

EU summit marks escalation of conflict between Europe and US

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The European Union summit in Malta on Friday was held in the context of growing tensions between Europe and the United States. Although the official topics of discussion were the exclusion of refugees from the EU, the future of the EU after Brexit, and preparations for the 60th anniversary in March of the Treaty of Rome, many European leaders used the occasion to sharply criticize the policies of the new US government.

“It is unacceptable that the president of the United States should make a series of statements pressuring Europe on what it should or should not be,” said French President François Hollande upon his arrival in Valletta, the capital of Malta.

German Chancellor Angel Merkel called for a strengthening of Europe’s international role in response to Donald Trump’s policies. She said that in view of the new US president, the more clearly Europe defines its role in the world, “the better we can maintain our transatlantic relationships.” She repeated her statement from the middle of January that Europe has “its fate in its own hands.”

This did not go far enough for Martin Schulz of the Social Democratic Party, who is a candidate for German chancellor and the former president of the European Parliament. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, he demanded that Merkel adopt a tougher attitude toward Washington.

The chancellor must not “keep quiet about behaviour we cannot accept,” he said. “If Trump sends his wrecking ball through our set of values, one must say clearly: that is not our policy.” Schulz declared the new US president to be “extremely dangerous to democracy.” He accused Trump of playing with “the security of the Western world” and beginning “a culture war.”

Even before the summit, EU Council President

Donald Tusk of Poland spoke of “worrisome declarations by the new American administration,” and characterized the US as an external “threat” along with “Russia’s aggressive policy,” an “increasingly, let us call it, assertive China” and the “wars, terror and anarchy in the Middle East and in Africa.” He said that “particularly the change in Washington” is placing the EU “in a difficult situation,” since the “new administration [is] seeming to put into question the last 70 years of American foreign policy.”

Tusk called on the 27 leaders of the countries that will remain in the EU after Brexit to implement a new common European foreign and defence policy to secure their global geo-strategic and economic interests, if necessary in opposition to Washington.

To master the “most dangerous challenges since the signing of the Rome Treaty,” he said, it is necessary “to take decisive, spectacular measures.” The aim must be “to use the changes in the trade strategy of the US to the advantage of the EU by intensifying our discussions with interested partners.”

This requires “a definitive strengthening of the external borders of the EU, improved collaboration between agencies that are responsible for combating terrorism and protecting peace and order within the border-free zone, an increase in defence spending, and a strengthening of the foreign policy of the EU as a whole.”

After the initial shock, the EU is reacting with aggressive countermeasures to what Tusk called the “new geopolitical situation” brought on by Trump’s nationalistic and militaristic foreign policy, which has in its crosshairs Germany and the EU as well as Iran, Russia, China and Mexico.

The *Handelsblatt* responded enthusiastically on Wednesday in an article entitled “The EU fights back.”

It wrote, “After initial speechlessness, the EU has reacted fiercely to Trump’s attacks and decisions.”

In addition to Tusk’s declaration, the German business newspaper hailed the decision of the EU “to put the US on the planned tax haven black list.” Green Party member of the European Parliament and cofounder of Attac-Deutschland, Sven Giegold, said it is “right that the EU Commission is targeting the US tax system.”

On Thursday, other leading members of the European Parliament opposed the expected appointment of Ted Malloch as the new American ambassador to the EU. Malloch openly questions the existence of the EU and has indicated that his aim is its destruction. In an interview conducted in January, he told the BBC why he wanted to become the US ambassador in Brussels. “I took a diplomatic post that helped to destroy the Soviet Union,” he said. “Perhaps there is another union that needs taming.”

In an open letter to Tusk and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, the factional heads of the Liberals (ALDE) and the conservatives (EVP) in the European Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt and Manfred Weber, said, “These statements demonstrate outrageous malice toward the values that constitute the EU. If an official representative of the US were to say something like this, it could seriously damage the transatlantic relationship that has been an essential contribution to peace, stability and prosperity on our continent.”

The deeper cause of the worsening of the transatlantic relationship as well as growing tensions within the EU itself is, however, not Malloch’s statements, or Trump’s actions, but the fundamental contradictions of the world capitalist system: the contradiction between the global integration and interconnection of the economy and its division into national states with opposed interests, and the contradiction between the social character of global production and its subordination to private ownership of the means of production and the accumulation of private profit by the ruling class.

Twenty-five years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, these contradictions, which in the last century led to two world wars but also the October Revolution in Russia, are emerging once again and driving the ruling class on both sides of the Atlantic to ever more

aggressive measures. While Trump’s “America First” policy is aimed at offsetting the economic decline of US imperialism by military means, the EU is reacting to the deep political, economic and social divisions in Europe with the militarization of the continent in both domestic and foreign policy.

Like few EU summits before it, the meeting in Malta contributed to the exposure of the rhetoric of democracy and human rights that is being used to mobilize the widespread outrage over Trump behind the realization of European great power fantasies.

The so-called “Declaration of Malta” prescribes the brutal sealing off of the central Mediterranean route against refugees from Africa. This involves the arming and training of the Libyan coast guard, which is infamous for its brutality, to capture refugees when they are still in Libyan territorial waters and bring them back to the African coast.

During her visit to Ankara on Thursday, Merkel supported the dirty refugee deal between the EU and Turkey, which aims to keep out refugees from the war-torn regions of the Middle East.



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