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Germany issues stinging rebuke of US sanctions against Russia

By
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Germany's Foreign Ministry published a sharply-worded press release Thursday from Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel (Social Democrats, SPD) and Austrian Chancellor Christian Kern (Social Democrats, SPÖ) denouncing the United States' foreign and economic policies.

Republicans and Democrats agreed almost unanimously, by 97 votes to 2, to impose new sanctions on Russia in the Senate on Wednesday. The Senate justified the measure as a punishment for Moscow's alleged meddling in the US presidential election, the annexation of Crimea and its support for Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The bipartisan bill was "the package of sanctions the Kremlin deserves for its actions," said Democratic Senator Jeanne Shaheen.

Gabriel and Kern brusquely rejected the US Senate's measure. The bill was really about "the sale of American liquefied gas and the sidelining of Russian gas supplies in the European market," according to the two social democratic politicians. That emerges from the text "particularly explicitly." The goal was "to secure jobs in the American oil and gas industries."

The US and Europe had since 2014 "side by side and in close joint consultation answered Russia's annexation of Crimea, which is illegal under international law, and its actions in eastern Ukraine. ... But the threat to impose extraterritorial sanctions which violate international law on

European companies participating in the expansion of European energy supplies” could not be tolerated. Europe’s energy provision was “a European affair, and not one for the United States of America!”

Gabriel and Kern went on to warn, “Instruments of political sanctions should not be connected with economic interests.” Threatening European companies “in US markets with punishments” if they participate in or finance projects like the Nord Stream II oil pipeline with Russia would introduce “an entirely new and extremely negative quality to European-American relations.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel explicitly backed her Foreign Minister on Friday. There was “very strong agreement in terms of content with Gabriel’s statement,” stated government spokesman Stefan Seibert. “It is, to put it mildly, an unconventional action by the US Senate.” It was troubling that European businesses were being targeted by sanctions to punish Russian behaviour. “That cannot be allowed,” added Seibert.

The bipartisan action by the US Senate and the sharp response from the German government make clear that the conflicts between the US and Germany are not simply intensifying as a result of President Donald Trump, but have deep objective roots. Twenty five years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the conflicts between the major imperialist powers, which resulted in two world wars during the 20th century, are erupting into the open once again.

Following the G7 summit three weeks ago, Merkel, in a speech delivered in a Munich beer tent, called into question the alliance with the United States, which formed the basis of Germany’s foreign policy in the post-war era. “The times in which we could completely depend upon others are long past,” she stated and advanced on this basis the demand, “We Europeans really have to take our fate into our own hands” and “fight for our own future.”

The German government has since worked systematically to expand its global political and economic relations. After Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Berlin at the beginning of the month, and Merkel visited Argentina and Mexico last week, the government organised a major conference on Africa in Berlin earlier this week.

As Berlin moves to fulfil Gabriel’s pledge to “use the spaces vacated by America,” the tensions with Washington are rising. Already last week, Gabriel criticised the US-backed action taken by Saudi Arabia against Qatar, which is aimed above all at Iran. In a statement, Gabriel defended the emirate and warned against a “Trumpification” of relations in the region. The “latest gigantic arms deals between US President Trump and the Gulf monarchies” intensified “the danger of a new arms race.” This was “a completely wrong policy, and certainly not Germany’s policy.”

Gabriel’s statements against the United States have nothing to do with pacifism. He is not concerned with “peace,” but the enforcement of German imperialist interests, which are increasingly at odds with those of the United States. While the United States under Trump is ever more openly heading in the direction of war with Iran, the German government is striving for a further opening up of the country’s economy to secure new markets for German corporations in the Middle East and new investment opportunities for German capital.

The same applies to Russia. Although the German government supported the right-wing coup against Viktor Yanukovitch alongside the US in Ukraine in 2014, and stationed troops on the Russian border, it opposed open conflict with Russia over Ukraine. In his new book “Remeasurements,” Gabriel boasts that “with the Minsk Accord, France and Germany, on behalf of Europe, while not resolving an escalating conflict, curbed it significantly for the first time,” and had done so “without the United States.”

Washington, at that time, had been “close to...supplying weapons to Ukraine,” the Foreign Minister stated. “With the cynical idea that although Russia could not be defeated militarily, it would be pressurised into peace talks more rapidly if it paid a high ‘price in blood’. The war in Ukraine would have become a war over Ukraine.” But Europe was “grown up enough...to foresee this and to let Germany and France negotiate.”

Following Brexit, the election of Trump and the victory of pro-European President Emmanuel Macron, Berlin seemingly feels it is “grown up enough” to increasingly distance itself from the US and to press ahead with the construction of a European army under German leadership.

“Europe’s security is Europe’s own responsibility,” noted Gabriel in his book. “We must become capable of acting strategically in foreign and security policy, because we don’t do so enough. That includes us defining our European interests and articulating them independently of the US. This obstinacy requires to some extent an emancipation from the direction adopted in Washington.”

He goes on, “Whoever has their own goals also should develop their capabilities to achieve them. The EU needs to see itself as a greater security policy power. Our defence budgets must be adjusted accordingly. The armaments of the European armies need to be modernised, made operationally deployable and reoriented to military tasks.”

Gabriel’s declared goal is the building of a veritable European combat power capable of enforcing its global imperialist interests independently of NATO and the US, and, if necessary, against them. The issue is not “just to buy new weapons. It is about integrating the arms industry more in Europe and pooling forces. It is about creating a joint European security identity, which opens the way to a European army through ever more closely integrated structures.”

This policy, which is supported by all of Germany’s parties, from the CDU/CSU to the SPD, Greens and Left Party, has an irresistible logic. As in the first half of the 20th century, the deepening rivalries between the imperialist powers over raw materials, markets and geostrategic influence are leading once again to a war between the great powers, unless the working class intervenes on the basis of its own socialist strategy.