

Societal security in Europe instead of imperialist insecurity

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Abstract

This article develops a broad understanding of security that combines ecological, social and military security at the European level. The starting point is the problem that, in political debate, solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance against Russian occupation is often pitted against peace, social security and a consistent environmental and climate policy. Indeed, these goals appear to constitute an irreconcilable trilemma.

The aim of this article is to resolve this trilemma and develop a consistent ecosocialist strategy. Building on the article *'Towards barbarism? Climate, war and ecosocialist security dilemmas'*, this piece lays the foundations for an ecosocialist concept of continental security that combines social, ecological and anti-militarist perspectives at the European level. The key argument is that this concept can only be realised at the European level. This article forms the basis for an *'Ecosocialist strategy for social, ecological and military security'* presented in the subsequent article.

Keywords:

War – Ukraine – Russia – Europe – Security – Military policy – Conscription – Rearmament

Military security has become a central area of political debate. Russia's war against the Ukrainian people has intensified the massive wave of rearmament that began several years earlier. The Russian leadership is waging war against independent Ukraine because it regards the country as a threat to its authoritarian rule. People in the Baltic states and Moldova find themselves facing Russian threats and claims. European government officials are painting a grim picture of the danger of further Russian attacks. European governments are supporting Ukraine, but not to a sufficient extent to effectively repel the invasion. Instead, they are using the war as a pretext for rearmament and tougher austerity measures. A Russian victory would have devastating consequences for the Ukrainian population and would give a boost to national-conservative and fascist forces across Europe. The escalating imperialist rivalry and wars such as those waged by the US and Israel against Iran are not only an attack on the people directly affected, but also undermine social, environmental and military security in societies elsewhere – including in Europe.

Global heating is accelerating. It forms the basis for all social developments. Militarisation and rearmament are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. The various imperialist powers continue to rely on fossil fuels. Governments are responding to global heating and the abrupt changes in the Earth's system with a strategy of unequal and selective adaptation, which accepts mass displacement, the threat to millions of lives and the normalisation of barbaric conditions. At the same time, imperialist rivalry over control of resources and energy sources—including their prices, logistics systems and markets—is intensifying, manifesting itself in land grabs, coups and the military enforcement of spheres of influence. Prolonged trends towards economic stagnation and the resulting intensified struggle for markets are exacerbating imperialist rivalry, which in turn is driving up arms build-up.

The rise of national-conservative and fascist movements, which are being promoted by both the Putin dictatorship and the increasingly authoritarian Trump administration, poses an immediate threat to the lives of millions of people and to vital social achievements.

In the article *'Towards Barbarism? Climate, War and Ecosocialist Security Dilemmas'*, I have discussed some of these challenges facing a solidarity-based and ecological orientation in Europe (Zeller 2026a). An ecosocialist orientation must be capable of responding to these trends with a consistent programme for the whole of Europe, whilst acting with a sense of global solidarity and responsibility.

This claim forms the starting point of this article. Various political currents have pitted solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance against Russian occupation – including arms supplies – against peace, social security and a consistent environmental and climate policy. In fact, these goals appear to present intractable, multiple dilemmas. How do we reconcile the necessary radical socio-ecological transformation and de-industrialisation, the improvement of living conditions, resistance to imperialist wars – such as the one against Iran – and against general rearmament, support for the Ukrainian resistance against Russian occupation, and resistance to authoritarian and fascist forces into a coherent programme? In practical terms, the question arises as to how calling for the production of weapons to defend Ukraine is compatible with an ecosocialist position.

The aim of this paper is to resolve these dilemmas and to develop the foundations for a consistent ecosocialist strategy. I argue that the contradictions cannot be resolved at the national level, but only on a large scale – that is, at the European level – which necessarily entails a perspective of global solidarity.

First, I identify the elements and areas of tension within an ecosocialist orientation, upon which the subsequent argument is based. Building on this, in the *second* section I develop the foundations of an ecosocialist concept of continental security that combines social, ecological and anti-militarist perspectives. I argue that this concept can only be realised at the European level. I therefore set out in the *third* section why a European perspective on security based on solidarity needs to be developed. However, there is a significant conceptual gap, particularly with regard to a comprehensive understanding of security that encompasses ecological, social and military aspects. Finally, in the *fourth* section, I outline the contours of an anti-militarist ecosocialist military policy. This is only possible if we succeed in bringing the military-industrial complex under democratic social control, which I explain in the *fifth* section. Finally, in the *sixth* section, I examine conscription and argue that an army of conscripts is the lesser evil compared to a professional army. The conclusion summarises the most important findings and considerations. On this basis, in the follow-up article '*Ecosocialist Strategy for Social, Ecological and Military Security*', I outline a 15-point ecosocialist strategy for social, ecological and military security in Europe (Zeller 2026b).

