

After Brexit: Berlin calls for German-European military union

Johannes Stern**29 June 2016**

Following the initial shock over the result of the Brexit referendum last Thursday, the German elite is seeking to exploit the historic “turning point for Europe” (as Chancellor Angela Merkel put it) and the deep political, economic and social crisis to further develop their economic and political dominance within the European Union.

Merkel set the tone with her statement to the press on Friday. She regretted “the decision of the majority of the British population ... to end the United Kingdom’s membership in the European Union.” At the same time, she cautioned the remaining 27 members states against making any decisions that “would further divide” Europe. Now at stake was the ability to “reassert our interests—economic, social, ecological, foreign and security policy—against global competition.”

The export-oriented German economy is more dependent than any other in Europe on a common internal market, and the majority of the Germany elite regard the survival of the EU (at least for the moment) as necessary for the pursuit of the economic and geo-strategic interests of German imperialism. Merkel declared, “Germany has a special interest in the success of European unity.” Then she warned that going forward she would “pay special attention ... to the interests of German citizens and the German economy.”

The efforts of the German government to stop the disintegration of the EU, to bring the worsening crisis under control and at the same time strengthen its own position against the other European powers have culminated in the demand that Britain’s exit be carried out as quickly as possible and that the EU undertakes a massive military expansion, both internally and externally.

At a joint press conference in Berlin with French

President François Hollande and Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, prior to the start of the EU summit in Brussels on Tuesday, Merkel warned against a “stalemate.” Article 50, which provides for a country’s withdrawal from the EU, “is very clear,” she said. Britain would now have to take the necessary step and submit to the European Council a petition for withdrawal.

Most aggressive in their demand for a quick implementation of the Brexit has been the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). The president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz (SPD), told the *Bild am Sonntag*: “Hesitating in order to accommodate the party tactics of the British conservatives” hurts everyone and leads “to still more uncertainty,” he said. He therefore expected that “the British government now delivers.” The EU summit was “the right moment for this.”

In an interview on Monday with *Handelsblatt*, SPD chairman and vice-chancellor Sigmar Gabriel explained provocatively: “There’s no such thing as being a little pregnant. And there’s also no halfway membership.” The British have “now decided that they are leaving” and there will be “no discussions about what the EU can offer Britain to convince it to stay.”

The foreign ministers of the six founder states of the EU, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg, issued a joint statement on Brexit Saturday, with SPD foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier signing on behalf of Germany. The statement declared: “We now expect the government of the United Kingdom to provide clarification and implement the decision arrived at through the referendum as quickly as possible.”

Strategy papers currently being worked out between the European capitals and in Brussels provide

information on the main thrust of the German position. A joint paper from Steinmeier and French foreign minister Jean-Marc Ayrault, titled “A strong Europe in a world of uncertainties,” expresses regret over Britain’s withdrawal, but also presents it as a chance to “focus our joints efforts on those challenges that can only be addressed by common European answers.”

In recent months and years, Great Britain was certainly a close ally of Berlin in the implementation of austerity policies in Greece and throughout Europe. But the conservative British government was increasingly seen as a problem for the development of a common defence, security and refugee policy. Above all, the creation of a European army, with which Germany has become increasingly involved, was met with harsh criticism in London.

Following Britain’s exit from the EU, at least a section of the German elite sees a chance to press ahead with their reactionary plans. At the centre of the paper by Steinmeier and Ayrault is the massive domestic and foreign military build-up of the continent.

Under the heading “A European security compact,” it states: “One of the main features of today’s security environment is the interdependence between internal and external security ... To respond to this challenge, Germany and France propose a European Security Compact which encompasses all aspects of security and defence dealt with at the European level.”

What then follows is a blueprint for the construction of a European police and military state. Steinmeier and Ayrault see the EU as “as a key power in its neighbourhood but also ... with global reach. An actor able to make a decisive contribution to tackling global challenges.” The EU will “need to take action more often in order to manage crises” and “therefore need[s] stronger and more flexible crisis prevention and crisis management capabilities.”

They go on: “The EU should be able to plan and conduct civil and military operations more effectively, with the support of a permanent civil-military chain of command. The EU should be able to rely on employable high-readiness forces and provide common financing for its operations. Within the framework of the EU, member states willing to establish permanent structured cooperation in the field of defence or to push ahead to launch operations should be able to do so in a flexible manner. If needed, EU member states should

consider establishing standing maritime forces or acquiring EU-owned capabilities in other key areas.”

Steinmeier and Ayrault do not mince words. “In order to live up to the growing security challenges, Europeans need to step up their defence efforts. European member states should reaffirm and abide by the commitments made collectively on defence budgets and the portion of spending dedicated to the procurement of equipment and to research and technology.”

Another paper, titled “EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy,” to be presented at the summit by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini, speaks a similar language. *Die Welt* has cited a few of the most important passages:

“As Europeans we must take greater responsibility for our security. We must be ready and able to deter, respond to, and protect ourselves against external threats.” In the realm of “concerted and joint initiatives”—the paper lists among other things “a solid European defence industry”—the focus would now have to be on improvements to collective military capabilities.

Die Welt points out that the new EU security strategy has Germany’s fingerprints all over it. Berlin “has championed and supported” the military unification of Europe “from the beginning,” according to a new white paper by the German military that “runs parallel to Mogherini’s document and was written in close collaboration.”

The desperate attempt of the European and above all the German elite to rescue the disintegrating EU with militarism exposes the historic lie that the continent can be united on the basis of capitalism. A progressive and permanent unification of Europe against the threat of nationalism and war is only possible in the form of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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