

European defence ministers sign on to European Intervention Initiative

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The defence ministers of nine European countries signed a letter of intent last week for a European Intervention Initiative (EI2). The initiative aims to enable the European powers to intervene militarily and wage wars with a “coalition of the willing.”

The initiative stems from a suggestion made by French President Emmanuel Macron in his Sorbonne speech last September. Macron referred to the lack of a “common strategic culture” as the main deficiency of European defence policy and offered cooperation to other European countries under the umbrella of the French armed forces. Macron demanded: “At the beginning of the next decade, Europe needs to establish a common intervention force, a common defence budget and a common doctrine for action.”

For a long time, Germany has been reluctant to become too militarily dependent on France, but it has now adopted Macron’s initiative, albeit in a somewhat weaker form. After signing the letter of intent, German Defence Minister Ursula von der Leyen declared that it intended to establish a “forum of like-minded countries,” which could jointly draw up situation reports and “are ready to discuss with each other at an early stage, when crises emerge in regions, and then also jointly develop political will.”

The EI2 differs in two ways from the existing plan to develop a European army, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which is currently being intensively pursued.

Firstly, the name makes clear what the signatories intend. For the first time they do without euphemisms such as “defence” and openly speak of intervention. The statement describes the objectives of the initiative as follows: “EI2 will enable better links and closer cooperation between the armed forces of European states that are willing and able to carry out international

military missions and operations, throughout the spectrum of crises.”

Secondly, the EI2 is not bound to the EU, NATO and other existing structures. Although it provides for the possibility of acting within the framework of the EU, NATO and the United Nations, it also allows for the defence of “European security interests” through “ad hoc coalitions.” It is thus creating a mechanism for military cooperation with Britain outside of the US-dominated NATO. Britain signed the declaration although it is soon leaving the EU.

Denmark also signed the letter of intent. Although the country is a member of the EU, it does not traditionally participate in its common security and defence policy. The other signatories are Belgium, Estonia, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. The original plan also included Italy as a participant, but the new government in Rome has not yet made a decision.

The declaration, the text of which is only available in English, clearly shows that France, Germany and other European powers are creating a new instrument for imperialist intervention and neo-colonial warfare.

Already in the first paragraph, the statement refers to “a highly unstable and uncertain strategic environment, subject to sweeping changes” that confronts Europe with the “greatest concentration of challenges since the end of the Cold War.” Examples include “an increasing terrorist threat, major migration crises, persistent vulnerabilities in its Southern region, from the Mediterranean to the Sahel-Sahara region, enduring destabilisation in the Middle East, resumption of open warfare on its doorstep and displays of force on its territory, including stemming from intimidation strategy, on its Eastern Flank and increasing natural disasters.”

The letter of intent is expressly committed to

“consolidate European strategic autonomy and freedom of decision and action.” For the time being, the defence ministers do not foresee providing the EI2 with troops of its own, instead relying on “existing standing rapid reaction/intervention forces” when necessary. A permanent secretariat in Paris will be formed, based on French staff and the existing network of international liaison officers.

However, as tensions grow with the US and inside the EU itself, it is clear that France and Germany are creating a command and infrastructure that will enable them to pursue their military interests independently of the US and against it when called for. French Defence Minister Florence Parly said last year that what was wanted was “a quick and manageable process to bring together European military forces when needed.”



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