

EU Africa summit plans increased European military intervention in Africa

Antoine Lerougetel**17 April 2014**

The Fourth European Union-Africa Summit of over 30 European and African heads of state held in Brussels on April 2-3 decided to send an EU force of up to 1,000 soldiers to the Central African Republic (CAR) by the end of May.

This was part of a determination by the leading EU nations, primarily Germany and France, to step up the neo-colonial offensive they are waging in Africa, together with the United States.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for a new approach to Africa at the start of the Brussels summit, saying it was important for European countries to see "the opportunities" on the continent "and not always just the problems."

At a joint press conference with French President François Hollande, she said: "Together, we can make progress on security, development and climate change" and be the "engine of collective development" for the EU in Africa. She also alluded to Germany's embarking on "a new path" in African foreign policy, seeking "to show greater responsibility within Africa as well as classical development policies." She cited German support for France's bloody war in Mali as an example.

Last February, German Development Minister Gerd Müller stated: "The African continent is the principal focal point of cooperation for Germany and the European Union." He stressed that Germany was a strategic partner of the African Union's military development.

European Commission President José Barroso confirmed an EU agreement to allocate €800 million to the African Union to strengthen its "prevention and management of conflicts."

The deepening military intervention of European imperialism in Africa, cynically packaged to the public as a humanitarian development enterprise, is a brutal

imperialist offensive for profits and strategic advantage. Washington and the European imperialist powers have launched a scramble for Africa, in competition with countries such as India, Brazil, and in particular China.

Calling "trade and investment" the "theme of this summit," Christoph Hasselbach of the Deutsche Welle (DW) news service said: "The EU is very, very aware that China has become extremely influential in Africa."

The European powers are also increasing their commercial penetration of African markets. "Since the Doha round in the year 2000, the EU has had an offer on the table—approved by the World Trade Organization—which would give the world's poorest countries, 33 of which are African, tariff-free access to Europe's markets," German aid official Francesco Mari told DW.

In return, those countries would be forced to open up their markets to EU goods in a deal the EU has set for October 2014. Otherwise, the EU will impose tariffs on goods from those countries. Only four African countries have ratified this agreement, however, due to nervousness over the impact of unrestrained competition with EU goods.

"The Europeans obviously want to sell their plant and machinery and spare parts to Africa. And there would be no tariffs, so they would be a better position than the Americans or the Chinese who would face such levies," said Mari.

The escalating European offensive in Africa is part of a broader explosion of European militarism that finds its most concentrated expression in the military build-up of Washington and the EU powers against Russia and the fascist-led, pro-EU putsch in Ukraine. In Africa, the European imperialist powers are returning to a continent that they brutally exploited as colonial overlords in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The

disastrous legacy of colonial oppression and continuing imperialist intervention gives the lie to claims the current offensive is a humanitarian enterprise.

In his recent inaugural policy speech, Manuel Valls, France's new Socialist Party (PS) prime minister, brazenly denied Paris' well-documented and criminal complicity in the genocide of 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994, during the presidency of the PS' François Mitterrand. This was after Rwandan President Kagame accused France of downplaying its responsibility in the event during commemorations of the 20th anniversary of the genocide.

In the same speech, Valls praised France's on-going military interventions in its impoverished former African colonies, Mali and CAR.

The German ruling elite's enthusiasm for abandoning a policy of military restraint, not only in eastern Europe but also in Africa, is gathering pace. DW reported, "Merkel has now emphasized that Germany is prepared to take on more commitments in Africa, agreeing with Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen's demands that Germany should take 'more responsibility in dealing with conflicts throughout the world, even militarily.'"

This build-up is being carried out in defiance of broad popular opposition to war in Europe. A recent poll for German news agency DPA found that half of those polled were outright opposed to deeper involvement of the Bundeswehr in Africa.

For the time being, despite the long history of rivalry and even military conflict between French and German imperialism in Africa, the French ruling elite appears to be encouraging Berlin in its African escalation. It is apparently calculating that it can use German military forces to bolster its own influence in the continent.

In one typical article, French news magazine *Le Nouvel Observateur*, which is strongly aligned with the ruling Socialist Party (PS), criticized the EU for not intervening more strongly in Africa.

It attacked the EU's contribution to France's war in CAR for not going far enough, calling it "a meagre consolation, as the forces and the logistical means to be mobilized will be so modest considering the resources of member states." It complained that the EU system of tactical battle groups of 1,500 troops "had never been used."

In a backhanded acknowledgement of the unpopular and anti-democratic character of Europe's intervention

in Africa, *Nouvel Observateur* said that this reluctance to intervene more strongly was due to "the political risks, given that public opinion is against military involvement and has no appetite for Europe as a military power."



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