

Warning of neo-fascist victory in France, Hollande promotes EU militarism

Alex Lantier
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Before yesterday's summit of German, Italian, Spanish, and French officials in Versailles, François Hollande gave an extensive interview to *Le Monde* and other papers of the Europa consortium—*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *La Stampa*, the *Guardian*, *La Vanguardia*, and *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The French president outlined the deeply pessimistic perspectives predominating in the layers of the European bourgeoisie closest to Berlin and the European Union (EU).

Hollande unambiguously indicated that the EU is on the brink of collapse, in particular because a National Front (FN) victory in the April-May French presidential elections would install in Paris a neo-fascist government that could blow up the EU. However, having pointed to the bankruptcy of the French and European capitalist regimes, the only perspective he could offer was to develop the EU as a massive military and police-state machine.

Asked about an FN electoral victory, Hollande said: "The threat exists. The far right has never been as high in the polls for more than 30 years." He added, "if somehow the National Front candidate were to win, she would immediately launch a process of exit from the eurozone, and even from the European Union. This is the objective of all the populists, wherever they are: to leave Europe, to close themselves to the world, and to imagine a world surrounded by barriers of all kinds and borders defended by watchtowers."

Hollande posed as a defender of the EU and democracy against the danger of the far right. "My last duty is to do everything to keep France from being convinced by such arguments, or to take such drastic action," Hollande declared, adding: "But France will not give way. First of all, because it is France and it is conscious of the fact that the votes on April 23 and on May 7 will determine not only the fate of our country, but the very future of European construction, as well."

These democratic pretensions are rank hypocrisy. The possibility of an FN victory and the disintegration of the EU is now very real, and this is above all an indictment of the reactionary policies of austerity and war pursued by the EU across Europe and, in particular, by Hollande's own Socialist Party (PS) government in France.

The EU's relentless austerity offensive after the 2008 Wall Street crash bled the working class white, most obviously in Greece, and Hollande imposed over €100 billion in austerity measures against the working class in France. The European ruling elite's response to growing social anger was to boost police powers and stimulate ever more anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment to divide the working class along racial lines.

The PS imposed and continuously extended a state of emergency in response to terror attacks carried out in France and Belgium. It initially concealed and then dismissed the significance of the fact that these attacks were carried out by Islamist terror networks that France and other NATO powers relied upon to wage their proxy war in Syria. Instead, it passed a reactionary mass electronic surveillance law and joined a media firestorm warning of religious war and demanding stepped up policing, aimed above all against Muslims.

This policy not only created the judicial and surveillance infrastructure of an authoritarian state in France, but paved a way for the neo-fascist FN to fully integrate itself into the bourgeois political mainstream and aspire to take over state power, exploiting anger with the PS on a populist basis.

The claim that the French people would reject an FN government due to its attachment to the EU is a political fraud. Not only is the EU broadly unpopular in France—in one poll last year, only 23 percent of the population thought EU membership helped France—but the EU's own positions on war and the persecution of immigrants and refugees are increasingly indistinguishable from those of

the FN.

Indeed, the political agenda Hollande then laid out for a post-Brexit EU to a large extent consisted of carrying out on a European scale the policies that the FN proposes for France: to build up the EU as a major military power and police-state apparatus, based on appeals to so-called European “community of spirit.”

“What Europeans demand, is that the EU be able to protect them more,” he declared, “that European sovereignty protect their borders, ward away the terrorist threat, and finally preserve a way of life, a culture, and a community of spirit. ... Today, Europe can find a second wind by concentrating on defence. On the one hand this would ensure its own security, but on the other it allows it to act in the world, to seek solutions to conflicts that threaten it.”

The danger of the coming to power of the FN, like Brexit or the election of Trump, reflects a deep breakdown of the relations and structures of international capitalism as they developed after World War II and after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the USSR in 1991. After the election of Trump, Hollande made clear, the purpose of the EU military machine would be to rival, and perhaps eventually threaten, the United States, as well as to pursue a harsh line against Britain after Brexit.

Hollande again stressed his wariness of Trump: “We now know the basic lines of his policy: isolationism, protectionism, anti-immigrant policies and budgetary irresponsibility. So one has to worry in the face of this uncertainty, and the euphoria of the financial markets strikes me as quite premature. As for his misunderstanding of what the EU is, it forces us to demonstrate to him its political cohesion, its economic weight, and its strategic autonomy.”

Asked what he would say if Britain wanted to keep the advantages of EU membership after Brexit, Hollande bluntly replied, “That it is impossible and that it will thus have to become an outsider to the EU. Here is the problem of the United Kingdom: it thought that by leaving Europe, it could develop a strategic partnership with the United States. But it turns out that America is closing itself to the world. The United Kingdom made the wrong choice at the wrong time. Sorry.”

The EU’s advocates are abandoning any idea—in line with claims at the EU’s founding in 1992 that it would prevent the re-emergence of a third world war between the European powers—that the EU would equally respect the rights of all its member states. As shown by the four-power format of the Versailles summit, which decided not

to issue any formal statement to minimize opposition from other EU states, Berlin and Paris aim to deal with rising tensions in Europe by sidelining smaller countries and moving to a so-called “multi-speed” Europe.

“Let’s be frank: some member states will never join the euro zone. Face up to it. And let us not wait for them to deepen the economic and monetary union,” Hollande declared. “Because if you want to do everything with all 27 member states, the danger is that you will do nothing at all.”

Finally, on Russia, while he adopted a hostile line, Hollande indicated differences with sections of the US foreign policy establishment that pursued an aggressive line against Moscow under Obama, to the point of risking a military clash with Russia in Syria or Ukraine.

Russia, Hollande said, “is affirming itself as a power. It tests our resistance and measures power relations at every point. At the same time, Russia uses all possible means to influence public opinion ... with strategies for influence, networks, and very conservative views on lifestyle issues. It also has pretensions that it will defend Christianity from Islam. Let us not exaggerate anything, but let us be vigilant.”

He added, “People often ask me, ‘Why don’t you speak more often with President Putin?’ But I never ceased speaking to him! Or with the [German] chancellor either, by the way. And that is good.”

Amid this escalating collapse and drive to war of the world capitalist system, both the defenders of the EU and the reactionary Trump administration and its allies within Europe, like the FN, face the international working class as enemies. The only way forward is to mobilise and unify workers around the world in struggle against austerity, war, and police-state measures.



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