

Juncker's State of the EU speech: Europe readies for war with the world

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In his State of the European Union (EU) speech yesterday in Brussels, EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker outlined an aggressive military and commercial agenda for the post-Brexit EU.

Juncker, the leader of an institution despised by workers for its austerity and police-state measures, constantly invoked “European values” as the basis of his policy. Stripped of these empty and misleading phrases, however, his address sent a clear message: amid the collapse of the EU's relations to long-standing allies, above all Washington and London, it must prepare for global trade war and pursue a military policy independent of the United States.

Juncker began by congratulating the EU for “an economic recovery that finally reaches every single [EU] member state,” nearly a decade after the 2008 Wall Street crash. Despite touting this so-called recovery, the fruits of which have overwhelmingly gone to the wealthiest layers of society, Juncker nevertheless sounded a worried note: “We now have a window of opportunity, but it will not stay open forever. Let us make the most of the momentum, catch the wind in our sails.”

While raising EU free trade deals with Canada and Japan, and plans for such deals with Mexico, South America and New Zealand, Juncker made clear that they go hand-in-hand with plans for commercial measures against Europe's trading partners and a major military build-up.

“Let me say once and for all: we are not naïve free traders. Europe must always defend its strategic interests,” Juncker said. “This is why today we are proposing a new EU framework for investment screening. If a foreign, state-owned company wants to purchase a European harbour, part of our energy infrastructure or a defence technology firm, this should

only happen in transparency, with scrutiny and debate.” Juncker added this would serve to “protect our security if needed.”

A year after US-EU Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) talks broke down over French and German objections, Juncker did not mention the United States as a key trading partner or a country with which the EU seeks a free trade deal.

Juncker went on to call for the accelerated formation of what would be an EU army, three years after Berlin announced the re-militarization of German foreign policy.

Juncker said the EU had “to become a stronger global actor. In order to have more weight in the world, we must be able to take foreign policy decisions quicker. This is why I want Member States to look at which foreign policy decisions could be moved from unanimity to qualified majority voting. ... And I want us to dedicate further efforts to defence matters. A new European Defence Fund is in the offing. As is a Permanent Structured Cooperation in the area of defence. By 2025 we need a fully-fledged European Defence Union. We need it. And NATO wants it.”

Juncker's claim that NATO, including Washington and London, want the formation of an EU defense union is nothing more than an attempt to downplay the rapid rise of US-EU conflict.

Amid an escalating drive to war internationally, military tensions are rising rapidly between Washington and the EU, and particularly the Berlin-Paris axis. While Washington has repeatedly pressed Europe to increase its military spending in recent years, hoping to receive more European aid in its own wars, Washington also relied on London to veto plans for an EU army, as long as Britain was in the EU. After Britain's exit from the EU, however, Germany and

France have rapidly revived plans for an aggressive EU military policy independent of the United States.

A quarter century after the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, depriving the European imperialist powers and the United States of a common enemy, tensions among the major NATO powers are bringing the alliance to the verge of collapse. The bases of the trans-Atlantic alliance have been shattered. Since his election, Trump has repeatedly indicated that his administration could target EU car and steel exports with punitive tariffs that could spark an all-out US-EU trade war.

These commercial tensions reflect explosive strategic conflicts that are building inside NATO, as US targeting of Russia and China places the world on the verge of all-out war. As Trump threatens North Korea with war, the subject of today's EU foreign ministers' meeting, it is ever more unlikely that the EU powers would support Washington in a war that could escalate into war with China.

Remarkably, Juncker's speech did not mention Russia, which has been the target of a relentless NATO military build-up in Eastern Europe since the 2014 NATO-backed putsch in Kiev. Berlin and Paris, however, intervened in Ukraine in 2015 to cut across a US policy of arming far-right militias in Ukraine against Russian-speaking forces in eastern Ukraine. With the Trump administration now threatening again to arm the Ukrainian regime, these conflicts are again reaching explosive levels.

The international working class is the only force that can oppose the drive to war, however; the EU itself is simply emerging as the vehicle for a brutal, competing assertion of European imperialist interests around the world that threatens to provoke new and bloodier conflicts.

The EU policy is not a peace policy, as reflected by its support for wars in Libya and Syria and its ruthless imposition of police-state measures at home, like the French state of emergency. It represents the interests of a rival bloc of imperialist powers competing with Washington, which aims to finance the building of a war machine on the backs of the European workers. Juncker spent much of his speech indicating a vast list of countries that have fallen afoul of the EU.

In response to the Turkish regime's brutal crackdown on domestic opposition after a failed US- and German-

backed coup attempt in Turkey last year, Juncker ruled out Turkey joining the EU. "The rule of law, justice and fundamental values have a top priority in the negotiations, and that rules out EU membership for Turkey in the foreseeable future," he said. "For some considerable time Turkey has been moving away from the European Union in leaps and bounds."

Juncker also addressed a stern warning to Britain. In response to cheers from EU parliament members from the pro-Brexit UK Independence Party, Juncker warned them: "I think you will regret [Brexit] as well soon, as I might say."

Juncker's call for monitoring foreign investment in Europe and foreign state ownership of European ports was a veiled threat against China, which is investing heavily in European companies and has acquired a majority stake in the major Piraeus port in Athens.

Moreover, while Juncker's speech aims to lay out an agenda to be pursued under the leadership of Berlin and Paris, after the election of French President Emmanuel Macron in May and upcoming German general elections on September 24, there are deep divisions inside the EU itself.

Visiting Athens last week, Macron had laid out calls for a major shake-up of the EU institutions, including the creation of a common parliament and budget of the eurozone. He also included calls for Greek debt forgiveness and expelling the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from the Greek debt program that have long been opposed by Berlin.

Juncker's speech was a targeted rebuke to Macron, refusing to endorse these proposals. Instead, he called for a European finance ministry and the formation of a European Monetary Fund to replace the Washington, DC-based IMF. *Le Monde* commented that Juncker was preparing for "the compromise that could emerge from the negotiations on the future of the eurozone that could begin this autumn between Mr. Macron and [German] Chancellor Angela Merkel, who will in all likelihood win a fourth term."



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