



PEOPLE'S NEWS

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This issue of *People's News*

This issue of *People's News* has an unusual number of articles on military matters, and regular readers will have noticed that over the past few months these types of articles have steadily increased in number. This reflects the alarmingly rapid development of an EU army and its support mechanisms. It is a development about which there is very little awareness in Ireland, and one that may have serious implications for us all.

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Is Germany creating an EU army through the back door?

While the debate about a common EU army continues in Brussels, such a force is being incrementally put in place, in a good example of EU "competence creep." But Germany's recent defence white paper revealed its own ambition to lead a pan-European force.



"German security policy has relevance—

also far beyond our country," the paper states. "Germany is willing to join early, decisively and substantially as a driving force in international debates ... to take responsibility and assume leadership."

The paper argues that the EU's arms industry is at present "organised nationally and seriously fragmented," raising costs, preventing it from competing internationally, and making it difficult to mount joint operations. "It is therefore necessary," the paper states, "that military capabilities are jointly planned, developed, managed, procured and deployed to raise the interoperability of Europe's defence forces and to further improve Europe's capacity to act."

At the EU level, Germany's ministry of defence wants to see joint civil-military headquarters for EU operations, a council of defence ministers, and the co-ordinated production and sharing of military equipment. The thrust of the paper displays a new-found confidence in German defence policy, and a new drive to take the lead on military matters within Europe.

And this year, far from the headlines, Germany and two of its European allies, the Czech Republic and Romania, quietly took a radical step on the path towards something that looks like an EU army while avoiding the messy politics associated with it: they announced the integration of their armed forces.

In doing so they follow the lead of two Dutch brigades, one of which has already joined the German army's Rapid Response Forces Division and the other integrated in Germany's 1st Armoured Division. This integration will

enable the German army to increase its combat power in a short time. In the future the units will support the 10th Panzer Division and the 81st Mechanised Brigade of the Rapid Forces Division, according to German media reports.

The Czech 4th Rapid Deployment Brigade—which has served in Afghanistan and Kosovo and is considered the Czech army’s spearhead force—will become part of the German army’s 10th Panzer Division.

The Czech Republic and Romania will provide the German army with between 1,500 and 5,000 soldiers each. This is in line with NATO’s Framework Nations Concept, which essentially is concerned with the fact that smaller armies are “docking” their special abilities, such as air defence or special forces, to the larger army.

The 1st German-Dutch Corps has existed since 1995. Its soldiers can be deployed within days “for NATO and EU possible deployments,” as the German army says on its web site.

This is a developing “anchor army,” with Bulgarian and Slovak units also under German command and control, as is almost two-thirds of the Dutch army. The host country agreement between the Nordic “neutral” members of the EU—Sweden and Finland—suggests that they are now prime candidates for absorption.

So, under the bland label of the Framework Nations Concept, Germany has been at work on something ambitious: the creation of what is essentially a German-led EU anchor army, and a *fait accompli*!

“European Defence Fund” launched—and we’ll be paying too!

The EU Commission is putting aside €1½ billion a year for joint defence spending in what is another step towards the creation of an EU army. It stated in Brussels on 7 June that the EU should spend €500 million a year of its joint budget (that means we’re paying a portion) from 2020 onwards on research and development for new military technologies, such as

robotics and cyber-defence. This is added to the €5 billion a year already pledged for “joint defence capabilities.”



The Commission also said it should spend a further €1 billion a year on the joint procurement of high-technology items, such as surveillance drones. R&D projects would be entirely financed from the EU budget.

The Commission and the EU Foreign Service added in a “reflection paper” that the fund could in future form part of the bloc’s “common defence and security.” Member-states’ armed forces could one day “be pre-positioned and be made permanently available for rapid deployment on behalf of the Union.” This EU army would launch “operations against terrorist groups [as defined by the EU], naval operations in hostile environments or cyber-defence action.”

