

“Ever-closer union”: another nail in the coffin of fiscal independence

In 2009 the German parliament made balanced budgets constitutionally mandatory. In 2012 Germany induced the other euro-zone countries, and the non-euro states other than Britain and the Czech Republic, to adopt the Fiscal Compact or Fiscal Stability Treaty.

Critics correctly called this the “Permanent Austerity Treaty.” Ireland required a constitutional referendum to ratify it, and this was duly held and carried.

Even though this treaty was an “intergovernmental” one between 26 of the 28 EU states (excluding Britain and the Czech Republic), the treaty’s preamble stated that it was the objective of the euro-zone states and others to incorporate it as soon as possible in the EU treaties, so that it would bind everyone.



On 6 December the EU Parliament will be on view playing its role in this process. According to Agence Europe, in the initial parliamentary debate, after a formal statement of the intention to make the fiscal pact EU law, the response from members was overwhelmingly in favour, including support from mainstream social democrats.

Marco Valli of the Five-Star Movement accurately summarised the proposed act as the “institutionalisation of the troika,” referring to the infamous coalition of debt collectors that ravaged Greece.

The impending legislation will be achieved through a process carried out in the name of “ever-closer union” (the vice-president of the EU Council, Valdis Dombrovskis, used the word “deepening”).

Most of the European mainstream left hold that without national fiscal flexibility the possibility of promoting credible progressive policies is no more than a pipe-dream. Now the one institution that the same leftists hold up as the fount of “EU democracy” is seeking to enshrine in EU law a scheme for German austerity that forbids Keynesian-style economic stimulus.

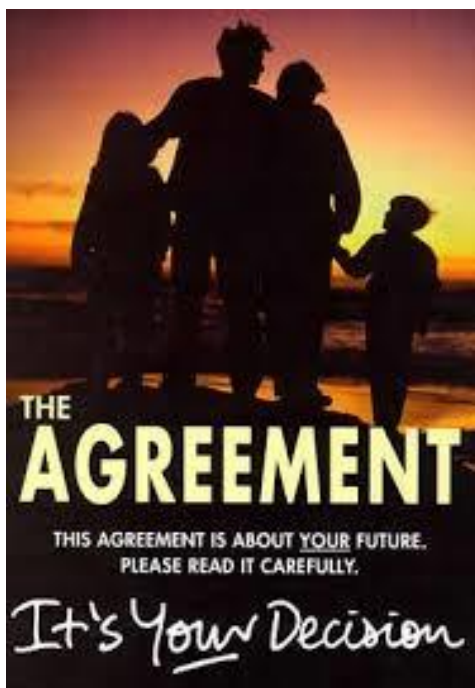
Avoiding a “hard border”

Is there any way after Brexit of avoiding the establishment of an EU frontier between Britain and Ireland, or between the North and South of Ireland?

Brexit is going to happen, because the leadership of Britain’s two main parties, Tory and Labour, accept the result of last year’s referendum. There is no likelihood of any going back on that fundamental point, whatever other differences there may be between them.

The creation of a frontier between an increasingly militarised EU federal state that includes the Republic and a United Kingdom outside the EU would make Irish politicians responsible for a second partition of Ireland, and would make eventual reunification more distant and more difficult, for several reasons.

It would add several new features to the existing North-South border, including customs posts or other customs controls, veterinary checks on animals and food checks on milk and other foods moving between North and South, and possible passport controls to prevent EU citizens using the Republic as a back door to the United Kingdom, which would affect the Anglo-Irish common travel area. And there would be growing divergence between EU-harmonised law provisions in the South and British ones in the North.



The British government's statement that it has "no strategic interest" in staying in Ireland if the majority of the people of Northern Ireland should wish to leave the United Kingdom at some time in the future underpinned the Downing Street Declaration (1993) and the Belfast Agreement (1998). If Ireland were to be reunited on the basis of that agreement—however distant that prospect may be at present—it would mean that the whole country, and not just the Republic, would become part of such an EU military bloc, under German hegemony.

That can hardly be in the security interests of the United Kingdom. It would give Britain a new reason to remain in the North, and give

future British governments good reason, from their point of view, to discourage any future moves towards a united Ireland.

