

EU member states take major step toward a European army

By Peter Schwarz
14 November 2017

The European Union has taken a major step toward developing the capacity to wage war in the future independently of and, if necessary, against the United States.

Foreign and defence ministers from 23 of the 28 EU member states signed a framework document on a common defence policy in Brussels on Monday. Along with Britain, which will leave the EU in 2019, only four smaller countries—Denmark, Ireland, Malta and Portugal—did not sign on to the deal. However, they can do so at any time.

With the “agreement on permanent structured cooperation” (PESCO), the EU states committed themselves to close cooperation in the development and purchase of weapons, and in making available troops and equipment for joint military interventions.

“PESCO is an ambitious, binding and inclusive European legal framework for investment in the security and defence of the EU’s territory and citizens,” the document states. The key issue is to make Europe more efficient, capable of acting and quicker, said a representative of the German defence ministry.

The agreement signifies an escalation of European militarism. The first of 20 conditions to which all parties must commit is a regular increase in military spending. At least 20 percent of this must be directed to the purchase of new weapons. For its part, the EU intends to contribute €500 million annually and €1 billion after 2021 to joint arms projects.

Details concerning the form of cooperation will be worked out over the coming weeks. There are currently 47 proposals for joint projects. These include a joint crisis response corps, the establishment of multinational combat units, a joint “centre of excellence” for European training missions, precautionary plans for military interventions in

various regions around the world, a “military Schengen” zone, which would allow the swift deployment of troops and heavy weaponry without bureaucratic hurdles, joint satellite reconnaissance, a European medics commando, and joint logistics hubs. Ten of these 47 projects are to be initiated in December.

The driving forces behind PESCO are Germany and France. In recent months, Berlin, Paris and Brussels have promoted the project by holding six workshops. French President Emmanuel Macron, in a speech delivered at the Sorbonne University in Paris in September, declared, “By the beginning of the next decade, Europe must have a joint intervention force, a common defence budget and a joint doctrine for action.”

German Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen said the signing of PESCO was “a great day for Europe.” The parties were taking “a further step towards an army for Europe.”

German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel described the agreement as “historic.” It was a “major step towards independence and the strengthening of the EU’s security and defence policy.” He anticipated that PESCO would result in a major increase in military capabilities.

Europe currently spends half of the money the US does on its military, he said, but achieves a capacity of only 15 percent. Closer cooperation could bring about an improvement.

Berlin, Paris and Brussels are seeking to portray EU military cooperation as complimentary to, rather than at odds with, NATO. The PESCO agreement itself states: “The strengthened military capacity of EU states will also be of use to NATO. It will strengthen the European pillar and serve to answer repeated demands

for stronger transatlantic burden-sharing.”

Von der Leyen also sought to deny any opposition to NATO. The transatlantic alliance would always be responsible for national and collective defence, she said, while the EU, with its “networked security,” would carry out tasks that are not part of NATO’s remit, such as “assistance” to African states.

This is nonsense. Commentators are generally agreed that two key events have encouraged the implementation of long-discussed but repeatedly frustrated plans for a European army: the election of Donald Trump and Brexit.

A first attempt to found a European Defence Community failed in 1954 in the face of French opposition. No further attempt was made for several decades. At the turn of the new century, efforts to establish closer military cooperation failed due to resistance from London, which, as Washington’s closest ally, wanted to prevent the emergence of any alternative to NATO.

Trump’s “America First” policy has sharpened the tensions between the United States and Europe. US policy in the Middle East and Southeast Asia is viewed in Berlin and Paris as an attack on their interests, and America, Europe and China are fighting among themselves for influence in Africa. Only in the preparations for war with Russia are the European powers and the US cooperating closely via NATO. But even here, there are tactical differences on how far the conflict should be pushed.

At the same time, Brexit has removed the most important opponent of a European army from the EU.

The PESCO agreement does not mean that all of the conflicts within Europe have been overcome, and that Germany and France will toe the same line from now on. Even prior to the agreement, sharp differences emerged.

While Paris wanted to restrict the agreement to a small, exclusive group of states with large armies that could intervene decisively in a crisis situation, Berlin pressed for the broadest possible range of participants, with a wide spectrum of tasks. Germany prevailed.

Since unanimous decisions are required, decision-making will be difficult. But Berlin feared that the Eastern European states, which are increasingly dominated by nationalist and anti-EU sentiment, would align with the US.

The huge hike in military spending connected with PESCO will exacerbate class tensions in Europe. The ruling elites are already responding to class tensions in every European country with a major buildup of the apparatus of state repression. This is encouraging right-wing and nationalist forces and tearing the EU apart.

In the final analysis, the growing tensions between the US and Europe are “not simply the product of the extreme nationalist policies of the current occupant of the White House,” as the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote in its June 2, 2017 Perspective column titled “The Great Unraveling: The crisis of the post-war geopolitical order.”

The column continued: “Rather, the tensions are rooted in deep contradictions between the interests of the major imperialist powers, which twice in the last century led to world war...”

“The events surrounding Trump’s trip to Europe reflect a crisis not only of American imperialism, but of the entire world capitalist system. None of Washington’s rivals—neither the EU, despised at home for its austerity policies, nor the economically moribund, right-wing regime in Japan, nor the post-Maoist capitalist oligarchy in China—offers a progressive alternative. Anyone who asserted that a coalition of these powers will emerge to stabilize world capitalism, and block the emergence of large-scale trade war and military conflict, would be placing heavy bets against history.”

The rearming of Europe confirms this. Only the construction of an international antiwar movement based on the working class and fighting for a socialist programme and the overthrow of capitalism can avert the catastrophe of another world war.

To contact the WSW and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>