The EU plan was immediately welcomed by France. Its minister for the armed forces, Sylvie Goulard, said that the proposed EU defence fund was “a turning-point for a better sharing of costs, but also for defence capabilities.” It would give “political impetus” to the EU’s ambition to become “sovereign” in its technological and strategic capabilities.

The secretary-general of NATO, Jens Stoltenberg, also welcomed the EU initiative. “Stronger European defence ... will strengthen the European pillar in NATO,” he said.

The Commission’s proposals also won support from mainstream groups in the EU Parliament, which will need to approve the fund. Manfred Weber, a German member who

chairs the centre-right European People's Party, the largest group in the parliament (and of which Fine Gael is a member and Enda Kenny a vice-president), said: "This is, after the euro, the second major development for Europe. I believe that common defence is ... a must."

Guy Verhofstadt, a Belgian member of the EU Parliament who heads the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (of which Marian Harkin is a member), said: "The proposed European Defence Fund is an important first step towards much-needed joint capabilities on defence." He commented that the Commission should have been bolder in its vision of an EU army. "We have to act now, independently and efficiently. That is why I am in favour of ... joint action and a real defence union."

An EU official commented that this was "something that the Commission had never done before," because in the past it had stayed out of military spending. He commented that the €590 million for the prototype defence fund would be ripped from the EU's existing budget for "connecting Europe" (including projects "contributing to sustainable development and protection of the environment").

€40 million was supposed to go to these projects. Greenpeace commented: "Peaceful societies rely on a healthy environment. Without investing in environmental protection and action on climate change, the EU would in fact increase the threat to peace and stability."

A familiar scenario

The creation of an EU army continues to divide opinion in neutral Austria. Critics of the plan say the country's neutrality is incompatible with military co-operation. The EU is pushing ahead with a plan for common defence and security, following the announcement of a fund of almost €40 billion for military capabilities.

But Austrian parties are also failing to find common ground on this divisive issue, despite the country's traditional opposition to military

involvement.

The minister of defence, Hans Peter Doskozil, has spoken out against the creation of an EU army and his country's participation in it. He has continually cited Austria's neutral status as a reason why the republic would not be allowed to join such a force. He has also pointed out that there are five neutral countries in the European Union, which would stand in the way of any joint decisions.

Austria's concept of neutrality was enacted in 1955. The present situation is made more complex by the election campaign, where the main parties will be wary about upsetting their voters with harsh truths about the EU's military policies. (Where have we seen that before?)

The stance of the ruling Austrian People's Party is controversial in this regard. The head of its delegation in the EU Parliament is on the same page as Brussels: "Given the latest unpredictability of the United States, it is clear that the EU cannot afford any further delay in taking its security and defence into its own hands." He insists that closer co-operation on military policy does not jeopardise Austria's neutrality—in a distinct echo of the attitude of the Irish government.

But this is the long-predicted rush towards an EU army; and now is the time for peace activists of all shades, irrespective of their attitudes to the EU, to come together to ensure that our participation in the formative stage of this army becomes an election issue. And with an election possible during the next year, this task becomes a matter of urgency.

What next with CETA?

The EU Court of Justice has ruled that EU trade agreements must be ratified by all member-states. It found that any trade deal that includes provision for a non-court dispute settlement system, such as the investor court system (ICS), would require ratification by the EU's thirty-eight national and regional authorities.

The decision, which applied to an EU-Singapore treaty signed in 2013, was made primarily on the grounds that the treaty contained an ICS clause. The judgement therefore confirmed—and extended—the competence of the EU to negotiate trade agreements without an ICS clause on behalf of member-states.



The EU Commission originally planned that the Singapore deal would only have required the green light of the EU Council (which groups officials and ministers from the EU's twenty-eight governments) and the EU Parliament.

