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European Union: From economic community to alliance of warmongers

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The European powers, led by Germany, are on a confrontation course with Russia. They are pursuing not only foreign, but also domestic political aims.

The instigation of a crisis and confrontation with Moscow is aimed at unifying a divided European Union and silencing all social opposition. Previously, the identity of the EU was grounded on economic issues, such as the free movement of capital and goods and the common currency. In future, the struggle against a common enemy will replace economics as the basis of the EU's internal cohesion.

A number of editorials in the German press have spelled this out. The Brussels correspondent of *Der Spiegel*, Gregor Peter Schmitz, writing on March 20 under the title "Europe's Great Opportunity," said, "As sad as the Crimean crisis is in many respects, it also offers an historic opportunity: To unite a stronger Europe."

Green Party leader and foreign minister Joschka Fischer stated approvingly in a commentary for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on March 30 that the conflict with Moscow reminded Europeans that

“the EU is not merely an economic community, but a political actor” whose “strategic interests” had “powerfully reemerged.”

The chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the German Bundestag (parliament), Norbert Röttgen, explained in the *Financial Times* of March 20: “But this conflict is not merely about Crimea or Ukraine... While we often struggled to speak with one voice in the past, the conflict with Russia is forcing Europeans to close ranks. It might become a catalyst for a common foreign and security policy.”

In turning to an aggressive foreign and military policy, the ruling elite is responding to a profound crisis of European capitalism. All of the attempts to unite Europe economically and socially have failed. The austerity measures with which Brussels and Berlin reacted to the 2008 financial crisis have exacerbated the conflicts between EU members and vastly intensified class antagonisms.

Social relations are strained to the breaking point. Within the EU, there are officially more than 26 million unemployed, corresponding to a rate of 11 percent. There is abject poverty in many regions, especially in the Eastern European countries that were incorporated into the EU 10 years ago and in the countries that have had to submit to the austerity programmes dictated by the EU and the International Monetary Fund. But even in supposedly rich Germany, one in three employees is deemed to be working under precarious conditions and 6 million people depend on welfare benefits.

More and more people are turning against the EU and see it for what it is—a tool of the most powerful banks and corporations, directed against working people and creating the conditions not for the progressive unification of Europe, but for the intensification of nationalist conflicts. Parties that oppose the EU are expected to garner record-high votes in next month’s European elections.

Under these circumstances, the war propaganda against Russia serves to divert internal tensions by projecting them outward against an external enemy. This applies especially to Eastern Europe, where corrupt politicians have long exploited Russo-phobia as a means of securing their rule.

The German government, which long sought a cooperative relationship with Moscow, has now embarked upon an anti-Russian course. It considers an aggressive policy towards Russia an appropriate means of welding the EU together and asserting German dominance in Europe. It is implementing in practice its proclamation in February of an end to the “policy of military restraint” and the adoption of a new policy based on “contributing to foreign and security policy earlier, more resolutely and more substantially.”

Germany is prepared to employ every means to this end. NATO has begun to move aircraft, ships and troops toward the Russian border and carry out military manoeuvres.

In Ukraine, the right-wing nationalist and fascist forces brought to power with the support of the West have created such an explosive situation that the smallest incident can escalate into a wider conflict or war. In their efforts to integrate Ukraine into the NATO sphere of influence and isolate Russia, the German government and its allies are willing to countenance the risk of nuclear war.

Their intervention in Ukraine has a further purpose. By collaborating with fascist parties and militia groups, they have created a precedent for all of Europe.

For a long time, among the established parties (officially, at least) the rule was that you did not cooperate with parties that defended the Nazis and their war crimes or spread anti-Semitism. The Svoboda party clearly falls into this category.

But over the past several months, high-level European and American officials have met with Svoboda leader Oleh Tyahnybok and collaborated closely with his organization. Tyahnybok's anti-Semitic tirades are documented and can be viewed on YouTube. Svoboda's hero, Stepan Bandera, was a Nazi collaborator, responsible for the mass murder of Jews and Communists. Bandera remained a staunch defender of Mussolini until his death in 1959 in Munich.

What applies to Svoboda applies even more to fascist militia groups such as the Right Sector, on whose services the Western powers relied to drive out the elected Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich. Not only fascists, but also known criminal elements are to be found in the ranks of the Right Sector.

Cooperation with Svoboda and the Right Sector has opened the door to using such forces against the working class in other European countries. The preparations for this are well advanced.

Panayiotis Baltakos, a close associate of Greek Prime Minister Antonis Samaras, had to resign a few days ago after a video emerged showing his close and friendly relations with the fascist Golden Dawn organization. In France, President Hollande has appointed Manuel Valls as head of government, knowing full well that Valls' neo-liberal and anti-immigrant politics will give a further boost to the neo-fascist National Front of Marine Le Pen. In Hungary, the fascist Jobbik party has just won more than a fifth of the vote, having been systematically promoted by the ruling party, Fidesz.

European leaders can go down this route because none of the establishment parties opposes them. The official "left" parties and the pseudo-left groups that operate in their orbits support the war policy and collaboration with Ukrainian fascists. They glorify the fascist-led coup in Kiev as a "democratic revolution" and portray Russia as the "aggressor." The German Left Party has

responded to the revival of German militarism by endorsing for the first time the deployment of the Bundeswehr (armed forces) outside Germany, with five of its members of parliament voting to support a deployment in the Mediterranean.

Those who want to fight against war and fascism should support the Partei für Soziale Gleichheit (PSG) in Germany and the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) in Britain, which are participating in next month's European elections to unite the working class in a struggle against militarism, austerity and the threat of dictatorship. The PSG and SEP reject the European Union and fight for the United Socialist States of Europe. Only the unification of Europe on a socialist basis can prevent the relapse of the continent into nationalism and war.