France recalls its ambassador to Italy

Alex Lantier
8 February 2019

Yesterday, for the first time since World War II, the French Foreign Ministry announced the recall of its ambassador in Rome. An immediate pretext was Italian Vice Premier Luigi di Maio's February 5 meeting with a group of "yellow vest" protesters calling for French President Emmanuel Macron's ouster. The communiqué made clear, however, that far broader international conflicts are involved.

"For several months," it wrote, "France has been targeted with repeated accusations, unfounded attacks, and outrageous declarations that everyone knows and recalls. It is unprecedented since the end of the war. To have disagreements is one thing, exploiting them for electoral purposes is another. The latest interventions constitute a further and unacceptable provocation."

While calling for "a relationship of friendship and mutual respect" between France and Italy, it added: "All these actions have created a grave situation that raises questions as to the intentions of the Italian government in its relations with France. In light of this unprecedented situation, the French government has decided to recall the French ambassador to Italy for consultations."

Paris's recall of its ambassador—a move typically signaling the danger of a collapse of diplomatic relations, or war—underscores the collapse of relations in the European Union (EU) flowing from the relentless incitement of nationalism and militarism by the European ruling class.

Clashes between Paris and Rome have become ever more bitter, as they vied for influence in the EU and backed rival factions in the civil war in Libya that followed the 2011 NATO war. Two years ago, Macron nationalized France's naval shipyards to keep Italy's Fincantieri corporation from buying them. When Italy's far-right government took power, Macron postured as the spokesman of an enlightened Berlin-Paris axis hostile to neofascism, attacking it as "spreading leprosy."

More recently, Italian officials have increasingly lashed out at France. After organizing with Brazil's fascistic President Jair Bolsonaro the rendition from Latin America of former Italian leftist Cesare Battisti, who had initially fled from Italy to France, Italian Interior Minister Matteo Salvini attacked Paris over Libya last month. "In Libya, France has no interest in stabilizing the situation, probably because its oil interests are opposed to Italy's," he said.

While setting up its own concentration camps for refugees in Libya, a former Italian colony, Rome has kept attacking France's neocolonial wars in Africa. "Europeans, and the French in particular, have never ceased colonizing Africa," di Maio said last month. He denounced the CFA franc, aligned on the French currency, used in many of France's former African colonies: "There are dozens of African countries where France prints a currency, the colonial franc, and with this currency it finances France's public debt."

Rome also criticized the US-led coup in Venezuela, which Paris has strongly supported—criticisms French papers attributed to Rome's sympathies for Russia and China, who support the Venezuelan regime.

It is not for nothing that the French Foreign Ministry reached back to World War II to find a situation comparable to the current crisis between Paris and Rome. Today, over a quarter of a century after its founding in 1992, the EU has not resolved any of the fundamental inter-imperialist conflicts that prompted Italy to attack France on June 10, 1940.

Italian and French troops clashed in the Alps as the Nazi Wehrmacht crushed the bulk of the French army in the north. After the armistice, Hitler negotiated with Nazi-collaborationist dictator Marshal Philippe Pétain, French agriculture and industry were redirected towards German and Italian requirements for war with the Soviet Union. Berlin and Rome militarily occupied

© World Socialist Web Site

much of France's colonial empire in North Africa, and Rome was authorized to occupy parts of southeastern France.

The similarity in foreign policy between 20th century fascist Europe and European imperialism today is unmistakable. After a quarter century of imperialist wars since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the threat of war against Russia and China, the struggle for domination in Europe and the plunder of ex-colonial regions is reaching extraordinary intensity.

In 2011, as French President Nicolas Sarkozy, London and Washington launched a war in Libya, despite objections in Germany and from significant forces in Italy, the WSWS warned of the implications the imperialist war drive would have in Europe:

> The common front of what former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld derided as "Old Europe" has broken apart. However, it is not to be assumed that Obama has fully worked through the implications of his support for Sarkozy's schemes. By participating in a war publicly opposed by Berlin, Washington has all but repudiated its decades-long policy of maintaining the political and military unity of Western Europe. It is exacerbating intra-European tensions on a continent already riven by conflicts over economic policies. As has happened in the past, Germany—fearing that it has been outmaneuvered and isolated by its historical adversaries—will look for other means to protect its interests. Once again, Washington has set into motion events which will have disastrous consequences.

This warning has been vindicated. In 2014, Berlin launched a campaign to remilitarize its foreign policy, and the Brexit vote and Trump's election in 2016 brought to the surface the profound breakdown of the NATO alliance. Now the European powers are all pouring hundreds of billions of euros into their military machines. While Macron said last year that Europe must be ready to fight Russia, China or the United States, the European powers are also preparing to fight each other.

As Britain prepares to leave the EU next month, the EU is in chaos. Bitter divisions persist in Berlin, the dominant EU power, over foreign policy. While Chancellor Angela Merkel is associated to an alliance with Macron, last year saw calls in both the German and Austrian ruling classes for a Berlin-Vienna-Rome "Axis," reprising the name of World War II-era alliance between Berlin and Rome. Under these conditions, Macron's sudden decision yesterday not to attend next month's Munich Security Conference is another sign of deep crisis.

None of the imperialist powers in Europe have anything to offer to the working class, which cannot let itself be drawn behind any of the contending camps. All of them stand for social austerity, militarism, and the defense of the legacy of 20th century European fascism—from German militarist professors seeking to rehabilitate Hitler, to far-right ministers in Italy who hail Mussolini, to Macron, who declared his admiration for Pétain.

The critical issue is the struggle to unify the European and international working class against war on a revolutionary, socialist program. To the European militarists' drive to war, the International Committee of the Fourth International counterposes the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site