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Germany's Schuble Says Raising Defense Spending Not Smart

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Germany's finance minister sees no reason to boost the country's defense budget due to the Ukraine crisis, he told a magazine, warning NATO that discussing higher spending or sending troops to Eastern Europe could create misunderstandings with Russia.

NATO's top military commander in Europe said this month that Russia's actions in Ukraine had shown it was not acting like a partner, and this should prompt more members of the NATO alliance to boost their defense spending toward the agreed target of 2 percent of gross domestic product, or GDP.

But German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble told Spiegel magazine that increased spending, or raising troop presence on NATO's eastern borders, could heighten political tensions.

"Ninety percent of the public not only in Germany and the European Union but beyond as well would view such a step as an aggravation of the situation," Schäuble said. He also said he hoped for an improvement in relations with Russia in time.

"Increasing the defense budget at the present moment would not be a smart move. In fact it would be the opposite of what we need," he added.

Schäuble said countries should show sensitivity to the fact that, because of its history and role in the two world wars, Germany was much more reluctant to use military resources.

The Nazi past has left Germany a profoundly pacifist country, although it has recently pledged to take a more active role in foreign policy and international peacekeeping missions.

Germany's defense spending amounted to 1.4 percent of GDP in 2013, according to data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

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