

After Trump's election, EU calls for more independent foreign policy

By Johannes Stern and Alex Lantier
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European Union (EU) foreign ministers gathered Sunday night and Monday in Brussels for their first meeting after the election of Donald Trump as US president, amid broad uncertainty over what the new president's foreign policy will be. There is deep concern in European ruling circles, moreover, since Trump denounced the NATO alliance as superfluous during the campaign and demanded Europe pay more for NATO defence.

The Brussels meeting highlighted major conflicts between EU policy and Trump's statements during the election campaign on international issues, as well as growing calls, spearheaded by Berlin and top EU officials, for an aggressive EU foreign policy independent of the United States.

On Monday, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini called the EU "a superpower," announcing that it had agreed upon an "Implementation Plan on Security and Defence" for a global EU foreign and military policy. She said the "Implementation Plan" comes a year after France invoked European solidarity after the terrorist attacks in Paris, and less than four months after the launching of the so-called EU Global Strategy—a paper arguing that the EU must become an aggressive world power, capable of intervening militarily and waging war independently of NATO and the United States.

"This is no time for theoretical or abstract discussions on European defence. [The Plan] is about doing concrete things, as of tomorrow, together," Mogherini stressed.

The EU's new "Implementation Plan" calls for building a command structure and air, land and sea forces capable of waging large-scale combat. It states that the Common European Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) must "be able to undertake rapid and decisive action" and requires "credible, deployable, interoperable, sustainable and multi-functional civilian and military capabilities."

The Plan is to be presented to EU heads of state and government at the next European Council in December.

The EU foreign ministers also adopted specific resolutions directly conflicting with Trump's stated positions.

While Trump has called for cancelling the Iran nuclear deal, the EU foreign ministers declared their "resolute commitment" to the agreement. Beyond its significance in terms of preventing war with Iran, the EU ministers' demands pointed to conflicts with the United States over access to Iranian markets. They called for "the lifting of nuclear-related economic and financial sanctions," previously imposed by Washington, and "the continued issuing of export licenses by the US Office of Foreign Assets Control" for goods bound for Iran, a major EU export market.

EU foreign ministers also adopted a resolution tightening export controls on "torture goods," declaring, "The aim is to prevent EU exports from contributing to human rights violations in third countries."

One prominent effect of such regulations has been to block EU chemical exports to the United States for use in mixing poisons to execute death row inmates. This repeatedly led US authorities to resort to unproven chemical cocktails, resulting in barbaric, excruciating executions widely seen in the United States, in Europe, and across the world as gross violations of basic democratic rights.

Geostrategic, economic, and political contradictions in relations between US and European capitalism that have existed since the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the end of the Cold War are reasserting themselves with enormous force.

These contradictions have already led to extremely sharp conflicts. The EU's demands for a "multipolar world" and increasing EU commercial penetration of Iran and Iraq at US expense, in the 1990s and early 2000s,

were followed soon after by the unilateral, illegal US invasion of Iraq in 2003. Faced with German and French opposition, Washington tried to divide Europe, with US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld dismissing Germany and France as “Old Europe” and calling a “New Europe” of pro-Iraq war, Eastern European states to come to the fore.

Inter-imperialist rivalries between Washington and the EU over access to oil, markets, and strategic advantage are even deeper today, however, after nearly a decade of an intense global economic crisis and threats of war between Iran, Russia, or even China and the United States. European officials were virtually unanimous in calling for a major European military escalation in response.

To be sure, they still largely call for a continued US military presence in Europe, fearing that a sudden, total withdrawal of US forces ordered by Trump could leave them vastly outnumbered by Russian forces. NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg penned a column in the *Guardian*, titled “Now is not the time for the US to abandon NATO—nor should its European allies go it alone,” to make this point.

The unmistakable implication of calls for independent European military policies, however, is that European militaries could ultimately find themselves fighting wars opposed by the United States, or even fighting the United States outright.

“We are in an uncertain world, and it has not started with the election of Mr Trump,” declared French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault. “But Europe must not wait for others’ decisions, it must defend its own interests—that is to say, the interest of Europeans—and at the same time reaffirming its strategic role on the global level.”

Belgian Foreign minister Didier Reynders said Trump’s election was “a possibility for the EU to go further. We need to enhance our capacity in defence and security. The EU needs to find a way to have its voice heard in the search for political solutions...and ensure that it’s not simply a conversation between Washington and Moscow, so that we can have the EU really at the table.”

The drive towards an ever more integrated European military union is being pushed above all by Berlin, however. Last weekend, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen described both the British vote to leave the European Union and Trump’s victory as a “chance for Europe.”

Writing in the liberal German daily *Der Tagesspiegel*, she stated: “We Europeans know NATO can’t deal with

all aspects of our security. We have to take more responsibility for the problems in our immediate environment... We Europeans have to set the course: we have to coordinate our instruments, we have to become more efficient with our resources and take faster decisions. And we need new capabilities—above all for our security and defence policy.”

The German ruling class is using Trump’s election as a pretext to promote the return of German militarism and assert its geostrategic and economic interests in Europe and internationally. Immediately after the election, the German Foreign Office published a statement by its Coordinator of Transatlantic Cooperation, Mr Jürgen Hardt, on the outcome of the US election.

It stated, “The need for us Europeans, and for Germany in particular, to assume greater responsibility and contribute even more with regard to all instruments of foreign and security policy will further increase during the Trump Presidency. Global developments will continue to provide the issues that will shape our cooperation in the coming months. This includes stabilising the situation in Syria and Iraq, implementing the Minsk agreement in Ukraine, and conducting relations with Russia.”

While German imperialism is making its bid for world power, it also faces deep divisions within Europe itself, highlighted by Britain’s exit from the EU this summer.

Inter-European tensions were again on display in Brussels, where the British and French foreign ministers snubbed the Sunday night meeting called for by Berlin. British Foreign Minister Boris Johnson mocked the meeting as a “whinge-o-rama,” while Whitehall sources dismissed it as “huffing and puffing” designed to allow EU officials to posture as opponents of Trump.

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