

# A Europe of peace is possible

Friday 10 February 2006, by [WAINWRIGHT Hilary](#) (Date first published: January 2006).

**Two different visions of the role of the European military are competing with each other. One is based on the traditional use of military power. Hilary Wainwright outlines how activists are developing an alternative based on human rights and civic conflict resolution [Eurotopia]**

The military clauses of the would-be European constitution, committing the EU to becoming a military power, concentrated the minds of peace campaigners across Europe. The first moves towards an EU foreign and security policy had occurred with the Maastricht treaty in 1992 in response to the collapse of the Soviet bloc. A decade later, the constitution proposed moving beyond occasional joint military cooperation to a permanent EU military capacity, including a European army.

The debate over the constitution coincided with three leading European powers actively participating in the US occupation of Iraq, in the face of a strong popular movement against the war but without sustained opposition from other EU governments. From this came a new energy for developing alternatives to a military Europe. Many of those who gave the constitution a critical 'yes' share this commitment. The emergence of an increasingly internationally-co-ordinated peace movement, both across Europe and with movements in the US and the Middle East, also expanded our ability to imagine non-military means of resolving conflicts and achieving social justice. A good place to catch up with work on these alternatives was at the Assembly of the Charter of Principles for Another Europe. More than 180 activists from across Europe met in November 2005 on the top floor of a converted monastery, looking out over the beauty of an autumnal Florence. Raffaella Bollini from Italy's historic peace movement Arci and Leo Gabriel from Austria's Social Forum presented proposals on peace and security, the result of consultations that began with the first Assembly in Rome in 2004 and have continued since, including at the third European Social Forum in London.

Their statement starts with the fundamental guiding principle: 'Our Europe repudiates war as a means for solving international conflicts and recognises peace as a fundamental right of human beings and people.' The statement goes on to insist that Europe could be an 'active subject' with the capacity to defend and promote the conditions for peace. It summarises a consensus on the principles guiding a Europe working for peace - including opposition to pre-emptive war - and an agreed list of measures for action by the EU, its member states and networks of civil society. It then flags up issues of disagreement and ideas that need further exploration. (see [www.transform.it](http://www.transform.it))

The disagreement among activists is over whether there should be a European 'security force' to protect human rights and provide a basis of independence from the US. (Different advocates of such a security force emphasise different purposes.) Related to this is the question of whether there should be the possibility of 'humanitarian intervention' to defend peoples who are suffering as a result of an armed attack.

The consensus of principles challenges US military power - implicitly through an insistence on the

democratisation of the UN, and directly by opposing unilateral action by individual states and any form of imperialism and colonialism. Similarly, the measures agreed at the Assembly included an immediate stop to the proliferation of US bases around the world and the creation of a People's Tribunal (whether through reform of the Penal Court at the Hague or the establishment of another tribunal) to pursue and prosecute the perpetrators of war and foreign occupation. Some argue that the proposed European constitution provides the basis on which to build Europe as a counter-power to the US. This position has support from unexpected sources. The radical Italian philosopher of Empire and Multitude, Antonio Negri, advocated a 'yes' vote for the constitution, on the grounds not only that '[it] is a means of fighting Empire, this new globalised capitalist society. Europe has the chance of being a barrier against the pensée unique of economic unilateralism: capitalist, conservative, reactionary', but also that 'Europe can construct a counter-power against American unilateralism, its imperial domination, its crusade in Iraq to dominate petrol.' What's the alternative? It has to begin by dismissing the very idea that classic military power along US lines offers security, argues Mary Kaldor, a veteran of the 1980s Campaign for European Nuclear Disarmament. She argues: 'The idea of replacing - rather than scrapping - Trident is a scandal; the Euro-fighter is part of the baroque arsenal of the defence industry; and the 1.8 million Europe citizens now under arms are wasting their time from the point of every security both in Europe and elsewhere.'