A "hard border" or new partition arrangement would give Northern unionists a whole series of new and objectively valid reasons for opposing a united Ireland. From their point of view, the reunification of Ireland at some future time would mean that the people of the North would have to rejoin the EU, with its 123,000 or so supranational rules, legal acts, and international agreements—which is hardly real freedom. They would have to adopt the dysfunctional euro as their currency. They would have to take on the burden of helping to pay for the private bank debt that the Troika imposed on the Republic when it decided in 2010 that no Irish bank should be allowed to fail. And they would have to agree to be bound by all the new EU laws and regulations that will be passed between now and whenever partition might end.

It is hard to see sufficient unionist consent to reunification occurring in those circumstances. Yet, as the Belfast Agreement recognises, partition can never be ended without the consent of at least a significant number of the present unionist population.

Brexit could be an opportunity for the Irish state to get back its independence and national democracy vis-à-vis the EU, including the independent Irish currency that underpinned its "Celtic Tiger" boom of the 1994–2001 period, and to re-establish a meaningful neutrality and foreign-policy independence.

At present Ireland is stuck with an overvalued currency that is hitting its exports and encouraging competing imports. The Republic very much needs to get its own currency back to restore its economic competitiveness, and to prevent Southern customers streaming North for their shopping in the face of the regularly falling pound, which the British economy needs to counter its deindustrialisation.

A restored Irish pound would need to be devalued to restore the Republic's competitiveness and maximise its economic growth. Ireland is probably the only member of the euro zone that could give up the single currency without bringing that currency down. It is possible that an Irish abandoning of the euro would be welcomed by Germany as a natural consequence of Brexit, given the country's special ties with Britain and its more important trade links with the English-speaking world than with the EU-26.

At present the Irish state does most of its trade (61 per cent of its exports and 66 per cent of imports) with markets outside the EU-26. The United States is the most important market for the Republic's foreign-owned firms, and Britain is the most important market for its Irish-owned firms.

It is not, of course, a question of the Republic having to choose between one export market and another if it should leave the EU along with the United Kingdom. If common sense prevails in the negotiations there should be continuing free trade between the Republic, the United Kingdom, and the EU.

Unfortunately, much of what passes for debate about Brexit and the dangers of "hard borders" fails to take account of these logical and politically irrefutable propositions.

Government gung-ho for an EU army

In the coming weeks Fine Gael ministers will ask the Independent Alliance to support Ireland's involvement in new EU military arrangements, but the alliance has not yet decided whether it will support the measures.

"Permanent structured co-operation" (PESCO) is a scheme under which countries can pool their military capabilities for missions authorised by the EU under its common security and defence policy. And the government of "neutral" Ireland wants to join this emerging EU army.

It is expected that it will be formally

launched next month at the EU summit meeting. The minister for foreign affairs, Simon Coveney, has told his EU colleagues that he is confident that Ireland's participation will be approved, though we would also be committed to "regularly increasing defence budgets in real terms."



Some forty-seven PESCO projects have been suggested so far by member-states: these include (in no particular order) a "centre of excellence for EU training missions," a "European medical command," a logistics hub, officer training, satellite capabilities, disaster-relief capacity, and research on a new battle tank.

PESCO is also to be closely connected with the new Co-ordinated Annual Review on Defence, a rolling assessment of individual member-states' capabilities and gaps in their resources and the EU Commission's new European Defence Fund, which will put EU money into weapons research.

In the Dáil last week the Taoiseach said he would also consult the "major opposition parties" before bringing the proposal to the Dáil, saying that the Government was "favourably disposed towards it." The proposal is expected to be brought to the Government by the minister of state for defence, Paul Kehoe, in the coming weeks.

Big Data is watching you!

“We’ve lost control of our personal data,” said Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the worldwide web on its twenty-eighth anniversary earlier this year.



“Electronic privacy” is concerned with trying to ensure the confidentiality of on-line communications. Every time you are on line, by means of a laptop, computer, or smartphone, you are under commercial surveillance. Your digital data—including the content of your e-mail, the web sites you visit, and the purchases you may have made, together with metadata (data that includes information about when, where and to whom your communications are sent)—is monitored and collected, by tracking “cookies” and other mechanisms. This sensitive information is then sold on and used to direct commercial advertising or political messages at you, and can be used by governments too.