The Irish government has already signed the agreement, and it now seems that it will be provisionally applied on the 1st of July, which means that all its provisions will be applied to the signatories, except ICS. The minister in charge for the time being, Mary Mitchell O'Connor, says that ratification can wait until we all see the "benefits of the deal"; but, with its measures adopted, its proponents have little to worry about, and it can be in place for a long time before the ratification procedure.

The Fine Gael coalition and Fianna Fáil are fully behind it, so it would appear that a Dáil majority for ratification is assured—though its recent rejection by the Seanad might take some time to overcome.

A court case to seek a referendum on the agreement would be a waste of time, as another remedy is available: an "ordinary referendum." An ordinary referendum is one

that does not relate to amending the Constitution of Ireland. Since the foundation of the state, however, no ordinary referendum has ever been held.

An ordinary referendum would be required if the President received a joint petition from both houses of the Oireachtas. The petition would state that a proposed bill was of such national importance that the will of the people should be found out before it became law.

Such a joint petition must be passed by a majority of members of the Seanad (they've already voted against it) and one-third of the members of the Dáil. Sinn Féin, the Labour Party, independents of various hues and smaller parties might just manage it.

When the President receives the petition he must consult the Council of State. If he decides that the bill contains a proposal of such national importance that the will of the people should be found out, he will refuse to sign the bill until a referendum has been held. The referendum must be held within eighteen months of the President's decision not to sign the bill.

Such a referendum gives the people a chance to decide whether the bill should become part of Irish law.

The voting procedure in the ordinary referendum is the same as in a constitutional referendum, except that the proposal is deemed to have been vetoed by the people if the majority of the votes cast are against the bill and those votes make up at least one-third of the presidential electors on the register of electors.

So, possibly for the first time in the history of the state, the make-up of the Dáil, and a Seanad whose support on this issue cannot be relied upon by the Government, might provide those opposed to a Government measure with an opportunity to campaign for an ordinary referendum. Is it worth the effort?

An EU nuclear weapons programme?

According to the *New York Times*, an idea once unthinkable is gaining attention in European policy circles: an EU nuclear weapons programme.

Under such a plan, France's arsenal would be adapted to cover the rest of the EU and would be put under a common EU command, financial system, defence doctrine, or some combination of these. It would be enacted only if the EU could no longer count on American protection—a situation that is being pushed by EU hawks as imminent.



Though no new countries would join the nuclear club under such a scheme, it would amount to an unprecedented stepping up of the EU's military power. Proponents—who remain a minority—acknowledge enormous hurdles. But the discussion of a so-called European deterrent has entered the mainstream, particularly in Germany, a country that would be central to any plan but where anti-nuclear sentiment is widespread.

Jana Puglierin of the German Council on Foreign Relations said that a handful of senior EU officials had certainly “triggered a public debate about this, taking place in newspapers and journals, radio interviews and TV documentaries. That in itself is remarkable. I am indeed very astonished that we discuss this at all.”

Jarosław Kaczyński, Poland's former prime minister and now chairperson of its ruling party, Law and Justice, provided the highest-

level call for an EU nuclear weapons policy in February in an interview with a German newspaper.



But the most important support has come from the foreign policy spokesperson of Germany's ruling Christian Democratic Union, Roderich Kiesewetter, who gave the nuclear option increased credibility by raising it shortly after President Donald Trump's election. In an interview, Kiesewetter, a former colonel who served in Afghanistan, calibrated his language carefully, providing just enough detail to demonstrate the seriousness of the option without offering too much and risking an outcry from German voters.

“My idea is to build on the existing weapons in Great Britain and France,” he said, though he acknowledged that Britain's decision to leave the European Union could preclude its participation. Such a policy, he said, would require four ingredients: a French pledge to commit its Force de Frappe weapons to a common EU defence, German financing to demonstrate the programme's collective nature, a joint command, and a plan to place French warheads in other European countries.

The number of warheads in Europe would not be increased, and could even decrease if the United States withdraws. “It's not a question of numbers,” Kiesewetter said. “The reassurance and deterrence comes from the existence of the weapons and their deployability.”

