

# French press expresses concerns over German re-militarization

Kumaran Ira, Alex Lantier  
6 April 2015

Sections of the French press are breaking the silence that has prevailed in France over the resurgence of German militarism, exposing rising tensions between the major European powers. Within the French bourgeoisie there are deep concerns that German rearmament is a fundamental threat to the interests of French imperialism.

After European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker called for the creation of an “EU joint army” in a March 8 interview with Germany’s *Welt am Sonntag* newspaper, *Le Monde* published an article titled “Germans in uniform.”

The French media and political establishment are for the most part remaining silent on Juncker’s proposal for an EU army, which would be dominated by Germany. *Le Monde* wrote, “The proposal, which has largely gone unnoticed in France, has become very popular on the other side of the Rhine.” *Le Monde* went on to cite German Defense Minister Ursula von der Leyen, who welcomed Juncker’s proposal, saying, “Our future, as Europeans, will one day depend on a European army.”

*Le Monde* drew a parallel with the situation after World War II, when Washington forced Paris to acquiesce to the rearmament of West Germany, which was directed against the USSR. The newspaper wrote: “The French had to submit to what they wanted to avoid: the rearming of Germany and its integration into NATO. Sixty-five years later, History seems to be repeating itself. Europe again wants Germans in uniform, as it is threatened by the Islamic State (IS) and Vladimir Putin.” However, as *Le Monde* bluntly added, “The French... are not in a hurry to see Germans in uniform.”

The newspaper summarily dismissed Berlin’s attempts to mask the reassertion of its imperialist

interests under the veneer of an all-European project. It explained Berlin’s calculations as follows: “We cannot scare our neighbors as we re-arm. It is better to give a European gloss to our re-militarization.”

Fundamental contradictions of European capitalism are reasserting themselves. Berlin and Paris are planning joint projects, such as combat drones, and have sought to work together to negotiate a cease-fire in Ukraine to prevent the US from precipitating outright war with Russia. However, the policy of rearmament across Europe is sharpening deeply rooted tensions between Germany and France, who fought wars three times in the last century-and-a-half: the Franco-Prussian war of 1870-1871 and the two world wars of the 20th century.

On Otto von Bismarck’s two hundredth birthday on April 1, the “Iron Chancellor” was hailed by political and media circles in Germany. Bismarck led a series of wars that unified the German states and established a powerful German Empire led by Prussia. Having defeated France in the Franco-Prussian war, he established Germany as the leading power in continental Europe.

Berlin’s decision to applaud Bismarck as a model for today--even through his policy in continental Europe was largely based on a strategy of crushing and then diplomatically isolating France--has been met mainly with stony silence, but there have been some criticisms in the French media.

In an April 2 article entitled “Germany gives itself over to the cult of Bismarck,” French business daily *Les Echos* wrote: “Paying homage to Otto is inevitably complicated, as the Prussian had multiple facets. In France, his name and pointed helmet remain associated with the Franco-Prussian war and the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine. And some Greek ministers could see

their views on Germany confirmed by reading his principle of *realpolitik*: ‘Great crises form a climate beneficial to Prussia’s growth, as we exploit them without fear and possibly without scruples.’”

Under the surface of rhetoric about European integration and solidarity, unresolved conflicts embedded in the bloody history of European and world capitalism threaten the international working class. Now, as in the war-torn twentieth century, the only progressive way forward is a united struggle of the international working class against war.

French imperialism is just as reactionary as its German counterpart. While it raises concerns about German rearmament, it does not object to a policy of aggressive war. It reacts out of fear of its more powerful competitors.

In its article on the European army, *Le Monde* pointed to a broad crisis of US-European relations as a driving force for German rearmament. “Germany distrusts America, as Merkel has not forgiven Obama for bugging her personal telephone,” the newspaper wrote, adding, “America is playing a dangerous game in Russia, pushing the Europeans in the back and inciting them to take a harsher line and accentuate tensions with Putin.”

Since a fascist-led coup ousted the pro-Russian Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovich in February 2014, Washington has escalated the conflict with Russia. Although Paris and Berlin backed the coup in Kiev, they have opposed sharp economic sanctions against Russia as well as US moves to arm the Kiev regime against Russia.

After press reports emerged this February of a push by factions within the Obama administration and the military/intelligence establishment for Washington to directly arm Kiev, Germany and France rushed to propose a diplomatic solution to the fighting in Ukraine. Before negotiating a cease-fire in Ukraine, French President Hollande warned that with Russia, “We have gone in the space of a few months from having differences, to conflict, to war... We are in a state of war, and a war that could be total.”

For now, fears of a world war provoked by Washington are bringing Berlin and Paris closer together. However, under the surface of joint attempts to de-escalate tensions with Russia and plan for a common European defense, an arms race is developing

between the European imperialist powers.

A major factor in this is the reckless policy of French imperialism itself. France pushed aggressively, in the face of German opposition, for a US-led war in Libya in 2011 and a subsequent war drive against Syria. Berlin refused to participate in the Libyan war and opposed Paris’ plans for a Mediterranean sphere of influence in its former colonial empire, under the rubric of a “Union of the Mediterranean.”

In the months leading up to the Libyan war, France signed a military alliance with Britain that pointedly excluded Germany. Paris clearly hoped to rely on its greater military strength, including its possession of nuclear weapons, to offset the economic dominance of Berlin. This strategy has blown up in France’s face.

It faces a resurgence of German militarism that has been prepared for some time and was clearly articulated in a speech by German President Joachim Gauck on the Day of German Unity in 2013. Gauck declared that Germany was “not an island” that could abstain “from political, economic and military conflicts.” At the Munich Security Conference in early 2014, he announced an end to “the policy of military abstention” by Germany.

After major increases in its military budget, Germany has finally overtaken France in military spending, reaching €32.4 billion per year, while French defense spending fell slightly to €31.4 billion. With France now poised to increase its military spending, and an arms race set to erupt within Europe, the initial expressions of concern over German militarism are being raised in the French media.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**