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European rearmament

For a campaign against rearmament, wars and imperialism

- Features -

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We are entering a new era. Trump's return to the White House is so disruptive that it is causing the historic crisis of transatlantic relations as they were constituted after the Second World War. The new Republican and reactionary administration aims to exploit the new situation of 'geopolitical chaos' to revive the role of the United States of America through an authoritarian turn, based on an alliance with the big hi-tech capitalists such as Elon Musk, and through a new foreign policy that focuses on imperialist national interests.

Faced with this unprecedented context, European heads of state are accelerating their rearmament race. Von der Leyen has promised 800 billion for the EU, Germany has announced a titanic plan of 900 billion euros, in France a massive increase in the French army budget is planned, which should reach at least 90 billion a year, while in our country the planned expenditure of 32 billion will increase exponentially.

The growing militarism is justified by war propaganda against the 'Russian threat' and by rhetoric about 'European values' and 'democracy'. The reality is quite different. In criticising Trump's brutality, the European powers, who support the genocide in Gaza, are acting with the same imperialist logic as the American leader, that is, they are preparing to defend their interests and those of their companies with weapons and cannons.

Militarism, nationalism and the rise of the reactionary far right

This unstoppable arms race is paving the way for disaster for the working classes, young people and the environment. To finance rearmament and impose their militaristic agenda, EU governments are preparing increasingly brutal attacks on the living conditions of the exploited classes, downgrading environmental protection policies and attacking democratic rights.

And it is precisely in this context that the reactionary far right is advancing and, where it does not win, increasingly influences the bourgeois ruling classes, in the United States as in Italy, in Israel as in Argentina, in Russia as in Turkey, in Hungary as in India, in France as in Germany. It is an extreme right that doesn't hide its 'will to power', that even scorns the typical forms of 'bourgeois' liberal democracies and that makes authoritarianism and the centrality of the leader the fulcrum of its politics. It is an extreme right that is increasingly courted by large sectors of the bourgeoisie, because it is considered a valid political-ideological solution capable of controlling mass movements with an iron fist, imposing brutal adjustments and expropriations with the aim of recovering profit.

Trump's aggressive imperialist rhetoric, which aims at the conquest of Greenland, the recovery of the Panama Canal and the annexation of Canada, should be interpreted within this reorientation, even if he refers to some historical traits of classic US imperialism such as the Monroe Doctrine or the historical Republican presidencies such as that of William McKinley, characterised by protectionism and US territorial expansion (Puerto Rico, the Philippines...). The big difference is that McKinley's imperialist expansion coincided with the rise of US power, while Trump's threats are a certain recognition of the limits of US power and occur in a context of decline. Trump's rise is, in fact, a symptom of a new international situation, in which we are witnessing the emergence of China as a competing power, increasingly oriented towards an alliance with Russia, as well as the of medium powers such as Turkey and other countries of the 'Global South' that aim to influence regional dynamics according to their own interests and that do not constitute a real political and social alternative at all, as some sectors of the Italian and European radical left recklessly claim. The fight against the far right can only take on an internationalist, anti-militarist and solidarity-based profile.

Historical leap in European militarism

The consequence of this crisis is a huge leap forward in the militarism of European imperialist governments, a shift that had already begun before the war in Ukraine but that will now deepen even further. With the justification of 'sovereign autonomy', 'defence of Ukraine' and the fantasy of an invasion by 'Russian imperialism' and 'Putin's Nazism', the European powers are preparing to embark on a new arms race with the enthusiastic support of conservatives, social democrats, greens, 'Atlanticists' and right-wing extremists.

Governments, businesses, journalists and the media are all repeating warmongering slogans reminiscent of the turbulent early 20th century. We need to defend Europe and its values, relaunch the military industry, teach 'love of country' in schools and train new recruits to expand the army and maybe even bring back compulsory military service. The Scuratis, the Serras, who have been joined by the main opposition force, the Democratic Party, are shouting loudly that Europe is in danger, is alone in a hostile world and must rearm. It's all Trump and Putin's fault, so the United States has abandoned Europe and Russia has expansionist ambitions.

Yet the militarism of the European Union preceded the war in Ukraine

In the 1970s, Ernest Mandel emphasised the need to investigate the 'economy of permanent rearmament' in his seminal book *Late Capitalism*. He wrote: 'Since the 1930s, arms production has played an increasingly important role in the imperialist economy. There is no sign whatsoever that this trend is coming to an end. It is one of the characteristics of the third age of capitalism, which must be explained in terms of the socio-economic development of this mode of production' [Ernest Mandel, *Le troisième âge du capitalisme*].

The economy of permanent rearmament is by no means over, even in Europe. The ReArm Europe plan didn't just spring up out of nowhere. Without a doubt, at the beginning of its construction process, the absence of a common defence policy initially favoured the image of the EU as a peaceful space, free from the militaristic impulses that belonged, on the contrary, to the nation-states. However, the militarisation of EU countries began well before Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, starting in 2010. Within NATO countries, in fact, military spending, mostly European, has risen from 162 billion euros in 2014 to 214 billion euros in 2022, a dizzying increase of 32% [source: European Defence Agency, EDA, December 2022].

