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German defense minister loses doctorate amid plagiarism scandal



The University of Bayreuth has taken back Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg's doctorate in law. Earlier in the day, opposition lawmakers grilled him over plagiarism charges during a lengthy session in Berlin.

German Defense Minister Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg's alma mater, the University of Bayreuth, on Wednesday revoked his doctorate in law amid allegations his thesis contained numerous plagiarized passages.

University president Ruediger Bormann told reporters a committee of economics and law professors determined Guttenberg's thesis violated academic standards to a "substantial extent."

Bormann gave no details of the thesis' problems, and said the committee did not determine whether Guttenberg's infractions were intentional.

"We do not need to check whether the whole work is a plagiarism," he said. Another commission would be looking into this, but its work would take longer.

The statement came after German opposition lawmakers grilled Guttenberg over the plagiarism charges at a four-hour-long session in Germany's lower house of parliament, the Bundestag, in Berlin.

"No deception"

While the defense minister previously admitted to mistakes in attributing the sources of his thesis, he had to answer parliamentarians' questions about whether he did so deliberately.

"In all my statements I have clearly said I neither knowingly nor intentionally deceived," Guttenberg said.

Opposition lawmakers were not placated when the defense minister said he was a fallible human being who makes mistakes.

"You have cheated, you have deceived, you have lied," said Thomas Oppermann of the Social Democratic Party. "I find it intolerable that the chancellor decided an impostor and liar should still belong to the cabinet."

On Monday, Chancellor Angela Merkel said she had "full confidence" in her defense minister.

Devil in the details

Guttenberg announced Monday he would renounce the use of his doctor's title. He wrote to the university asking it to take back the degree, but his university said it would decide for itself. It has now done so.

In his letter, Guttenberg said he "lost track of the use of his sources over the course of the seven years in which [he] worked on the thesis."

Several German law professors had accused Guttenberg of blatant plagiarism, listing up to 70 passages in which he did not correctly cite their work.

As tempestuous as Wednesday was for the defense minister, his troubles are not over yet. State prosecutors in Bavaria have confirmed at least two criminal complaints have been filed against him. The complaints allege Guttenberg violated copyright laws, and lied in a previous sworn statement that his thesis was entirely his own work.

Many of Guttenberg's political allies are keen to see him remain in office, since he is Germany's most popular politician by far. Guttenberg, who has been listed as a possible future chancellor, has dismissed opposition calls for him to resign.

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