

EU summit reveals sharp divisions within Europe and tensions with US

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The annual Euro Summit meeting of the 28 EU heads of government, which began Thursday, was dominated by sharp transatlantic tensions and a deep crisis of the European Union (EU).

Conflicts between Germany and the United States intensified ahead of Chancellor Angela Merkel's first meeting with President Donald Trump next week. On Monday, Peter Navarro, Trump's economic adviser, described the US's trade deficit with Germany as a "serious matter" and as "one of the most difficult issues" for American trade policy.

"I think that it would be useful to have candid discussions with Germany about ways that we could possibly get that deficit reduced outside the boundaries and restrictions that they claim that they are under," Navarro said in Washington.

Germany has responded to Washington's increasingly belligerent rhetoric by attempting to bind Europe together under its leadership and prepare "for a trade war with the United States," as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper put it.

The European powers are seeking to exploit Trump's cancellation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership to expand economically into Asian markets. In a piece entitled "Europe counters Trump" the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on the draft statement for the summit: "At their meeting in Brussels, the EU heads of government want to stand up to Trump's 'America first policy'...and are determined to fill the hole that the United States will leave behind following Trump's withdrawal from world trade."

The EU is striving to rapidly conclude a trade agreement with Japan, which is the second-largest Asian economy after China, and is currently negotiating free trade deals around the world with a further 20 countries, among them Singapore and

Vietnam.

Before travelling to Brussels, Merkel noted in a statement to the German parliament "that Europe will act together against unfair and protectionist trade practices, and firmly defend its interests, whenever and wherever this is necessary." In the future, she said, the EU had "to be capable of carrying out independent crisis management." Germany was "reliant not only on having access to the single market, but also to global markets."

In order to pursue these global interests militarily, Germany and other European powers are seeking to establish a European army. Ahead of Thursday's summit, a meeting of European foreign and defence ministers on Monday agreed to the creation of a joint command centre for military interventions. According to diplomats, the headquarters will begin work this month and be fully operational by June.

Germany's aspirations to rise to the position of Europe's hegemon, and its mounting conflict with the United States, which as a military protective power and arbitrator has supported European unity since the end of World War II, are intensifying the already sharp divisions within the European Union.

This found expression at the summit in a sharp dispute over the re-election of European Council President Donald Tusk. Although the Polish government vehemently opposed the re-election of Tusk, a former Polish prime minister, the summit extended his term in office. The election of a politician into a senior position within the EU against the will of his own government is an unprecedented event in the history of the EU. Tusk is a member of Poland's largest opposition party, Civic Platform (PO), which is engaged in a bitter dispute with the governing PiS.

PiS chairman Jaroslaw Kaczyński described Tusk

prior to the summit as “Germany’s candidate.” Poland’s foreign Minister, Witold Waszczykowski, spoke in the aftermath of the election of a “diktat from Berlin.” “We now know that it is an EU in which Berlin calls the shots,” he told the Polish media. The Polish delegation announced it would block all further decisions at the summit with its veto.

In an effort to keep the right-wing, anti-Russian Polish government on board, Berlin has adopted a more strident tone against Russia. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (SPD) demonstratively stopped off in Warsaw on his way to a visit in Moscow. Along with the three Baltic States, Poland is among the four Eastern European countries where NATO is in the process of deploying 4,000 military personnel, together with tanks and other heavy weapons. Gabriel visited the battalion being led by the German army in Lithuania last week.

Speaking in Moscow, Gabriel vehemently defended the first stationing of German troops in Eastern Europe since the genocidal war launched under the Nazis and blamed “the violation of borders in the centre of Europe” on Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov rejected Gabriel’s accusation that his country was threatening NATO’s eastern members. “We have different statistics on that,” he stated. In fact, Russia was being “encircled by NATO weapons, NATO units... NATO ground troops are appearing on our borders, including from the Federal Republic of Germany.”

The intensifying crisis in the Balkans was also on the agenda of the EU summit. The region was being subjected to “challenges and tensions,” the EU’s foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini warned in Brussels, “far more than ever.” She warned that the Balkans were increasingly becoming “a chessboard for great power games.”

Britain accused Russia at the beginning of the week of fomenting tensions in the region. Moscow was involved in the “undermining of countries in the Western Balkans,” which was “completely unacceptable,” British foreign Minister Boris Johnson stated. In truth, it is the Western powers that are fomenting conflict in the Balkans. In the 1990s, they tore Yugoslavia apart and bombed it. Less than a year ago, in spite of Russian warnings, NATO accepted Montenegro as a new member in the military alliance.

The growing tensions over the Balkans are only the most visible manifestation of the parallels in Europe to the run-up to the First World War over a hundred years ago. With world capitalism gripped by an ever-deepening economic and political crisis in every country, divisions within Europe and between the European powers and America increasingly take the form of protectionism, backed by rearmament and the threat of military force.



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