1 Areas of tension within an ecosocialist orientation

Ecosocialists must be able to counter the unequal and selective adaptation to global heating driven by governments, the struggle to redivide the world into spheres of influence, the massive deterioration in living conditions, militarisation, and the authoritarian and fascist threats from both outside and within our societies with a consistent approach. We¹ need a project based on solidarity and ecology for the whole of Europe, grounded in a sense of global solidarity and responsibility. Before I set out the ecosocialist approach to an integrated European concept of security, I shall outline three fundamental positions on which the programme and strategy are based.

- As a matter of principle, we stand **with oppressed peoples**, regardless of which regime is attacking them and which political force dominates the resistance. We support those who are fighting against exploitation, discrimination and marginalisation, and for equal rights. This applies irrespective of the composition of governments and geopolitical constellations. That is why we support the Ukrainian people, particularly the trade unions, women's organisations, environmental groups, socialists, feminists and anarchists, in their struggle against the Russian occupation and their resistance to the Ukrainian government's neoliberal policies. We demand that Ukraine receive all necessary support, including weapons, to defend its independent society (International Declaration 2024; Zeller 2024c). That is why we are joining the global solidarity movement with the people of Gaza. We demand an immediate end to all support for the State of Israel, which is committing genocide against the Palestinian people. We stand up for the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people just as much as that of the Ukrainian people. *Occupation is a crime!* We stand with those forces in Palestine-Israel who are campaigning for full equality for the entire population and the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Likewise, we stand with the Sudanese people; we also defend the right of the Taiwanese people to self-determination and their own state; and we stand with the people

¹ When I write here in the first-person plural, I am including everyone who advocates for an ecosocialist transformation of production and reproduction, for democratic and national self-determination, and for the self-organisation of the working classes, and who, transcending geopolitical divisions, stands on the side of the oppressed, the discriminated against and the exploited. See also the presentation of *emancipation-journal for ecosocialist strategy* (<https://emanzipation.org/about-1/>).

of Venezuela who are fighting for a democratic and solidarity-based government and resisting colonisation by the USA. We stand with the diverse Iranian population in their resistance against the reactionary regime, whilst at the same time opposing the imperialist war waged by the US and Israel against Iran. The US leadership itself states that its aim is neither regime change nor the democratic rights of the people, but rather the establishment of an authoritarian regime friendly to the US – ideally involving some of the existing leadership – and the appropriation of oil resources.

In the past, like-minded movements supported the Algerian and Vietnamese peoples against imperialist domination and occupation by France and the United States respectively. We have also supported the Syrian Democratic Forces and the People's Defence Units in north-eastern Syria against Islamic State, Turkey and the Assad dictatorship toppled in December 2024, and welcomed the fact that the self-administration in Rojava was able to hold its ground thanks to US support. In this spirit, we advocate that Ukraine be provided with all the necessary resources and weapons to repel Russian imperialism.

- We advocate **economic restructuring and conversion** in order to replace fossil fuels entirely with renewable energy sources. This requires a massive reduction in energy consumption. However, global heating can only be slowed down if we succeed in disempowering fossil fuel capital and, indeed, in overcoming the rule of capital altogether. That is why a gradual socio-ecological transformation of capitalism is impossible. Nevertheless, we advocate any measure that helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As a step in this direction, we support the call for the socialisation of the energy sector. The redistribution of work, the reduction of working hours and the massive, democratically controlled expansion of social infrastructure in the areas of health, care, education and local public transport are important steps towards reducing the gender-specific division of labour, saving energy and curbing the fossil fuel sector. Production and reproduction must be restructured in equal measure (Zeller 2020, 2022a).
- An ecosocialist transformation of society is only feasible with the support of the vast majority of the **working population**. We stand with workers who campaign, both within and outside the workplace, for good working conditions, wages and social infrastructure. The struggles for a good life, decent housing and quality leisure time are equally important. Social emancipation and a sustainable relationship with nature are inextricably linked. That is why we emphasise that every social demand

must take ecological limits into account. However, whilst we do not defend jobs in the fossil fuel sectors, we do defend the right to decent work. The aim is to ecologically restructure and phase out these sectors with the active participation of the workers.

