

French presidential candidate François Fillon calls for alliance with Germany against US

Alice Laurençon
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François Fillon, the right-wing Republicans' (LR) candidate in the French presidential elections, travelled to Berlin on Monday to meet with German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Also present were German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble and Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen.

The aggressive stance taken by President Trump towards Europe, and in particular towards Germany, is causing panic among the European powers over the consequences of Trump's "America First" policies for their economic and military position. Fillon's visit to Berlin, aimed at strengthening France's economic and military ties with Germany, Europe's dominant economic power, underscored that the European powers are moving rapidly toward conflict with Washington.

The meeting reaffirmed the geostrategic orientation outlined by Merkel and French President François Hollande after the UK's vote to leave the European Union (EU) last June, when Paris and Berlin proposed to create a European military alliance, independent of NATO and the UK. Much of Merkel's discussion with Fillon centred on his call for a "European defence alliance." This is a proposal for increased military cooperation between France and Germany to assert their imperialist interests independently of NATO, which Trump recently declared to be "obsolete".

Fillon's statements made quite clear that the purpose of this policy is to prepare to forcefully counter, with military power if necessary, hostile moves by the US government.

In a long interview jointly conducted by the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* and French newspaper *Le Monde* the day before the Berlin meeting, Fillon described Trump as a threat to Europe: "Europe has been warned. It must organise itself in the face of an American policy that will do us no favours. This means more than ever European initiatives. What Trump has announced began before Trump."

Fillon pointed to multi-billion-euro fines imposed by US financial authorities on Germany's Deutsche Bank and BNP Paribas in France.

Fillon also called for closer ties between Germany, France

and Russia, based on finding a settlement of US-instigated wars in Syria and Ukraine. Washington and the European powers led a bloody proxy war for regime change against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad starting in 2011, and installed an anti-Russian Ukraine regime in a fascist-led coup in Kiev in 2014. Fillon made clear that he sees these interventions as mistaken and based on deception by the NATO powers, including France.

Russia, he said, "is an immense country that one can't treat lightly, it's a country without a democratic tradition that has nuclear weapons. ... Who can reasonably want to enter in conflict with Russia?" Asked whether Putin is a reliable partner, he replied: "Was the West always reliable? Did it never mislead the Russians about [the war in] Libya, Kosovo, on economic partnership with the EU? Russia has a lot to answer for, but it is not the only one."

Calling France's alliance with Germany "fundamental," and denouncing Hollande for having initially sought the "encircling" of Germany in the initial years of his presidency, Fillon called for the "reinforcing" of the Franco-German alliance. However, he also insisted that this alliance be a "partnership between equals," despite France's "economic weakness and lack of structural reforms."

Fillon outlined proposals for an economic government in the Eurozone, lead by Paris and Berlin. "I propose to first of all revive the Eurozone", stated Fillon, by setting a "harmonised programme of tax... on businesses". Fillon also proposed to lessen the supremacy of the dollar in the world economy and "make the euro an international reserve currency", by creating a European Monetary Fund as a potential counterweight to the International Monetary Fund.

The aims of Berlin and Paris in developing such military and financial collaboration are reactionary. In response to Trump's threats and the imminent danger of the breakup of the European Union (EU), the European ruling class is trying to hold the EU together with militarist and police-state policies.

These strategies, which escalate the danger of outright military conflict between the NATO powers, are predicated

on devastating attacks on workers' social and democratic rights. Fillon's call for "structural reforms" in France is linked to his campaign pledge to cut 500,000 public sector jobs and eliminate much or all of the Social Security system's publicly-funded health care in France.

On immigration, Fillon stated that he would ignore the theoretically open borders of the Schengen Zone and called for increased security on Europe's internal and external borders. "France doesn't have to accept refugee quotas. That's a concern for each state", said Fillon, criticising Merkel's refugee policy and stating that France would "make a different choice" from Germany under his leadership.

Fillon's proposed alliance with Berlin, which strongly recalls the Paris-Berlin-Moscow axis that emerged as several of the European powers criticized the illegal US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, point to deep and lasting inter-imperialist rivalries that twice in the last century erupted into world war.

The relative stability of relations between the US and Europe after World War Two rested on the vast economic superiority of the United States, and the fact that the Soviet Union provided the imperialist powers in NATO with a common enemy. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 therefore transformed relations between the United States and Europe. Conflicts rapidly re-emerged among the imperialist powers over war policy and the struggle for oil, resources, markets and access to cheap labour.

Global geostrategic tensions are even sharper today than 25 years ago, as US economic decline accelerates and the European powers, including Russia, develop ever closer ties with China, which Trump has designated as one of the main targets of his administration's foreign policy.

The German minister for economic affairs, Sigmar Gabriel, stated that Europe and Germany should not react to Trump by being "afraid or submissive", but rather "firmly" pursue their own interests. Germany is "a strong country" and Europe "a strong continent, which must stick together." According to Gabriel, Germany and Europe needed a new orientation toward China and Asia. If the United States "starts a trade war with China and throughout Asia, then we are a fair partner," he added.

Were an alliance of the capitalist regimes of Germany, France, Russia and China against the US to emerge—a threat that will increasingly spur Washington to military action in order to prevent it from occurring—it would prove to be utterly reactionary. What is emerging is that the international bourgeoisie is again showing itself to be incapable of overcoming the fundamental contradictions between the integrated character of the global economy and the division of the world into antagonistic nation states.

The only force that can prevent the explosion of a new

world war is the international working class, by struggling against the capitalist system that is its root cause.

Indeed, the increasingly bitter and intractable divisions tearing apart capitalist Europe were clearly on display during Fillon's visit, even as he tried to lead Paris towards closer ties with Berlin.

Trump's hostility towards Germany, including his threatened sanctions on its auto industry and labeling of the EU "a vehicle for Germany", is seen as a threat by Germany's ruling class, requiring a more independent and aggressive European foreign policy, including coordination with Paris.

Nonetheless, there were significant conflicts between Merkel and Fillon, not just over the question of immigration, but on Fillon's proposal for a unified European economic government, which Berlin had already rejected when it was proposed by then-French President Nicolas Sarkozy. Also, Fillon aims to "rebuild" relations with Russia by establishing closer military ties and lifting economic sanctions imposed during the Ukraine crisis—which Merkel has opposed.

Social, economic and political tensions are already extremely sharp in Europe, and Fillon has declared that he wants France to become Europe's dominant power—in a barely veiled challenge to German hegemony in Europe. In both countries, right-wing, nationalist forces are on the rise, and Brexit last year only exacerbated tensions in Europe. London no doubt sees calls for more military integration on the European continent as a threat, particularly as, post-Brexit, UK Prime Minister Theresa May is moving closer to Trump.



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