

EU summit pledges more arms to Ukraine against Russia

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European Union (EU) heads of state ended a two-day summit at Versailles, France, yesterday addressing the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Pouring fuel on the flames of the war, they adopted multiple anti-Russian measures: further arming Ukrainian army units and nationalist militias while pledging to cut off deliveries of Russian oil, gas and grain critical to the food and energy supply of Europe and Africa.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and EU Council President Charles Michel were joined by President Emmanuel Macron of France, which now holds the EU's rotating presidency, at a press conference yesterday afternoon. While COVID-19 infects over 4 million people and claims over 15,000 lives each week in Europe, they said nothing about the pandemic. Nor did they refer to the growing international wave of strikes against rising fuel costs.

They called instead for massive, unspecified increases in EU military spending to "conduct the full range of operations and missions," including warfare in space and cyberspace.

They announced that the EU would continue pouring weapons into Ukraine, providing a further €1 billion in arms to Kiev. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell had said earlier that the EU would increase its weapons supplies to Ukraine by €500 million. "The decision was taken to add a further €500 million" to the previously agreed-upon increase in weapons spending mentioned by Borrell, Michel said, without specifying how the money would be spent.

Ukraine has previously called on the EU to supply it with anti-aircraft missiles, anti-drone weapons, mine-detection equipment, radio and radar equipment, night vision goggles and ambulances.

While refusing to admit Ukraine into the EU, EU officials agreed to admit Ukrainian refugees into the EU—but only temporarily. Macron said, "The path to our Europe is open to Ukrainians. Their struggle for democracy and the values that unite us has shown that Ukraine indeed belongs to our European family." However, he added, "Can there be an

exceptional and accelerated procedure for entry [into the EU] for a country that is at war? The answer is no."

In the summit resolution, the EU pledged to "phase out our dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports as soon as possible," referring to 2027 as a possible deadline. This disruption of world energy markets would massively increase oil and gas prices that are already surging. Moreover, the moves by Washington and the European powers to cut Russia and Belarus out of dollar-denominated transactions in international trade would accelerate the surge in food prices, as the region is a critical exporter of grain.

Macron made clear these policies will have a devastating impact on workers' living standards, but that the EU will proceed anyway. Europe and Africa "will be very deeply destabilized in terms of food" over the next year, he said. "We must re-evaluate production strategies to defend our sovereignty in food... as Europeans, but also re-evaluate our Africa strategy. Otherwise African countries will be hit in the next 12 to 18 months ... because of what cannot currently be planted."

To justify its policies targeting the working class, the EU summit resolution issued a one-sided denunciation of Russia. It declared: "Two weeks ago Russia brought war back to Europe. Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine grossly violates international law and the principles of the UN Charter and undermines European and global security and stability. It is inflicting unspeakable suffering on the Ukrainian population. Russia, and its accomplice Belarus, bear full responsibility for this war of aggression..."

While the Kremlin's decision to invade Ukraine is undoubtedly reckless and reactionary, the EU's blaming of militarism, mass COVID-19 infections and social austerity on Russia is a pack of lies.

First of all, it was not the Kremlin that "brought war back to Europe," but the NATO imperialist powers. The Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 cleared the way for a wave of bloody NATO wars not only in the Middle East, starting with Iraq and Afghanistan, but in Europe itself. The

Yugoslav wars of the 1990s were incited and backed by the NATO powers, who encouraged various Yugoslav republics to secede and then bombed Serbia and Kosovo in 1999.

Moreover, the EU's posturing as a temporary haven for Ukrainian immigrants is of truly staggering hypocrisy. After NATO wars across the Middle East and Africa over the last 30 years, over 80 million people have become refugees worldwide. The EU has closed its borders to them, consigning millions to refugee camps and leaving tens of thousands to drown in the Mediterranean. Now, however, to denounce Russia and justify its right-wing policies, it is making an insincere and discriminatory show of concern, but only for specifically Ukrainian refugees.

Finally, the EU's program of rearmament and war targeting Russia is to be waged overwhelmingly at the expense of the working class. As the EU floats plans to borrow €200 billion for rearmament, this will clearly be financed by massive social attacks on workers in Europe. Already Macron has pledged to increase the retirement age in France by three years.

The far-reaching, essentially fascistic implications of this rearmament offensive emerge in bellicose articles in the bourgeois media. On the eve of the summit, German news magazine *Der Spiegel* published an article titled "An angel with a sword is still an angel!" Its author, Belgian philosopher Luuk van Middelaar, a former advisor to European Commission President Hermann Van Rompuy, praises the return of German militarism.

He writes, "After years of hesitation, the Federal Republic now intends to arm seriously. It has also started to support Kiev militarily. Berlin is breaking with its economic policy towards Moscow, recognising its dependence on gas as a strategic mistake ... What its eastern neighbours and several US presidents have failed to do over many years, Putin has achieved in one fell swoop: Germany has woken up geopolitically."

Middelaar calls on the EU to become a major military power that can wage war on other major powers: "If Europe wants to emerge as a power among powers, capable at some point even of commanding destructive military forces, it will need a different political language to talk about itself and its place in the world. The European Union will have to change its ethos and its demeanor. It must understand that it will then no longer be the angel that liberates the continent and the world from evil and tyranny—but a mortal, strategic and realpolitik actor..."

Workers in Europe and internationally must be warned. After triggering two world wars in the 20th century, the European ruling classes will stop at nothing to impose their imperialist interests in the 21st. Having used Putin's reactionary invasion to launch its biggest rearmament

programme since Hitler, the German bourgeoisie is debating building nuclear weapons.

As *Focus* magazine wrote, "No fear of nuclear weapons: Why Germany must now talk about nuclear rearmament," German EU parliamentarian Manfred Weber declared: "The basis of real European sovereignty is the ability for Europe to defend itself—at some point including nuclear weapons."

The alternative to the EU's reactionary policies is the growing international class struggle against them. In Italy, fishermen are on a nationwide strike against skyrocketing fuel costs. According to the fishing sector of the Italian farmers' association Coldiretti Impresapesca, fuel prices for fishing boats have risen 90 percent compared to last year.

Spanish truckers are to go on indefinite strike on 14 March, demanding cuts in fuel taxes to compensate for rising fuel prices.

In Albania, mass protests have erupted against fuel prices. Albanian police arrested at least 16 people Wednesday evening for "illegal assembly." Street protests have been taking place for days in the capital, Tirana, and in other cities, against a 30 percent increase in oil and gas prices in one week.

In Germany, too, strikes are underway. On Tuesday kindergarten teachers, particularly hard hit by the pandemic, went on strike. Pilots of the cargo airline Aerologic have also voted to strike.

The European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) are fighting to arm the growing opposition among workers and youth with a socialist programme. The threat of world war, the death of millions from the pandemic and mass social impoverishment can only be overcome by building an independent mass movement against capitalism and the struggle for workers' power as part of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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