

German, French parliaments prepare new alliance, 55 years after Elysée treaty

By Alex Lantier
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On Monday, for the 55th anniversary of the signing of the post-World War II German-French Elysée treaty, the *Bundestag* and the *Assemblée Nationale* jointly adopted a common “resolution for a new Elysée treaty.” This unusual simultaneous vote of both parliaments underscored the political, and not simply historic, content of the commemoration.

The European Union’s (EU) German-French “axis” is trying to hammer out a world policy around which to rally the EU, despite Brexit and a historic crisis of US-EU relations that has erupted to the surface since the election of Donald Trump. The resolution adopted by both parliaments shows that the policies jointly being prepared in Berlin and in Paris are reactionary and lack any element of democratic legitimacy. It lays out a framework for a major military build-up, deep social cuts and attacks on democratic rights.

On both sides of the Rhine, the media tried to downplay this unpopular political agenda, and play up cross-border friendship and promises that the 1963 treaty put an end to the German-French conflicts that helped trigger two world wars in the 20th century. *Le Monde* hailed the 1963 treaty as the historic “gesture of reconciliation that European institutions had failed to create until then.”

In his article titled “Friendship is a feeling” for German state broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*, Max Hoffmann wrote, “Don’t confuse the simple and clear document of 1963, that let millions of youth get to know the other country and its people, with bureaucratic nonsense about the euro group and PESCO, the Permanent Structured Cooperation on defense policy. While this may be important for the future of the EU, Franco-German friendship is not only about budget deficits, military coordination and structural reforms. It’s about a German-French feeling.”

Propaganda calling workers to passively accept the diplomacy, war planning, and austerity policies of European capital is reactionary and false. What has prevented war in Europe since 1945 is not the pro-militarist “German-French feelings” praised by Mr Hoffman. It was opposition to militarism and austerity in the working class—bound up with the existence of the Soviet Union and the Soviet victory against Nazi Germany in World War II—and, especially after the Stalinist bureaucracy’s dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, US imperialism’s status as the lone but fading superpower.

The period when US imperialism could rely on its economic and military power to try to impose settlements to conflicts that

emerged between other powers is over, however. The German-French resolution lays out plans for the assertion of their imperialist interests in the face of the growing economic weakness of US imperialism, the disasters caused by its endless Middle East wars, and Trump’s threats to lock European products out of US markets.

Anyone who claims that the “axis” between German and French imperialism will avert major wars is placing heavy bets against history. The German-French “axis” is seeking to develop itself as a major independent militarist power, financing a war machine based on the ruthless exploitation of the working class.

Notwithstanding its calls for more German-French sister cities and joint foreign language programs, the resolution is centered around the commitment of Berlin and Paris to a military build-up. It calls for “reinforcing a common foreign and security policy,” hailing “the creation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) on 11 December 2017 and the agreement on setting up a European Defense Fund.” It calls for stepped-up German-French military coordination, up to the level of the general staffs of their armed forces.

It also calls for more attacks on immigrants, committing Berlin and Paris to “deepen common efforts in the struggle against the causes of immigration”—efforts that have already seen the EU finance detention camps in Libya where immigrants are subjected to torture, sexually assaulted and sold into slavery.

The resolution also calls for more free market and social austerity policies. Germany and France, it declares, “aspire to a complete and rapid integration of their markets ... [and] collectively call for a fully integrated European internal market.” This is to be based on a “European foundation of basic social rights, aiming to produce in Europe a minimum level of equality of opportunity and of access to the labor market, of fair working conditions, of social protection and inclusion, and of equality between women and men.”

In fact, the policies pursued by Macron in nine months since his election give an indication of the ruthless attacks now being prepared. He rammed through labor decrees, partially modeled on the German social democracy’s Hartz laws, that effectively suspended the Labor Code and allowed employers to impose sub-minimum wage salary levels in the oil industry and unregulated mass sackings in auto. He is planning broad cuts to pension and health care spending in the coming years.

These attacks are designed to roll back all of the social

concessions made to the working class in an earlier historical period, and press forward with a major escalation of European militarism. Before the vote on the *Bundestag-Assemblée* resolution, Macron gave a speech at the Toulon naval base again calling for a return to military conscription for all youth in France. This goes hand in hand with growing discussion in Germany of the possible development of a German nuclear arsenal.