The increase in military spending has been particularly rapid in the Baltic countries and in Central and Eastern European countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Poland), while some countries account for the majority of EU military spending: Germany, France, Italy, Poland and the Netherlands. Together these countries account for 70% of the EU's military spending [Germany: 23.4 – France: 20.9 – Italy: 12.1 – Poland: 6.6 – Netherlands: 6.2]. As far as sophisticated weapons are concerned, France is the leader with 71% of European production, followed by Germany with 22%.

The ReArm Europe plan

The European Commission (with the exception of the Hungarian president, the 'Trumpist' Victor Orbán) has approved the 'ReArm Europe' plan worth 800 billion euros, exempting the military spending of member states from the deficit limit of 3% of GDP (the austerity commitment established in the Stability and Growth Pact). The plan also includes collective loans of up to 150 billion euros for military investments by member states, opening up military

funding to private investments, among other measures.

In Germany, the future coalition government between the conservatives (CDU) and the social democrats (SPD) led by F. Merz has announced a monumental rearmament plan approved by the Bundestag and the Bundesrat – ‘defence at all costs’ – which involves constitutional changes to lift the debt ceiling and the allocation of funds for billions of euros for defence. In the Bundesrat, the plan was also approved by the majority of the members of the upper house from Die Linke, causing much controversy.

The Meloni government, which wavers between Trump and Von der Leyen, seems cautious. In reality, the Italian far right is putting forward its own specific proposal in the debate on the rearmament plan: a European plan that envisages allocating European public funds to guarantee private investments in the defence sector and technological innovation. This is an integrative proposal that would add a new instrument to those already envisaged by the ReArm Europe plan defined by Ursula von der Leyen with the aim of encouraging greater investment by European companies in the military sector.

Italy, for its part, is already in full swing towards rearmament. In fact, let’s not forget that **in 2025 military spending will be 32 billion, 13 billion of which will be spent on weapons alone!**

A new cycle of austerity policies and the revival of European imperialism

The rearmament and increase in the arms industry and arms trade in the EU aim to increase the GDP of member states and restore the rate of profit for companies and investors. This rearmament goes hand in hand, and cannot be otherwise, with the strengthening of new debt policies that in the medium term prelude a new cycle of austerity, generating a collective imagination of a threatened Europe that must respond according to the old parameters of ‘patriotic unity’. The EU – and with it our government that aligns itself with the right represented by Von der Leyen, Macron, Merz or Mark Rutte – responds to problems with the same imperialist logic as the United States, China or Russia. As the economist Brancaccio writes, ‘at a time when the debt crisis is forcing the American empire to reduce its area of influence and to burden even its vassals with duties, the problem of European diplomacy becomes one: to plan an autonomous imperialism, capable of accompanying the projection of European capitalism towards the outside with an autonomous military power’, [Il Manifesto](#), 13 March 2025.

Military companies are and will obviously be the main beneficiaries of increased military spending. It is the arms industries, concentrated in a small number of Member States, that have increasing influence in shaping the Commission’s strategic choices.

They are located in France, Germany and Italy and their turnover is by no means negligible. According to the SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) sources, while American groups represent 50% of the total sales of the top 100 companies in the world, European groups account for 14% and British groups 7%. Among the European companies, the one that does the most business is Leonardo, while the second is Airbus, a Franco-German company. These handful of large European groups dominate production and public orders in the Member States and influence the Commission’s strategy. Claude Serfati emphasises that ‘The support of the major European groups by national governments has enabled them to create powerful channels of influence at the community level (Commission, European Parliament, etc.). Since the 2000s, the heads of the main European defence groups have been present in the working groups set up by the Commission. In recent years, lobbying of the Commission and Parliament has increased considerably in line with the militarisation of the EU, even if the European defence groups have not been able to influence the Commission. [Claude Serfati, *Un monde en guerres*, Textuel, p.

180].

So, while strong contrasts and contradictions remain between the various European countries, war and crises are pushing the EU towards greater military integration, driven by military companies.

With the current shift under Donald Trump, the push for armament is therefore inevitable and should concern us, given that throughout history all arms races in Europe have ended in tragedy and massacre. This arms race will be financed by attacking social achievements and by liquidating what remains of the welfare state. It will also involve cuts to democratic rights and policies that are costly for the extreme right, such as the reintroduction of compulsory military service in some countries, which could, on the whole, reactivate the struggles against the cuts and the attacks on living conditions and anti-war movements.

Fortress Europe and securitarianism as part of the militarisation process

Repressive measures against migrants are an integral part of the ongoing militarisation process. It is no coincidence that these measures have grown exponentially over the last few years. In about twenty years, EU funding to countries on the other side of the Mediterranean aimed at outsourcing the control and management of migratory flows has reached more than 130 billion euros. In 2021 Frontex, the agency in charge of controlling migration flows in the Mediterranean, received unprecedented funding of 5.6 billion euros, which will be covered in the period 2021-2027 **with an increase of 194% compared to the previous budget cycle**. This funding includes the purchase of new 'lethal and non-lethal' weapons. It will be difficult to distinguish the former from the latter.

