

Germany's motto for the EU Council presidency: For militarism and war

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Germany took over the rotating presidency of the European Union for six months from July 1. This is being accompanied by an aggressive campaign for militarism and a more independent German-European great power policy. Significantly, the official motto of the German government for the Council presidency is “Gemeinsam. Europa wieder stark machen” (“Together. Making Europe strong again”)—Berlin’s counterpart to Trump’s “Make America Great Again.”

The statements of leading politicians of all parties in the Bundestag (federal parliament) and leading comments in the bourgeois media underline that German imperialism is in no way inferior to American imperialism in terms of aggressiveness and warmongering. On the contrary, six years after the German government announced the end of military restraint at the 2014 Munich Security Conference, the political goals and rhetoric of the ruling class are increasingly reminiscent of German egomania in the first half of the 20th century.

In an interview with DPA, Foreign Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party, SPD) formulates the central concerns of the German Council presidency. In addition to resolving “financial issues”—i.e., mounting new attacks on the working class—and the successful handling of Brexit, he said, “Europe must succeed in positioning itself as an entity in the global great power competition between the USA, China and Russia, which is becoming increasingly unpredictable.” One would “only have a chance to assert oneself in this environment if we do so together as Europeans.” Otherwise one would become “the plaything of others.”

This is unmistakable. “Germany’s destiny: To lead Europe to lead the world” was the title of a 2014 article on an official website of the Federal Foreign Ministry. Now, these plans are to be taken forward. “One of several goals,” Maas continued, was a permanent seat on the UN Security Council—on which Berlin has also held the one-month chair since July 1.

Because of the general “inability to act” in “current crises

such as Syria and the coronavirus,” he said, “the need for reform is more urgent than ever.” However, “progress can’t be made in tiny steps,” he added.

In pursuing these interests, the German foreign minister above all identifies the US as the opponent. He said that they were working to ensure that transatlantic relations “have a future. But the way it is now, it no longer meets the demands of both sides.” This would not change after the US presidential election in November, no matter what the outcome. “Anyone who thinks that with a Democratic Party president everything will be back to the way it was in the transatlantic partnership underestimates the structural changes,” he said.

In a guest column in the *Tagesspiegel*, Maas’ predecessor Sigmar Gabriel also calls on Brussels and Berlin to organise themselves more independently of Washington. “Europe—and Germany too—must stop looking at the US like a rabbit at a snake,” writes Gabriel. “We must define our own interests and clarify what political, economic or even military means we want to use to maintain and develop our idea of living together on a united continent.” The times when “to put it bluntly, our interests could be projected onto US aircraft carriers are over.”

Seventy-five years after the end of World War II, transatlantic relations are about to turn into open hostility. In the Bundestag’s economic committee, former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder (SPD) pleaded on Wednesday for countermeasures in response to threatened US sanctions against the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Germany and Russia. He was supported by several members of the Bundestag. Earlier, the Trump administration’s announcement on withdrawing 9,500 US soldiers from Germany had already triggered fierce criticism and a militaristic campaign in politics and the media.

The German government’s plans to use its presidency of the Council of the European Union for a systematic foreign policy offensive are shared by all parties in the Bundestag—above all the nominally left ones. “The EU must become capable of global politics,” reads the new draft of

the Green Party's basic programme. Above all, it is necessary "to strengthen the EU's common foreign and security policy and thus become more capable of action."

The Left Party also dreams of a German-European world power policy. "The US will then have to get used to the fact that the smaller- to medium-sized states in Europe will become a global political factor through the EU," threatens its foreign policy spokesman Gregor Gysi in a recent interview with the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Washington would "then have to take Europe seriously" and "then cannot dictate to us how we should behave towards China." That would "then also be the new thing about the future world order. Europe would act more independently, and Washington would have to accept that."

The media is demanding that the far-reaching great power and militarization plans finally be implemented. In an editorial by Von Klaus-Dieter Frankenberger headlined, "Germany must want to lead," the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (FAZ), for example, warns that Germany must no longer be merely "the motor, moderator and bridge-builder" in Europe, but must finally show "leadership." Chancellor Angela Merkel's "wake-up call" that "Europeans must take their fate into their own hands" was now "already three years old." And Europe had not yet made much progress in "acquiring the language of power."

This aggressive campaign underlines why all parties in the Bundestag promote the extreme right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) and why they have defended radical right-wing and militarist professors like Jörg Baberowski ("Hitler was not cruel") and Herfried Münkler (Germany must play the "role of a 'disciplinary' in Europe") against all criticism in recent years. As the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) and its youth and student organisation the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) have declared, the trivialisation of Nazi crimes and the call for a German Europe are directly linked to the return of German militarism.

Frankenberger's commentary in the FAZ gives an impression of the developments to which the German elites are reacting with their increasingly aggressive and nervous calls for German leadership in Europe and worldwide. It is "not only the consequences of the coronavirus pandemic" that are giving "new impetus to European unification in general," he writes. The USA's "now porous political and social foundations" would "undermine America's claim to world order." Germany must now "do everything in its power to ensure that the EU regains its economic strength, and in such a way that the centrifugal forces do not become stronger." "Cohesion" was "one of the most important commodities that the EU can use in the struggle of the great

powers."

The German ruling class knows it is sitting on a social and political powder keg. The coronavirus pandemic has not only exacerbated the growing conflicts between the imperialist powers but above all exposed the economic, social, political, cultural and moral bankruptcy of the entire capitalist system.

Governments around the world are using the crisis as an opportunity to impose long-planned mass sackings and social attacks and to transfer trillions into the pockets of the banks, big business and the super-rich once again. The premature "back to work" policy, which aims to squeeze gigantic sums out of the working class once more, endangers the health and lives of millions more. COVID-19 has already infected more than 10.8 million people worldwide and killed over 520,000.

Resistance is developing among workers and youth worldwide against this catastrophe and the criminal response of the ruling class. In the US, workers are organising in independent action committees to fight against unsafe working conditions imposed on them by management and trade unions.

In Germany, Amazon workers went on strike earlier this week, and there is also ferment in the car industry, aviation and retail, where mass layoffs are pending everywhere. Last month, hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Germany during the worldwide mass protests following the murder of George Floyd. These showed not only the widespread hatred against the police but also opposition to all official politics.

The SGP rejects the policy of militarism, stepping up state powers and social cutbacks and fights to arm the growing opposition among workers and youth with a socialist programme. Together with our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International, we are fighting for international working-class action against the COVID-19 pandemic and the building of an international movement of the working class and youth against capitalism, imperialism and war.



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