



PEOPLE'S NEWS

News Digest of the People's Movement

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EU leaders mull boots on the ground in Ukraine as Irish mine flails go into action against Russia.



Emmanuel Macron said last week that the Paris Summit that “nothing is ruled out” when it comes to sending EU troops to fight in Ukraine. He warned the situation on the ground was so critical, that much more effort was needed to fight back Russia. “We’re at a critical point in the conflict where we need to take the initiative,” Macron said “We’re determined to do whatever it takes for as long as it takes.”

EU leaders, including Leo Varadkar, were present at the meeting. It is now up to Europeans to ensure Ukraine wins, said Macron. “Europe is at stake.” On his way into the meeting Varadkar said that: “we’re also seeing if there are other ways we can help, particularly around things like air defence” in addition to the mine flails already in action on the front line.

[Read more here](#)

A signature Irish foreign policy gathers dust!

Nuclear non-proliferation was aimed at preventing Germany from developing a nuclear arsenal. Hitler’s Germany had been working on a nuclear program that was never completed. This is why it is surprising how candid the calls for creating a EU nuclear arsenal sound, coming from the SDP lead candidate and others in Germany

In 1958 Ireland introduced at the UN the first of what became known as the “Irish Resolutions”. This initiative culminated in the adoption of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Ireland was the first country to sign the NPT in 1968. The website of Ireland’s Permanent Mission to the UN states that: ‘Promoting disarmament, therefore, is one of five signature foreign policies for Ireland and builds upon Ireland’s historic legacy in this area.’



So why don’t we promote a counter narrative to those advocating a nuclear – armed EU? Surely we have the moral authority to do so? It seems that our signature foreign policy joins our neutrality as something the government pays homage to at home and blithely ignores abroad.

Our next protest against EU Militarisation and government participation

Regular readers will have noticed we have devoted a large amount of space in recent issues to EU Militarisation. This is because the primary focus of the von der Leyen Commission is now militarily informed and will continue to be so if she is re-elected later this year. The Irish public is largely unaware of this rush to arms, and though our effort is a very modest one, it is important to signal to our legislators that there is opposition to these developments and the Irish government's participation in them. That is why these currently small protests, are important. Please try to get along when you can.

PEOPLE'S MOVEMENT
GLUAISEAcht AN PHOBAIL 

No to EU Militarisation and an EU Army!

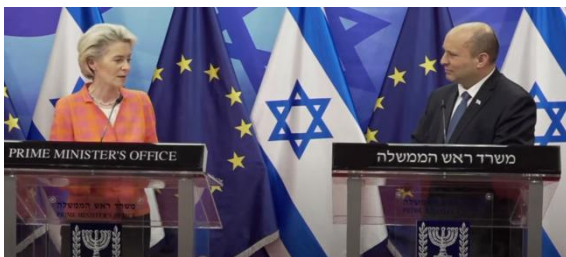
Neutrality is our best defence.

The Peoples Movement will hold its monthly protest on
Wednesday 20th March 2024 at 1:00pm

Outside Dáil Eireann, Kildare St.

Please try to get along – it is important!
Placards and posters will be provided.

The von der Leyen Presidency part two?



Ursula von der Leyen's time as the President of the EU Commission has been disastrous. Her [infamous trip](#) to Israel, led to Josep Borrell issuing a [public rebuke](#). He questioning von der Leyen's entitlement to represent EU views on foreign policy: with the Taoiseach chiming in.

As her first term comes to a close, it becomes increasingly evident that von der Leyen is steering the EU toward what Politico characterises as autocracy, federalism, and a detachment from the democratic roots that are claimed to underpin the EU project. The spectre of unelected political elite dictating the fate of member states looms large; shattering any illusion of a united Europe built on the principles of collaboration and shared sovereignty.

[Read more here](#)

Watch out! The EU knows who you are!