This model relies on tracking users’ web browsing, analysing metadata and content in communications, and monitoring the use of television and other devices, so that advertising can be targeted. The on-line advertising and marketing lobbies have closely collaborated on the electronic-privacy dossier with newspaper and magazine publishers, who increasingly rely on the income from on-line advertising derived in this way. Facebook and Google, to name just two, are also heavily reliant on surveillance-based advertising income, earned by monitoring users’ electronic communications.

Electronic privacy can be protected by banning interference in your communications (phone calls, chats, text messages, Skype, etc.); by making sure that settings on new equipment

and software are designed and set at the highest privacy level by default; and by making sure that people who refuse to be tracked cannot be banned from visiting particular web sites.

Digital-rights campaigners demand that citizens should enjoy optimum data privacy when on line. Public opinion appears to back this approach, with 81 per cent of the individual citizens who responded to a recent survey demanding that “privacy by default” settings be activated on all new IT equipment. According to a survey by Eurobarometer, 89 per cent of its respondents agreed with that suggestion.

By contrast, a majority of industry respondents to the EU Commission’s consultation favoured self-regulation or joint regulation instead. At the heart of industry strategy has been the attempt to reframe the debate so that it is not about privacy but about media plurality, combating fake news, and even the future of the internet; and they have regularly woven EU buzzwords and policy mantras, such as “better regulation” and “innovation,” into their appeals to policy-makers.

A recent industry document claimed that “media plurality and ultimately functioning democracies, depend on media having diverse revenue streams. These must include advertising.” The document invokes moral arguments to defend what is in fact simply an existing business model that is based on tracking, and implies that it is the only viable form of on-line advertising. It cites the Commission’s “Better Regulation” (i.e. de-regulatory) agenda, an EU mantra, and argues for voluntary rather than legally binding regulation.

Industry lobbyists have the attentive ear of the EU. In 2016 at least forty-one lobbying meetings were held with either of two members of the Commission, Andrus Ansip and Günther Oettinger, or members of their cabinets, or with the director-general of communications, Roberto Viola, which included

discussions on electronic privacy. Of these 41 meetings, 36 (88 per cent) were with corporate interests and only 5 (12 per cent) were with civil society, indicating a high degree of corporate bias.

As *Politico* has pointed out, Oettinger “won the gratitude of some of Europe’s telecom giants and big media publishers.” He continued to meet lobbyists from the technology world in 2017, despite having been appointed to an entirely different portfolio (the EU budget) in January.

A “freedom of information” request to the Commission for minutes of industry lobbying meetings on electronic privacy has remained unanswered, four months after it was tabled. It is safe to assume that by the time officials and members of the Commission left for their 2016 Christmas break they would all have been exceedingly clear about industry’s demands.

Throughout 2017 industry has maintained its lobbying pressure through a series of one-to-one lobbying meetings, sponsored events, industry sign-up letters, cocktail debates, and round-table discussions with members of the EU Parliament. Members on the relevant committees were being bombarded with demands from industry to read briefings, hold lobbying meetings, and put forward amendments. More than eight hundred amendments were tabled, mostly by members of the EU Parliament attached to the European People’s Party and European Conservatives and Reformists (centre-right or right wing), who adopted a pro-industry, anti-privacy position.

At the end of October these pro-industry, anti-privacy groups secured a vote needed to bring the EU’s electronic privacy proposals back to the EU Parliament, where they can give the *coup de grâce* to any last progressive elements that might remain.

A commentator described the situation as one in which “lobby efforts are going through the roof right now.”

The spider’s web

The close relationship between the European Union and the arms industry has been described as a “spider’s web,” involving the arms industry, its political and lobbying arm, and EU institutions.

Traditionally the EU had never financed military research. Last year this changed when €90 million was earmarked for a first project. An exclusive and secret “Group of Personalities” had proposed this as a first step on the way to a true EU research programme for defence.

This was not an ordinary expert group, governed by transparency rules, such as the Commission uses all the time, but something special. Neither was it in any way balanced: all the major arms firms were represented, as well as research institutions at least partly dependent on finance from the weapons industry.



Now we are regularly told by both the Commission and the leaders of member-states’ governments that threats on the international level are so great that we have urgent need of an EU defence policy. Over the next ten years the Commission wants to channel €40 billion into weapons research by way a European Defence Fund.

The amount of grants for security and military research has grown exponentially, from €65 million in 2004–06 to a projected minimum of €3½ billion from 2021 onwards. This process is heavily dominated by corporate interests and exclusively decided on by the EU Commission,

the European Defence Agency, member-states, and the arms industry. Civil society and the EU Parliament are kept almost totally in the dark.

The Group of Personalities recommended that above all the EU must invest in wars without soldiers. So they are keen on drones, which can play at war without too much human intervention.

But drones are no less deadly than traditional warfare. They are still deadly weapons. Why opt for them? The answer is simple: as things stand, the European arms industry lags behind the Americans in this area and could certainly use some support.

In 2016 the EU established the European Defence Fund, to which it would allocate more than €40 billion for research and development and the procurement of weapons.

The fund creates a self-fulfilling and continuous loop between supply and demand, financed from public money. This creates the spectre of a European permanent war economy, an economy that is constantly subsidised by public means to remain competitive and in which even basic levels of control of arms exports are seen as a hindrance to the competitiveness of the European defence industry.

The emergence of a military-industrial complex in tandem with the nucleus of an EU army fundamentally changes the nature of the EU, and raises the question of our continued relationship with it.

The future of the European Union has never seemed so much in doubt, with the euro zone in permanent crisis, Brexit on the horizon, and far-right parties on the rise, as in Germany and the Czech Republic. There is no shortage of political leaders aspiring to revive the federalising project; but whether it's the old-style federalist president of the EU Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, Angela Merkel or the conservative Macron leading the discussion about the EU's future there is a recurring theme at the top of the priority list: defence.

EU leaders are planning a massive arms build-up.

In his speech at the University of Paris in September on the future of the EU, Macron expressed his grand vision: "At the beginning of the next decade Europe must have a joint intervention force, a common defence budget and a joint doctrine for action."

This is not merely a political wish list: both the financing arrangements and the institutional infrastructure for just such a consolidation of EU military policy are being established at an astonishing speed. As readers will know, billions have been put on the table for R&D and weapons procurement. Plans to militarise development aid, circumvent constitutional restraints and bring European forces to the battlefield are on paper and ready to go.

Representatives of EU member-states met last week in Brussels to sign a defence agreement, "Permanent Structured Co-operation," calling for a massive increase in military investment and paving the way for the use of European forces.

Ireland is outside the pact for the moment, but Varadkar has shown his support for the project, and the Department of Defence will propose to the Government in the next few weeks that Ireland should join PESCO before its formal launch at the December EU summit. The issue will then go before the Dáil. If accepted, we would be committed to "regularly increasing defence budgets in real terms."

"Permanent structured co-operation" is a creature of the Lisbon Treaty (articles 42 (6) and 46), a framework for pooling resources and enhancing the effectiveness of member-states' armed forces, particularly their interoperability and research programmes, to better equip them for missions under the EU's common security and defence policy.

The Defence Forces have participated in many EU military operations, while Irish civilians are at present serving in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, Georgia, and the Palestinian

Territories. Members of the Garda Síochána are also serving in the EU “Rule of Law” Mission in Kosovo.



Most Irish citizens know nothing of these machinations, and critics’ voices are too marginal to be heard. The emerging alliance between politicians and the EU’s military industries recalls Dwight Eisenhower’s warning almost sixty years ago: “We must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists, and will persist.”

In his address to the EU Parliament in 2016 Juncker spoke about the threats facing the “European way of life.” In a hostile world, he said, Europe would have to adapt; soft power is no longer enough to confront modern threats. “For European defence to be strong, the European defence industry needs to innovate. That is why we will propose before the end of the year [2016] a European Defence Fund, to turbo-boost research and innovation.”

The EU commissioner for industry, Elzbieta Bieńkowska, instantly tweeted: “Good news for defence industry: new European Defence Fund before the end of the year!” Earlier, in March 2015, she had initiated a “High Level Group of Personalities” to advise the Commission on how to support and promote military and security research, comprising big names from the industry’s and the Commission’s corridors of power. The CEOs of the largest European military contractors, among them Indra, Saab,

Airbus Group, BAE Systems, and Finmeccanica, were invited to join, alongside think-tank denizens and political players such as Carl Bildt and the German member of the EU Parliament Michael Gahler.

