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Divisions over Russia policy erupt inside EU at Brussels summit

On Thursday, European Union (EU) heads of state met for a two-day summit in Brussels that endorsed EU policy on the pandemic, while clashing bitterly on foreign policy, especially Russian.

On Thursday evening, the EU issued an initial summit communiqué whitewashing its pandemic policies in Orwellian terms. It hailed “good progress on vaccination and the overall improvement in the epidemiological situation” and stressed “the EU’s commitment to international solidarity in response to the pandemic.”



Angela Merkel [Wikipedia Commons]

In reality, over 1.1 million people have died in Europe due to EU opposition to scientific social-distancing policies. It kept hundreds of millions of workers and youth on the job

and at school, even in many of the deadliest weeks of the pandemic. Now, EU states are pressing to end all social distancing, even as the Delta variant spreads, threatening a new contagion. Moreover, EU countries are starving the Covax global vaccination program of doses, pledging to deliver only 100 million by the end of 2021 though they have already administered 325.1 million doses in Europe.

The heart of the summit, however, was planning an aggressive imperialist foreign policy, targeting refugees and Russia. Even before the summit opened, conflicts were mounting over EU relations with Moscow, after the bilateral summit between US President Joe Biden and Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier this month.

It came after a dangerous incident on Wednesday between Russia and Britain in the Black Sea, in which Russian aircraft dropped bombs in the path of a British destroyer allegedly violating Russian territorial waters in the Black Sea. In response, Berlin and Paris proposed to renew EU-Russia talks, which have been suspended since the 2014 NATO-backed regime change operation in Ukraine.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel floated the proposal before the German parliament on Thursday morning. “It is not enough for the US president to speak to the Russian president. I am very happy about that, but the European Union must also create different formats for discussion,” she said. Citing wars in Libya and Syria, Merkel added: “We must define an agenda of common strategic interests, for instance on climate protection, but also in the areas of peace and security.”

French President Emmanuel Macron supported her remarks as he arrived in Brussels on Thursday. “Dialog is necessary to stabilize the European continent but it must be firm, as we will not give up any of our values or of our interests,” Macron said. He added, “We cannot remain on a purely defensive attitude to Russia, on a case-by-case basis, while, very legitimately, we saw a structured discussion unfold between President Biden and President Putin.”

The proposal went too far for most EU states and was rejected out of hand, especially by Eastern European governments. The Polish government demanded that Putin first meet EU demands, first and foremost the implementation of the Minsk agreement on Ukraine. Approaching Russia before that would be “a bad signal,” said Lithuanian President

Gitanas Nausėda, right at the start of the EU meeting. “It would be like trying to talk to the bear to save some of the honey.”

Instead, the EU called for a tougher course against Russia. Its communiqué “stresses the need for a firm and coordinated response by the EU and its Member States to any further malign, illegal and disruptive activity by Russia, making full use of all instruments at the EU’s disposal, and ensuring coordination with partners.” To this end, the EU Commission and the High Representative are tasked to “present options for additional restrictive measures, including economic sanctions.”

In reality, the proposal of Merkel and Macron had nothing to do with a more peaceful policy. It aimed to develop a foreign and military policy towards Russia more independent from Washington, in order to strengthen the EU’s hand against its foreign rivals and to impose its policies of austerity and “herd immunity” on the coronavirus at home.

From their point of view, however, it was not enough to “let ourselves be debriefed about talks with the president of the United States,” Merkel explained. She said the EU must be “man enough and woman enough to put forward its point of view in direct talks.”

Berlin and Paris are stepping up military pressure on Russia. France will participate in the massive Sea Breeze naval maneuver, scheduled for June 28–July 10 in the Black Sea. Hosted by US and Ukrainian forces, it includes 5,000 troops, 32 ships and 40 aircraft from dozens of countries.

This week, the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) is participating for the first time in a NATO airspace surveillance mission over the Black Sea. Two Eurofighters from Tactical Air Wing 71 “Richthofen” landed at Romania’s Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base in Constanta on Thursday. Until July 9, they will patrol Black Sea airspace together with British forces.

As the EU escalates its military threats, divisions between the member states are growing. Writing on Paris’ and Berlin’s failure to secure support for their proposal, the German weekly *Der Spiegel* warned: “Merkel’s and Macron’s defeat extends beyond the day. ... The Union is also divided over its dealings with Hungary: the rift between East and West threatens to become an abyss.”

At the summit, besides Hungary and Portugal—which holds the rotating EU Council presidency—eight Eastern European states (Bulgaria, Croatia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and the Czech Republic) refused to sign a joint letter attacking Hungary’s new anti-LGBT law, banning schools from using material seen as promoting homosexuality. A Reuters report called it “the most intense personal clash among the bloc’s leaders in years.”

The EU is responding to its explosive internal divisions and to growing social and political opposition among workers and youth with a constant police state and military build-up.

In the Mediterranean and Africa, the EU called for closer cooperation with regional allies to halt migrants, deny their right to asylum and imprison them in camps. It stated that “mutually beneficial partnerships and cooperation with countries of origin and transit will be intensified.” This has led to the construction of detention camps including in Turkey, Libya, Bosnia, Greece and Spain where hundreds of thousands of refugees are kept in appalling conditions.

The EU identified Turkey as a key partner against refugees. It hailed “preparatory work for high level dialogues with Turkey on issues of mutual interest, such as migration, public health, climate, counter-terrorism and regional issues.”

“The European Council calls on the Commission to put forward without delay formal proposals for the continuation of financing for Syrian refugees and host communities in Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon and other parts of the region,” it added. It also hailed “de-escalation in the Eastern Mediterranean,” where Turkey has clashed with Greece and France, and new customs deals with Turkey.

The EU communiqué also endorsed France’s war in Mali and its collaboration with the military junta installed in an August 2020 coup in Bamako. It reaffirmed its “call on the Malian transition authorities to fully implement the Transition Charter” and return to nominally civilian rule.

This came as a car bomb attack wounded 12 German troops supporting French forces in Mali, near Ichagara in the northern Gao region, as well as a soldier from another unidentified country, four days after a car bomb injured six French soldiers near

Kaigourou. German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said three German soldiers were seriously wounded.

Nonetheless, the EU hailed its missions in Africa in support of France, including “the continuation of EU CSDP missions and engagement in the Takuba Task Force,” which involves troops from 12 European countries beyond France.

The summit concluded with a closed-door discussion of the Next Generation EU bailout, one of the multiple bailouts that collectively will funnel over €2 trillion to the banks and corporations during the pandemic. Such bailouts are to be paid for with austerity attacks targeting the working class, such as renewed labor reforms in Spain and pension cuts in France that are already being prepared.

This summit provided further, irrefutable evidence of the reactionary nature of the EU, and the necessity to unify and mobilize workers across Europe against it, in a struggle to bring down the EU and build instead the United Socialist States of Europe.

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