in the area of a secure environment, especially with regard to digitalization, secure communications and other aspects to be given even more to the University of the Bundeswehr.

Fred Pleitgen: Is it possible to develop civilian and military at the same time? For example, in Israel and America. Universities, you just mentioned, is that something we want?

Annegret Kramp-...: We have a very clear regulation, including in the scientific sector, which is very strict also in its separation. But I believe that the Bundeswehr University in particular has a special character. We have great researchers there. Some of them are world leaders. And this is why we have to create our special nuclears there.

- Fred Pleitgen: We've now got a question from a student of European Studies. Do you believe the EU should have its own army, or would that be a form of competition?
- Annegret Kramp-...: I think that we need a lot of European cooperation in the sense of European power within NATO. Today, we already have European units that work together. We've got bi- or tri-national corporations. I do not believe that it is a feasible prospect, at least not in the short term, to say that we're all giving up all our national armies and forming a European army. But if in our projects on structural cooperation, PESCO or others, we really need to get to work together better and more closely in terms of equipment procurement and cooperation, then we could spend much of what we are now spending in the individual national armies more or less in parallel. And we could already combine many of them and achieve better results.
- Fred Pleitgen: Okay. I've got a longer question now. Germany's handling of the COVID-19 crisis, including its Europeanist ambition, have created lots of respect for the country. Yet several European countries are flabbergasted about Germany's nuclear sharing debate. They question whether Germany can ever be a true leader in Europe when they cannot be relied upon to shoulder the most basic and more important tasks of defense and deterrence. What do you tell these critics around Europe?
- Annegret Kramp-...: On the one hand with regard to Europe, at the beginning of the crisis, there were serious doubts as to whether Germany would be able to live up to this historical situation. And it is a historical situation so to speak, even in its responsibility. I think the answer has been given. It has been given as part of the Merkel-Macron, the recovery fund. It is given here as the major economic stimulus package here in Germany. Because we see how important it is that we really do play our part as an economically strong nation in order to help the global economy as a whole, to pick up the speed here in Europe. It serves us all, and we are a very clear and reliable partner in NATO. We are clearly a true provider. We provide our capabilities, and we also provide and stand by nuclear sharing.
- I said that we are an open nation. We can discuss everything politically. But the important thing is, what is the commitment of the government in this coalition? And the commitment is, we commit to nuclear sharing as long as there are no other political majorities in Germany, even in electoral decision, supported by the citizens who might decide otherwise. We are a reliable partner. And next year in this election coming too, I will do my utmost to ensure that Germany continues to live up to its responsibility in the world and in NATO.
- Fred Pleitgen: You have said that you're very keen on trans-Atlantic cooperation. It's no secret, the trans-Atlantic relationship is not in good shape. To what extent do you think that this relationship can be renewed, can be as strong as before, and can perhaps be stronger in another form? How do you see the future of the trans-Atlantic relationship?

Annegret Kramp-...: A real friendship, or the value of a friendship, is particularly evident when it is under stress. And I think it is fair to say that the trans-Atlantic relationship is under stress at the moment. But it is precisely then that it's important to remember what we have in common. And I have already mentioned it in another context, the values on which America is founded are values that we also stand for, values from which we benefit. These are the values that set us apart, for example, from a system like China. We must never forget that. And we have many common interests, and we must hold onto them. This is why the way the respective government, they may come and go, but the constitution of the United States ensures these values.

This is also the relationship that also carries us through many many personal friendships, and we must hold onto them. Now, institutions in Germany and Europe that stand for the trans-Atlantic relationship are in demand. In good times, it's always easy to be a trans-Atlantic partner. But when things get difficult, we just simply have to stick to it as well. And it's quite difficult right now.

Fred Pleitgen: These are excellent closing words. Thank you very much for the conversation. Thanks also to our viewers, and take care. Thank you.