Not surprisingly, the group’s proposal, delivered in February 2016 to the EU Institute for Security Studies, put the industry at the forefront of EU military policy-making, recommending the establishment of a new military-research line in the next EU budget as well as a specialised advisory group to support “road-mapping between the industry (the final supplier) and the member states (the trusted customers).” The Commission was advised to consult organisations “like the ASD Aerospace and Defence Industries Association of Europe,” which “could provide valuable input for the selection of stakeholder representatives.”

The ASD is the main lobbying group representing the interests of armaments giants. Its members include some of the same arms contractors whose CEOs sat on Bieńkowska’s High-Level Group, as well as national associations representing their industrial interests. In a classic example of the creation of a military-industrial complex, industry representatives together with associated experts and politicians suggested that the Commission look to them—as it does in other areas—for help regarding innovations in military policy, from which they would end up being the main beneficiaries.

There’s nothing new about the way the EU is using extraordinary research funds to leverage policy-making for the benefit of the arms industry. Thirteen years ago the Commission followed much the same process in relation to “homeland security,” when another high-level group (with a membership almost identical to that of Bieńkowska’s) produced the report “Research for a Secure Europe,” setting in motion an identical process. What began as a marginal pilot research scheme eventually injected €3½ billion into the EU’s budget for the direct procurement of

biometrics, surveillance apparatus, and other security equipment.

A report commissioned in 2014 by the EU Parliament's liberties watchdog committee severely criticised the high-level forums shaping security and defence policy as a "closed community in the making, interested in the development of huge margins of profits for the industry." "Funded security research in the future," it warned, "will be mainly put at the service of industry rather than society."



Videos of meetings of the EU Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence often show bored members listening to experts on military and security issues or to geopolitical analysts describing the world beyond the EU's borders. But when discussion does take place it tends to follow the theme of supposed threats to the European way of life: Islamist terrorism, Trump's isolationism, and—especially for members from eastern European countries—President Putin's anti-EU agenda and propaganda.

Hard facts seem to be a low priority when estimating the size of the military threat to Europe from the east. The European Institute for Security Studies reported that in 2016 the twenty-eight EU member-states invested a massive €206 billion in the arms industry. France alone spent €43 billion, topping Russia's €42 billion.

The United States has enthusiastically led the push for militarisation, putting pressure on its European allies at the 2016 NATO summit to spend 2 per cent of their budgets on military spending. The German and French defence

ministries were quick to respond to the call, submitting their bilateral plan to the EU in September 2016. Both Merkel and Macron seem keen to cultivate the impression that their push for rapid militarisation is a joint agenda.

For Germany, whose defence industry lags behind in relative terms, Europeanisation could bypass the mistrust a strictly German military expansion would evoke. For France, the joint initiative is another attempt to tame German hegemony after the failure of the euro zone to contain it. Then there's the lingering suspicion that Germany surrendered its currency for a nuclear-armed EU army under joint Franco-German control.

The transition from soft securitisation to hard-core militarisation now under way is rapid. Members of the EU Parliament worried about alleged Russian military ambitions or hybrid security threats such as cyber-attacks have turned the EU Parliament into a welcoming forum for such initiatives.

For those who have pursued militarisation all along, the prospects have never been better. At the end of last year Michael Gahler urgently reminded his fellow-members that "using the momentum on security and defence policies after the Brexit referendum and the election of Mr Trump in the US is crucial for pushing ahead"—and he proposed the revival of PESCO, a mechanism known among EU officials as "the Sleeping Beauty of the Lisbon Treaty," which could send EU forces into direct military action. Or, as Merkel has said, "Never waste a good crisis."

