

EU celebrations in Berlin

Germany pushes for great power politics behind a European facade

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The weather was fine in Berlin last weekend, and in bright sunshine tens of thousands of Berliners took the opportunity of a walk along the city's historic *Unter den Linden*.

Along the way, they could take part in the celebrations to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Rome treaty, which marked the first step towards the capitalist unification of Europe. Twenty-seven different EU member states had set up tents offering national delicacies, cakes and wine, while Beethoven's Ninth Symphony was played over loudspeakers. Berlin's famous "island of museums" was bathed in light for a special exhibition devoted to the theme of beauty, and young Berliners could dance the night away at more than 60 nightclubs featuring music from a host of European DJs.

The official program for the 27 heads of government and state attending the celebrations began in the Philharmonic Concert Hall, where prominent guests once again heard Beethoven's "Ode to Joy"—this time under the direction of Sir Simon Rattle. The state guests solemnly rose together with all those in attendance in the hall for the playing of the "European hymn." There then followed a lavish festival dinner, and on Sunday the solemn signing of the "Berlin Declaration" in the grounds of the German Historical Museum. Once again, Beethoven's "Ode" was played by the youth orchestra of the European Union.

Those responsible for the organisation of the festivities had gone to some lengths to combine public activities with the official state celebration, but the large video screens featuring speeches and interviews with European Union politicians were largely ignored. Jubilant reports in the media over "Berlin's celebration of the European Union" could not hide the fact that the public demonstrated little interest in the official celebrations.

More than 5,000 policemen and special units were at hand to protect the official celebrations. Snipers were stationed on the roofs of houses close to the conference areas, and the city centre resembled a fortress. The huge police presence was indicative of the real relations between European heads of state and the population at large.

The extensive festivities were aimed at diverting attention away from the fact that popular opposition to the European Union has actually increased since the decision two years ago by voters in France and the Netherlands to reject the EU constitution. At the same time, the assembled heads of government and state are determined to press ahead with their unpopular policies. To the tune of Beethoven's music and Schiller's lyrics declaring that "all humans will be brothers!" the European Union is preparing for violent struggles both at home and abroad.

While the "Berlin Declaration" of the European Union begins with the words, "We, the citizens of the European Union," the text was kept secret up to last moment before its signing. Every word in the short text had been honed and negotiated over a period of months by the 27 EU states. At the start of the year, the German chancellor had requested her 26 EU colleagues and the presidents of the EU Commission and European Parliament announce the names of "confidential partners" who could be entrusted with the task of negotiating the terms of the Declaration in private discussions.

The result is a collection of platitudes, hollow and deceitful clichés, pious hopes and declarations of intent. Under the heading "We, the citizens of the European Union have united for the better," "common ideals" are praised: "For us, the individual is paramount. His dignity is inviolable. His rights are inalienable. Women and men enjoy equal rights."

There then follows the striving of the European Union for "peace and freedom, for democracy and the rule of law, for mutual respect and shared responsibility, for prosperity and security, for tolerance and participation, for justice and solidarity."

Point two of the Declaration states: "We are facing major challenges which do not stop at national borders. The European Union is our response to these challenges. Only together can we continue to preserve our ideal of European society in future for the good of all European Union citizens."

After an appeal for "economic success and social responsibility," the document continues: "The common market and the euro make us strong." The fight against "terrorism" and

“organised crime” is then placed directly alongside the fight against “illegal immigration,” while in the same breath the document stresses that “racism and xenophobia must never again be given any rein.”

The document then declares that the European Union is striving to assume “a leading role” in the world, in particular in the struggle against “poverty, hunger and diseases.”

It is astonishing to find so many lies printed on one-and-a-half sheets of paper. In fact, EU analyses and statistics show a diametrically opposed picture. Just a month ago, the European Union Commission submitted a “Report on the quality of life in Europe,” which warns of the increasing dangers to the quality of life and refers to the serious consequences of unemployment and “unresolved problems of widespread poverty.”

According to the report, the gap between rich and poor has grown in many European Union states. The results include increased stress, overweight and drug dependency for many citizens. The risks of psychological illnesses and criminality are also growing. A staggering 72 million European citizens—15 percent of the population of European Union—live in poverty, and an additional 36 million are threatened with descent into poverty, with the increasing tendency of poverty being passed on from one generation to the next.

The Berlin Declaration is of interest not only because of its denial of reality on the part of the European ruling elite, but also because it documents a growing tendency towards nationalism in Europe, which lay behind the pompous display of unity last weekend. The reality is that after weeks of negotiation the 27 governments of the EU were unable to agree on anything other than a few utterly general and non-committal phrases.

Up to the last moment, Great Britain wanted to delete references to the euro as the cause for economic growth and prosperity, because it does not belong to the euro group. Spain demanded that the fight against terror and organised crime be directly linked with so-called “illegal immigration” in order to extend the fortress of Europe. Poland and the Czech Republic objected to the text to the very end and then allowed themselves to be bought off at a heavy price. Even those countries that did not raise objections made clear that the document was not really binding because it had only been undersigned by the German chancellor “in the name of all,” together with the presidents of the European Parliament and Commission.

Paradoxically it is the increasing nationalism in Europe, and the associated fears that the European Union could break apart, that plays into the hands of the German government. The most controversial sentence comes at the end of the document and states: “That is why today, 50 years after the signing of the Treaties of Rome, we are united in our aim of placing the European Union on a renewed common basis before the European Parliament elections in 2009.”

As the strongest economic power, the German government regards this clause as a charter for assuming leadership of the

European Union and reviving the failed attempts to impose a constitution, which in future is to have a different name. Also prominent on the list of Berlin’s objectives is establishing a “common foreign and security policy” for the European Union.

Following the crimes committed in Europe and worldwide by German imperialism and militarism in the last century, Germany conducts itself today in a reserved, moderate manner—with kid gloves, so to speak. As president of the European Union, chancellor Merkel avoided any form of criticism, and her real intentions only became clear in an indirect fashion. In an interview, Merkel declared that the building of a European army and clearer EU structures were crucial for the future of the European Union. “We must move towards a common European army. The European Union Commission will be authorised to act, and on the basis of clearly regulated responsibilities.”

Merkel avoided using phrases similar to those employed by former foreign minister Joschka Fischer (the Greens), who a few days previously had given a speech at Humboldt University demanding, in light of the “self-imposed weakening of the United States through its policy of unilateralism,” more European self-sufficiency in world politics and more German leadership in Europe.

The German chancellor left it to the media to draw their own conclusions. For example, Martin Winter wrote in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, under the headline “An end to playing around,” that it was time to call a stop to the festivities; Europe had to act now or would sink into crisis. In a rapidly changing world, “where new powers are emerging, old powers such as Russia are regaining strength, and the US superpower has harmed its own interests. Europeans cannot afford to only act together when there is no other alternative.”

Merkel merely hinted her support for Fischer’s Humboldt speech, when she repeated his warning sentence: “The world will not wait for Europe.”

To secure a longer period of leadership in Europe, the German government has already sought to treble its six-month presidency of the Council of Europe by agreeing to a “triple partnership” with the two countries officially due to succeed Germany, Portugal and Slovenia. During this time, Germany will seek to press ahead with establishing new structures in the EU, which will give due weight and influence to the strongest European powers. On the fringes of the celebrations last weekend, it was also made clear that any member country objecting to this procedure could simply leave the EU if it wished.



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