

EU Summit backs trade war and militarism

Johannes Stern
11 March 2017

The European Union is responding to the deepest crisis since its founding by further militarizing the continent and preparing for an economic showdown with the United States.

In a statement issued Friday at the end of the two-day EU summit in Brussels, the 27 remaining member states declared their intention to press ahead with “greater determination and speed” with the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). The European Council welcomed the “holding of a high-level conference on security and defence in Prague on 9 June.” Just days prior to the conference, the EU foreign and defence ministers agreed on Monday to the creation of a joint headquarters for military interventions.

The EU referred to the “need to implement the ‘common set of proposals’ for enhanced cooperation with NATO.” But it is clear that the offensive rearmament is increasingly directed against the United States. The statement does not mention US President Donald Trump by name, but spoke out explicitly against “protectionist tendencies” in world trade and called for the development of “tools to tackle unfair trade practices and market distortions.”

Brussels, and above all Berlin, are using the threats of the new US President to position the EU economy in opposition to that of the United States.

The EU will “continue to engage actively with international trading partners,” the statement says. This will include “resolutely advancing on all ongoing negotiations for ambitious and balanced free trade agreements, including with Mercosur and Mexico.” Negotiations with Japan “are closest to an early conclusion” and “relations with China should be strengthened on the basis of a shared understanding of reciprocal and mutual benefits.”

The EU is thereby seeking an expansion of its economic relations with countries that are in the crosshairs of American imperialism. Trump is

threatening Mexico with trade war and the abandonment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). And Washington is ever more openly adopting a course towards war with China. As a result, transatlantic tensions will only deepen.

A guest comment in Friday’s *Süddeutsche Zeitung* warned of the “enormous potential for destruction” of the Trumpian “America first” policy. The countermeasures proposed by economics professor and former Finance Minister of the state of Saxony-Anhalt, Karl-Heinz Paqué, in a piece entitled “Cool heads and a firm hand” are just as aggressive. Europe must “if necessary be ready to wage trade war against Trump’s America.”

Paqué writes, “If Trump goes against WTO regulations and imposes tariffs or quotas on cars from Europe, Europe could do the same with microprocessors and information technology from the US...” And “should all else fail,” Europe would have to “be ready with a firm hand for a controlled trade war and its economic victims.” The answer to “America first” is “global trade first.”

This theme was taken up by German Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democrats, CDU) in her government statement prior to the beginning of the EU summit. Europe must “determinedly defend its interests [...] whenever and wherever necessary.” Precisely “because the character of transatlantic relations” was changing, Europe had “decided to assume more responsibility in the future than it has in the past, and in our own neighbourhood as well as beyond.” Germany was “reliant not only on having access to the single market, but also to global markets.”

Berlin is striving for a core Europe under German leadership to enforce its geostrategic and economic interests by military means in opposition to the United States if necessary, and maintain control over the growing conflicts within the EU. “The tasks before us

are too great,” Merkel said, “for us to continue working at the lowest common denominator.” It therefore must be “increasingly possible for some member states to move forward, while others do not wish to participate yet in certain steps.”

Merkel’s call for a “two-speed Europe” is reproduced almost word-for-word in the statement that the EU intends to adopt on 25 March to mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome, which founded the European Economic Community, the EU’s predecessor. “An undivided and indivisible EU acts together wherever that is possible, and in different steps and intensities where that is necessary,” a draft cited by *Handelsblatt* stated.

Germany’s desire to rise to the position of Europe’s hegemon, and the mounting conflict with the United States, are intensifying the sharp tensions within the EU and the ruling class of each country.

“We will never accept a two-speed Europe,” stated Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło after the conference. In Brussels, the right-wing Polish PiS (Law and Justice Party) government vehemently opposed the reelection of EU Council President Donald Tusk, a former Polish Prime Minister. Tusk was “Germany’s candidate” and his reelection would “intensify the union’s crisis,” warned PiS chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski prior to the beginning of the summit.

Due to the reelection of Tusk, a member of Poland’s largest opposition party PO (Citizens Platform), which is engaged in a major dispute with the government, above all due to its pro-EU stance, the Polish delegation blocked all of the summit’s decisions.

The ruling class in Germany is particularly concerned about the “erosion of the EU” as *Handelsblatt* put it. In the lead article of Saturday’s edition of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, Stefan Kornelius bemoans the “existential crisis of the EU.” After Brexit and the election of Trump last year, “two events this year [could...] accelerate this dynamic,” if “in the Netherlands or more importantly France fate is on the side of the EU destroyers Wilders and Le Pen.”

The European working class confronts two scenarios, both of which would mean a relapse into barbarism and war: the transformation of the EU into a military union dominated by Germany and preparing for trade war against its international rivals, and Europe’s division into hostile nation states. The only way to successfully

fight war and nationalism is to unite Europe on a socialist basis.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact