



PEOPLE'S NEWS

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“The EU is in a unique position to provide global security”

The European Union is in a unique position to provide global security, according to Federica Mogherini, the EU's head of foreign affairs and vice-president of the EU Commission, who stated that the EU had both the “hard” and the “soft” power needed to accomplish the task.

Speaking in Estonia, she said: “There is a European way to security that is never purely and only military. You take any crisis or security threat in the world of today, and you realise that the hard power, the military means are always necessary but never enough.

“The European Union has this unique mix of hard power that needs to be increased because it's not enough, what we have now, but we have at the same time the soft power. And this is a unique mix if we manage to increase our hard power, position ourselves in a place that can be very helpful for our partners in the world to tackle some security issues.”

If the bloc had the “political courage” to take on the role it could become an institution that provides worldwide security. “So I think that the work we have ahead of us is huge but we have, if we are self-confident and we take the political courage to use the potential we have, we could be indeed the security provider for European regions, and more largely the world.”

Feeding the casino economy

The president of the EU Central Bank, Mario Draghi, recently let the cat out of the bag when he revealed to a committee of the Dutch Parliament that, while the EU preaches the gospel of austerity for ordinary folk, the ECB

pumps some €60 billion per month in debt securities into banks and corporations.

It does this by buying bonds from companies such as Shell and Heineken. These profit-making (and polluting) corporations certainly don't need the money, nor do they invest it in the productive economy, preferring to play around with it in the casino economy.



The Dutch legislators challenged Draghi to explain why the ECB is keeping interest rates low. The effect of this policy is a massive redistribution of income between labour and capital.

As one member of the parliament told Draghi, “pensioners are losing out while high-risk investors and the wealthy are making hay, and all the time the chances of a further financial bubbles is growing.”

The ECB mandate precludes it from buying up government bonds, despite this being a way of directly stimulating the economy.

Meanwhile Draghi and the ECB's senior officials operate for a large part of the time in a semi-clandestine manner, with very little in the way of a record of who they meet or what is discussed at such meetings. Yet these are the officials who have it in their power to dole out

€60 billion per month to the undeserving “corporate poor” and preach austerity to the rest of us!

“An EU army is a project that would give additional weight to the EU foreign and security policy”

The president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has finally admitted to a plan for an EU army after it emerged that France and Germany are behind a joint fund to pay for drones and robots.



Juncker said the military force would add “additional weight to the European foreign and security policy,” bringing the controversial force one step closer to becoming a reality. His remarks came after it emerged that the EU is planning to set up a budget for the first time for military purposes, in the wake of Britain’s Brexit vote.

The proposed European Defence Fund would finance the development of prototype military projects such as cyber-defence technology, including robots and drones. The plan is being pushed forward by France and Germany.

Juncker told the German news site Salzburg.com: *“A European army is not a project for the near future. It is, however, a project that would give additional weight to the European foreign and security policy. Even though the road may still be long, we could already focus our strengths better. That is precisely why the Commission has proposed a European Defence Fund.”*

The plan for the fund will be unveiled by early June by the EU Commission, which

believes the fund could spend €500 million per year on research from 2020. Foreign and defence ministers discussed the project at a meeting in Brussels in early May.

Britain has always pushed hard to prevent an EU Army being formed, making clear its view that military action should be co-ordinated through NATO, and that it would veto any decision to create a pan-European army.

However, Britain’s departure from the EU—which could happen by 2020—has opened up an opportunity for the remaining big powers, Germany and France, to push forward with the EU army project.

Wake up to TiSA!

Since 2012 the European Union has been negotiating a treaty with twenty-two countries on five continents, known as the Trade in Services Agreement.



The negotiators are attempting to force almost all services to be put out to tender, not merely in the twenty-eight EU states but also among these twenty-two countries. That is to say, for example, veterinary practices in Taiwan, banks in Iceland, and—a brilliant idea—tax advisers from Panama.

The only exception the negotiators have raised is for services relating to public security. So we won’t be seeing Japanese soldiers or Israeli police on our streets; but the list of services that would be thrown open to companies from other countries is long. It includes not only local health services but also hospital care and the ambulance service.

Aside from a great deal of the health

service, private education would also be put on the market, opening the door to expensive Swiss and American firms offering education and training for the children of the rich. Not only the provision of financial and legal services but also postal, water transport and dental services would be thrown open.

If you want to bid for health services you won't need any qualifications, or even to register as an officially recognised health worker.

Already alarm bells are beginning to sound in other member-states about the risks involved in an obligation to put local health services out to tender.

The most important objection to the public procurement law is that private care-providers from other countries would lack local knowledge, and that the duty to tender throughout Europe is creating an enormous bureaucratic burden.

Meanwhile the EU continues to work steadily towards a treaty on services that will only make the problems worse.

Who is Paul Kehoe?

Paul Kehoe is minister of state at the Departments of the Taoiseach and Defence, with special responsibility for defence. He would stand in for the Taoiseach at EU military meetings.



Here is an extract from what he had to say recently regarding military procurement. It's noteworthy that he didn't say anything about the ultimate object of this "co-operation"—the

standardisation of equipment produced in the EU for an EU army. A quick look at the agency's web site and publications will convince you!

"At EU level, there is a range of initiatives in the area of capability development that are in place or are currently being discussed. These include Ireland's participation in the European Defence Agency, EDA. Ireland has participated in the European Defence Agency since it was established in 2004.

Ireland also participates in a collaborative database which is managed by the EDA. This database provides a platform for engaging with other member states on a number of fronts, including collaborative or joint procurement.

Over the last number of years, the Government has invested €250 million in the ships replacement programme. At the moment, our armoured personnel carriers are being refurbished at a total value of €55 million. We have also issued a tender for the replacement of the Cessna aircraft in the Air Corps. It is important in any investment we make in the Defence Forces that there is a provision—there is one in the EU—in regard to how we can get better value for money for the taxpayer in working and collaborating with our close EU neighbours in terms of investment in machinery or otherwise for the betterment of the Irish Defence Forces."

The European Patent Office—a bad employer

At the European Patent Office, workers' rights are being violated on a grand scale. Union leaders have been sacked, the pressure of work grows with each passing year, and employees have to contend with a tyrannical management.

Both in its Dutch office in Rijswijk and its head office in Munich, the pressure of work has already led to several suicides. As things stand, employees can only present a complaint to the International Labour Organisation, a process that takes years.



Because the EPO is a transnational organisation, it is exempt from a great deal of national law under the Protocol on Privileges and Immunities, despite having thousands of employees in member-states.

An amendment to the protocol could ensure that not only the EPO but other transnational organisations must respect national labour law and ensure that people who work at the EPO could take their grievances to court.

But unfortunately no-one expects reforms any time soon.

The militarist legacy of Enda Kenny

Federica Mogherini, vice-president of the EU Commission and its high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, has said that the contribution of France under its new president, Emmanuel Macron, would be more important to the project's military ambitions than Britain, which is not expected to contribute when it quits the club.

Mogherini made the remarks as she arrived at a summit meeting of defence ministers in Brussels, at which they are expected to rubber-stamp a plan for a new EU military headquarters and an expansion of the bloc's battle groups. This will be one of Enda Kenny's legacies as minister for defence.



EU officials have an ambitious plan to pool military resources, and they want to change the way foreign interventions are paid for in future, to encourage member-states to put "boots on the ground" on behalf of Brussels. Mogherini has repeatedly insisted that the proposal is not for the creation of an EU army, but critics say that the EU is slowly syphoning away powers from member-states through a form of "legislative capture."

Mogherini said: "At the moment I don't see the consequence of Brexit on our work. We are still twenty-eight, we will continue to work at twenty-eight by consensus and it's working well up until now." She expected to see France provide a "push" to the process under its new Europhile president, and that it would play a "more important" role, along with Germany, Italy, Spain, and Estonia.

"I honestly see a determination on the part of the other twenty-seven member-states to make a European defence one of the key dossiers for the future of the EU."

These twenty-seven include Ireland, whose people generally haven't a clue about what's going on and what's being agreed to in their name.

The EU's military plans include the ability to act "autonomously," independently of NATO, while the president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has said the club needs its own army in order to be a true global power.

EU trade deals must be ratified by all members

EU trade agreements must be ratified by all member-states, the EU Court of Justice has ruled, with possible consequences for Brexit.

Britain hopes to win a fast-track trade deal with the EU after it negotiates its divorce; but the decision by the ECJ could scupper that plan.

In a closely watched decision, the court said that any trade agreement that includes a non-court dispute settlement system (formerly known as investor-state dispute settlement)

would require ratification by the EU's thirty-eight national and regional authorities.

Crucially, the court also said that transport, intellectual property rights and labour and environmental standards are exclusively within the EU's competence, significantly extending the power of the Commission in another example of "competence creep." So this has been only a partial victory.