The EU has officially opened its [AI Office](#) which will be staffed by about 100 people. The office, which was created as part of the [Artificial Intelligence Act](#), will monitor and enforce observance of the AI Act's rules on general-purpose AI; creating related codes of practice, guidelines and evaluation tools; encouraging the uptake of trustworthy AI across the Union and within the Commission and overseeing the interim "[AI Pact](#)."

However, [A legal critique](#) of the draft 'AI Act' from 2022 revealed a wide array of criticisms at the proposed regulations, concluding that much of the document is 'stitched together' from scarcely applicable 1980s consumer regulation and that it actually promotes a deregulated AI environment in the EU, rather than bringing the sector under coherent regulation.

The EU's decision to not ban public mass surveillance in AI Act sets a devastating global precedent. And, it also failed to ban the export of harmful AI technologies, including for social scoring such as [the proposed Chinese system](#), which would [be illegal in the EU](#).

[Read more here](#)

Time to ditch the EU's austerity fiscal rules



Last year, the EU Commission's Strategic Foresight Report stated that the EU would need around 620 billion euros in additional annual investments to reach its climate goals. Then, in December, EU finance ministers agreed on a fiscal rules reform requiring most governments to curtail their spending.

EU-level money is also not available anymore, as the "[European Sovereignty Fund](#)" concept seems to have been shelved by the EU Commission. Add to this more military spending and more support for dual – use and military technologies, and the task becomes impossible. Either the austerity rules are broken, or the policy goals are not reached.

[Read more here](#)

A familiar ring



military capabilities.

The EU Parliament President's call for the EU to increase its military capabilities does not distort Malta's neutrality, according to Bernard Grech, the leader of the country's second largest party, The Nationalist Party. EU Parliament President Roberta Metsola called on EU countries to "step up" their

Von der Leyen envisages an EU Military Industrial complex



Launching her official campaign for a second mandate as President of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen has left the door open to working with rightwing European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group — which is projected to achieve big wins in June. Von der Leyen said that she would with any group that is "pro-European, pro-Nato and pro-Ukraine".

She will soon put forward a common strategy for the EU's defense industry, designed to strengthen military production and arms supply and establish an EU military – industrial complex to compliment the emerging EU Army. "We have to spend more, we have to spend better, and I think we have to spend in a more 'European' way to consolidate our defence industrial base," she said.

EU member states have considerably increased their military spending. From a total of €240 billion in 2022, it has increased to €280 billion in 2023 and will rise to €350 billion in 2024, Von der Leyen told Euronews. A cornerstone of the strategy is the establishment of a European Defence Commissioner, responsible for coordinating defence policies and supporting the military industry.

Mercosur deal hits further obstacles



The EU and the South American Mercosur countries have been discussing a trade agreement 1999, but the current political climate could hardly be less favourable to clinching the deal. Opponents say it would dump beef from Brazil and Argentina on a continent that has been shaken by farm protests ahead of elections to the EU Parliament.

France, the major opponent of the deal has [raised the pressure](#) on Brussels to halt the accord, Macron saying that he would not support signing it in its current form, to be later joined by Varadkar, who said it “wouldn’t be fair” to ratify the EU-Mercosur trade deal in its current form, as farmers in Ireland showed solidarity with EU-wide protests. In reality, it seems to have been a power move against van der Leyen, who will need Macron’s backing to secure a second term.

In the unlikely event of a political deal being struck before the European election, the legal scrubbing could take years. So, it would appear that Irish farmers can rest easy for the time being!

[Read more here](#)

Redefinition of ‘sustainable’ investment to include weaponry!



Member states including the Czech Republic are increasing pressure on Economy and Finance Ministers to amend both the European Investment Bank (EIB)'s defence-related lending criteria and EU sustainability requirements (ESG) that would be restricting arms companies' access to financing.

