

EU summit backs herd immunity policy and sanctions against Belarus

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The European Council of European Union (EU) heads of state met in Brussels for two days, Thursday and Friday, to discuss the bloc's foreign and economic policy.

The meeting came amid an unprecedented international political crisis. After the premature ending of lockdown policies this spring, the COVID-19 pandemic is again infecting hundreds of thousands weekly in Europe. In the US, President Donald Trump has vowed to disregard the November presidential elections and try to maintain himself in power in an illegal post-election coup. Meanwhile, the August elections in Belarus remain disputed, and war broke out this week between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, threatening military escalation in this explosive region.

The summit confirmed that the EU is no alternative to the disintegration of American democracy. While maintaining a deafening silence on the US election crisis, the EU heads of state signaled they would continue their murderous herd immunity policies and advanced an aggressive foreign policy targeting Turkey, Russia and China.

A communiqué on the first day's talks published at midnight Friday focused on foreign policy and "a cooperative and mutually beneficial relationship with Turkey." Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan both supported the Azeri offensive to take the Nagorno-Karabakh area from Armenia and aggressively pressed his claims on oil and gas fields in the eastern Mediterranean against Greece. While Greece and Turkey nearly went to war this summer, the Armenian-Azeri war also poses the danger of a clash between the two powers' main respective regional backers, Russia and Turkey.

The EU declared its "full solidarity with Greece and Cyprus" in the Mediterranean dispute, and that it "welcomes" recent attempts to negotiate a delimitation of Greek and Turkish maritime claims. It opted for a carrot-and-stick approach. The EU announced it would "launch a positive political EU-Turkey agenda with a specific emphasis on the modernization of the Customs Union and trade facilitation, people-to-people contacts, high-level

dialogues and continued cooperation on migration issues" in line with the EU's anti-immigrant policy.

This reactionary "agenda" of offering Turkish firms more access to EU markets while ordering Ankara to block Middle Eastern refugees from traveling to Europe, however, depends on Turkish compliance with EU policy on the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus. The EU demanded in exchange "substantial negotiations" between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and Turkish abandonment of "unilateral actions" in the Mediterranean. Turkey has opened talks with Greece on that issue, and with Russia in an apparent attempt to broker a peace deal in the Caucasus.

In exchange for threatening Turkey with sanctions, the EU obtained an agreement by Cyprus to drop its objections to imposing sanctions on Belarus. The EU has backed opposition politicians who claimed President Aleksandr Lukashenko stole the elections, and it now has imposed sanctions on 40 Lukashenko regime officials. Incoherently, it did not impose sanctions on Lukashenko himself, however, as it tries to keep its options open for political operations inside the former Soviet Union.

In the dubious and as yet unresolved matter of the apparent poisoning of Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny, the EU called it "a serious breach of international law." They demanded that Russian authorities ensure "an impartial international investigation and to bring those responsible to justice."

While pursuing sanctions against Lukashenko for allegedly stealing the Belarusian elections, the EU said nothing about Trump's threats to steal the US elections. Remarkably, its communiqué made no mention either of the United States or of the major EU powers' NATO military alliance with the United States. It is more or less apparent that this reflects growing US-EU tensions, concern that a political breakdown in Washington could trigger further wars internationally and unspoken fear of an explosive reaction among workers both in America and Europe to Trump's planned coup.

With Washington mounting a military build-up in the Pacific and imposing trade tariffs to halt China's economic

rise, the EU also demanded investment deals to ensure EU access to profits in China and criticized China's "human rights situation." However, the difference in tone from that of US policy towards China was unmistakable. The EU asked China to "assume greater responsibility in dealing with global challenges" and for "coherent efforts" to intensify EU-China diplomatic ties. It scheduled a March 2021 meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The EU, as usual, couched its military and financial ambitions in rhetoric on "multilateralism" and developing "strategic autonomy" from Washington, echoing French President Emmanuel Macron's remarks last month to the UN.

"The world cannot just be about China-US rivalry," Macron said, but "there will be no miracle cure to the disintegration of the contemporary order." He added that "all the fault lines from before the pandemic—the great powers' clash for hegemony, the undermining or manipulation of multilateralism, the trampling of international law—have only accelerated and gone deeper."

Calling for more EU cooperation and strategic autonomy, such as in the joint French-German neo-colonial occupation of Mali, Macron said: "Multilateralism is not just an act of faith, it is an operational necessity. ... The European Union, often predicted to be divided and impotent, has thanks to this crisis made a historic step towards unity, sovereignty and solidarity."

The EU is however a reactionary bloc led by the major European powers, asserting their imperialist interests overseas and financing their profits and overseas wars at workers' expense. In particular, as in the United States, the European ruling class consciously pursues a policy of herd immunity on COVID-19. Following the premature lifting of lockdowns imposed earlier this year, the drive by EU governments to reopen schools and workplaces has already paved the way for a resurgence of the virus threatening the lives of millions.

In Europe there are now 2,384,762 active cases with numbers exploding across the continent. Yesterday France reported 12,148 infections and 136 deaths. The situation is similarly catastrophic in Spain with 3,722 infections and 113 deaths and Britain (6,968/66). Also the numbers in Eastern Europe are exploding with daily record infections and deaths in Poland (2,292/27), Czech Republic (1,762/21), Romania (2,343/53), Ukraine (4,633/68) and Russia (9,412/186). In Germany 2,832 were counted yesterday—one of the highest rates since April.

The EU summit once again underscored that there will be no serious coordinated efforts taken to contain the disease. On the contrary: In her press statement at the end of the summit President of the European Commission Ursula von

der Leyen made clear that the deadly back-to-work campaign is a key component of the EU's strategy to position itself as an industrial and foreign policy power pursuing its imperialist interests against its international rivals.

"With regards to industry", she explained, "the priority is to join forces in key strategic areas and ensure our industry can compete on a global scale. As you know, we presented our new Industry Strategy in March, to ensure industry can lead the twin green and digital transition."

"Europe clearly needs to 'up its game,'" von der Leyen stressed, effectively laying out a trade war strategy to outdo competitors. "We are working at full speed on legislative proposals on foreign subsidies from third countries. We know that these foreign subsidies from third countries can significantly distort the functioning of our Single Market, and disadvantage EU market operators."

The WSWS has characterized the pandemic as a "trigger event," which accelerated the already far advanced social, economic, and geopolitical crises of world capitalism.

In her remarks von der Leyen left no doubt that the EU's industrial and foreign policy offensive will be accompanied by a new round of austerity measures only intensifying the social devastation and impoverishment of workers across the continent. "First of all, we are carrying out a comprehensive review on how to adapt EU competition rules. We need to make them fit for purpose in a globalized and digital world", she insisted.

What this means is clear: the trillions of euros handed over to the banks and big corporations must be squeezed out of the working class again.

The pandemic has also intensified the preparations of the imperialist powers for war. The Trump administration has not only accused China of being responsible for the pandemic, but the US ruling class is making ever more aggressive preparations for military conflict with Russia and China. The European powers led by Germany and France are also exploiting the crisis to press ahead with their great power plans—against Russia and China, but also against the United States.



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