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Militarism, Neoliberalism, Elitism: The Agenda of the French EU Council Presidency

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An E-Mail by a senior Irish official has been leaked to the press recently. According to this Mail, the government originally preferred to hold the referendum about the Treaty of Lisbon in the autumn of 2008: "But the risk of unhelpful developments during the French presidency - particularly related to EU defence - were just too great", the official is quoted.[1] The French population already noticed that their president Nicolas Sarkozy is good for many bad surprises, not the least because of his dismantling of the welfare state, his approval ratings are on a historical low. Nevertheless, the French President now intends to act on the European level, too. The chances for this are good as France took over the EU-Council Presidency on the 1st of July for the next six months. Especially in the realm of the "European Security and Defence Policy" (ESDP) Sarkozy has ambitious plans.

As is well known, the preponing of the Irish referendum was in vain. On the 12th of June, the Irish population rejected the Treaty of Lisbon. With this "No", the ambitions of the European governments to transform the EU into a military union, has been reined in. But as advancing the EU's military policy is a central project of the Union's elites, they want to proceed without a new treaty, too: "We want to advance the European defence, whatever the future of the Treaty of Lisbon is" Sarkozy said to the online magazine *Europolitan* on the 18th of June. The French Council Presidency, Sarkozy continued, will "be the first step for the rejuvenation of the European defence in the years to come." The plans of the French Council Presidency are

encompassing a significant intensification of the relationship between the European Union and NATO as well as concrete armaments projects. Furthermore, under the term "Global Europe", it intends to start a major offensive in the military and economic realm. Last but not least, the French Presidency will also try to implement the Treaty of Lisbon.

France is besides Germany the major proponent of the "keep-it-up" approach. The ratification process shall go on, regardless of the Irish referendum. Respecting the sovereign – the population – has never been a matter near to the heart of the EU-elites. Originally, it was – and still is - planned that during the French Presidency, parts of the still not ratified treaty will be realized, especially in the area of military policy. In a document, published at the beginning of June, the French Presidency still intended to "bring forward the necessary preparations in order to implement the treaty timely and smoothly and to assure that the treaty can be fully used from the time it is entering into force." [2]

Due to the Irish population and the superb work of CAEUC (Campaign Against the EU Constitution), the French government is now forced to cope with this situation in order to get the treaty into force by one way or the other. For this purpose, various proposals are currently in the discussion – they reach from building a core Europe until throwing the Irish out of the EU. But currently, the most probable option is to let the Irish population simply vote ones again, either with some cosmetic changes or in combination

with the question of whether Ireland intends to stay in the European Union. A final decision about how to proceed will be prepared until the next EU summit in October.

Once again, the EU elites' understanding of democracy is revealing. Instead of respecting the decision of the Irish population they want to let them vote until the results seem to fit the governors of the member states, the EU Commission, the EU Council and the majority in the European Parliament. This procedure has already been practiced at the end of 2002 after the Irish "No" to the Treaty of Nice.

Arming formally correct

The reason for this upholding of the Lisbon Treaty is the fact that several crucial aspects, especially in the military area, cannot be realized without the treaty. But also the intention to change the distribution of power in the EU's most relevant institution, the Council, dramatically in favour of the biggest member states depends on the treaty. Only after the treaty is ratified, the German voting count would skyrocket from currently 8,4 percent to 16,72 percent (but France would also heavily benefit).

Furthermore, currently it is forbidden to build "avant-garde-groups" in the area of military policy which can exclusively decide over policies in this area without having to consider the opinions of other states not taking part. The "Permanent Structured Cooperation" of the Lisbon Treaty will make this possible for the first time thereby annulling the consensus principle currently holding in the area of military policy. The goal of such Permanent Structured Cooperations was revealed when Sarkozy proposed to use this instrument to build a "directorate" in the area of military policy consisting of France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain and Poland.[3] Without a new treaty such proposals simply do not have the necessary legal ground to materialize.

Additionally, the Treaty of Nice explicitly prohibits the establishment of a European military budget

(in addition to the budgets of the member states). Therefore ESDP missions have to be funded via other ways – for example by using funds from the European Development Funds or by the juridically questionable ATHENA mechanism. Hereby, the EU member states are paying into an extra budget which is not part of the European Union. In order to improve this problematic financial situation, the Lisbon Treaty intends to establish an official European military budget, called "start-up fund". That's why the French Council Presidency originally intended to integrate the ATHENA funds into the European Union in order to be able to pursue its militarization projects in a formally correct manner. Finally, the deployment of military troops within the member states will also be prohibited without a new treaty, too.

Notwithstanding these serious difficulties, the French Council Presidency faces due to the Irish referendum, it nevertheless intends to pave the way for ground-breaking novelties in the area of military policy, especially regarding the relationship between the European Union and NATO.

