

EU sets up joint military command centre and European defence fund

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Under conditions of growing transatlantic tensions and the departure of Britain from the European Union, the 27 remaining EU member states are rapidly pushing ahead with the establishment of an independent military policy.

In Luxembourg on Thursday, the EU finally decided to establish a joint command centre for civilian and military operations. It will initially be used to direct EU missions “without executive powers,” such as training missions in Mali, Somalia and South Africa. In the medium term, “executive” EU military operations could also follow, i.e. comprehensive war operations such as in Syria or Iraq, which have hitherto been directed from headquarters in the respective member states.

The day before, the European Commission had initiated a European Defence Fund of €5.5 billion per year. This year, the EU will “for the first time offer grants for collaborative research in innovative defence technologies and products, fully and directly funded from the EU budget,” the official press release said. In 2018, the Commission will then propose “a dedicated EU defence research programme with an estimated annual budget of €500 million, making the EU one of the biggest defence research investors in Europe.”

The second level of the fund concerns the “development and the acquisition of defence equipment and technology.” Some €500 million will be spent directly in this area, for example, to “jointly invest in developing drone technology or satellite communication, or bulk buy helicopters to reduce costs.” After 2020, “It could therefore generate a total investment in defence capability development of €5 billion per year.”

The aim of the measures is the development of the EU as an aggressive great power, able to intervene militarily and conduct war independently of NATO and the United States.

In a “Reflection Paper on the Future of European Defence,” also published by the European Commission

on Wednesday, the following is stated: “The onus on improving European security lies first of all in European hands. The resources should be there: collectively European countries are the second largest military spender worldwide ... While acting together with our partners will remain the EU’s norm and preference, we should be able to act alone when necessary.”

The declared objective of the Commission is the massive rearmament of Europe in order to “help keep pace with new trends and generate the technological and industrial capabilities Europe needs to ensure its strategic autonomy.” In 2016, the defence budgets had already been increased, “but the road ahead is still long,” the paper warns. “Moving towards Europe’s strategic autonomy requires spending more on our defences, as well as spending better and spending together.”

The US, China and Russia are now the benchmarks for the EU: “The United States already invests more than twice as much on defence than all Member States combined and will increase its budget by almost 10 percent in 2018. China has increased its budget by 150 percent over the past decade, with a further rise of 7 percent expected in 2017, while Russia invested 5.4 percent of its GDP on defence last year.”

The message is unmistakable. Europe must also take part in the arms race in order to assert its global interests militarily against the other great powers. In the section “Europe in 2025—moving towards a Security and Defence Union,” the paper gives an insight into three rearmament scenarios that are being prepared behind the backs of the European population, all of which aim to build a veritable military-police state.

“In this scenario, Member States would deepen cooperation and integration further towards a common defence and security,” the document states. As a result, the EU would “be able to run high-end operations to better protect Europe, potentially including operations

against terrorist groups, naval operations in hostile environments or cyber-defence actions.”

The new defence fund would provide “capabilities in areas such as space, air and maritime surveillance, communication, strategic airlift and cyber ... to ensure immediate responses.” In addition, Europe would have “detection and offensive cyber-capabilities,” and a “dedicated European Defence Research Agency” would conduct “forward-looking defence innovation and help translate it into the military capabilities of tomorrow.”

The European elites know that a more independent and aggressive European war policy also requires the internal militarization of the continent. “Security threats would be systematically monitored and assessed jointly, in close cooperation with national security and intelligence services,” the Commission says. “Contingency planning would be carried out at the European level, bringing internal and external security closer together. The interconnection of national security interests would lead to genuine European security interests.”

As expected, the loudest applause for the European Commission’s plans came from Berlin. The German government regards Brexit and disengagement from the USA as an opportunity to reorganize the EU as a military alliance under German leadership and the starting point of its own great power policy.

“I expressly welcome the Commission’s proposal on the future of European defence policy. It is ambitious and shows how far we have moved towards a security and defence union in the last twelve months,” declared German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen (Christian Democratic Union, CDU). We must “now take advantage of the momentum to reach the next milestones, such as the European Defence Fund and PESCO [Permanent Structured Cooperation] with our European partners in the second half of the year.”

Specifically, the German defence minister is working to establish the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) as a so-called “anchor army” for the European NATO states, to upgrade them and gradually subordinate them to the command structures of the Bundeswehr. One would have to think “again in larger federations,” wrote von der Leyen several weeks ago in a comment in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in which she explained her strategy.

In his new book, *New Assessments*, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (Social Democratic Party, SPD) leaves no doubt that the government is striving to build a European Army under German leadership. “It is a question of more closely integrating the armaments industry in Europe and

concentrating forces. It is about creating a common European security identity that opens the way to a European Army through increasingly integrated structures,” he says in the chapter “Foreign policy following the election of Trump.”

As well as the SPD, the Left Party in particular is playing a key role in transforming the widespread disgust against the right-wing politics of President Donald Trump into support for an independent European and German great-power policy. On Thursday, the pro-Left Party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* (*ND*) published a comment backing the German Foreign Minister in his criticism of the Saudi Arabian offensive against Qatar, which is supported by Trump. “His [Gabriel’s] perseverance is desired in this,” *ND* wrote. “What Germany needs the least—and Gabriel is perfectly right about this—is a Trump-isation of its foreign policy.”

The attempt by the Left Party to market Gabriel and German imperialism as a more peaceful alternative to US imperialism and Trump is pure propaganda. In reality, the ruling elites in Germany and Europe have long since matched the right-wing billionaire in the White House. They are rearming and stepping up state powers at home, and preparing for war.

The Socialist Equality Party (SGP) and its sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are the only parties in Europe to reject the militarization of the continent and to advance a socialist programme. The SGP manifesto for the federal elections in September states, “We reject all imperialist alliances and military blocs. We are for the dissolution of NATO and the European Union and fight instead for the United Socialist States of Europe. Our ally in the struggle against German militarism is the European, American and international working class.”



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