

Germany and France press ahead with a European military union

Johannes Stern
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The German Ministry of Defence has released the joint military policy paper of German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen and her French counterpart Jean-Yves Le Drian, which was earlier quoted in the European press in the run-up to the European Union (EU) summit in Bratislava. It underscores how Paris and Berlin are using the withdrawal of Britain from the EU to push forward the development of an independent European military and great power policy.

The title of the six-page document says it all: “Renewing the GSVP [Joint Security and Defence Policy]: Toward a comprehensive, realistic and reliable defence in the EU.” From the very beginning, von der Leyen and Le Drian refer to the “new EU global strategy for foreign and security policy (EUGS),” submitted by High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini at the first EU summit after the Brexit referendum in July.

At the centre of Mogherini’s paper, which was written parallel to the German White Paper and bears the fingerprints of Berlin, is the transformation of the EU into a military union capable of military interventions worldwide and independent of the United States. While NATO is certainly there to protect its members from enemy attacks, says the paper’s section on global strategy, Europe “must be better equipped, trained and organised to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary.”

Von der Leyen and Le Drian now call for “quickly” implementing this strategy “in concrete plans of action, especially in the area of security and defence.” These include “the support of GSVP military missions, the development of military capability and European defence cooperation as well as the concrete support of

the European defence industry.” On this basis, a “strategic autonomy is ensured” and a “strong, competitive and innovative” European defence industry will be built.

In addition, the German-French paper calls for “a permanent EU HQ [headquarters] for military and civilian missions and operations” and “a permanent military EU planning and implementation capability.” To increase the “effectiveness of the GSVP,” von der Leyen and Le Drian further propose the building of a “European medical command,” “additional improvements in the operability of EU ‘battle groups’,” and an “improvement of the troop contingent process for EU missions and operations.”

In addition, it is proposed the EU “develop strategic transport capabilities (land/air/sea)” and “connect to a European logistics hub.” Further plans include the development of a “maritime EU security strategy (EUMSS)” and the joint training of officers “to improve the existing European officer network” and “to promote a genuine European spirit among our officers.”

Under conditions of a deep social and political crisis in Europe and growing conflict between the major powers internationally, Berlin and Paris are rapidly pushing forward the militarisation of the continent. Von der Leyen and Le Drian intend to present “a timetable” during the informal meeting of defence ministers on September 26 and 27. Their goal is “a favourable decision” by the next meeting of EU defence ministers on November 15. The European Council should then adopt “additional comprehensive political guidelines in the area of security and defence” in December.

Von der Leyen and Le Drian refer to a joint EU-NATO statement from the beginning of July and emphasise “that a stronger, more capable European

defence also represents a strengthening of NATO at the same time.” But there is no doubt that the building of an independent European military structure challenges the transatlantic alliance of the post-war period and would reproduce the same conflicts that led to two world wars in the twentieth century.

London, which repeatedly blocked the development of a joint European military policy—at the behest of Washington—in the past heavily criticised the latest German-French attempt.

British Defence Secretary Michael Fallon assured the *Financial Times* that as long as Britain was a formal member of the EU, it would vote against plans for a European army. “That is not going to happen,” said Fallon of the EU plans discussed in Bratislava. “We are full members of the EU and we will go on resisting any attempt to set up a rival to NATO.” Menzies Campbell, the former leader of the Liberal Democrats, declared: “Even as a fervent European, I regard the creation of a European army as a deeply damaging, long-term threat to NATO.”

The British ruling class is reacting to the militarisation of the EU with its own massive campaign of military build-up. In a 10-page private memorandum to Fallon, made available to the *Financial Times*, General Sir Richard Barrons complained about the insufficient combat readiness of the British armed forces and called for the acquisition of new weapons systems. Barrons warned against not being prepared to some extent for a war with Russia. “Capability that is foundational to all major armed forces has been withered by design,” he complained, adding, “There is a sense that modern conflict is ordained to be only as small and as short term as we want to afford, and that is absurd.”

In June, Malcolm Chalmers of the Royal United Services Institute, a British think tank, said that if it were to leave the EU, Britain would “come under considerable pressure to retain, and perhaps even increase, its commitment to NATO collective defence in Europe.” Since then, the British government has increased its military budget extending through 2020/2021 to almost 5 billion pounds to meet the NATO goal of devoting 2 percent of GDP of each member state to defence each year.

On the continent, the EU militarisation plans are also aggravating divisions between the powers. In

Bratislava, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi refused to participate in the closing press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande. Just a few weeks before, Renzi met with Merkel and Hollande on an aircraft carrier off the Italian island of Ventotene to revive the reactionary vision of a European military union following the Brexit referendum.

For the moment, Germany, France and Italy are (still) working closely together, but they are pursuing different national agendas. While Berlin wants to assume leadership of Europe, including militarily, to assert its geostrategic and economic interests worldwide, France and Italy themselves seek to play the most dominant role possible and to keep German hegemony under control.

In an article featured in the latest edition of the Italian political magazine *Eastwest*, the former adviser to the Italian Foreign Ministry, Gerardo Pelosi, writes: “Renzi in the directorate [at Ventotene] also means that in the Mediterranean region, the leading role in Europe’s southern flank falls to Italy.” The “stabilisation of Libya” and the “creation of a large energy interface for countries in the region, Italy itself and the rest of Europe in the eastern Mediterranean” is “the Italian answer to Nord Stream 2 and would balance Germany’s dominance in the north of the European Union.”



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