A paper presented to Economy and Finance Ministers last week, calls for: “the inclusion of the defence industry into the scope of sustainable finance”, in particular by adding defence assets to the bloc’s taxonomy legislation as ‘socially sustainable’ investments. Currently, the EIB only funds dual military- and civil-application projects whose future revenue must come *primarily* from the civil-use component.

Of course it makes no sense, but the industry players in the emerging EU Military Industrial Complex are eying the prospect of huge profits and want to get down to business. The government should form a coalition of member states to stop this dangerous nonsense before it gets out of hand.

[Read more here](#)

Europeans “need to change the paradigm and move into war economy mode”



The EU Commission plans comprehensive measures to develop the bloc’s military-industrial complex and increase war readiness, with subsidies to boost production capacity, build reserves, and encourage investment, according to a draft text seen by *Euractiv*.

The new strategy includes subsidies to motivate cooperation, support industrialisation, and the industrial ramp-up of the bloc, as well as a security of supply regime, according to *Bloomberg*. Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton has spoken of the possibility of mobilising “a hundred billion euros” of investment in the next 12 months. Europeans “need to change the paradigm and move into war economy mode.” The EU executive is proposing subsidies for joint procurement but also a VAT exemption for joint ownership of capabilities. Based on how the Commission secured the production of vaccines against COVID-19 during the pandemic and gas stockpiles, with advanced purchase agreements and take-off contracts, the Commission could pass defence contracts on behalf of member states *before they do it themselves* as already outlined by von der Leyen

Sarkozy surfaces again!

The man who came especially to Ireland to tell us we’d have to vote again after the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty; France’s former president Nicolas Sarkozy has been found guilty of illegal campaign financing by the Paris Court of Appeal and given a one-year prison sentence, including a six-month suspended sentence. Sarkozy’s lawyers confirmed minutes after the ruling that they would take the case to the country’s Supreme Court, which means the sentence will be suspended for the time being.

CETA 'interpretation' agreed – expect another attempt at ratification



The EU Commission and Canada have agreed on the “interpretation” of parts of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) that relate to investor protection from environmental regulation, in a push by Brussels to persuade member states to ratify the bilateral multibillion-euro deal.

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EU countries have previously expressed concern that the agreement, which provisionally entered into force in 2017, could effectively allow investors to sue member states if they impose more stringent environmental laws. Most of the CETA deal has already been approved by the EU institutions and is legally operational and binding on Member States and the EU since 2017. Ten member states including Ireland have still not ratified the deal but we can now anticipate another attempt!

“What we agreed is on the interpretation of certain provisions that aim to clarify the right to regulate for environmental purposes,” the EU Trade Commissioner said. In previous trade agreements the legal notion of “fair and equitable treatment” of foreign companies – a customary legal term in international trade deals – “has been in some cases interpreted in expansive ways by tribunals and we want to avoid that”.

Completing a biography



The Irish Times, not unexpectedly, has joined the many recent calls for an EU Army, publishing an opinion piece entitled: *There are three good reasons to support the development of an EU army* but it was less than complete in its biography of the author of the article, Prof. John O'Brennan.

You can add that he's the Jean Monnet Chair in European Integration and the Director of the Maynooth Centre for European and Eurasian Studies which is a designated Jean Monet Centre of Excellence (2020-23). His work focuses on the politics of the EU's Enlargement policy. He is also a member of the Irish Institute for European and International Affairs'[IIEA] 'Global Europe' group. [This week, the IIEA was addressed by Admiral Rob Bauer, Chair of the Military Committee of NATO] on 'NATO in a New Era of Collective Defence'. It could be said that a casual observer would hardly consider Prof. O'Brennan a disinterested commentator.

In case you missed it



Ireland, is now advocating change in the [relationship between Israel and the EU](#). The government is in talks with other EU members including Spain, who want a review of the EU-Israel Association Agreement on the basis that Israel may be breaching the agreement's human rights clause.

Following last Friday's massacre and the real threat of disease and starvation in Gaza, we can only hope that the agreement is terminated and that sanctions are placed on Israel, which has consistently flouted international law, ignored the ICJ and is accused by some countries of promoting genocide.

The Greens and *Courage to Change*



The European Greens EU election manifesto, *Courage to Change*, while containing a lot of laudable aspirations, foregrounds the party's strengthened foreign and defence priorities. Meanwhile, on foreign and security policy – the third chapter of the manifesto – the Greens have taken a Realpolitik-turn compared to the 2019 manifesto, advocating for deeper military cooperation and building up the EU's diplomatic capabilities.

“In today's world, we believe the European Union must be a strong player. The EU is and has always been a peace project” and “As no country can face the threats to security alone, the EU must develop a Security Union it adds.

In reference to the EU's ‘mutual assistance clause’, they stress the EU must increase “cooperation on military capabilities and creating synergies, for example through promoting interoperability and coordinating procurement, maintenance, and supply systems”. Deeper cooperation with NATO is embraced, as well as the creation of “conditions to allow the EU to freely determine its engagement in the rapidly shifting geopolitical environment”.

“For the EU, a multilateral approach also includes strengthening and deepening cooperation with NATO, while respecting a clear division of competences and without setting precedence,” the draft reads, adding that “member states decide for themselves about NATO membership” but not about a common defence – an EU army. Ask your Green candidate or Green MEP where they stand on this issue and how they voted at the Convention in Lyon!

EU explores using Copernicus for military applications



Copernicus is the EU's Earth-observation programme that provides high-quality imaging for environmental monitoring. The EU has now awarded separate contracts to two consortiums led by Telespazio and OHB System to explore the feasibility of exploiting the Copernicus Earth-observation constellation for military purposes.

The two contracts were awarded as part of the Earth Observation Governmental Service (EOGS). The selected consortiums will now compete to explore how best to deliver and implement the service under two simultaneous 12-month long studies. The aim is to make the service available to the EU and its member states in 2028–34.

Back to Carnsore



Small modular reactors (SMRs) will be partly relied upon to meet the EU's 2040 climate objectives, with an industrial alliance to be launched shortly and the first reactors deployed "by 2030", the EU Commission has announced.

The Commission's recommended climate objective for 2040 aims to reduce the EU's greenhouse gas emissions by 90% compared to 1990 levels. To achieve this, the EU's dependence on fossil fuels must be reduced by 80% by 2040 compared to 2021. These reactors will even benefit from an industrial alliance.

However BENE – Better Environment with Nuclear Energy - an Irish nuclear lobby group is suggesting Carnsore Point and Moneypoint in Co. Clare as suitable locations and as member states – presumably including Ireland – have signed off in Brussels, there is every chance of this proposal becoming a reality. History may repeat itself and Christy Moore may have to return to Carnsore. So dust down your tent! Oh, and what's the betting the Greens won't be there this time?

[Read more here](#)

A 'defence commissioner'



EU member states usually want full control over their defense policy. But the EU is considering creating a new defense commissioner role to initially oversee industrial aspects of the policy. "While it will be for the new president of the Commission to decide the composition and roles of his/her college, I can confirm that von der Leyen is very positive with respect to this," a Commission spokesperson said.

Von der Leyen is a member of the EPP group of which Fine Gael is a member and which first called for an EU defense commissioner. The Commission President is running for a second term and if she is successful, she would decide who would get the roles in the new Commission — including a potential defense role which would have a substantial budget.

Since the commencement of the Ukraine conflict, EU member states have considerably increased their military spending. From a total of €240 billion in 2022, it has increased to €280 billion in 2023 and will rise to €350 billion in 2024, according to Von der Leyen.

One possibility is Radosław Sikorski, Poland's current foreign minister another contender is Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas, who was behind the EU's pledge to deliver 1 million shells to Ukraine by March. However, discussions about the scope are likely to be contentious and may continue into the term of the next Irish government. Interesting times!