"It follows that the free trade agreement can, as it stands, only be concluded by the EU and the Member States jointly," the court said in a statement. The decision applied to a treaty between the EU and Singapore signed in 2013 but will stand as crucial jurisprudence for future trade agreements, including any deal with Britain, which may now, at the very least, be subject to ratification by the Oireachtas.



Quasi-legal private arbitration systems—a core part of international trade deals—have drawn fierce opposition from activists who see them as being under the influence of corporate interests, in a case of corporate sovereignty trumping national sovereignty. Last year the small region of Wallonia in Belgium almost killed off the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the EU and Canada after years of talks, because of its opposition to this system.

That tussle emphasised the dangers posed to corporate plans by a ratification process that involves high-tension votes in national or regional parliaments. This is a vulnerability that campaigners against CETA can now exploit to the full.

The EU Commission, which under the

Lisbon Treaty handles trade negotiations for all the EU member-states, saw the Singapore deal as a new standard that reflected bigger powers won by Brussels. In the Commission's plans the Singapore deal would have required only the green light of the EU Council (which groups officials and ministers from the EU's twenty-eight governments) and the EU Parliament.

The British prime minister, Theresa May, has insisted that Britain could negotiate its departure from the EU and a new trading arrangement within two years; but the EU-Canada agreement took seven years to negotiate and has only now begun the long national approval process.

Some Irish legal opinion maintains that a constitutional referendum on CETA will be required because of the inclusion of the Investment Court proposal, which would allow corporations to sue governments for enacting progressive legislation if it affected profits. If this is the case the Government should not have to be brought to court itself in order for that referendum to be held but should immediately announce its intention to hold one. After all, it has been trumpeting the advantages of this deal—and TTIP—so it should be confident of carrying it.

More on Kenny, EU militarisation, and even Brexit

In his speech on Brexit on 15 February the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, said:

"We are being buffeted by strong external forces—of politics, of economics and of technology. The greatest of these, of course, is Brexit ... We must make sure that we shape that future for ourselves. I firmly believe that we can. My purpose today is to explain how."

He went on to say that in 2016, "as we commemorated the Centenary of the Easter Rising, we recalled the achievements of the revolutionary generation ... It was a year of renewal—renewal of our sense of ourselves and of the values we hold dear. It is those

enduring Irish values that will guide us safely through the stormy seas in the years ahead. The values of freedom and democracy, of openness, of tolerance, of community, of solidarity and of respect for others.”

Kenny’s list of Irish values omits the 1916 values of anti-imperialism, independence, and solidarity—specifically solidarity with colonised and decolonising nations.

He went on to say: “Our values are European values, too. They are the common values that animate our European Union. They are the values that bind us together as a Union of democratic states, working together for the greater good of our common European home.”

His statements fail to recognise that EU foreign policy is driven by French and German foreign-policy ambitions, cloaked in European multilateralism, to achieve “great power” or “global actor” status to rival that of the United States. These are not traditional Irish foreign-policy values.

“Three years after the Rising, in 1919, the First Dáil met to formally declare our independence ... But that message contained an essential and abiding truth about Ireland—we are a European island nation.”



What that Message to the Free Nations of the World actually said was that Ireland *“believes in freedom and justice as the fundamental principles of international law, because she believes in a frank co-operation between the peoples for equal rights against the vested privileges of ancient tyrannies, because the permanent peace of Europe can*

never be secured by perpetuating military dominion for the profit of empire but only by establishing the control of government in every land upon the basis of the free will of a free people.”

These values—resisting vested interests and ensuring peace in Europe through national sovereignty, based on what the people of Ireland want in their foreign policy—must be reiterated on the centenary of the first Dáil; and we have an ideal opportunity to do so.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921. On 19 December Arthur Griffith said in Dáil Éireann: *“It is the first Treaty that admits the equality of Ireland ... We have brought back to Ireland her full rights and powers of fiscal control.”*

Recent Governments, on the other hand, have given up control of this state’s fiscal policy through the EU bail-out scheme—indicative of the fate of what is left of Irish foreign policy, which will most probably be sacrificed for the EU’s ambitions.

These ambitions are exemplified by Federica Mogherini, who, speaking in Estonia earlier this month, claimed that the EU is in a unique position to provide global security. She asserted that if the bloc had the “political courage” to take on the role it could become an institution that provides worldwide security—but you’ll notice there is no mention of neutrals!