He envisaged a programme designed to deter nuclear as well as conventional threats—a clear nod to Russia’s military superiority. This would require a doctrine, he said, that allowed the EU to introduce nuclear weapons to a non-nuclear conflict. He compared it to the Israeli policy, which is believed to allow for a nuclear strike against an overwhelming conventional attack. “These are political weapons. Their use must be unpredictable,” he said. Smaller nuclear powers often maintain vague doctrines to deter more powerful adversaries.

Kiesewetter said he had heard expressions of interest from officials in the Polish and Hungarian governments, at NATO headquarters in Brussels, and within relevant German ministries, though he would not say which.

But any EU nuclear weapons programme would face enormous hurdles. The biggest challenge might be who controls the French arsenal, and where it is based.

The United States shares warheads with allies, including Germany, whose military are equipped to deliver the weapons, granting the programme credibility as a pan-European defence. But France has shown no willingness to share its weapons, much less to put them under a joint European command. If the French government maintains a final say over their use, this might cause an adversary to doubt whether France would really initiate a nuclear conflict.

While most French warheads are lodged on submarines, a few dozen are fitted to air-launched cruise missiles that could be housed in, for example, German airfields. These are smaller, shorter-range tactical weapons—exactly the American capability that Europe most fears losing. French policy already allows for, though does not require, the use of nuclear weapons in defence of an ally.

With Britain’s exit from the European Union “the French might feel they have a special responsibility” as the EU’s sole nuclear power; and there is a lingering suspicion that France

agreed to a potential future sharing of its nuclear capability with Germany in exchange for its surrender of the German mark.

In any event, there is a growing belief that Germany has quietly developed latent capabilities, sometimes figuratively described as a “screwdriver’s turn” away from a bomb.

However, this seems to be a very serious discussion of a possible EU nuclear weapons programme, the first since a failed and now-forgotten effort in the 1950s for French-German-Italian nuclear co-operation, under which it was envisaged that the then Federal Republic might construct elements of nuclear missiles under some form of control arrangement with the Western European Union.

The present military capacity of the EU



The military capacity of the European Union comprises the various co-operative structures that have been established between the armed forces of the member-states, both inter-governmentally and within the institutional framework of the union: the common security and defence policy, a branch of the common foreign and security policy.

The emblem of the EU Military Committee (above) tells of its ambition!

Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union provides for substantial military integration within the institutional framework of the union:

- Article 42.2 provides for complete integration, which would require unanimity in the EU Council (made up of heads of state or heads of government), though this has been blocked by the United Kingdom in particular (which, however, is scheduled to withdraw from the union in 2019).
- Article 42.6 enables the armed forces of a

subset of member-states to establish “permanent structured co-operation” between themselves. So far this option has not been used, despite increasingly frequent calls by prominent leaders for a common defence for the EU.

However, the debate has been intensified by the stalemate between the EU and Russia over Ukraine, by Brexit, and by the presidency of Donald Trump in the United States. Capitalising on these issues, there have been strident calls for an EU army from the president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, and from other EU leaders and policy-makers, such as the chairperson of the German parliament’s foreign policy committee, Norbert Röttgen, who says that an EU army is “a European vision whose time has come.”



The mutual defence clause, article 42.7, was invoked for the first time in November 2015 following the terrorist attacks in Paris, which were described by the then President, François Hollande,

as an attack against Europe as a whole, a sentiment echoed by the new President, Emmanuel Macron.

The structures

- European Defence Agency
- EU Institute for Security Studies
- EU Military Staff
- EU Military Committee
- EU Battle Groups (18)
- Finabel
- Eurocorps
- European Gendarmerie Force
- European Air Group
- European Air Transport Command
- European Maritime Force
- Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation

- 1st German-Dutch Corps
- Combined Joint Expeditionary Force
- Multinational Corps Northeast

Equipment comprises 546 ships, 2,448 aircraft, and 7,490 battle tanks, with a budget (2016) of more than €200 billion.



