

Ahead of EU Brexit summit, Merkel takes tough stance on UK

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Germany and the European Union insisted on a tough stance towards the UK in the run-up to today's special EU summit on Brexit in Brussels and the upcoming British elections on June 8. In a government statement to the German parliament (Bundestag) on Thursday, Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke out sharply against London and announced that no concessions would be made in the EU-UK negotiations.

"A third country—and this will be the case with the United Kingdom—cannot and will not have the same rights and cannot expect to be treated better than a member of the European Union," Merkel threatened. She had "to unfortunately express that clearly here," because "some in the UK still have illusions. That, however, would just be a waste of time."

Merkel defended the EU's position not to conduct substantive negotiations on post-Brexit trade and economic relations with London until the financial details of the withdrawal were clarified. The UK government is pressing to address the question of its separation payment at the end of the planned two-year interim talks, but according to Merkel, "We cannot conclude these negotiations." They are part of the most important aspects "that will be on the agenda from the very beginning." Therefore we "can only proceed in this order and not vice versa."

Germany and the other member states of the European Union "did not want this withdrawal," Merkel said, stressing that it was now up to Germany and other EU member states to "define our own interests and objectives for the forthcoming negotiations." To this end, "the European Council will take the first step on Saturday and adopt the 27 common guidelines for negotiations."

The "Guidelines" read like a declaration of war on Britain on the part of Berlin and the European states.

The *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published a preliminary report on the document prepared by the EU Commission under the headline, "EU plans very hard Brexit negotiations." The article noted that the paper contained "a number of demands that would be regarded in London as impertinent" and run counter to the plans of British Prime Minister Theresa May.

Among other things, the rights of EU citizens already resident in Britain are to be preserved "life-long," without any restrictions. This means that all EU citizens living in the UK would continue to enjoy equal access to the labour market and the British social system, even after Brexit. For the Conservative Party government in Britain such a demand is unacceptable. In the course of the Brexit campaign, the Tory right wing agitated against EU migrants and demanded an immediate end to all relations with Brussels after the break with the EU.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the EU Commission is also "unrelenting" regarding financial commitments. Brussels insists that "Great Britain should pay all the costs associated with leaving the EU—in euros." In this manner, the Commission would "shift any currency risks back into the lap of the United Kingdom."

All the costs incurred by Brexit, such as the relocation of EU institutions back to the continent, are to be "fully covered" by London. This would be the case, for example, for the European banking supervision authority, which has up to now been based in London, and also the European Medicines Agency.

Merkel left no doubt that the main motion was largely drafted in Berlin. She thanked the president of the European Council, Donald Tusk, for "a very good and balanced draft of the text, after intensive preparation, in which, of course, the German government has

participated.”

In the run-up to the summit, Berlin has systematically worked to create a united front of EU countries against London. Merkel said that their many talks in recent weeks have shown that “there is now a great deal of agreement among the 27 member states and the institutions on our common negotiating line with the UK.” One could therefore “assume that the European Council of 27 will send a strong signal of unity.”

There is one central aim behind the tough stance of the chancellor. Berlin is seeking to fuse Europe together under German domination in order to further its geo-strategic and economic interests as effectively as possible. Any concessions to London are unacceptable to the German ruling class because they would put at risk German hegemony and accelerate the break-up of the EU under conditions of growing political and economic conflicts across the continent.

A government resolution adopted by the German parliament states: “From the standpoint of the German Bundestag, the ultimate objective of the Brexit negotiations is to ensure the unity of the EU. Particular interests should not jeopardise the achievement of this long-term and overarching objective. ‘Cherry picking’ by the UK is not allowed.”

In an attempt to play the role of Europe’s “disciplinarian,” the German government can count on the country’s so-called opposition parties in the Bundestag. While making tactical criticisms of the German government’s response to Brexit, the chair of the Left Party fraction in the Bundestag, Sahra Wagenknecht, who spoke directly after Merkel, solidarised herself with the chancellor in the very first sentence of her remarks. “Mrs. Chancellor, I agree with your criticism of the current developments in Turkey,” she said.

As a concerned representative of the ruling elite, Wagenknecht warned the government that it “put at risk the legacy of the great founding fathers of Europe” with its “strategy of deterring other potential imitators by attaching the worst possible conditions to withdrawal.” Among the “great founding fathers of Europe” to whom Wagenknecht referred was Konrad Adenauer, the arch-conservative and deeply anti-communist first German chancellor of the post-war period.

From start to finish, Wagenknecht identified herself

with the EU, which is increasingly dominated by Berlin. Her handful of social phrases were intended to obscure the reactionary character of the institutions in Brussels, which are increasingly recognised by workers and youth for what they really are: instruments in the hands of a tiny hyper-wealthy financial oligarchy that has declared war on the working class, encourages extreme right-wing forces and is rearming for war at home and abroad.



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