In his Brexit speech Kenny argued that as members of “a Union with other like-minded democracies who share our values and interests, we have a much more powerful voice on the global stage.” Unfortunately, he has been an agent in diluting Ireland’s voice on the global stage, in order to align it with EU interests or even the interests of individual members.

For instance, two helicopters and five hundred soldiers—17 per cent of the entire Irish army—were the core unit of EUFOR Chad, the EU peace-enforcing command, which was

controlled directly by the EU and essentially was supporting a force of 2,500 French soldiers. The force undertook operations in both Chad and Darfur, a large province of Sudan. Until his retirement in 2009, the bemedalled Lieutenant-General Pat Nash (below), formerly officer commanding the 1st (Southern) Brigade, was the overall commander of this force, which was presented as being on a peace mission.



But back to Kenny, who also said in his Brexit speech: “If we believe in a vision of a bright future for our continent and for our European values, then we must place that vision at the heart of our discussions. Otherwise, we will be playing into the hands of those who do not share those values, or that vision. But let me also make one thing absolutely clear—Ireland will be on the EU side of the table when the negotiations begin. We will be one of the 27.”

In adopting this identity for us all as a “European island,” Kenny failed to recognise that the job of the leader of this state is to defend *Irish* values and interests, and to be on the side of *Ireland* when negotiating Brexit.

Neither he nor his Government are on the side of the Irish people when it comes to direct involvement in the accelerating military developments that will inevitably lead to a *de facto* EU army.

This, ironically, is a development given momentum by Brexit (though Britain will have a vote until 2019), as the British always clung fast to NATO and opposed military developments in the EU, seeing them as merely a

vehicle for French and German global ambitions.

So even an Irish government serious about neutrality in the face of the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty would have lost a potentially valuable ally, although one whose opposition was for different reasons.

On 18 May, Enda Kenny, as minister for defence, rubberstamped the EU Council’s “conclusions” to create a new headquarters in Brussels for EU overseas military training missions and to prepare joint “battle groups” for future intervention in north Africa and the Middle East. These were previously approved by foreign ministers (that’s Charlie Flanagan) without a scintilla of explanation to those who elected them or even a modicum of public debate. This is conduct more characteristic of a dictatorship.

Furthermore, in the second week of May defence ministers returned to the topic in greater detail, together with the secretary-general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg. Presumably the Irish minister (Kenny) was in attendance, or perhaps it was Paul Kehoe. There wasn’t a peep out of him, though Britain and Poland kicked up a bit of a fuss (for different reasons).



The EU’s common foreign and security policy and common security and defence policy, as they have developed and as they will

develop according to stated EU plans, are incompatible with “our traditional policy of neutrality” as expressed through Irish foreign-policy values: anti-militarism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism, independence based on resistance to big-power foreign-policy agendas, the promotion of peace, impartiality, and solidarity with other small decolonised and decolonising nations.

No honeymoon for Macron

The election of Emmanuel Macron as president of France has received a rapturous welcome from the mainstream media as well as in the boardrooms and financial markets of international capital.



The scale of Macron’s victory has been greeted with relief and, in many quarters, is being presented as some sort of revalidation of France’s credentials as a liberal democracy committed to core republican values—among them liberty, equality, and fraternity.

The reality is somewhat remote from this comfort zone. The election process lifted the lid on deep divisions within French society, ruptures resulting from a thoroughgoing economic and political crisis.

At the most visible level, the political and constitutional arrangements that have existed since 1958 (the founding of the Fifth Republic) are under pressure as never before. A two-party system dominated by mainstream parties of the centre left and centre right is disintegrating before our eyes, while the extreme right is exerting formidable muscle

power in its attempt to present itself as a “legitimate” political alternative.

Beneath this lies a profound structural problem, accentuated and rendered intractable by the economic straitjacket imposed by the European Union. As elsewhere in Europe, national governments must answer to the EU Central Bank, the EU Commission and the International Monetary Fund when making economic decisions. Euro-zone members face demands to reduce budgetary deficits by cutting government spending, including spending on health and pensions and reducing public-sector employment, and to “liberate” the labour market by undermining job security and slashing away at workers’ hard-won protections and gains.

This no-option-but-austerity imperative is evident in the IMF’s article IV consultation for France, as well as the Stability Programme that France has signed up to with the EU. These documents insist that France freeze real spending and make a commitment to reducing its budgetary deficit to nil by 2021.

