

Scholz, Macron meet in Berlin to call for EU military build-up against Russia

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On May 9, on the anniversary of Nazi Germany's defeat in World War II, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and newly-reelected French President Emmanuel Macron met in Berlin. They discussed plans to accelerate the re-militarization of Germany and the EU and escalate EU participation in the war NATO is waging against Russia in Ukraine.

In the evening, the two visited the Brandenburg Gate, which was illuminated in Ukraine's blue-and-yellow colors. A few hundred supporters and journalists were allowed to gather near Scholz and Macron and to shout pro-Ukrainian slogans. Asked by journalists what message he and Scholz intended to send with their night-time visit to the Brandenburg Gate, Macron replied: "Full support for Ukraine."

Earlier that day, Scholz had given a speech rejecting any "Russian-dictated peace" in Ukraine, after having accused Russia of waging a "war of extermination" and "breaking with civilization." The reactionary capitalist regime of Russian President Vladimir Putin is waging war in Ukraine, but Scholz's war speech, effectively equating Russia with Nazism as a genocidal entity that must be fought and destroyed, was inflammatory and false. It was the basis for Scholz and Macron to lay out a militaristic agenda.

At the joint press conference, Scholz praised Macron's reelection as "a good sign for Europe." He said that there had been agreement "for a long time that our countries can only successfully master the great challenges of our time if we proceed together and within the framework of a strong and sovereign Europe. We want to continue on this path together."

The remarks of Scholz and Macron left no doubt as to what this meant. Berlin and Paris are working to massively rearm Europe and organize it more powerfully in order to be able to pursue their geostrategic and economic interests more independently of Washington.

All the phrases of "peace and freedom," "democracy" and "social justice"—employed repeatedly by both leaders during their remarks—cannot hide this fact.

Scholz and Macron threw their weight behind NATO's proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and announced further arms deliveries to Kiev. "We stand closely and unbreakably by Ukraine's side," Scholz said. "We support them financially, from a humanitarian standpoint and also militarily with our arms deliveries in order to end this war"—that is, to militarily defeat Russia.

Scholz described Germany's military support for Ukraine as "very far-reaching." Its arms deliveries, he said, are "very comprehensive assistance from our own stocks, from cooperation with our defense industry and from cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe that have what is so urgently needed in Ukraine, namely Russian weapons that can be used immediately in the conflict."

Currently, beyond supplying its own heavy weapons, such as the self-propelled Howitzer 2000, Berlin is organizing so-called "ring exchanges" with Eastern European countries. Concretely, this means that Eastern European EU and NATO member states supply Soviet-designed tanks and air defense missiles to Ukraine. In return, Germany undertakes to replace the respective weapons systems with corresponding weapons of Western and German production.

At the same time, the Bundeswehr will train Ukrainian soldiers in Germany on these weapon systems. Future Ukrainian crews of the self-propelled howitzer 2000 and technical specialists reportedly landed in Rhineland-Palatinate on Tuesday. Training is to start today at the Bundeswehr's artillery school in Idar-Oberstein. According to an expert report by the Bundestag's Scientific Service, the training of Ukrainian soldiers on German soil constitutes war participation under international law.

In addition to military support for Ukraine, Scholz stressed that Germany would do “whatever it takes” to “strengthen its own defense capabilities.” At a special summit of the European Council at the end of May, he said, “We want to discuss how we in the European Union can better coordinate our investments in defense and use them more effectively. In this context, we naturally also want to speed up Franco-German armaments projects.”

The far-reaching plans at stake are evident in foreign policy papers such as the “Strategic Compass for Security and Defense,” recently adopted by the EU. In Berlin, Macron described the paper, which aims to equip the EU for “this era of growing strategic competition” and “major geopolitical shifts,” as an important means of establishing a more independent European foreign and war policy.

To achieve the necessary capabilities, the paper commits EU states to “spend more and better in defence” and massive rearmament. Among other things, it proposes to “jointly develop cutting-edge military capabilities” in all operational areas, “such as high-end naval platforms, future combat air systems, space-based capabilities and main battle tanks.”

Some of these mega-projects, worth hundreds of billions in total, such as the new European Future Combat Air System (FCAS) and the Franco-German Main Ground Combat System (MGCS), are now being pushed. For example, the rearmament package announced by Scholz at the end of February provides for spending of some €34 billion on these “multinational armament projects” alone.

At the press conference with Macron, Scholz boasted of Germany's biggest rearmament drive since the Nazis. Berlin, he said, will “permanently spend two percent of its economic output on defense. We have decided that we will launch a special fund of €100 billion to advance this process and also bring about a restructured defense capability for Germany,” he said. Germany already has “a very large conventional army,” he added, and “if we correspondingly strengthen massively our armed forces, of course that will have positive effects on the defense capability of Europe as a whole.”

Macron backed Germany's rearmament. “Germany has just made far-reaching decisions that I expressly welcome,” he said. Macron also presented his own plans to make Europe more powerful, which were again supported by Scholz. To give Europe “the right political and geopolitical shape,” he advocated building “a European political community.” In addition to Great Britain, which left the EU on January 31, 2020, Macron

also mentioned the countries of the Western Balkans and Ukraine as potential members.

On the EU, Macron advocated dispensing with the requirement of unanimity in EU decision-making. He proposed moving to “qualified majority voting” in “public policies that we currently still decide by unanimity ... for example, fiscal policy or defence policy.” This would allow the EU to take faster decisions on military offensives and on social austerity policies under conditions of large-scale war and economic crisis on the European continent.

In reality, broad layers of European workers are aware that the reckless war policy of the EU and the entire NATO alliance threatens to escalate into an all-out NATO-Russia nuclear war. One recent poll found that 76 percent of French people are concerned about the danger of a nuclear war with Russia. Nonetheless, EU governments are thrusting aside mass popular disquiet and opposition to rearm and grab their share of the spoils in an imperialist carve-up of the former Soviet Union.

Fierce tensions are building up between the German and French ruling classes under the surface, notably over how the loot is to be divided. During last month's French presidential election, Macron's far-right opponent, Marine Le Pen, threatened to end the Franco-German alliance, calling Germany “the absolute negation of French strategic identity.” While every effort is for now being made to paper over these divisions, conflicts inside the EU also continue to mount.

Above all, the EU policy depends on an onslaught against the working class. This takes overt form in Macron's election promise to spend billions more on the military, even as France sends hundreds of millions of euros in arms to Ukraine, by slashing unemployment payments and pensions and making welfare recipients work for their benefits. This points to the objective basis for a struggle to mobilize and unite workers across Europe in a fight against EU austerity and war policies, and for the United Socialist States of Europe.



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