

European Union Commission plans multi-billion weapons fund

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In the wake of Donald Trump's election as US president, the European powers are pushing ahead rapidly with plans for military rearmament. On Wednesday, the European Union (EU) Commission presented proposals for increased military spending and closer Europe-wide coordination on the research and development of weaponry.

The main change will involve the restructuring of relevant EU mechanisms and funding sources to direct them towards arms production. Following the use of the EU's institutions to implement attacks on social and democratic rights in recent years, the bureaucratic apparatus is now to be deployed to enforce a deeply unpopular policy of war and the build-up of the military.

The Commission proposed the creation of a European defence fund. The goal of the plan is "that member states jointly purchase, develop and retain the full spectrum of land, air, space travel and naval capabilities," a paper from the Commission states.

The main areas of focus will be expanding the capacities for surveillance, the development of armed drones, unmanned access to outer space, and cybersecurity. It is precisely in these areas that the European powers remain heavily dependent upon the United States.

The Commission acknowledged, "Taken as a whole, Europe has the second-highest level of military spending. Yet Europe trails behind the US and suffers due to an inefficient use of means, which can be linked to overlapping structures, a lack of interoperability and technological gaps."

Therefore, major investments are necessary, and defence cooperation needs to be achieved, the EU Commission states. Only in this way can the necessary expertise be obtained and its resources used effectively to secure the "strategic autonomy of the union."

In practice, the "defence fund" will comprise two parts.

The first will be financed by EU funds and support research in weaponry. From the year 2020, €500 million is planned for this annually, which will most likely be raised through cuts to EU civilian programmes. Currently, all EU members spend just €2 billion on arms research. The EU fund would therefore amount to an increase in funding of 25 percent.

The much larger second part would cover the development and purchase of military equipment. Member states will coordinate their purchases through this according to demand. If France, Germany and Italy all intend to buy armoured personnel carriers, for example, they should not order these individually in the future, but coordinate purchases through the defence fund. The Commission estimates a gross total of €5 billion per year. But no limits on the fund have been established.

A central feature of the plan is that the investments undertaken through the defence fund will not be calculated when figuring out each state's budget deficit. The Commission's paper states that such investments will be "viewed as 'one-off measures' in the spirit of the Stability and Growth Pact and will therefore not burden the efforts towards structural consolidation expected from the member states."

In practice, this means that EU states which breach the deficit criteria will be punished if they use funds for civilian jobs, hospitals, infrastructure projects or schools, but not when they invest the same loans for tanks, submarines and fighter jets.

In Greece, the EU's insistence on debt reduction resulted in people dying from treatable diseases, youth unemployment increasing to almost 50 percent and the decimation of wages. By contrast, the floodgates are to be opened for loans to expand the military.

The military build-up is being undertaken in close collaboration with the companies which will profit from it. The defence fund is to be managed by a coordinating

committee, which, along with representatives from the member states and the EU, will also include lobbyists from the arms industry.

In addition, the EU Commission will inject large amounts of resources actually intended for civilian and economic projects into the arms industry. For example, the European Investment Bank (EIB) will “make available loans, guarantees and its own capital for the expansion of ongoing activities in the area of goods with a double purpose,” according to the paper. In this way, the regulation prohibiting the funding of arms companies will be evaded.

Other EU funding sources, such as Erasmus+ and the funding of regional clusters of excellence, in which universities also participate, will be directed increasingly towards military research and production.

The Commission noted that its proposals were not about creating a European army, but that the jointly developed and purchased equipment would remain in the possession of the individual member states.

But the proposals correspond with the plan for a “security and defence union” to be discussed at the EU summit on December 15-16. The German government is the main driving force behind calls for a European army and the integration of European foreign policy. Berlin hopes in this way to dominate the EU’s structures and rise to the position of a world power.

On Tuesday, the European minister in the Foreign Office, Michael Roth, underscored this position at the Berlin Security Conference. Especially after Brexit and the election of Trump, Germany needed “a responsible European foreign policy. In foreign and security policy, the EU cannot afford to stand on the sidelines and take no action.”

Roth continued, “The EU must therefore now really assume responsibility for peace and security in the world—as crisis manager and negotiator, and, yes if necessary, militarily.” This policy of wars and interventions is to be ramped up with the release of the EU Commission paper.



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