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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

23 January 2019

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24.01.2019

Germany, France step up military, police alliance with Aachen treaty

Fifty-six years after the signing of the 1963 Elysée treaty, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron met yesterday in Aachen to sign another Franco-German friendship treaty. Despite its tired references to international amity and social rights, a reading of the treaty makes clear that it is part of an aggressive, wide-ranging and unpopular agenda to impose police-state regimes across Europe in order to collectively rival America as a military power.

Comparisons of the Aachen and Elysée treaties are fundamentally misleading. While the Elysée treaty was signed shortly after France's bloody neo-colonial war in Algeria and amid growing financial tensions with Washington over the US dollar, it was signed amid the post-war economic boom. The German government intervened to insert provisions in the Elysée treaty specifying that it would be subordinated to the NATO alliance with the United States.

Now, after nearly three decades of imperialist war and growing economic crisis since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, a far deeper crisis of capitalism and of inter-imperialist relations is unfolding. Amid US threats of trade war, transatlantic relations are disintegrating and Germany is seeking to remilitarize its foreign policy. Just before mass "yellow vest" protests against austerity and inequality erupted in France last November, Macron said Europe should be prepared to confront Russia, China or the United States.

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Speaking in Aachen yesterday, Merkel confirmed this is the central purpose of the new treaty: “We are committing ourselves to the development of a common military culture, a common defence industry and a common policy on weapons exports. This is how we want to make our contribution to the development of a European army.”

The treaty lays this out, pledging Berlin and Paris to “seek a common foreign and security policy that is both strong and effective, and reinforce and deepen economic and monetary union. ... The two states will deepen policy cooperation on foreign, defence, exterior security and interior security, and development while seeking to reinforce Europe’s independent capacity for action. They will work to define common positions on any important decision affecting their common interests.”

The treaty creates “a Franco-German Council for Defense and Security as the political organ to guide these common commitments.” With German troops already fighting in France’s war in Mali, it pledges to “further reinforce cooperation between their armed forces in order to create a common culture and plan joint deployments.” It sets up a yearly dialogue between Berlin and Paris on Africa policy, including “management of peacekeeping and post-conflict situations.”

Amid calls for an EU army and after the creation of a €13 billion European Defense Fund last year to boost funding for European weapons systems, including tanks and fighter jets, the treaty calls for a close integration of German and French arms industries. Berlin and Paris, it declares, “support the closest possible cooperation between their defense industries, on the basis of mutual trust. The two states will formulate a common approach on exports of jointly-produced weapons.”

While the treaty maintains the pretense that Berlin and Paris work within the NATO alliance, in fact it calls for coordination between German and French officials at the UN, NATO, and the EU to work out an independent Franco-German policy. It adds, “The admission of the Federal Republic of Germany as a permanent member of the UN Security Council is a priority of Franco-German diplomacy.”

The treaty commits Germany and France to coordinating economic policy, as well as environmental policy and research on artificial intelligence and “other cutting-edge innovations.” It also calls for coordinating transport and infrastructure policies in regions along the German-French border. This is to be achieved via yearly joint meetings of the full German and French ministerial cabinets, and exchanges between them every trimester. EU policies of austerity and militarism are widely despised among workers in Germany, France and across the European continent. And so the drive towards militarism abroad is

inseparable from the drive to police-state measures and coordination of police and domestic intelligence operations across the continent. The treaty specifies that joint Franco-German police operations will proceed not only on German or French soil but, remarkably, in foreign countries as well.

It states, “On internal security, the governments of the two states will further reinforce their bilateral cooperation against terrorism and organised crime, as well as their cooperation on judicial matters, intelligence and police. They will set up measures for joint training and deployment and create a common unit designed for stabilisation operations in other countries.”

One indication of the character of Franco-German police operations is the collaboration two years ago of German and French officials to censor and shut down the German linksunten.indymedia.org website hosted in France. This was a blatant attack on freedom of speech. Now, the Aachen treaty is being signed amid widely reported fears that French police could be swamped by the “yellow vest” protests.

The Aachen treaty is a warning to workers across Europe and beyond. Militarism, austerity and police-state repression of social opposition are not accidents or mistakes by individual heads of state. Rather, the accelerating turn towards military-police rule is an international process, rooted in a systemic breakdown of world capitalism. It can only be fought by uniting the working class internationally on a socialist program for struggle against capitalism, dictatorship and war.

The only progressive opposition to the maneuvers of the Merkel-Macron axis comes from the working class. From within the political establishment, the only criticisms came from neo-fascistic or nationalist politicians seeking to advance their imperialist interests at the expense of the other member of the German-French tandem.

Alice Weidel of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) attacked the treaty as an attempt to subordinate Germany to French interests: “Macron gets what he wants. Germany commits in the first article to ‘strengthen and deepen’ economic and monetary union, that is, to build a union that transfers and redistributes money ... a better, quicker grab at German tax funds for French inflationary policy.” She also said French defense contractors could be the “main profiteers” from a European defence policy.

In France, neo-fascist politicians led attacks on Macron for betraying French interests to Germany without public discussion. Marine Le Pen said, “Macron is selling our country, destroying its sovereignty. ... He ultimately may think of sharing our UN Security Council seat with Germany, maybe even sharing our nuclear arsenal because he wants arms

industry agreements at any price.” She said that the issue of France’s UN Security Council seat was “extremely serious.”

Passing over in silence German-French police cooperation against the population, Le Pen warned against any defence industry cooperation with Germany as harmful to French arms exporting interests. She said, “If we build weapons with the Germans, we French people will have to ask for permission from the *Bundestag* [German parliament] before exporting weapons.”

Jean-Luc Mélenchon of Unsubmissive France (LFI), affiliated to Germany’s Left Party and the pro-austerity Syriza government in Greece, called the treaty “a step back for our sovereignty” and a “social and ecological step backward.” He said German-French collaboration would mean “fewer public services and less public investment, wage cuts, attacks on the unemployed.”

In fact, the record of Syriza—which took power in 2015 pledging to end austerity, but then trampled the will of the electorate, imposing billions in new social cuts to work out a deal with the EU and the banks—is the clearest indication that there is no national perspective for the workers. The only way forward against austerity and the move to military-police rule is the mobilization of the growing opposition in the working class and its unification in a struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.