Innovation and Growth in a Time of "Zeitenwende"

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David Voskuhl and Alisa Grunert



The Path into Defense Technology

Alisa Grunert: Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview. To start, could you describe in a few sentences how you reached your current position at Diehl Defence?

David Voskuhl: Certainly. I have been active in public relations and press work for a good 30 years now. I spent 25 of those years in aviation and have been with Diehl Defence since 2021. Before that, I spent twelve years

within the Diehl Group at Diehl Aviation, our sister sub-group that operates as an aviation supplier.

Alisa Grunert: What was your original motivation for entering this field?

David Voskuhl: The interest in journalism and communication was there early on. Even as a high school student and later during university, I worked a lot for local newspapers—the classic student job. After university, I briefly moved away from the field technically but returned very quickly when the opportunity arose to join Airbus in Toulouse as a press spokesperson. In total, I spent 14 years at Airbus at locations in Toulouse and Hamburg.

Diehl Defence in the European Security Structure

Alisa Grunert: What role does Diehl play in the current European security structure?

David Voskuhl: You have to see it in context: the Diehl Group is a family-owned company with five sub-groups active in different industries—Metall, Controls, Defence, Aviation, and Metering. Diehl Defence is responsible for defense technology within the group. In Germany, we are one of the larger providers. Globally speaking, there are even larger players, but in our core segments—namely guided missiles and ground-based air defense—we are among the world leaders technologically.

Alisa Grunert: What is your strategic orientation in these areas?

David Voskuhl: We have a broadly diversified product portfolio. The three most important pillars are guided missiles for various applications (especially air-to-air and naval), systemic ground-based air defense, and ammunition.

The Challenges of the "Zeitenwende"

Alisa Grunert: Have the events of recent years—especially the war in Ukraine—influenced your strategy?

David Voskuhl: We are living in a completely new world today. When I moved from aviation to defense technology in 2021, the environment was still relatively quiet and manageable. With the war in Ukraine and the associated "Zeitenwende" (turning point), stormy growth set in. Interestingly, this dynamics reminds me of phases I previously experienced in the aviation industry.

Alisa Grunert: Which technological developments are currently in the foreground for you?

David Voskuhl: There isn't just one "miracle technology"; rather, we are working on a variety of innovations. A key focus is the further development of our guided missile expertise for the next generation. One example is the development of a missile to defend against hypersonic weapons. In the future, networking will play a central role. Think of concepts like FCAS (Future Combat Air System), where fighter jets are networked with units

on the ground, at sea, and in the air. A "system of systems" is emerging. Similarly, in our ground-based air defense, radar, launchers, and other components must be highly networked with each other.

Cooperation with Governments and Partners

Alisa Grunert: How is the cooperation with politics and authorities organized?

David Voskuhl: Cooperation takes place along many strands—from the procurement office and the armed forces as users to key political bodies such as defense ministries, parliaments, and budget committees. These contacts have intensified massively in the last three to four years. Today, we see a significantly higher density of high-ranking visits. Just recently, for the laying of the foundation stone of a new building in Überlingen, we had a visit from the Parliamentary State Secretary from the BMVG (Federal Ministry of Defence) and high-ranking officers from Germany and abroad.

Alisa Grunert: How is your business distributed internationally?

David Voskuhl: About half of our volume comes from the German public client. We generate the other 50 percent in the rest of the world, with European NATO countries being the focus here. As is well known, we also deliver to Ukraine. In addition, there are exciting cooperations in the Asian region, such as with South Korea on the new KF-21 fighter jet, as well as customers in Brazil and South Africa.

The Bottleneck: Capacities and New Talent

Alisa Grunert: What challenges does this massive growth pose for the security industry?

David Voskuhl: The biggest challenge is certainly meeting the extremely increased demand from our customers. We have to build up capacities in a very short time—in development as well as in production and support. This creates pressure on the entire industry. We must simultaneously become significantly more efficient in terms of pure volume, but also in quality for new developments.

Alisa Grunert: Speaking of capacities: How are you mastering the expansion?

David Voskuhl: Growth is taking place on three levels : First, we are massively expanding our own properties. Second, the entire supply chain must keep up—it's no use if we have 99 percent of a product ready but a small part from a supplier is missing. Third is the workforce. We need qualified personnel in all areas—from development and program management to trade fair organization. We handle a significantly higher number of events today than in 2019.

A Wish for the Future

Alisa Grunert: Finally, if you had one wish for the European security architecture, what would it be?

David Voskuhl: My wish would be that we all work together to ensure as much planning security as possible. I am aware that you cannot simply pray for security in an uncertain world. We still have to get used to these new global challenges. But it must be our goal to master this growth and these tasks collectively.

Alisa Grunert: Mr. Voskuhl, thank you very much for the interesting conversation.

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