This is how migration policy sheds a much more realistic light on the behaviour of European countries compared to the declarations of their leaders on the 'democratic values' on which European integration is based.

The true face of the European Union: the Europe of Capital, neocolonial and racist

How credible is the European Union as a bastion of democracy after it was unable to stop trading arms with Israel while it committed genocide against the Palestinian people? What credibility can France have, when it has plundered and controlled the economy of most of its former colonies? What credibility can Italy have, when it defends tooth and nail those sinister torturers who prevent migrants from reaching the Italian coast?

If classical imperialism justified its intervention with the need to civilise other peoples by exporting the values of Western culture. Starting with the Iraq war in 1990, contemporary imperialism has proclaimed a humanitarian imperative for its military operations, justifying them with the aim of overthrowing dictatorial governments.

With the deepening of geopolitical chaos and the intensification of the inter-imperialist clash, these objectives have not disappeared. Thus today the European Union bases its warmongering rhetoric in the name of peace and democracy. All this is not only repugnant, but is also profoundly functional to a project that wants to strengthen a colonial and racist Europe of capital and feeds the momentum of the extreme right. However they are financed, the EU's rearmament plans will only benefit the big capitalists, the merchants of death who are already rubbing their hands with glee at the increase in the value of their shares. However they are financed, the rearmament plans will be accompanied by a restriction of political rights within the countries.

Denouncing the false ‘pax trumpista’

Fighting against war, militarism and imperialists means also denouncing the false peace proposed by Trump. The re-elected US president has radically changed his country’s position on the war in Ukraine. The United States has gone from arming Ukraine and leading NATO allies to opening bilateral ceasefire negotiations directly with Vladimir Putin, excluding his former allies – the European powers and Zelensky himself – from the talks.

Trump’s message is categorical and rather blackmail-like: either Zelensky (and his European allies) accept the conditions negotiated by Putin for a ceasefire, or the United States will withdraw. Negotiations are ongoing, or rather have just begun. Although the details of the first meeting between Russia and the United States in Riyadh are not known, any agreement between the two presupposes that Ukraine admits defeat, which implies at least accepting the loss of 20% of the territory occupied by the Russians (the four autonomous regions of Donbass plus the Crimea); and that it declares itself neutral, renouncing its claim to join NATO (and the EU). On the other hand, Putin has made it a condition that elections be held in Ukraine without Zelensky, and is advocating his replacement with a government favourable to the Kremlin.

Furthermore, Trump is demanding that Zelensky sign an agreement for the exploitation of minerals and rare earths, according to which the United States would retain half of these resources, as compensation for the military aid received. It should be remembered that Zelensky himself was the first to propose this practically colonial transaction to Trump, hoping to obtain a security guarantee from the United States in exchange, something that clearly will not happen.

Time seems to be playing in Putin’s favour. Before accepting a ceasefire he will certainly try to consolidate and perhaps extend his progress on the battlefield, and to guarantee some ‘red lines’ for the Kremlin, including the neutrality of Ukraine, which includes the demilitarisation of the Ukrainian state, a buffer zone and the assurance that there will be no NATO troops.

The fate of Ukraine, battered by three years of conflict, is therefore becoming a prize fought over by the United States and Russia, with the European powers claiming their share, for now unfortunately. The self-determination of the Ukrainian people cannot be achieved through the false peace plan agreed by Trump and Putin, but only through a real ceasefire that leads to the establishment of real talks involving all the actors in the field, starting with the Ukrainians.

For a united European mobilisation against the ongoing militarisation – Stop Rearm Europe!

Faced with the new, increasingly bleak scenarios, it is more urgent than ever to push for a united European mobilisation against militarisation. **This is why we firmly support the appeal [‘Stop Rearm Europe – welfare, not warfare’](#)**, launched by Transform Europe, the Transnational Institute, Arci and Attac Italy, among others.

We will do this as internationalists and ecosocialists, focussing on the battle against this neo-colonial and imperialist Europe of Capital, for another Europe, the necessary and indispensable one we want, a Europe of workers, united, peaceful and anti-racist, focussing on the self-determination of its peoples.

Precisely for this reason, we will do it, without ever forgetting anti-colonial solidarity with struggles such as that of the

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Palestinian people in the face of Zionist genocide, so that the self-determination of the Kurdish people and of Rojava is recognised. It is clear that the ruling class has no other plan than to accelerate the open crises: a project based on investing in the 'means of destruction' of life and the planet, to defend the interests of the bourgeoisie. For this reason we think it is necessary to organise a confrontation within an ecosocialist programme, which tackles their rearmament plans and fights at all levels against the Europe of capital with the perspective of an ecosocialist United States of Europe as an alternative to the barbarism of the present.

We will do this because we are against all forms of imperialism, against the US-NATO of both the Biden and Trump administrations, against the militaristic and warmongering European bourgeoisie, as well as against Putin and his imperial and tsarist regime, all of whom are united in using their oppressive tools to maintain their spheres of domination; and because we have no confidence in other emerging capitalist powers.

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Source: [Sinistra Anticapitalista](#).

PS:

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