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Road haulage and social dumping

Only a few weeks ago the EU Commission was trying to present itself as champion of a “social Europe.” Just how hollow this claim is has been shown by how it tackles the exploitation and oppression of long-distance lorry-drivers. Drivers can clearly expect nothing from the Commission.



Under a proposal being pushed by the EU Commission, eastern European drivers will be allowed to make as many domestic journeys as they wish within a five-day period in a member-state to which they have made a delivery from abroad.

While the monitoring of existing rules still isn’t adequate, the Commission wants to make them even more flexible. As always when confronted with an issue, the Commission opts for further liberalisation. In doing so it is now

proposing to legalise what up to now has been illegal.

The minimum wage and collective agreements for foreign drivers will begin to apply only after three days. What this means in practice is that eastern European drivers will be allowed to work for starvation wages.

Cabotage (picking up and dropping off goods within a single country by a diver working for a firm based in a different member-state) has always been restricted. Increasing the limit on the number of such journeys that may be taken makes it certain that competition will get out of hand.

Irish drivers are simply losing out and will soon be driving for nothing. Particularly hard hit will be self-employed drivers with their own vehicles. In effect they will have to bear the brunt of the social dumping made possible by the Commission. In the end we will have no transport industry at all left in Ireland.

Proposed measures for tackling the problem of “mailbox companies”—which register in countries where they are not active, in order to avoid paying higher taxes in their true sites of activity—are more cosmetic than serious, as is the plan to monitor compliance with the remaining rules on cabotage.

It's time to get real about “consent”

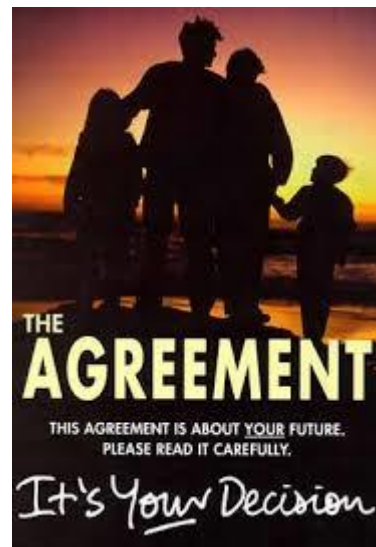
The following article is an opinion piece by Kevin McCorry.

Does Northern Ireland’s constitutional arrangement within the United Kingdom require it to be given some sort of special legal status in the Brexit process? Is there a legal basis for the claim that it could stay within the EU?

Brexit lacks the consent of the people of Northern Ireland (a majority voted to remain), and the principle of consent is central to the governance of Northern Ireland—or so the argument goes.

Section 1 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) lays down the principle of consent as it relates

to Northern Ireland’s constitutional status within the United Kingdom: “It is hereby declared that Northern Ireland in its entirety remains part of the United Kingdom and shall not cease to be so without the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland voting in a poll for the purposes of this section ...”



The British Supreme Court recently pronounced on the scope of this provision in an application made to it by a Northern Ireland anti-Brexit campaigner, Raymond McCord. “In our view this important provision which arose out of the Belfast Agreement gave the people of Northern Ireland the right to determine whether to remain part of the United Kingdom or to become part of a United Ireland. It neither regulated any other change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland nor required the consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU.”



The question that Northern Ireland voters

were asked to decide was whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union or leave it. They were asked to vote on the course they wished the United Kingdom state as a whole to follow, and not Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland taken separately.

Of the 1.9 million people living in Northern Ireland, some 1.3 million were on the electoral register. The turn-out in the referendum was 63 per cent (as against 72 per cent in the United Kingdom as a whole). Of the total of 789,879 voters, 440,437 (56 per cent) voted “remain” and 349,442 (44 per cent) voted “leave,” while 471,109 did not vote. A majority of Northern nationalists voted “remain,” while some three-quarters of Northern unionists voted “leave.”

