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Symposium "Is neutrality a possible security concept for Europe?"

Development of Neutrality and Militarization of the EU

Often "Europe" as a concept is used in a misleading way. Europe is perceived as identical to the European Union, in which case the other European countries remain excluded. On the other hand, the European Union is often referred to in a way that does not take into consideration the diversity of member States, thus overlooking the different solutions regarding their security policy, i.e. the different attitude vis-à-vis NATO. Such approaches tend to create the impression of the absence of alternatives in European politics. This is why this seminar is so important, and I want to thank for the possibility to take part in this discussion.

In Finland neutrality was a conclusion of the policy, which more than 60 years ago led Finland to war against the Soviet Union side by side with Nazi Germany. This political conclusion was based on the judgment that the security of our country is founded on cooperation and not on arms. Later on, security was understood more and more as a challenge linked to the problems of environment, poverty and other global issues.

However, the involvement with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU has led to a change of this political line. In this respect, the EU Summit in Helsinki 1999 was a decisive turning point. It was decided to start setting up EU battle troops. The Foreign minister of that time, present President of Finland Tarja Halonen, tried vainly to include in the conclusions of the Summit at least the notion, that troops can be used only under UN Security Council mandate. Paradoxically, this Helsinki EU Summit meant the end of the process of detente, the symbol of which had been the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe, held in Helsinki back in 1975.

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In 2003, the militarization process of the European Union reached a new, institutionalised and strategic level. The Union leaders adopted the draft Constitutional Treaty and the Security Strategy paper.

The security strategy embraces to a very large extent the doctrine of the “war on terror” proclaimed by the Bush Administration. Rather than defending own territory, the strategy underlined that the frontline of EU security interests was situated far abroad. The Union was intended to develop such a military capability making several simultaneous military operations possible. According to this strategy, the Union should be capable for "early, rapid and when needed robust military interventions". Furthermore, such operations can be undertaken without UN mandate.

Already then the EU leaders agreed upon measures to start implementing military articles of the Constitution, although the Constitution had not been ratified. They decided to set up the European Defence Agency for the development of military capabilities. In addition, they reinforced the so called Berlin-Plus arrangements between NATO and the EU – an arrangement according to which EU military capabilities are developed in the framework of the NATO Strategic Partnership and can also use NATO resources.

The draft Constitution clearly shows the close links with NATO. So, the Common Foreign and Defence Policy should be in "conformity" with the policy agreed under NATO. Permanent structures for military cooperation, such as multinational battle troops and armaments' plans are created within the Union.

Out of many hundred articles of the draft Constitution not one single article focuses on political action to prevent conflicts, or on civil crisis management. This demonstrates the shift towards military actions in security policy. The Constitution commits Member States to build up their military capabilities, which again confers priority to the military aspects. On the other hand, the Constitution contains no obligation to increase resources for social, environmental or development cooperation.

At the recent EU Summit in Lisbon, EU heads of States and governments approved again the Constitutional Treaty, under a new name, but otherwise almost identical to the previous draft. For instance, nothing has changed in the articles dealing with the military. Also the Protocol on permanent military structured cooperation has again been incorporated as Annex 4 of the new Treaty.

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The vast majority of the Finnish population supports military non-alignment. Therefore, the Right wing forces have chosen the tactics of integrating Finland step by step into NATO. And the militarization process of the EU, which takes place in close cooperation with NATO, suits this tactics. Also constant propaganda around Russia as a threat is used to prepare the ground for military alignment. Such propaganda points to undemocratic developments in Russia, its growing expression of superpower ambitions and warfare in Chechnya. Finland's government itself has fed such threat images by refusing to join in the beginning the international ban on land mines and now the international ban on cluster bombs under the argument that such weapons are needed on the Finnish-Russian border.

The government of Finland is committed to participate in EU military operations. They did away with a restriction in Finnish law, saying that Finnish troops can be sent abroad only under the UN Security Council mandate. The participation in EU and also NATO led multinational troops is the main argument used to justify the arms build-up, which for next year alone provides for an increase of 17 %.

Participation in the cooperation of the European armaments industry has led to a situation where the EADS Corporation has become a major shareholder of the earlier State-owned Finnish defence company Patria. This company has opened cooperation with the world biggest multinational of the armament industry, Lockheed Martin, to produce special vehicles for the US mariners.

Finland participates in the NATO Partnership for Peace Programme. The Finnish armed forces have been made compatible with NATO standards to the extent that according to army generals membership is only short of a political decision. The US leadership as well as Finland's Right wing push for the next step to be taken, i.e. participating in NATO rapid deployment forces.

At the same time, Finland has reduced drastically her participation in conventional UN peace-keeping operations. In addition to EU multinational operations Finnish troops have started to take part in NATO led operations, for instance in Afghanistan.

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The Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU links neutral countries to NATO and event to support US imperialist politics. Over recent years, despite some contradictions, this link has grown stronger inside the European Union, because of the increasing number of governments favourable to US politics and NATO.

In my view, alternatives to the militarization of the European Union and to its linkage with NATO must be looked for outside the Union Treaty. The NO to the Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch referendums showed that we are not doomed to accept the "realities" as dictated by the elite. The antiwar movement has managed to force a number of governments not to send troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, or to withdraw their soldiers. I think that these examples speak in favour of the possibility to keep at least some member countries away from the EU militarization process.

In the Communist Party of Finland we have developed alternatives that combine the traditions of peace-loving policy of neutrality and military non-alignment on the one hand and the objectives of global security based on cooperation and justice on the other hand.

In a world torn by numerous conflicts and wars, there is a need for neutral mediation and humanitarian assistance. The non aligned European countries can have a positive role to

play in this diplomacy of peace. This requires an independent policy so that they cannot be identified with parties of conflicts or with imperialist policies.

Although we are told that the cold war belongs to the past, the contradictions between great powers have not vanished. This is exemplified by the present intention of the US to deploy missile and radar bases in Poland and Czech Republic. This is also an example showing the contradiction between European collective security interests and the US arms build-up and domination. The same is true for the US efforts to control the world's energy resources.

For us in Finland, neutrality is an alternative to the militarization of the EU and to NATO membership. It is a central reason why we say NO to the new Treaty.

Neutrality and non-alignment can also be seen in a broader perspective as an alternative to the militarization of international relations and to the attempts to solve international contradictions by means of force. We want a Europe that does not attempt to strengthen its positions by means of war. Besides that, Europe should not accept the role of payer of the bills of the US imperialist wars.

According to the well-known expression of von Clausewitz, war is the continuation of policy by other means. Correspondingly, anti-militarism calls for a different policy that does not defend corporate power and privileges of the wealthy minority. Here we need broader cooperation between Communist, Left wing and Red-Green parties. For example, we could continue initiatives of this seminar by organizing a seminar on neutrality and non-alignment in the next European Social Forum in October 2008 in Sweden.