The capitalist mode of production would not have emerged without gender-based and racial discrimination and oppression. It remains dependent on these oppressive conditions. Militarisation helps to perpetuate and intensify them. That is why feminist, queer and anti-racist struggles are central pillars of an ecosocialist perspective. Ecosocialists strive to link these struggles with those taking place in the workplace and in their local communities, with socio-ecological transformation, and with transnational campaigns in support of anti-colonial and democratic movements.

This orientation, which I have outlined here only briefly and will not elaborate on further, forms the basis, in the current situation, for a revolutionary ecosocialist approach to comprehensive social security. However, this must resolve contradictions and dilemmas, which is only possible at a continental or European level. What does this mean, then, in terms of our resistance to the rise of militarism and the challenge posed by a comprehensive concept of security in Europe that also includes a military component?

In our opposition to the rearmament and militarisation of European states, we face a difficult trilemma. On the one hand, it lies at the heart of our political identity to resist militarisation and rearmament. On the other hand, we support the armed and unarmed resistance of the Ukrainian people against the Russian occupying forces. At the same time, we know that the entire military sector contributes significantly to global heating and devours vital social resources that are urgently needed in many other areas of society.²

All arms production and the use of weapons rely on fossil fuels. Arms production is responsible for a significant proportion of greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, governments use rearmament to justify their policy of public sector cuts. Capital is responding to global heating and the associated social catastrophes with increasing militarisation. The strengthening of the arms industry makes efforts to radically transform the industrial

² A similar trilemma is evident in the struggle over energy supply and prices. How can the struggles for affordable energy prices be reconciled with transnational solidarity and with the urgent ecological necessity of reducing energy consumption? At the time of the sharp rises in energy prices in autumn 2022, I put forward a number of proposals (Zeller 2022b).

system and achieve a complete phase-out of fossil fuels in energy production even more difficult. In such a situation, we must unite the following three pillars within a consistent programme and develop corresponding strategies (Figure1).

- We support social struggles for a good life, against all forms of exploitation, oppression and discrimination, in defence of social and democratic achievements, and in resistance to militarisation and rearmament.
- We stand in transnational and global solidarity with peoples fighting against discrimination, oppression and occupation, with the Ukrainian people as well as with the Palestinian and Iranian peoples, and with all other anti-imperialist struggles, regardless of the geopolitical constellation.
- We recognise planetary and ecological limits. We therefore advocate for a socio-ecological transformation and phasing out of the fossil-fuel-based industrial and energy system, with a view to complete defossilisation and the necessary reduction in energy and material consumption.

These three programmatic pillars must be interwoven and channeled into a strategy that enables the formulation of a shared, solidarity-based and ecological vision for the entire European continent, across all scales from local to continental. A solidarity-based orientation, which does justice to the responsibility of European societies towards the dependent and poor societies of the world, can only be realised at a continental level due to the intertwined production systems and interdependent political dynamics. Social struggles at different and often interconnected levels also influence the processes of learning through policy-making. However, collective learning processes can only be put into practice through democratically organised struggles. It is not uncommon for further difficulties to arise when the dynamics and balance of power at different geographical and institutional levels differ from one another or even run counter to one another.

