

European powers on verge of new military intervention in Libya

Johannes Stern
21 April 2016

The European powers are exploiting the mass drownings in the Mediterranean Sea to expand their military engagement in the region and prepare a new intervention in Libya.

Concretely, the EU intends to expand its military mission in the Mediterranean and take action against refugees on the Libyan coast. This was agreed at a meeting of EU foreign and defence ministers on Monday in Luxembourg.

Austrian Foreign Minister Sebastian Kurz declared it was important that “we are already active on the Libyan coast.” His German counterpart, Frank-Walter Steinmeier (Social Democrats), declared, “We currently have a mandate allowing us to combat the operations of smugglers and taking refugees from the Mediterranean, meaning emergency rescue at sea. That more in addition will be necessary, and even possible, goes without saying.”

By expanding the EUNAVOR Med Sophia mission, which was officially agreed upon exactly a year ago, warships in the Mediterranean would be permitted to take action against smugglers in foreign territorial waters. To date, the operation was in its second phase “merely” in seas outside of Libyan sovereign waters and was aimed at stopping refugee boats and arresting alleged smugglers. According to EU diplomats, the expansion and extension of the naval operation will be agreed at the end of May or in early June.

In fact, under the guise of a struggle against “criminal smugglers,” much more comprehensive plans for a new military intervention in Libya are being discussed. The French delegation presented a strategy paper in Luxembourg according to which EU ships would be tasked with policing the weapons embargo imposed on Libya to prevent the supply of weapons to Islamist militias aligned with Islamic State in Libya, media reports said. Steinmeier proposed that the subject should be dealt

with and reviewed in a further UN Security Council resolution.

The German foreign minister and his French counterpart Jean-Marc Ayrault also reported in Luxembourg on their brief meeting on Saturday in Tripoli with Fayez al-Sarraj, the prime minister of the imperialist-backed Libyan unity government. Ayrault described the visit as an “extremely important stage” and opined that the unity government now required “the support of Libyans, the parliament and the international community.” Steinmeier declared, “We have to proceed with caution and attempt step-by-step to empower this government in Tripoli.”

The EU’s goal is to install the puppet Sarraj, who thus far only “rules” over a militarily secured “green zone” in Tripoli, and receive his agreement for a direct military intervention.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* wrote on the EU and Steinmeier’s goals: “Along with economic assistance—the EU has already offered a small package of €100 million—the issue above all is how the unity government can be put in a position where it can extend its control beyond the capital city throughout the country, where militias rule and the terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS) is active. To strengthen the security forces, a civilian mission within the framework of the joint security and defence policy is being considered.”

In truth, the plans go well beyond a “civilian mission.” In Luxembourg, the foreign and defence ministers decided to support the new unity government to rebuild security forces. Although Berlin proposed training these troops in Tunisia out of security considerations, the British government stated it would consider conducting training in Libya. In addition, British Defence Minister Michael Fallon called for the collaboration of NATO to train the coast guard.

Based on a military source, British media reported that Britain already has special forces present in Libya and

was preparing for the arrival of regular army units in a matter of weeks. According to the *Daily Star*, the plans are “robust” and comprise Apache helicopters, warships, Tornados and Eurofighter jets based in Cyprus. British Prime Minister David Cameron had declared his support “in principle” for “British units together with French, Italian and American troops marching into Tripoli to stabilise and secure the city.”

Such a mission has long been secretly prepared. In mid-March, the Italian government, which has been pressing for a war in Libya for some time, confirmed similar plans. Italy was to lead a UN mission with up to 6,000 soldiers, which would be supported by air strikes from the Sicilian air bases of Trapani and Sigonella. Western agents and special forces have been in Libya for some time to train and arm militias, and armed drones have already been flying out of Sigonella.

The German government, which withheld its support in 2011 for the NATO bombardment of Libya, is also preparing a military intervention. Defence Minister Ursula Von der Leyen (Christian Democrats) made clear in January in reference to the installation of the unity government in Libya and the struggle against IS in Libya, “Germany will not be able to evade its responsibility to make a contribution there.” After the Luxembourg meeting, she stated that it was now decisive that “Libya itself formulates the type of assistance it requires.”

What the German government understands by “assistance” was made clear in an interview with Wolfgang Ischinger, the head of the Munich Security Conference (MSC), in Monday’s edition of *Die Welt*. According to Ischinger, who for the first time last week held a “core group meeting” of the MSC in “Africa’s capital” Addis Ababa, Germany “ought to have joined” the Libya mission five years ago. The bombardment that destroyed the society, killed tens of thousands and turned millions into refugees, was “not wrong, but necessary.” However, they had forgotten “to think about the day after and to use just as much energy to stabilise the country.”

Ischinger gave free rein to his dream of a new and comprehensive German policy of colonial occupation. Africa was “not a troop training ground” and “the military intervention” could “only be the first step. Steps two and three are much more important and difficult, because we have to use more resources for them. It requires people to take care of justice and the police, to maintain the administration and order, promote rebuilding and growth.”

He added: “The crises in Africa are the places where we

can show that we have learnt from our mistakes. In particular that one requires comprehensive concepts for the overcoming of crises. And for that, one cannot take half measures.”

Ischinger left no doubt about what he meant by this. Responding to a question from *Die Welt* on whether Europe would have to “fight,” he said: “Who else? We can no longer rely on the US Sixth Fleet to regulate the problems for us. Obama has repeated that America is no longer running around with a fire extinguisher and providing security around the world. An emancipation of European security policy in the sense of a forward-looking and independent policy of crisis prevention and fighting to realise its own interests is therefore unavoidable.”

A glance at the numerous foreign policy strategy papers prepared in Berlin in recent years reveals what these “own interests” are and on what traditions the German elite, which already fantasised about a hegemonic position in Africa under the Kaiser, is drawing.

Germany’s entry into the new scramble for Africa has been planned for some time and is part of Germany’s return to an aggressive imperialist foreign policy.

The “Guidelines for an Africa policy” adopted by the German government early in 2014, refer to the “Growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe,” which, among other things, arises out of the increasingly dynamic economy and the “rich natural resources” of the continent. Therefore, the German government intended to “target” the strengthening of “Germany’s engagement in Africa politically, in security policy and economic policy,” act “early, quickly, decisively and substantially,” and “deploy the entire range of available resources ... across government departments.”



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact