

Poll finds mass opposition in Europe to war drive vs. Russia over Ukraine

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The findings of a poll published yesterday by the Washington, DC-based Pew Research Center, showing broad opposition in Europe to a NATO war with Russia, underscore the anti-democratic character of the US-led war drive against Russia over Ukraine.

The poll was formulated to elicit answers as favorable as possible to US and NATO policy, particularly in regard to a possible war with Russia. The poll questionnaire did not once raise that Russia and NATO both have nuclear weapons, or inquire about the respondents' willingness to risk nuclear war. As a result, the poll vastly underestimates public opposition to war.

The main question on war was whether NATO member states should fight a defensive war against Russia, if Russia "got into a serious military conflict with one of its neighboring countries that is our NATO ally." In such a situation, Article 5 of the NATO Charter on collective self-defense would require all NATO member states to declare war on Russia.

Despite having framed the question in a manner intended to elicit support for such a supposedly defensive war, the Pew poll found broad opposition among Europeans. Fifty-eight percent of Germans, 53 percent of the French population and 51 percent of Italians opposed fighting even a defensive war with Russia to protect a NATO member.

This is not, however, the character of the war that now threatens to erupt. NATO is not playing a defensive role in Ukraine, which is not a NATO member state. The Ukrainian crisis erupted after the US and the European powers backed a fascist-led putsch against a pro-Russian government in Kiev in February 2014, bringing to power an ultra-right regime that launched a civil war against pro-Russian areas of eastern Ukraine. With US and Russian missile forces

on heightened alert and NATO land, air and naval forces engaged in continuous exercises on Russia's borders, the world stands on the verge of a catastrophic war provoked by Washington and its European allies.

Popular sentiment emerged most clearly when the Pew poll inquired about initiatives NATO is threatening to pursue in Ukraine. Asked about NATO arming the Kiev regime against Russia, a policy being pushed by the Obama administration, majorities or pluralities opposed the measure in every European country surveyed except Poland, where 50 percent supported arming Kiev.

Fully 77 percent of Germans opposed NATO arming Kiev, versus only 19 percent who supported it. The poll found 65 percent opposition versus 22 percent support in Italy, 66 versus 25 percent in Spain, 59 versus 40 percent in France, and 45 versus 42 percent in Britain.

Opposition within Germany, where the government, the media and sections of academia have been waging a relentless propaganda campaign in support of militarism, was particularly strong. A mere 38 percent of Germans said Russia was a danger to NATO member states on its borders, and only 29 percent blamed Moscow for the violence in Ukraine.

These findings constitute a devastating indictment of last year's Kiev putsch and the ensuing US-led war drive against Russia, which have been backed by governments across Europe. While workers are kept in the dark about the true dangers of a war that they do not want, NATO is pressing ahead with reckless policies overwhelmingly rejected by the European population.

The findings of the Pew poll among Ukrainians expose the claims of Washington and the European imperialist powers that they are supporting Ukraine against Russia in order to defend a nascent democratic regime threatened by Russian aggression. The Kiev

regime is imposing brutal austerity measures demanded by the Western banks and using increasingly authoritarian and violent means to suppress internal opposition among Ukraine workers.

Kiev's war against Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine, fought with the aid of the CIA and various fascistic militias, is being carried out in flagrant disregard of the wishes of the Ukrainian people. According to the Pew poll, more than twice as many Ukrainians want to settle the conflict with the separatists through negotiations (47 percent) than with force (23 percent).

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's policies on these issues are widely unpopular, with 57 percent of the population opposing both his handling of the eastern Ukraine conflict and his posture toward Russia.

The domestic policies of the Kiev regime are no less unpopular. Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk's disapproval rating is 60 percent.

With the Ukrainian currency in a state of collapse, waves of mass layoffs taking place, and the government hiking the prices of key utilities, the Pew poll shows 94 percent of the people viewing Ukraine's economic situation as "bad." Fifty-five percent of Ukrainians have concluded that the Kiev regime does not respect personal freedoms.

The Pew poll also interviewed Russian respondents, finding a surge in distrust towards NATO, seen as a threat by 81 percent of Russians, as well as general hostility towards Obama (86 percent negative) and German Chancellor Angela Merkel (66 percent). While Putin's opposition to NATO's intervention in Ukraine has boosted his approval ratings to 88 percent, there is broad distrust of the oligarchic regime he leads, which emerged from the restoration of capitalism in the USSR. Some 69 percent of Russians and 34 percent of Ukrainians said in the poll that the dissolution of the USSR was bad for their country.

The results of the Pew poll underscore the disastrous political implications of the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, nearly a quarter century ago. Combined with the collapse and plundering of Soviet industry, the dissolution of the USSR geo-strategically crippled Russia, throwing open vast areas of the former Soviet Union to NATO's reactionary intrigues. Above all, the emergence of a criminal oligarchy ruling Russia weakened the opposition that had existed in the

international and particularly the European working class to imperialist threats against the USSR.

The preparation of the NATO powers for an all-out war with Russia that could incinerate the planet is colliding with deeply rooted anti-war sentiment in Europe, the United States and worldwide. The very fact that the Pew poll was commissioned is itself a sign of mounting concern in ruling circles internationally over mass opposition to war.

The ruling elites of the imperialist countries have made clear, however, that they intend to ignore popular sentiment and proceed with their campaign against Russia. The *New York Times*, in its report on the Pew poll, presented the mass opposition to war as a "challenge" to US and NATO war plans that needs to be overcome.

It cited former US Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder, who called for continued propaganda in support of military action against Russia, saying that, "it will take a serious effort by the alliance to convince its public of the need to prepare for, deter, and, if necessary, respond to a Russian attack."

The *Times* added that, "public opinion is not always decisive in shaping NATO policy." It continued: "President Ronald Reagan managed to win sufficient European backing to deploy Pershing II and ground-launched cruise missiles on the [European] Continent despite a substantial peace movement."

The *Times'* reference to the US deployment of Pershing II missiles in Europe during the 1980s is particularly significant. US officials are now discussing escalated missile deployments in Europe and the possibility of launching pre-emptive missile strikes against targets inside Russia.



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