This rules out any effort by a French government to reduce mass unemployment, which is approximately 10 per cent but rises significantly among young workers. Also ruled out is any significant scheme of public investment, hence any realistic prospect of economic stimulus.

A look back over the past few decades reveals a succession of political leaders falling victim to the iron dictates of neo-liberalism and tumbling at the wayside. The most recent example is François Hollande of the centre-left Socialist Party, who was swept to power on a surge of optimistic expectations in the last presidential election in 2012.

While confident predictions were made about his ability to make use of his overwhelming mandate to propel France to better things, it did not take long for Hollande’s approval ratings to plumb previously unreachable depths. His government became indissolubly linked in people’s minds with intractable high

unemployment, repeated assaults on working people's rights, ill-conceived foreign adventures (Libya among them), and, since 2015, a permanent state of emergency.

French presidents routinely stand for a second term, but in Hollande's case this option was blocked by the party establishment, making him the first president of the Fifth Republic to "relinquish" this right.

The sway of neo-liberalism has also affected the relationship between traditional parties and their mass base. In the case of the Socialist Party, a hollowing-out process is evident, with a socialist-leaning base, which includes many trade unionists, finding itself increasingly at odds with the party leadership.

This discontent boiled over at the primary election the party held in January to choose its presidential candidate. Instead of backing the "official" choice—Manuel Valls, prime minister under Hollande and the architect of core elements of his anti-worker policies—party members and supporters opted for a candidate from the party's left wing, Benoît Hamon. This was the cue for operators on the party's right, Valls among them, to jump ship and join forces with Macron.



A parallel process of division and disintegration is evident on the centre-right, within the party now renamed Les Républicains (formerly the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire). Here too political impotence in the context of EU-enforced neo-liberal policies is wreaking havoc, with the addition of jaw-dropping levels of corruption to spice things up.

Once again, the choice of an American-style primary for selecting a presidential candidate was akin to opening Pandora's box: the "moderate" favoured by the party big-wigs was passed over in favour of François Fillon, champion of the party's right wing. Supposedly a man of rectitude and high principle, Fillon was soon revealed to be anything but: within weeks he was under investigation for the wholesale misuse of public funds (specifically payments of roughly a million euros to his wife for purely notional work). Undaunted, he battled on, causing many of his campaign supporters to abandon him and fatally weakening his party's effort to get through to the second round of the presidential poll.

The turmoil and hollowing-out evident within both of France's mainstream parties has thus created a vacuum, an opening that has enabled other forces to seize the initiative and join battle.

The victorious Macron represents what Tariq Ali has described as the "extreme centre"—a "dictatorship of capital that has reduced political parties to the status of the living dead," with centre-left and centre-right colluding to preserve the status quo. Young, telegenic, and charming, Macron is the embodiment of neo-liberalism as defined and enforced by European and global finance.

Backed by an army of tech-savvy enthusiasts organised in what is characterised as a "movement" rather than a party, the president-elect is casting himself as the new broom required to sweep away the detritus of the past and get France "*en marche*" (on the move). Adept at coining pleasing but empty phrases ("What France needs is more young people who want to become billionaires"; "Who cares about programmes? What counts is vision!"), Macron pursues a strategy whose content and overtones are eerily reminiscent of Tony Blair's New Labour.

As an ardent free-marketer and champion of the EU, Macron upholds the free movement of labour as well as of capital and is a devotee

of social liberalism. A former banker at Rothschild's, he served as a minister under Hollande, in which role he spearheaded (and lent his name to) a raft of legislation undermining crucial protections for workers. While seeking to style himself as "above" or "outside" traditional politics, Macron in fact constitutes its newest incarnation.

Abstentions this time were higher than in any French election since 1969. Together with blank and spoiled ballots, 34 per cent of the electorate chose none of the above.



Macron's solutions are therefore reforms that push down wages (laws weakening

unions), increase labour supply (tightening eligibility for unemployment insurance and other social benefits), and worsen job security.

The Macron law of 2015, which made it easier for employers to sack workers, is a good example of how much these reforms are worth in improving the economy or employment. The OECD looked at five sets of provisions in this law and estimated that these would lead to a GDP ten years from now that is merely 0.4 per cent bigger than it would be without the law. In other words, France would have a GDP in August 2025 that it would otherwise not have until December 2025.

Macron's deficit reduction and structural reforms are part of the problem, not the solution. They may worsen French income distribution and create more economic insecurity, but that will not resolve the real structural problems that have collapsed the centrist parties in France, whose basic programme Macron will probably continue to implement.