At about the same time that Bieńkowska's High-Level Group was concluding its duties two separate reports on EU military policy were also pending, one initiated by an Estonian member of the EU Parliament, Urmas Paet, and the other prepared by the vice-president of the Parliament, Ioan Mircea Paşcu. Both reproduced the main findings of the Bieńkowska group's report; both were approved by the plenary meeting of the EU Parliament in

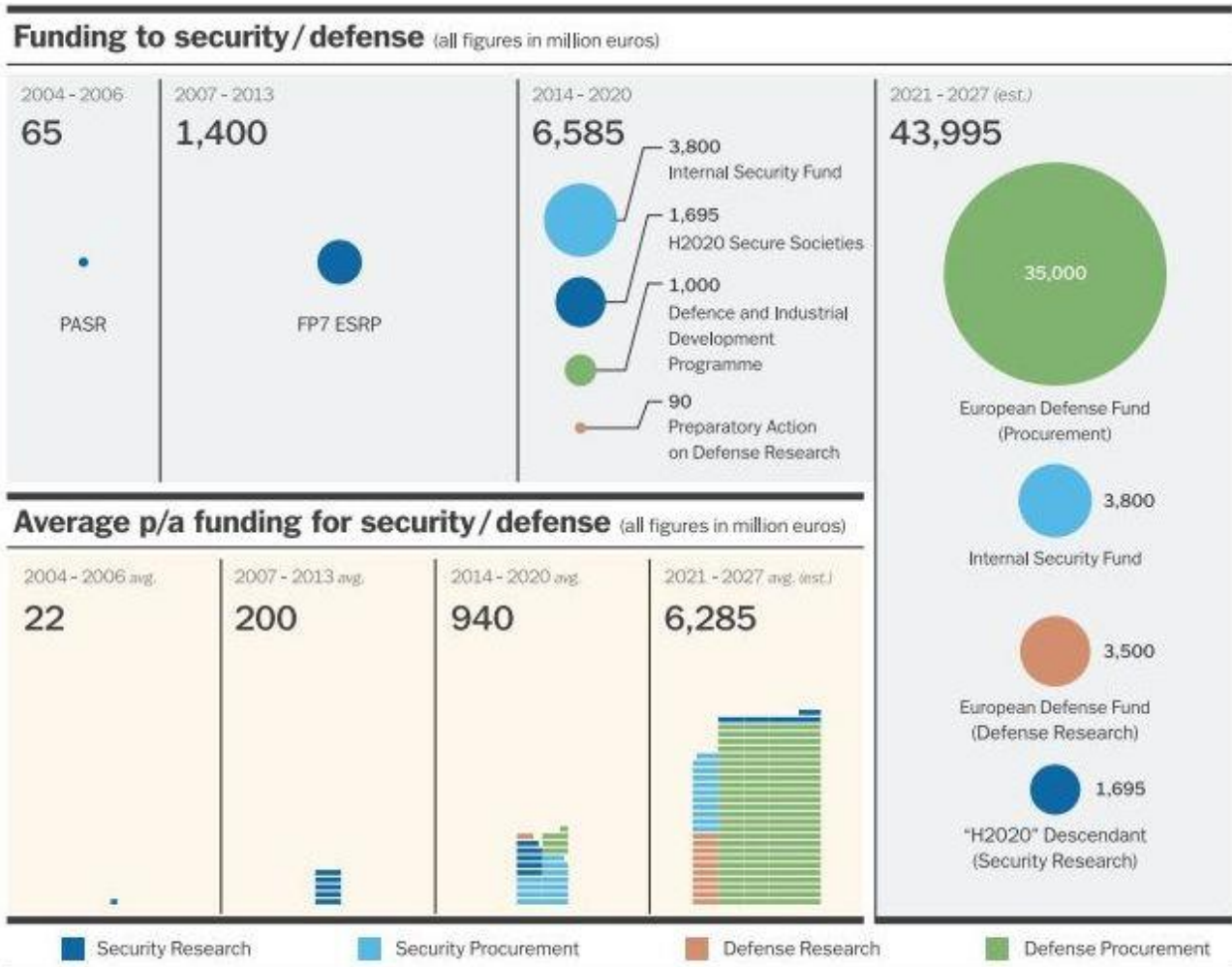
November 2016.

Their extensive proposals included the creation of a new financial instrument to support EU military research, creating a platform for helping the Commission to coordinate political imperatives and industrial needs, a new European Council of defence ministers, and the use of the EU’s capacity to deploy armed forces in crisis zones.