The French return to NATO

Shortly after he took office, Sarkozy announced that France will fully re-integrate itself into NATO's military structures after being absent for more than 40 years. In 1966, then President Charles de Gaulles justified the French withdrawal with his discontent over America's domination of the alliance. Since then, the French military policy aimed to strengthen autonomous European capacities and thereby implicitly and sometimes explicitly tried to weaken the United States and NATO.

In this context, a paradigm shift seems to be in the making: "France had long championed the EU over NATO but President Nicolas Sarkozy changed that. He has ordered his diplomats to stop obstructing NATO's work and offered to return France to NATO's military structures." [4] During its Council Presidency, France intends to

fully return into NATO's Defence Committee (whether it will also return to the Nuclear Planning Group is unclear, yet). Sarkozy sees this as an important confidence-building measure vis-à-vis the United States which is necessary in order to bring the EU and NATO closer together. This goal is one of the main projects of the French Council Presidency: "Strengthening EU/NATO cooperation, including increasing transparency, will be a priority, both at the strategic and tactical levels. [...] Generally, the transatlantic relations will be intensified regarding political, economic and military questions." [5] Whether France's NATO rapprochement will cause an institutional reorganization of the alliance is not decided, yet. For this purpose a far-reaching proposal has been put forward recently which could change the relationship between the European Union and NATO dramatically.

Not surprisingly, these considerations are made in a time, when NATO is in one of its most difficult phases in its history. The missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan are underscoring that the alliance has transformed itself into a globally acting organization not only waging war around the globe but also engaging into quasi colonial occupations. In light of the bloody escalation in Afghanistan und NATO's huge difficulties to "pacify" this country, the alliance is working on concepts in order to improve their capacities for such occupations. As soldiers are not well suited for the administration of quasi colonies like Afghanistan, more civil capacities (jurists, engineers, humanitarian workers, etc.) are necessary which shall help the military in its mission. Thereby, civil capacities are de facto subordinated under the military. This Civil Military Cooperation (CIMIC), called by NATO the "comprehensive approach", shall be massively expanded in the years to come.

But concerning the civil capacities, neither the United States nor NATO have enough capacities. As France also wants to be rewarded for its full return into NATO's military structures with important posts, the "Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik" a German think tank with very close ties to the government, recently made the following

proposal: "France [should] use its EU Presidency for a masterstroke: connecting NATO and the EU by creating an operational civil-military EU planning and conduct capability closely linked to NATO's capacities at SHAPE. [...] This would lead to a situation where the EU and NATO were closely connected. [U]nder the motto of 'Berlin Plus Reversed' NATO could be granted the opportunity to draw on the EU's civilian capacities." [6] While the Berlin Plus Agreement of March 2003 assures that NATO's military capacities can be used for EU missions, the new arrangement shall go the other way round by providing "civilian" EU occupiers for NATO missions.

Major neoliberal offensive

With the Lisbon strategy issued in 2000, the European Union formulated the ambitious goal to be the world's premium economic power in the year 2010. For this purpose, the neoliberal remodelling within the member states has been forced. In Germany, for example, this resulted in the "Agenda 2010" and the accompanying dismantling of the welfare state.

But it was soon realized that this high-flying goal also requires the aggressive opening of new markets all over the world. Therefore the EU-Commission began under the title "Global Europe" to work on an external dimension of the Lisbon strategy. The result has been published in October 2007 under the title "The European Interest: Succeeding in the age of globalisation". The paper intends to provide the backbone for a European approach to globalisation." In fact, European economic interests have scarcely been expressed in a similar and more aggressive way: "Externally, the EU is prospering from its openness to the rest of the world – in economic terms, but also in terms of cultural and knowledge exchange, and in terms of the recognition given to European values worldwide. As the world's largest exporter of goods and services and its largest importer of goods, the largest importer of energy, the second largest source and the second largest destination of foreign direct

investment, the EU is a major beneficiary of an open world economic system. [...] It has an obvious stake in defining the rules of global governance in a way that reflects its interests and values. [...] Whilst the EU needs to protect its citizens, its interests and its values, protectionism cannot be the solution. As the world's leading trader and investor, our openness allows lower cost inputs for industry, lower prices for consumers, a competitive stimulus for business, and new investment. At the same time, it is important for the EU to use its influence in international negotiations to seek openness from others: the political case for openness can only be sustained if others reciprocate in a positive manner. The EU needs to ensure that third countries offer proportionate levels of openness to EU exporters and investors and to have ground rules which do not impinge on our capacity to protect our interests." [7] The egalitarian terms like "openness" or "equal opportunities" are masquerading naked economic interests as free trade always benefits the stronger actor. So the Commission in fact argues like someone who would claim a car race between a bus and a Ferrari would be fair only because both are using the same road.