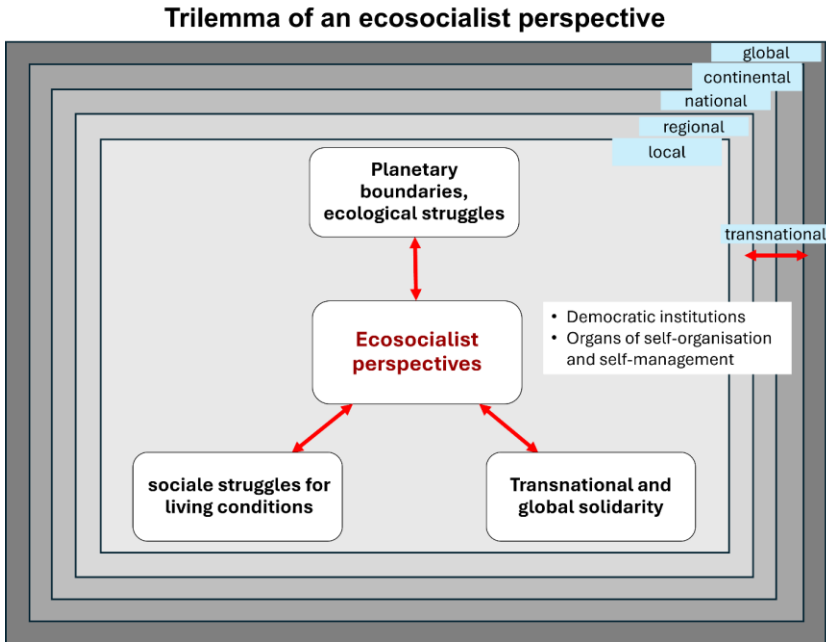


Figure1 | The ecosocialist perspective must bring together, in some cases conflicting, dynamics at all scales, from local to global

2 Foundations of an ecosocialist concept of continental security

Just as consistent industrial restructuring and conversion must be conceived on a transnational and continental scale in order to create social and ecological security, so too can the challenge of military security only be tackled through a continental and transnational approach. This means that conceiving a military-political concept, an armament or disarmament project, or even a vision of peace on a nation-state basis is already misleading.

In order to define the challenge more precisely and formulate **strategic hypotheses**, it is necessary to make political **assumptions**, which are, of course, subject to uncertainties and ambiguities. These assumptions are based on the abrupt changes to the Earth's and climate systems, unequal and selective adaptation, intensified imperialist rivalry, the deliberate destruction of social fabrics by Russia in Ukraine and by the US and Israel in

Palestine, Lebanon, Iran and possibly other regions; the justifiable and worthy-of-support defensive struggle in Ukraine; and the military build-up, intensified austerity and the accompanying social crises, upheavals and conflicts. I have analysed these processes in the article *'Towards Barbarism? Climate, War and Security'* (Zeller 2026a) . These assumptions are derived from that analysis.

The **first assumption** is based on an intensification of imperialist rivalry over spheres of influence, markets, sources of strategic inputs and energy resources. China and other emerging markets are challenging the existing US dominance and the associated so-called unipolar world order. However, a multipolar world order in which several authoritarian powers vie for influence does not in any way bring us closer to more democratic and less unequal conditions. The US, Russia, China and the strongest European states are seeking to impose a division of the world into spheres of influence. The planned partition of Ukraine by the US and Russian governments, Russia's endorsement of the Trump–Netanyahu deal at the expense of the people of Gaza, and the destruction of social infrastructure in Iran by the US and Israel all reflect these trends. The multipolar world order is a world of authoritarian powers designed to oppress large sections of the global population (Krishnan 2023). The division of the world could soon look like this: the US would dominate the Americas from Greenland to Tierra del Fuego, maintaining its influence in Europe as well as in selected areas of West Asia, South-East Asia and Africa. This would be in line with the security strategy published in early December 2025 (The White House 2025). Russia is striving for the power to shape Eastern Europe and Central Asia, although its success depends heavily on the course of the war in Ukraine. However, it must accept the loss of its spheres of influence in Latin America and the Middle East. The rising imperialist power of China determines what happens in South Asia and parts of Africa and presents itself as a partner to the so-called Global South. In between lie hotspots of conflict, such as in West Asia, and zones of joint exploitation, such as the Arctic Northern Sea Route. Climate change will leave a distinct mark on this rivalry.

The **second assumption** identifies a political threat to European societies — one that is not primarily military but is underpinned by military power — posed by national-conservative and fascist forces in Europe. The rise of these forces is the result of a profound crisis affecting both bourgeois-liberal society and the entire labour movement in many European states. The tsarist-fascist Putin regime and the increasingly authoritarian Trump administration, which is linked to fascist forces, are driving this

threat forward at the forefront. The Kremlin regime threatens the entire Ukrainian population. At the same time, the Russian leadership is strategically aiming to weaken and divide the EU and NATO and seeks to expand its own sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. It would, however, be pointless to threaten Germany, Austria or France, for example. It is entirely sufficient to exert military pressure on the Baltic states or Moldova to provoke differing and even conflicting reactions amongst the European elites and among the populations, and to deepen these contradictions. Various forms of sabotage and destabilisation are integral parts of such a strategy. The seizure of political power by national-conservative and fascist forces in key European countries, supported by Putin's leadership, would give a massive boost to the geopolitical and, above all, socio-political projects of Russian fascism.