Kaldor recently convened a study group that was commissioned by the EU commissioner for foreign policy and security, Javier Solana, to write a report for the EU on Europe's security policies. Its final report, *A Human Security Doctrine For Europe*, argues for a 'human security response force' of around 15,000 people, which would be one third civilians, including police, human rights monitors and development and humanitarian specialists. This would need to be able to 'prevent and contain violence in different parts of the world in ways that are quite different from classic defence and war-fighting'. The policy framework within which it operated would be based on the protection of human rights against gross violation and a contribution to global security under UN auspices, rather than the defence of nation states. It would require greater powers for the European Parliament over European security policy, as well as greater control by any local population that the force was aiming to protect. While Kaldor works inside the EU institutions at the same time as participating in the movement against the Iraq war, Ramon Fernandez Duran - who cut his peaceactivist teeth during the campaign against Spanish membership of NATO in the 1980s - is sceptical of any initiative coming from the EU. 'There is a wide gulf between rhetoric and reality,' he says. 'Europe presents itself as a "soft power" but is building itself as a hard power.' Fernandez Duran's analysis of US/EU relations recognises tensions but sees these in terms of economic competition - competition between currencies and, in the long run, competition for the earth's scarce resources, especially oil. He believes that the priority now must be for civil society organisations to develop non-military means of resolving conflict. At the moment these ideas are mainly being developed through brave experiments such as those of Women in Black in the former Yugoslavia (see page 39), but they need more resources and support from better-resourced movements such as the trade unions. Building capacity for non-militaristic conflict resolution, argues Fernandez Duran, needs to be combined with constant efforts 'to dismantle and challenge the dominant military and political power by building the capacity of democratic civil structures from below, at the same time as we reduce military budgets and reorient defence spending (and R&D) to civil society and social and ecological needs.'

These ideas find a strong echo in arguments developed within the Russian Social Forum, tussling with the long history of how far and in what ways Russia is part of Europe. For them, an answer is to reject artificial borders that purposefully exclude Russia from Europe. The idea of the EU as a centre of power competing economically and militarily with the US would be 'the end of the left in Europe', in the words of Alla Glinchikova. 'It would involve closing the borders of Europe tightly; it would mean a strongly vertical and bureaucratic kind of politics.' Glinchikova believes in the potential of Europe - a Europe that includes those parts of Russia that see themselves as European - to be a

powerful force for an alternative world. But for Europe to play this role, she argues, 'Europeans must promote a civic integration, going beyond state borders and based on the power of civic resistance.' This, Glinchikova argues, would represent quite contrary kinds of power structures to those of the US. She sees 'Civic Europe' as 'an open, multi-circle project', which would include different types of involvement, from the west and east European 'circles' within the borders of the EU through to all European countries outside the borders of the EU, but always with the aim of bringing different parts of Europe closer together, more able to contribute to a global alternative. Another significant but undervalued voice speaking from outside the borders of the EU for an alternative Europe is that of the Socialist Left Party (SV) in Norway, now in government with the Labour Party with the support (and constant pressure) of the trade union and peace movements. The SV starts from a commitment to complete demilitarisation, withdrawal from NATO and the reallocation of money to the southern hemisphere. (Norway's then environment minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was the author of the highly influential 1987 UN report, *Our Common Future*, which linked the security of the North with the well-being of the South. The SV took this report to its logical, radical conclusions.)

Now, after tough negotiations with the Labour Party accompanied by daily popular demonstrations outside, the SV is making some small gains. These include a reallocation of oil surplus as aid for the South; the commitment to withdraw Norwegian troops from Iraq; the actual withdrawal of Norwegian special staff from NATO's Afghanistan operation; a commitment to end trading in hand weapons; and a commitment, against the wishes of the Labour Party, that Norway will not participate in international military operations without a clear UN mandate.

'Our approach is to build peace by addressing the causes of conflict - the growing gulf between rich and poor and the abuse of human rights - and by supporting civilian initiatives in conflict resolution and campaigning for nuclear nonproliferation and for the UN to develop a standing peace-keeping force,' says Dag Seirestad, one of the leaders of the SV.

There is still a long way to go, and there is an urgency about developing alternative policies. There is clearly a strong radical consensus on dismantling the existing military, including nuclear forces and US bases in Europe. There is a commitment to using the military budgets of the EU (which pays for the EU Military Staff) and EU states for international peace-keeping missions in areas of conflict. And there is agreement on the importance of non-military approaches to conflict resolution.

To add to this, we need to be able to conduct a tough and principled debate about the role of the military - however transformed - and what is possible through the existing EU institutions. The EU elites have been in crisis since the rejection of the constitution, but one likely response to this crisis is for them to go ahead anyway with further constructing a military Europe, as they have done in the past. The peace movement has had an impact within the EU, however, and now is the time to follow through our potential advantage with proposals and action that would weaken any such move and develop new thinking based on the wide variety of civic initiatives that have taken place in conflict zones across the world.

---

**P.S.**

\* Published by Eurotopia.