Nevertheless, the French Presidency regards the Global Europe approach as the blueprint for its foreign economic policy. It intends to "work on the implementation of the Commission Communication on Global Europe [and to] renew the EU's commitment to Global Europe by asking the Commission for an up-date as a formal and integral part of the Lisbon Strategy." [8] In April 2008, the French government already published a document called "Euroworld 2015". Its core element is also to complement the Lisbon strategy with an aggressive external dimension, a step it regards as ground-breaking: "In effect, the weight given to the external dimension is not insignificant: it signals the fact that European unification is entering a new phase in its history, centred no longer on Europe itself but on its relationship with the rest of the world. This new phase represents a genuine paradigm shift, the implications of which we have attempted to explore. It is now up to the French EU presidency

to start carrying through this new strategic vision." [9]

With this strategy, the further impoverishment of the so called Third World is knowingly accepted and even forced. The results are catastrophic; no wonder that the military "pacification" of hunger revolts is growing in importance in military circles. French Defence Minister Hervé Morin hit the nail on the head when he said: "Our military tools have to adapt to globalisation and the new threats." [10]

Expanding the European Army

When the new French military White Book was published in June [11], Sarkozy announced at the same time his intention to heavily expand the European army. In the future, up to 60.000 soldiers should be deployable in the field. Although this army has already been decided in 1999 and declared operational four years later, it mainly existed on paper. The French government also wants to improve the maritime and air support for this army, capacities which had also demanded by the Kuhne-report of the European Parliament. [12]

French secretary of state for European affairs, Jean Pierre Jouyet even envisions "concrete goals" for the next ten years. "He named among others a common air and sea combat troop and a commonly used transport fleet consisting of Airbus A400M." [13] Furthermore, currently the maneuver MILX 09 is being prepared which will be held in the year 2009. In this exercise, the deployment of a maritime component will be trained for the first time without recourse to NATO assets. This also fits in neatly. Notwithstanding his rapprochement towards NATO, Sarkozy always emphasised that he also wants to strengthen the EU's autonomous military structures. Therefore he advocates expanding the existing planning cell for military operations into a full European headquarter. Furthermore, the French military White Book wants to double the funds for the country's military space assets up to 700 million euro per year. This is fully in line with

the Wogau-report of the European Parliament on the "contribution of space assets to ESDP" who also pleads for a massive budget increase on the European level.[14]

A further priority of the French Council Presidency is the adoption of a directive prepared by the Commission formally aimed at the "harmonization" of the European armaments sector. In reality, the directive will de facto end export controls for armaments sales within the European Union. As the directive has virtually no control mechanisms whether those arms will be re-exported outside the European Union, this offers the possibility to undermine national export controls and to foster arms trade with problematic conflict ridden regions.[15]

A final but very important point that shall be tackled during the French Council Presidency will be the update of the European Security Strategy from December 2003 which is scheduled for the end of this year. Especially energy security and climate change shall be given a higher priority in the updated version. In April, Javier Solana already published a European climate change strategy which advocated increasing Europe's crises management capacities in order to (militarily) cope with the consequences of climate change.[16]

Thanks to the Irish population, the militarization of the European Union is temporarily slowed down. Although the European elites are currently massively trying to get the Lisbon Treaty passed one way or the other, the Irish example shows that opposition against the undemocratic, neoliberal and militaristic policies of the European Union is not only necessary but that it can also be successful.

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<http://openeuropeblog.blogspot.com/2008/04/irish-memo-in-full.html>

[2] Entwurf des Achtzehnmonatsprogramms des Rates, Brüssel, den 9. Juni 2008.

[3] Howorth, Jolyon: The Future of European Security, EXPO/B/SEDE/2008/16, March 2008.

[4] Valasek, Thomas: France, NATO and European Defence, CER Policy Brief, May 2008, p. 1.

[5] Entwurf des Achtzehnmonatsprogramms des Rates, Brüssel, den 9. Juni 2008, S. 78, 85.

[6] Kempin, Ronja: Could France Bring NATO and the EU Closer Together? SWP Comments 2008/C11, Mai 2008.

[7] EU-Commission: The European Interest: Succeeding in the age of globalisation, COM(2007) 581 final, Brussels, 3.10.2007.

[8] Entwurf des Achtzehnmonatsprogramms des Rates, S. 25.

[9] République Française: Euroworld 2015: A European Strategy for Globalisation, 15.4.08.

[10] Frankreich verkleinert Armee, Tagesspiegel, 16.6.08.

[11] An English version of the French White Book can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/528j9y>

[12] Kuhne, Helmut: Entwurf eines Berichts über die Umsetzung der Europäischen Sicherheitsstrategie und der ESVP (2008/2003(INI)), 31.1.2008.

[13] Frankreich verkleinert Armee, Tagesspiegel, 16.6.08.

[14] DRAFT REPORT on the contribution of space-supported systems to ESDP (2008/2030(INI)), Rapporteur: Karl von Wogau.

[15] Commission of the European Communities, Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on simplifying terms and conditions of transfers of defence-related products within the Community, Brussels, COM(2007) 765 final.

[16] Climate Change and International Security, Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council, S113/08, 14.03.2008, URL: <http://tinyurl.com/6s3qe3>

[1] Irish Memo in Full, URL:

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