The Trump administration also poses a threat to European societies. In its new security strategy, it openly announces its intention to support reactionary forces in Europe. It openly declares the EU to be an adversary that must be weakened and aims to fragment it into nation states that offer US capital open access to their markets. Trump's announcement of his intention to annex Greenland is aimed not only at geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the North Atlantic (resources, a new transport route through the Arctic Ocean), but primarily at weakening and, if possible, dismantling NATO and the EU. It is already becoming apparent that the EU and its member states are unable to resolutely resist the blackmail of the US leadership. This reflects, *firstly*, divergent interests within the EU; *secondly*, its extensive military dependence on the US; and *thirdly*, the lack of a coherent project for European unification.

The **third assumption** is that the bourgeoisie, which remains organised along national lines, will be unable to develop a coherent joint project for European societies within the framework of the EU. Within this framework, they will also be neither able nor willing to jointly defend the democratic constitution of European states (Zeller 2024a). On the contrary, the 'European elites' are pushing ahead with authoritarian projects whilst actively questioning the validity of international law. They subordinate themselves to the US in order to safeguard and, where possible, expand their own imperialist interests in its slipstream. France traditionally regards the Maghreb and parts of West Africa as its traditional sphere of influence, which it repeatedly secures, including by military means. Despite long-standing efforts, the EU has failed to develop a common and unified military strategy. The nation states are developing their own military capacities and capabilities, albeit mostly within the framework of NATO (Serfati

2025). At the same time, armament companies – most of which are rooted in nation states – are competing for major government contracts and potential export markets. For example, the French company Dassault and the Italian firm Leonardo are competing with Airbus – where the German side exerts significant influence alongside the French – over the development of a new joint 6th-generation bomber and air combat system. The project for a new main battle tank (MGCS) also risks being ground down by the rivalry between German and French capital interests (Carstens and Wyssuwa 2025).

The Russian war against Ukraine clearly reveals that the EU has so far been unable to develop a common security strategy. The pressure exerted by the Trump administration on European governments to step up their rearmament efforts also does not suggest that the EU will arrive at a unified security and military doctrine any time soon. Nevertheless, the powerful capital groups and state apparatuses are faced with the task of redefining their European project. However, there are strong indications that the national bourgeoisies will not be able to develop a consistent and unified security concept, any more than they have been able to truly overcome their rivalry in economic and political spheres, despite their shared commitment to integration based on competitive states. It is possible that the leading forces in Europe will cause the European unification project to fail due to their internal contradictions and diverging interests.

3 Developing a European programme and strategy

Socialists and progressive social movements now face the task of addressing the European dimension themselves with their own programmatic and strategic proposals, in order to put themselves in a position to substantially alter the balance of power in their own favour. The central foundation for this is a focus on defending and expanding social and democratic rights, underpinned by the self-organisation of workers at all levels. The European perspective is indispensable for developing a security policy based on solidarity.

The aim, then, is to reflect together on how the resistance against the Tsarist-fascist, fossil-fuel-based dictatorship in Russia, the destruction of Palestinian society, the war against Iran, and solidarity with the Ukrainian and Palestinian peoples' determination to assert themselves, can be reconciled with a comprehensive vision of social, environmental and military security, whilst at the same time pursuing a radical socio-ecological transformation across the whole of Europe. I have presented some reflections in

connection with the international declaration ‘Ukraine: a peace of the peoples, not an imperial peace’ (International Declaration 2024; Zeller 2024c).

3.1 Launching a debate on continental perspectives

Remarkably, there is currently hardly any broad social discussion about the prospects for a Europe based on solidarity and ecological sustainability. Apart from a technocratic and increasingly authoritarian administration driven by practical constraints – whether social democrat, green, liberal or conservative in nature – there seem to be no other projects left. Liberals of all stripes, including their social-democratic and green variants, offer not even remotely credible answers to a single challenge, neither at national nor at European level (Zeller 2024a; Samary and Zeller 2025).