Juncker took one week to come up with specific plans for the new policy. On 30 November, in a not-so-widely noticed press statement, he announced the Commission’s “European Defence Action Plan,” which was somewhat more ambitious than that envisaged

by all three reports: he was putting serious money on the table. A newly proposed fund, to run from 2020 onwards, earmarked €500 million a year for research and development and foresaw a parallel funding stream of €5 billion a year, essentially for procuring military equipment through groups of member-states. The total amount approached €39 billion, partly from EU resources and partly from national contributions, which—as an extra incentive to member-states to spend more—could be excluded from the EU’s budget-balancing rules.

Image credit: Costis Palatoglou



PASR: Preparatory Action in the field of Security Research, FP7 ESRP: European Security Research Programme

Seven years earlier, at the peak of its debt crisis, Greece had asked for the same flexible approach, only to receive a flat No.

The image illustrates the wider militarisation of all aspects of the EU budget. Besides the billions the EDAP was proposing to syphon directly to the military industry, the EU is working towards facilitating access by arms producers to a range of EU funding opportunities, including structural funds, development aid intended to alleviate poverty, and even Erasmus, the EU scheme for education and training. “Already in January 2017 a call for proposals launched under Erasmus includes defence as one of six priority areas.”

Even without the diversion of subsidies earmarked for peaceful purposes, if Juncker’s budget projections hold, the direct allocation of EU funds to military contractors and their security subsidiaries will have exploded from 0 in 2004 to tens of billions by 2020.

The creation of a military-industrial complex is linked to the potential creation of an EU army, a dream cherished by various EU politicians, including some of our own. Juncker himself told the German paper *Welt am Sonntag*: “A joint EU army would show the world that there would never again be a war between EU countries. Such an army would also help us to form common foreign and security policies and allow Europe to take on responsibility in the world.”

So, the deployment of EU armed forces is a policy priority; and once the capacity to finance and deploy EU forces has been established, a pretext for sending those forces into the field might not be far behind.

Last May the German minister of the interior, Thomas de Maizière, and his Italian counterpart, Marco Minniti, were already asking for a mission to be set up “as soon as possible” between Libya and Niger to do what EU policy had failed to do in the Mediterranean: stop refugees and migrants getting to

Europe.

On 30 October the EU commissioner for foreign affairs, Federica Mogherini, stated that joint EU battle groups, each consisting of 1,500 soldiers, may be sent on UN missions in Africa. These battle groups could contribute to the new UN missions being demanded by several EU countries to combat the threat of terrorism in the Sahel region and to take on smuggling networks there that capitalise on growing insecurity. If so, it would be the first time joint EU military forces have seen action anywhere in the world.

The emergence of a military-industrial complex, in conjunction with opportunities for the EU to go to war, will inevitably have a profound effect on the future of the EU. And it’s all back to the Lisbon Treaty, which confirmed the EU’s commitment to the “progressive framing of a common Union defence policy.” The treaty provides a flexible framework for the development of a common security and defence policy, namely through (a) the mutual assistance clause (article 42 (7)), (b) permanent structured co-operation (articles 42 (6) and 46 and Protocol No. 10), (c) enhanced co-operation (article 20), and (d) entrusting CSDP operations to a group of member-states (article 44).

Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty extended the scope and type of civilian and military missions to be carried out under the CSDP framework—the “Petersberg Tasks” (article 43).



The reality of an EU army with full Irish involvement and without any public debate is now upon us. Not only will it change the nature of the EU but it must raise the question of our continued membership, already brought into sharper focus by Brexit. If we are to avoid fighting, and financing, the Franco-German wars of the future there seems to be only one clear course of action, and we should open the discussion now.

Here is the latest newsletter of the EU Military Committee (9 November). It reports a two-day meeting of defence ministers, including Ireland's. You will notice the continued presence of high-ranking NATO officers. Of course, we don't know what they were talking about.

Super-trawlers dominate EU waters

The super-trawler has become a global concern, and for many the term has come to signify a form of intensive factory-fishing, mainly concentrated on small pelagic species, such as herring, mackerel, and other related mid-water fish.



