

European Union summit agrees to “historic” military build-up

By Johannes Stern
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Following the beginning of the Brexit talks at the start of this past week, the European Union’s (EU) member states are moving rapidly to transform the bloc into a military and defence union. At the center of the EU summit on Thursday and Friday in Brussels were far-reaching measures aimed at militarisation at home and abroad.

Among other things, it was agreed “to establish comprehensive and ambitious Permanent Security Cooperation (PESCO) for the strengthening of European security and defence.” Within three months, the governments will “finalise a joint list with criteria and obligations, together with concrete capability projects,” according to the European Council’s official website. This would also include “missions with the highest requirements,” meaning military interventions with European “combat units.”

Already at the beginning of the month, the EU agreed to establish a joint command centre for civilian and military operations and provide the European Commission with a multi-billion euro defence fund. A summit paper entitled “Conclusions of the European Council on security and defence” welcomed this step “and expects its swift utilisation.” The goal is to build a “competitive, innovative [...] European defence industry.”

The aim of the measures is to develop the EU into an aggressive great power capable, when required, to intervene militarily and wage war independently of NATO and the United States.

A “Reflection Paper on the future of European Defence,” published by the European Commission on 7 June, states, “Europeans themselves are above all responsible for the improvement of European security. The resources are actually available: taken together, the military spending of the European powers is the second

highest in the world [...] although cooperation with our partners will remain the norm and the preferred solution for the EU, we should also be able to act alone when necessary.”

Europe’s military build up is therefore being measured against the fighting capabilities of the United States. EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said at a joint press conference with EU Council President Donald Tusk, “The defence fund is necessary. We have in Europe 130 types of weapon systems whereas the US has 30. We have in Europe 17 types of tanks whereas the US has 1. We are spending half of the military budget of the US, but our efficiency is 15 percent... So there is room for improvement, and that is what we have decided today.”

The rapid militarisation of Europe is being pushed above all by the German and French governments. “That is real added value we have agreed upon,” enthused German Chancellor Angela Merkel in response to the defence plan reached in Brussels. “Because it puts us in a position to be able to carry out missions for example in Africa, where we will not only consider the military aspect, but also incorporate the possibilities for political solutions and development cooperation.”

Newly-elected French President Emmanuel Macron described the decisions as “historic.” “For years and years there has not been any progress on defence, there has been one today,” he told reporters. At the same time, he noted the importance of the Paris-Berlin axis for the reorganisation of the EU. “We will work hand in hand with Germany,” he said.

At the end of the summit, Merkel and Macron put on a united front for the media by arranging a joint press conference. Merkel described the summit as a “council of assurance and energy.” Macron declared, “Europe is

our best defence given the global challenges.” The French president obviously did not mean by this Russia, against which the EU extended its sanctions by six months, but the United States. With an eye on Donald Trump’s announcement of a US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change, Macron stated that there was strong support for the deal.

The EU representatives could also not resist a swipe at British Prime Minister Theresa May, who barely played a part in the summit. “My first impression is that the first offer from the United Kingdom falls short of our expectations,” said Tusk on the proposal from May on the rights of EU citizens after Brexit.

Concessions to London are unacceptable to Berlin and Brussels because they would only accelerate the break up of the EU under conditions of deepening political and economic conflicts on the continent. “Not everyone is satisfied with the German-French leadership duo,” wrote the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*. The Eastern European Vyšehrad states once again refused to accept any refugees, and there is allegedly “dissent” on trade policy. While the Netherlands, Ireland and others are advocates of free trade, Macron is calling for protectionist measures and “a Europe which protects.”

As the reactionary character of the EU becomes ever clearer, the propaganda from the ruling class to mobilise support for it becomes more absurd. In an interview published prior to the summit in a number of leading European newspapers, Macron claimed that Europe had a “special role” in the defence of “freedom” and “democracy.” “Democracy emerged on our continent,” Macron said. “The US, like us, loves freedom—but it does not share our sense of justice.”

Macron knows very well that the capitalist Europe does not create “justice and peace,” but, like the capitalist United States, is a breeding ground for nationalism, social counterrevolution, police state measures and war. The austerity measures dictated by the EU have laid waste to entire countries like Greece and plunged millions into poverty. The brutal attack on refugees by the policy of “Fortress Europe,” which was strengthened in Brussels, has transformed the Mediterranean into a mass grave. In France, Macron’s cabinet extended the state of emergency on Thursday and is preparing major attacks on the working class.

The propaganda about a “peaceful European power” is exposed above all by the fact that it is precisely

German militarism, which twice left the continent in ruins during the 20th century, that is once again on the rise and seeking to organise Europe. Berlin views Brexit, the mounting Transatlantic tensions and cooperation with the new French government as a unique opportunity to expand its economic and political predominance in Europe, and increasingly dominate militarily.

“None of us want to take our own special national road, not Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic or Italy,” said Hans-Peter Bartels, the parliamentary ombudsman for the armed forces, prior to the summit. The policy of small military states had to be abandoned and the European part of NATO organised, he continued. “In the end, there will be a European army,” proclaimed Bartels. To this end, “every step in the right direction [is] important.”

Germany’s defence ministry is working on concrete plans to establish the German army as a “anchor army” for NATO’s European members, whose armies are to be heavily armed and integrated into the command and control structures of Germany. Germany, Romania and the Czech Republic signed cooperation agreements for closer collaboration between their armed forces in February. The Dutch army has already integrated almost two thirds of its units into German army command structures. On Wednesday, the German cabinet sealed an agreement with Norway for the building of new submarines.

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