

Europe against US Missile Defence, a European conference organised by Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), London, UK, 31st January 2009

Europe against US missile defence – a conference in London to give Barack Obama a strong signal

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Abstract

On Saturday 31st January 2009, CND (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) organized a conference to show the strong opposition across Europe to the installation of the US Missile Defence system. Politicians and peace activists came from Great Britain, Poland, Czech Republic, France and Germany.

Keywords

Peace; Europe; US Missile Defence

Introduction

President Bush began the deployment of the US missile defence system immediately following his election in 2000. In 2001 he unilaterally renounced Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty with Russia and the proposals for the system in Europe initially consisted of US bases in the UK, with more recent plans for an interceptor missile base in Poland and a radar base in the Czech Republic. These proposals have created tension within Europe and with Russia. It is the neo-cons aim to achieve full military domination over the rest of the world. Pretending that this system is a defence system, US missile defence would give the USA the ability to destroy the Russian nuclear arsenal in a first strike attack, whilst its interceptor missiles could protect against any Russian missiles that were not destroyed. However an initial attack by Russia could not be stopped by the system. The new US President, Barack Obama, has not yet agreed the continuation of the project – making the conference timely in sending him a clear and strong signal of European opposition [1]. Main speakers at the conference are on the photograph presented in Figure 1.

Great Britain

Jeremy Corbyn, a Labour Member of Parliament (MP), underlined new perspectives opened by the arrival of Barack Obama, and the unilateral announcement of Russia on 28th of January 2009, that the deployment of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad will be delayed. The installation of Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad was announced by Russian president Dmitri Medvedev in November, in response to the new Cold War decisions to build the US radar in Czech Republic and install 10

interceptor missiles in Poland. Mr Corbyn reminded delegates of the enormous cost of the system, in comparison with the financial and economical crisis affecting all countries including the USA. But Michael Connarty, another Labour MP, noted that Obama's team includes those who still think in terms of the Cold War, which should ensure we stay vigilant in monitoring the new policy of US administration. Jean Lambert, Member of the European Parliament for the Greens, representing London, called for international solidarity against US missile defence.



Fig. 1: From left to right, first link: Elaheh Rostami-Povey (SOAS, UK), Monika Knoche (MP, Die Linke, D), Jolanta Szymanek-Deresz (MP, SLD, PL), Michael Connarty (MP, Labour, UK), Patrice Salzenstein (Mouvement de la Paix, F) and second link: Kate Hudson (CND, UK), Jana Glivická

Poland and Czech Republic

Jolanta Symanek-Deresz, MP, Socjaldemokracja Polska (SLD), said that according to the recent polls, only 47% of Polish people – against 39% for

– are opposed to the installation of the 10 interceptor missiles. This project, unpopular in public opinion, began with Polish president Lech Kaczynski (Law and Justice, i.e. PiS) and was followed, with some hesitations, by Donald Tusk's centre right (PO) government. The system is presented by Tusk as protecting Polish territory, but Ms Szymanek-Deresz indicated that not only will it be militarily insufficient, but also additional financial and technological help promised for Polish army had not yet materialised. She said that the SLD had signed an agreement with its Czech equivalent against US missile defence and promoted better relations with Russia, as the world is not dominated by a unipolar power any more, and Russia should be considered as a partner and not an enemy. Ivona Novomestská, speaking on behalf of the Czech social democrats (CSSD), indicated that 70% of Czechs remain opposed to US missile defence, and that more than 65 mayors of Brdy region, 60km south-west from Prague where the radar base is due to be installed, are visiting Brussels on 18th February to highlight their opposition during the Czech presidency of the European Union. She also stated that twenty years after the Russian army left their country, Czech people are proud of their independence and don't support another foreign army that would come with the US base [2].

Germany

The German social democrats (SPD) also gave message to show all what they expect after Obama became president. Monika Knoche, Bundestag member for Die Linke, Germany, called for a world without any nuclear weapons, and not only maintain a "wait and see" position, but to act strongly against US missile defence. She stated that the European Left Party is committed to opposing the system. She hoped that both

Europeans and Americans will take the opportunity of the recent Russian declaration ending their missile deployment in Kaliningrad and, in response, stop the installation of US missile defence in Europe.

Conclusion and perspectives

Other speakers, including myself, agreed that the anti-NATO summit in April 2009 in Strasbourg and Kehl, will be a good occasion to build opposition to the US missile defence system and CND will be sending a delegation. In order to co-ordinate action at European and international level, it would be useful to define common dates for anti-war initiatives and demonstrations in several countries at the same time. Giving a more European dimension, and not only preoccupation of England, Poland and the Czech Republic, is fundamental to help citizens who do not have the direct link of a US missile defence military base in their country. The next European Parliament elections will also be a good opportunity to ask all the candidates their opinion on the system. Better coordination could be provided by common tools such as a website providing information on pan-European campaigning actions and documentation about the US missile defence. Other issues discussed the question of financial needs for actions, like the cost of transport to demonstrations, other campaigning costs; and the idea of campaigning groups working with their counterparts in the Czech and Polish towns they are twinned with, to build a strong link across borders.

References:

- [1] P. Salzenstein, "Non au bouclier antimissile," *Planète Paix* 529, 20-21 (2008).
- [2] P. Salzenstein, "Ces Tchèques qui refusent le radar," *Planète Paix* 534, 18 (2008).