The provisions of the Belfast Agreement were largely implemented through the Northern Ireland Act (1998), as amended in the light of changes derived from the St Andrews Agreement between the United Kingdom and Ireland in 2006. A range of safeguards is provided for in the agreements that have yet to be implemented, particularly a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland and an Irish Language Act (which the British Government committed itself to in the St Andrews Agreement). These outstanding issues are totally separate from the Brexit process.

Northern Ireland is not a “state.” It is a devolved jurisdiction that is ultimately under the political and legal hegemony of the British state. It never was anything else—the illusions of unionist and nationalist politicians notwithstanding.

The Belfast Agreement provides that the power of the British Parliament in London to make legislation for Northern Ireland “will remain unaffected.” It can legislate on non-devolved issues, and in addition can “legislate as necessary to ensure [that] the United Kingdom’s international obligations are met in respect of Northern Ireland.”

The British government’s white paper sets

out a plan for a “Great Repeal Bill,” to incorporate the provisions of most EU laws in national legislation, including laws in devolved areas of competence. This should be the area of engagement for democrats.

Democratic opinion should insist that the relevant British governmental powers that will be repatriated from Brussels should be devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive in Belfast. These should include (1) control of Northern Ireland’s sea fisheries and other underwater resources, (2) a comparable rate of corporation profits tax being introduced for the North as exists in the South, so as to encourage foreign investment on an all-Ireland basis, and (3) generous direct payments to be provided by the British exchequer for Northern Ireland’s farmers to compensate them for the loss of payments under the EU’s common agricultural policy and the effect of cheap food imports to the British market after Brexit.

It would be to Ireland’s advantage if Britain were to be encouraged to co-operate with the Government in securing a mutually advantageous post-Brexit agreement between the United Kingdom, Ireland and the EU that would ensure free trade, including free trade in agricultural products.

The British government should also be encouraged to co-operate with the Irish government, the EU Central Bank and the governments of the nineteen euro countries, in particular Germany, in facilitating Ireland’s leaving the euro zone and re-establishing an Irish currency in as constructive and least disturbing a manner as possible for the euro zone as a whole.



It was the highly competitive exchange rate that an independent Irish currency made possible that gave the Republic the 8 per cent average annual economic growth of its “Celtic Tiger” years, 1993–2000. This was the only period since its foundation in 1922 in which the Irish state followed a *de facto* floating exchange-rate policy. At present the Republic is stuck with an overvalued currency that is hitting its exports and encouraging competing imports. It desperately 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 a regularly falling British pound.

A restored Irish pound will need to be devalued to restore the South’s competitiveness, and the support of the Bank of England would be helpful in preventing that devaluation going too far in its early days and weeks.

The British government should also be shown the mutual advantages in co-operating closely with the Irish government in negotiating joint trade agreements and foreign investment deals with third countries for the benefit of both parts of Ireland and in co-operation with the Northern Ireland Executive in Belfast.

But most of the problems resulting from Brexit could be avoided if Ireland left the European Union at or near the same time as

the United Kingdom—for five principal reasons:

- Leaving the EU would save the state money, as we are now net contributors to the EU budget, rather than net recipients from it.
- It would give us back control of our valuable sea fisheries, the annual value of catches by foreign boats being a several-times multiple of the money we have got from the EU over the years.
- It would give us back control of our law-making, free us from the rulings and sanctions of the EU Court of Justice, and thereby restore our state sovereignty and national democracy.
- It would give us back a national currency—one of the two pillars of any independent state—and with it the capacity to run the independent exchange-rate policy that is vital for our economic competitiveness, especially in the context of Brexit.
- Above all, leaving the EU along with the United Kingdom is the only way to save the Irish government, and the parties that support its policy, from the guilt before future generations of implementing in our time a new partition of Ireland.

Responses from readers to the above article are welcome.