Workers cannot afford to wait for Berlin and Paris to implement this reactionary agenda. This year has seen growing strikes and social struggles, from German steelworkers and British railworkers to Iranian and Tunisian workers, pointing to growing militancy in the working class. The only viable response is the fight to build an international movement against war, social austerity, and attacks on democratic rights, unifying workers across Europe in a revolutionary socialist struggle against capitalism and for the United Socialist States of Europe.

This requires a conscious break with the reactionary, nationally-oriented, social democratic, Stalinist, and petty-bourgeois pseudo left forces that promote European militarism, insisting it is less violent than its American counterpart. Sahra Wagenknecht, a leader of the German Left Party, presented their arguments in detail when she traveled with former German Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schäuble to Paris to speak on the joint resolution in the *Assemblée nationale*.

She hailed the two right-wing heads of state who signed the 1963 treaty, German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and French President Charles de Gaulle, as models for the EU. She declared, “We want ‘a Europe in which progress ‘becomes a common good,’ as de Gaulle said. Progress as a common good, that is really an entirely different frame of mind from the current EU treaties, in which the freedom of capital clearly outweighs basic social rights.”

This is a travesty of the 1963 treaty designed to sow illusions in the benevolent nature of European capitalism. After five years of talks, Adenauer and de Gaulle both agreed to the treaty to promote their imperialist interests. Adenauer sought an alliance to dissociate West German capitalism from its Nazi past and free it up to play a greater role in Europe; de Gaulle was seeking a German ally against US interference in French imperialism’s colonial interests, in particular the bloody 1954-1962 war in Algeria.

The treaty disappointed de Gaulle, however: the *Bundestag* voted to add a preamble to the treaty stressing the alliance with the United States. De Gaulle was furious, privately denouncing Germans who “fear they are not kowtowing enough to the Anglo-Saxons. They are acting like pigs. It would be fitting for us to denounce the treaty, break the alliance and agree one with the Russians.”

Wagenknecht’s hailing of de Gaulle as a model for today is reactionary. European capitalism has abandoned its pretensions to distribute wealth as a “common good,” that it maintained in de Gaulle’s era, while the Soviet Union existed as a visible alternative to capitalism. Its national welfare policies undermined by the globalization of economic life, it is tearing up the social gains established by workers struggles in the 20th century and preparing for war.

The divisions between the United States and Europe have, moreover, only grown since de Gaulle’s time and are now reaching explosive levels. Significantly, today’s German-French resolution does not mention any alliance with the United States, Britain, or NATO. Indeed, in the *Assemblée nationale*, Wagenknecht went on to endorse French imperialism’s anti-American policy in the 1960s, attack Trump, and call for an independent EU foreign policy.

“Lately,” she said, “since the United States has a president who in key moments boasts about the size of his atomic arsenal, it has become fully clear that Europe, as de Gaulle wanted before, must take its fate in its own hands. Yes, we need an independent European foreign policy. But we need it in order to bring peace, disarmament and de-escalation and not to bring on an arms race.”

Wagenknecht’s appeal to re-arm in order to prevent an arms race is cynical and false. An independent European military escalation will not convince Trump or Washington to disarm or deescalate, but intensify the pressure on US imperialism and, indeed, every major power, to step up its armaments programs. Wagenknecht ignores this lesson of both of the world wars of the last century to dress up the reactionary military policy of Berlin and Paris in bright, peaceful colors.

In the final analysis, moreover, such plans only sharpen the strategic and military tensions between Berlin and Paris, which have fought three major wars against each other in the last 150 years. Berlin has emerged from the reunification of Germany immensely strengthened vis-à-vis Paris. The long-standing rivalries between the two again erupted after the September 2017 German elections, when Free Democratic Party leader Christian Lindner attacked Macron’s economic proposals for Europe, denouncing them as a “money pipeline to Paris” that was unacceptable to Berlin.

Significantly, even as Berlin and Paris intensify their strategic cooperation, there are growing signs of nervousness in French ruling circles at German policy. Articles in the pro-Macron *Le Monde* have warned that Berlin may not respect important French interests, like supporting French military interventions in Africa and maintaining a “pragmatic” approach to Russia.

“Germany, both in terms of public opinion and in ruling circles, does not seem disposed to increase Franco-German strategic cooperation,” *Le Monde* wrote. It added, “Moreover, greater European integration on defense policy runs up against major obstacles, like the problem of sharing France’s nuclear arsenal or the deployment of German combat troops abroad.”

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