

US pressure provokes fissures in European Union

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The world economic crisis, European Union (EU) enlargement, and the debate on EU governmental structures are forcing major changes in the political positions of the European powers, exposing deep economic and political fault lines inside the EU. Underlying the disagreements within the EU is the impact of US foreign policy on the European integration project. In its turn toward unilateralism and militarism, Washington is exacerbating intergovernmental tensions on the continent, instead of favoring European integration as it did during the Cold War.

The recent bitter dispute over agricultural subsidies between French President Jacques Chirac and British Prime Minister Tony Blair demonstrates the inseparable links between internal EU disputes and Euro-American relations.

One of the principal obstacles to eastward expansion of the EU has been the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), an agricultural subsidy program costing about 40 billion euros per year (roughly 40 percent of the EU budget). The full extension of these subsidies to the numerous small farms in Eastern Europe would have been quite expensive. Negotiations on the eastward expansion of the CAP had always stumbled on the conflict between the countries that benefit from the CAP (France, Spain, and Italy) and those that are net contributors (Germany, the UK, and Denmark).

A surprise agreement reached by Chirac and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder on the eve of the EU expansion negotiations largely settled the matter in favor of the French side: the CAP will stay until 2006, and will gradually decrease from then on. The eastern countries will receive a certain fraction of normal EU subsidies (starting at 25 percent and reaching parity at a date when the CAP will presumably have been largely reduced). This Franco-German agreement, which the subsequent negotiations of the 15 EU member countries did not significantly modify, helped rapidly settle the expansion dossier.

Blair publicly condemned the hypocrisy of the French government, which speaks of helping Africa while cutting off African farmers from European markets. Chirac retaliated by canceling the Franco-British diplomatic summit

planned for December 3 at Le Touquet.

The Franco-German decision on the CAP has thrown the foreign policy of the Blair government into a major crisis. London's attempt to ally itself with the conservative governments in Italy and Spain has had mixed results, especially after their failure at the Seville summit to force through their ultra-repressive immigration agenda, opposed by France and Sweden. The British press worried about a possible return to the era of Franco-German ascendancy in Europe, when French President François Mitterrand and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl presented the launching of the euro as a *fait accompli* to Great Britain. Blair had the meager consolation of claiming that the 1 percent increase in the CAP budget in the years to come would probably be below inflation.

The French Minister for European Affairs, Noëlle Lenoir, announced the "end of anti-Germanic pathos" in French diplomacy; the French government's directive to its European representatives was to "refine, or even adjust" diplomatic goals according to the indications of its allies, "above all Germany." This Franco-German collaboration is somewhat surprising, given that relations between the two heads of state—Chirac and Schröder—have been rather frosty: Chirac gave the *Légion d'Honneur* to the CDU challenger, Stoiber, during the German election campaign.

A variety of economic and geopolitical factors are causing a noticeable convergence of French and German positions. Both governments are running budget deficits that will probably go over the 3 percent limit imposed by the European Stability Pact and have indicated that they would support relaxing the restrictions in a time of economic crisis. However, the geopolitical implications of the current budget deficits are unmistakable—the French government had previously argued in favor of amending the Stability Pact so as to allow the euro-zone countries to build up their military power through deficit spending.

British commentators also noted that France and Germany, which are currently leading European integration, are also the European countries that have expressed the most

reservations about US plans for war in Iraq. Schröder's reelection was based on a pacifist attitude towards the Iraq offensive, and France insisted on long negotiation sessions on the UN Security Council before bowing to Washington. The British *Guardian* warned of a "nightmare scenario" for Blair: finding himself isolated in Europe due to his unflinching support for US war plans.

This indicates what is fundamentally at stake in the current convergence between France and Germany: the makeup and geopolitical orientation of European power. There are, however, no guarantees that this convergence will last; several EU members—notably the Italian government of Silvio Berlusconi—have taken positions closer to the Franco-German axis on certain issues and closer to the British pro-Americanism on others.

The British government fears that the development of a European political agenda less submissive to Washington could harm its traditional intermediate position of compromise-broker for the EU and the US. It therefore responded to the Franco-German accords on the CAP by immediately insisting that it would try to torpedo the draft of a future EU Constitution by Valérie Giscard d'Estaing, the former French president.

This draft, which foresees the formation of an embryonic state power—a Congress of European Peoples consisting of European and national parliamentarians, a president of the Council of European heads of State, and a president of each Council of Ministers (in agriculture, transportation, etc.)—and the transfer of various powers previously left to national governments, is far from receiving unanimous support. However, German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, while declaring that he did not support all of the proposed institutions, insisted that if there was to be a EU Constitution it would be the one drafted by Giscard, "without further detailed negotiations."

France and Germany have scheduled a summit to announce a common position on the EU Constitution. The French press made it clear that Chirac would insist on the inclusion of a clause "guaranteeing mutual assistance" on the question of "global security," as well as on a definitive German commitment to financing the A-400M, the project to build a European military transport plane—a central prerequisite for projecting European military power independently of the US and NATO.

American pressure on EU development does not come about simply through the British government's desperate attempts to prevent the expression of EU-US antagonisms. Washington's persistent support for Turkey's admission into the EU represents a thinly disguised attempt to increase its influence in the internal functioning of the EU. Turkey, whose population of roughly 60 million would give it a large

number of seats in most European institutions, is one of Washington's main allies in the Middle East.

The British and Italian governments, traditionally closer to Washington, have stated their support for Ankara's membership. On November 9, Giscard announced that he thought that Turkish membership would signify "the end of the EU," citing as justification cultural differences and Turkey's rapidly growing population. Showing that religious and cultural questions have little to do with his position, he then suggested organizing a common market for Europe and nearby Middle Eastern regions, mentioning the possibility of a "partnership pact" between the EU and Turkey. Giscard's only real concern is the effect of Turkish membership on the political balance of power within the EU.

The head of the majority delegation at the National Assembly in Paris, Jacques Barrot, echoed these concerns, and Jean-Claude Juncker, minister-president of Luxembourg, indicated his opposition to scheduling Turkish membership meetings. On November 13, Schröder indicated that he wanted to see a "rapprochement" of Turkey and the EU, without speaking of membership. He pointedly questioned Turkey's "geopolitical direction." A European representative of the German CDU, Elmar Brok, said that he was thinking seriously about an intermediate membership status for border regions of the EU. The debates, currently planned for December, on whether or not to schedule Turkish membership talks will doubtless be quite tense.

The disputes shaking the EU all have a common point of reference: a large part of their intensity comes from the immense concerns of the European ruling classes over US-EU relations and the evolution of Washington's foreign policy. The shifting alliances between the different EU member states are in large part defined by their attitude towards the US. The increasingly unbalanced, unilateral and militarist policies coming out of Washington will inevitably provoke major political crises in the European Union.



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