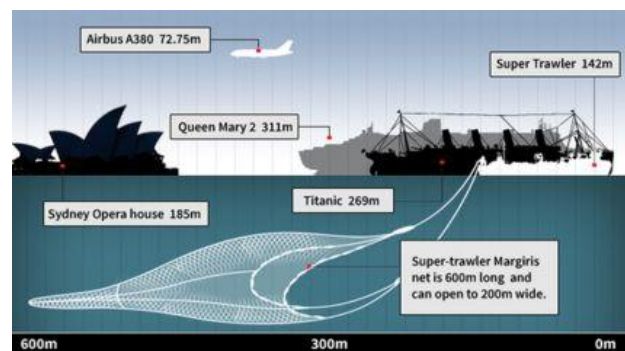
The rise of super-trawlers in the EU is a product of the common fisheries policy, rooted in the "scrap and rebuild" approach in the 1990s by the then EU commissioner for fisheries, Emma Bonino, who encapsulated Europe's fishing woes as "too many boats and too few fish."

She predicted a future for coastal communities that depended on fishing in shore-based factory jobs, processing and adding value to fish caught by super-trawlers working offshore. In her vision of a "Blue Europe," the days of small-scale inshore fleets were numbered: in her view the future lay in a smaller, easier-to-manage fleet of very large vessels, catching fish in a more cost-effective manner. Hers was a "win-win" vision of improved conservation, a more profitable fleet, shore jobs, and cheap processed fish for consumers.

Bonino's vision has come true; but for places like the west of Ireland, super-trawlers work offshore but the shore jobs she envisaged have failed to materialise, because even though fish factories do exist along the coast, jobs are highly seasonal and full of uncertainty. This has knock-on effects, with workers forced to leave their communities to seek employment elsewhere. In turn this leads to coastal areas suffering economic hardship and a lack of skilled seamen.

The arrival of the super-trawler has also contributed to a concentration of fishing wealth in the hands of a few millionaires, which also skews the power relations around the negotiating table. Such unequal power is reflected in the recent decision by the Government to grant 87 per cent of the 2018 mackerel quota, valued at €61 million, to the Killybegs mackerel millionaires. At the same time the Government refused a request from the Irish Islands Marine Resource Organisation (IIMRO), which represents small-scale fishers from the islands off the west coast, for a small share of the quota, 106 tonnes, 1 per cent of the 2017 quota increase, and 0.12 per cent of the total Irish catch of 86,429 tonnes for 2017.

Super-trawlers concentrate too much wealth and power in too few hands, upsetting the balance needed to achieve sustainable development for the benefit of all.



Monitoring and controlling super-trawlers is a huge problem, because the vessel-monitoring system only sends a signal every two hours. VMS is a form of satellite tracking using transmitters on fishing vessels, a requirement under EU regulations. This can lead to a super-

trawler causing a lot of damage in a short time when it is not under monitoring. Off the island of Arranmore, Co. Donegal, the crab pots of inshore fishermen are regularly carried away by trawlers.

A haul of 400–1,000 tonnes, even with only 1–5 per cent by-catch (fish or other marine species caught unintentionally), implies 4–50 tonnes of marine mammals, sharks, finfish and other marine life; with 10 per cent or more it could mean 100 tonnes or more of by-catch in a big haul. This will lead to the decline in the stock of other species of fish and mammals that are victims of the super-trawler's huge nets.

In 2016 at least ninety-one pots were lost, worth about €8,000; and so far in 2017 equipment valued at €24,510 has been lost. Also there is no mechanism through which fishermen can make compensation claims or take legal action for such losses. Issues like this are considered a civil matter, and the Sea

Fisheries Protection Authority, the Naval Service, the Garda Síochána and the Coast Guard refuse to help. Similar reports of damaged gear and of undeclared and discarded by-catch have been received from Scotland and the North Sea.

In an attempted solution to safeguard the rights of coastal and island communities the IIMRO has proposed an island fisheries heritage licence, to enable fishers to operate small vessels and static gear inside the six-mile zone, subject to certain restrictions. This inshore area would be dedicated to small-scale low-impact fishing vessels owned and operated by members of adjacent coastal and island communities.

The priority right now is to redress the huge imbalance that exists if our fisheries are to be sustained on a fair and equitable basis and not destroyed by super-trawlers.