

EU foreign ministers adopt statement denouncing Russia and Syria

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Meeting in Luxembourg yesterday, European Union (EU) foreign ministers adopted a statement denouncing the actions of the Russian and Syrian regimes in NATO's now five-year-long war for regime change in Syria.

In another reactionary move yesterday to boost pressure on Moscow, British banking authorities suspended the bank accounts of Russia's English-language state broadcaster Russia Today (RT). Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) later denied having frozen RT's accounts, but RT officials cited a RBS letter that declared, "We have recently undertaken a review of your banking arrangements with us and reached the conclusion that we will no longer provide these facilities." RBS called the decision "final" and said it was "not prepared to enter into any discussion in relation to it."

The Luxembourg statement aligns the EU with the flood of anti-Russian propaganda emanating from Washington. As US-backed Islamist militias in Aleppo face imminent defeat at the hands of the Syrian army and the Russian air force, the US media are denouncing Moscow. Top US military officers have publicly advocated imposing no-fly zones over Syria to ground Russian warplanes, acknowledging that this would require a war with Syria and Russia, a nuclear-armed power.

The EU statement echoes this mendacious war propaganda. It calls for the ending of all flights over Aleppo and denounces Moscow for possible "war crimes," while covering up NATO's arming of Al Qaeda-linked militias, like the Al Nusra Front (now also known as Fateh al-Sham), in Syria.

It writes, "The Syrian regime has the primary responsibility for the protection of the Syrian population. The EU therefore strongly condemns the

excessive and disproportionate attacks by the regime and its allies, both deliberate and indiscriminate, against civilian populations, humanitarian and health care personnel, and civilian and humanitarian infrastructures and calls on them to cease indiscriminate aerial bombardment. The EU condemns the continued systematic, widespread, and gross violations and abuses of human rights and all violations of international humanitarian law by all parties, particularly the Syrian regime and its allies."

The summit also agreed on financial aid to the Lebanese and Jordanian regimes, who host Syrian refugee camps, and for youth employment in Tunisia—where, five years ago, mass protests against joblessness turned into a working class uprising that toppled the NATO-backed dictatorship.

The EU statement's appeals for intervention on the basis of "humanitarian" imperialist arguments drip with cynicism. It acknowledges that the opposition is guilty of systematic, mass violations of human rights. Armed and backed by NATO, the opposition has in fact carried out hundreds of terror bombings, sectarian massacres, and mass executions of prisoners, as well as looting factories and granaries, forcing over 10 million Syrians to flee their homes.

The EU's propaganda method is selective outrage. Covering up its own politically criminal role in backing the opposition militias, it simply asserts that outrage must focus only on Moscow and Damascus—even as Washington and the EU back a military assault on Mosul, which could provoke an even larger bloodbath, by the US puppet regime in neighboring Iraq.

There is nothing progressive in the Russian and Syrian regimes' attempts to retake a larger sphere of influence in Syria, from which they aim to negotiate better relations with imperialism. Nonetheless, their

actions, including the bombing of eastern Aleppo, are a response to a CIA-led war.

The EU's condemnation of Moscow reeks of hypocrisy. The EU enthusiastically endorses the right of EU member states to suspend democratic rights and impose a state of emergency, as in France, in response to Islamist terror attacks. In 2014, after backing the installation of a far-right, anti-Russian regime in Ukraine by a putsch in Kiev, it supported the new Kiev regime's bloody military suppression of opposition in Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine.

Yet they denounce the Assad regime's attempts to defend itself from a far larger military threat—the direct intervention of the CIA and the European intelligence agencies, funded by the Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms, to back Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias—as a war crime.

European foreign ministers, particularly of Britain and France, made stark moralistic appeals in support of the EU statement. “The pressure must be strong,” French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault said of EU relations with Russia. “The more the European Union shows unity and determination, the more we can move forward in what is a moral obligation: to stop the massacre of the population of Aleppo.”

Similarly, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson said the Russian bombing operation over Aleppo “shames humanity” and denounced Moscow as the Syrian government's “puppeteers.”

Nonetheless, there were also indications of deep tensions between the EU and Washington and within the EU itself, in the negotiations leading up to the issuing of the EU statement.

The statement distances itself from more aggressive Pentagon demands for military escalation. “The EU firmly believes that there can be no military solution to the conflict,” it declares, calling for negotiations so Washington and the EU can oust Assad without risking all-out war with Russia.

EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini stressed this at her press conference yesterday evening on the EU declaration: “The EU supports and encourages all efforts in all formats not only to stop the bombing on Aleppo, but also supports all efforts to avoid any further military escalation and any further direct confrontation on a military level.”

The EU meeting also rejected calls from Washington

for stepped-up sanctions against Russia, which were explicitly criticized by several EU powers, led by Germany. “At present I don't see how sanctions, which may have a long-term impact, should help here to improve the provision of the [Syrian] civilian population,” German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said.

Similar criticisms emerged in Hungary, Greece, Cyprus and Austria, whose foreign minister, Sebastian Kurz, said: “The idea to have additional sanctions against Russia would be wrong. We do not need a further escalation.”

Since the British vote to leave the EU—as Berlin, Rome and Paris demanded a common military policy of the remaining EU states—demands for an independent EU military policy have continued to rise. The US war drive against Russia and China faces opposition from sections of the European ruling class. In the longer term, they are considering the possibility of designing war policy independently of, that is potentially against, Washington.

The European bourgeoisie is carrying out a massive military build-up, plunging tens of billions of euros more each year in military spending; its conflicts with Washington do not reflect pacifism. It fears, however, that the US war drive will destabilize Europe and provoke a major war before they are prepared.

These issues emerged in a recent paper, titled “America's Russia policy and the European security order,” by the German think-tank *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik* (SWP). “US-Russian relations remain central to the European security order,” the SWP complained, adding: “Strong social and economic interests in a stable cooperative relationship have not succeeded in developing.”

This has resulted in a situation, the SWP added, where “Washington increasingly faces the alternatives of either accepting a [Russian] sphere of influence in the interest of global cooperation and the avoidance of war risks, or of power rivalries with a high potential for escalation.”



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