

French president Macron and ex-left Cohn-Bendit advocate a militarily strong Europe at Frankfurt Book Fair

By Marianne Arens
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French President Emmanuel Macron used this year's Frankfurt Book Fair, at which France is the official guest nation, to advocate his concept of a militarised and authoritarian Europe dominated by France and Germany.

In his speech at the fair, which he opened jointly with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Macron boasted about Europe's culture. "Without culture, no Europe!" he declared to his audience, citing Goethe, and praising Walter Benjamin, Charles Baudelaire and Edmund Husserl, as well as the latter's French translator, Paul Ricoeur, Macron's favourite philosopher. He spent some time at the book fair, chatted with authors, translators and visitors, and called for every second European young person to be given the opportunity to spend six months in another European country to learn the language.

Prior to this, Macron revealed the reactionary essence of his vision for Europe in the ballroom at Frankfurt's Goethe University. It has nothing in common with the cosmopolitan ideals of a Goethe or Beethoven, to the sound of whose "Ode to Joy" Macron made an eerie appearance at the Louvre on election night in France.

Macron is striving for a heavily armed Europe capable of pursuing its own global imperialist strategy while suppressing domestic opposition. He developed his "Europe vision" on the same day as just a few hundred miles to the west, hundreds of thousands of public sector workers at schools, hospitals and transport firms took strike action against Macron's labour market "reforms."

Macron's invocation of European culture serves to win support for his reactionary project among the educated middle class, which once styled itself as

progressive but has now, in the face of growing international and social conflicts, discovered its love for the nation, military and a strong state. Nobody embodies this transformation better than Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who served at the Goethe University as Macron's stooge.

During the 1968 student revolt in France, Cohn-Bendit became a star in the media, which nicknamed him "Danny the Red" and crafted his image as the terror of bourgeois society, even though the student leader, who rejected Marxism in favour of an anarchist "sponti" theory, never represented a threat to the bourgeois order.

In the 1970s, Cohn-Bendit and his close friend and protégé Joschka Fischer turned their backs on street battles and set out on "the long march through the institutions" that would lead them into high positions within the state. Fischer became the first Green minister in a state government in 1985 and German foreign minister in 1998. In this role, he paved the way for the first foreign intervention by the German army since World War II and supported Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's anti-working class Agenda 2010.

Cohn-Bendit, who is both a German and French citizen, made a career for himself in the Greens on both sides of the Rhine. He was a member of the European Parliament for twenty years, leading the Green group until 2014. In this role, he backed wars in the Middle East and North Africa, and authored a manifesto in defence of the European Union (EU) together with the former Liberal prime minister of Belgium, Guy Verhofstadt.

At the Goethe University, Cohn-Bendit supplied Macron with the prompts to develop his vision of

Europe as a militarily strong power. He said it was “fantastic” that the French and German armies were conducting a joint military intervention in Mali, despite their different traditions. Europe must go further in this direction, he added.

Macron responded with praise for Merkel. In recent years, she has “played an important role in Germany once again investing in the armed forces.” Much had changed, he continued, and Germany was now militarily active in many locations. Although unlike in France, the army in Germany was not subordinate to the president, German military intervention in Mali had been made possible by Merkel, he said.

And that was not all. “Germany is strongly represented in the sub-Sahara zone,” said Macron. “And that is very important for us.” The French president noted in this context that additional joint plans with the German chancellor existed. For example, it was very important to coordinate Europe’s intelligence agencies, “to develop, order and purchase fighter jets together.”

The third individual on the podium, sociologist and “Jihad expert” Gilles Kepel, provided Macron with proposals to support this policy. He explained that Europe had become very insecure and had to “ensure more security,” especially in the Mediterranean zone, which he described as “our Mare Nostrum.”

Macron asserted that Europe required a “geopolitical goal.” “A political roadmap” has to be developed. In the wars carried out to date, this had been absent, he added. France did not take part in the Iraq war, Macron noted, but it had failed to develop its own strategy. The absence of its own political vision encouraged terrorism. “We deceived ourselves and left an ever expanding space for the terrorists,” said Macron.

It is clear what he means by this. In his view, Europe’s mistake in the Middle East and North Africa was that it did not pursue its own strategy, distinct from the American and Russian. He wants to change this. Europe should in future more aggressively advance its own imperialist interests in the imperialist wars, wars that have already claimed the lives of millions and forced millions more to flee.

On the situation in the Middle East, Europe had to “manage and resolve the conflicts that give rise to wars.” In Syria, the West is experiencing “its greatest defeat. What do we have there: Russia, Turkey and Iran

are active there—that is crazy.” The question has to be asked, “What can Europe contribute there?”, because too often “there is nothing to be seen from the United Nations, from Europe.”

Cohn-Bendit repeatedly addressed controversial topics and attempted to push Macron even further to the right. One example was his call for the EU to play a greater role in the suppression of the Catalan independence movement. “Why isn’t Europe waking up? The separatist leaders are getting a hearing—but why does Europe not act?” the French ex-leftist demanded to know.

Macron, who has repeatedly expressed support for the Spanish government’s violent crackdown, answered that France could not intervene in the “internal affairs” of the Spanish state, but noted, “Spain belongs to Europe. The Catalanian actions are not provided for in the Spanish constitutional order.” He subsequently added that Spain’s sovereignty could not be interfered with.

Macron backs the Spanish government’s violent crackdown against Catalan voters, and he is seeking to write the state of emergency in France permanently into law. This would enable the police to clamp down on workers who resist his neoliberal labour market “reforms.” Macron has already denounced these workers as “slackers, cynics and extremists.”

While Cohn-Bendit backed Macron in Frankfurt, Germany’s Greens are preparing to enter a governing coalition with the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and the neoliberal Free Democratic Party. This government will accelerate the military build-up and the attacks on the working class. This will, notwithstanding the commitment to a “European vision,” intensify divisions between France and Germany and accelerate the breakup of the European Union. The only way to unite Europe on a progressive basis is the United Socialist States of Europe.

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