National-populist, national-conservative and fascist forces are stepping into this void with their emphasis on national sovereignty within the framework of a ‘white’ Europe. The Putin dictatorship and the authoritarian Trump administration form the spearhead of this movement and are driving it forward at the international level. In several countries and regions of Europe, these forces are pushing their way into government or are already leading it, as in Italy, Hungary and Russia. The Trump administration brought about a qualitative shift in favour of these forces. The US National Security Strategy 2025 openly sides with these forces (The White House 2025). In numerous countries, we are witnessing a widespread popularisation and normalisation of fascist views, which are taking hold among broad sections of the population. The agendas of national-conservative and fascist forces are becoming increasingly clear: the continuation of the fossil-fuel economy; the generalisation of economic competition alongside selective national shielding; racist exclusion and white supremacy; a patriarchal backlash; authoritarian regimes; and technological solutionism.

There have periodically been debates and discussions about a united socialist Europe, which we should take up again. Even at the height of the Cold War confrontation and the arms race in the early 1980s, neither the peace movement nor the socialist left was in a position to bring comprehensive joint proposals for a European security and peace order into the debate. In an article that is still well worth reading today, Peter Gowan outlined at the time some key points on how socialists in the East and West could develop a shared European perspective beyond the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain (MacDonald 1986).

Around 20 years ago, there was a more wide-ranging debate about a different, social Europe. In the wake of the anti-globalisation movement and

the European Social Forums, various grassroots initiatives and anti-capitalist forces formed networks. They not only coordinated their activities but also exchanged views on their visions for society and their strategies (Zeller 2006).

In the referendums held in France in May 2005 and shortly afterwards in the Netherlands in June, a majority of voters in each country rejected the neoliberal and authoritarian European Constitutional Treaty. In doing so, the people dealt a crushing defeat to the governments of their countries and the EU leadership. Large sections of the radical left and social movements campaigned vigorously for rejection, not, however, out of an anti-European stance, but quite the opposite: to lay the groundwork for an alternative Europe – one based on solidarity and environmental sustainability. Debates began to emerge, albeit tentatively, about far-reaching social alternatives in Europe and institutional changes for a more solidarity-based global economy. In the resistance against privatisations, the question of ownership was also raised in a proactive manner. In France, both critical academics and movement activists brought the perspective of '*appropriation sociale*' – that is, the social appropriation of key sectors of the economy – into the debates (Coutrot 2002; Andréani, et al. 2002). A widely acclaimed manifesto for a different Europe (Salesse 2004) spurred further debate.

The financial and economic crisis, the burden of which was heavily shifted onto the populations of southern Europe; the European crisis and the euro crisis; the suppression of the uprisings in the Arab countries; the outbreak of Russia's war against Ukraine in 2014; the migration flows; and the failure of the left-wing populist Syriza government in Greece caused the pendulum to swing back. Progressive social movements and left-wing parties such as Podemos in Spain allowed themselves to be integrated into the prevailing government policy and were forced onto the defensive. To a large extent, the focus was now solely on warding off further deterioration and the emerging influence of nationalist-populist forces. When the Brexit referendum was held in the UK, the Left, both within and outside the Labour Party, was divided. Some saw Brexit as an opportunity to weaken the neoliberal EU, whilst others believed that remaining in the EU would be a better way of upholding European solidarity. The simplistic rejection of the EU by the first faction underestimated the rise of the nationalist right. Whilst the second faction recognised the European challenge to some extent, it was unable to develop an independent, at least radically democratic and socio-ecological programme for Europe – within, against and outside the EU (cf. Samary and Zeller 2025).

Since the start of the large-scale Russian offensive against the Ukrainian population on 24 February 2022, the debate has been dominated by military and defence policy considerations. The traditional Left no longer offers any impetus in this complex situation. The climate movement and other movements mostly operate on a small scale, lacking a shared transnational or even a continental perspective and practical orientation that would enable them to improve the balance of power.

Despite the EU's authoritarian, competitiveness-driven integration, political and social debates have remained fragmented along national lines. To date, hardly any common European space for civil society has developed in which to advance social demands. This is due, on the one hand, to the EU's fragmenting policies and, on the other, to the failure of critical social scientists and (eco)socialist organisations to recognise that the European dimension is central, as well as to the inability of progressive social movements to organise across national borders. There is no evidence to suggest that the withdrawal of individual states from the EU would make it any easier to create a shared space for discussion and exchange 'from below'.

We therefore need continental strategies and organisational processes to drive forward joint mobilisations, whilst at the same time taking account of national, regional and local circumstances and specificities. This means that a continental strategy must connect with the numerous and diverse movements at local, regional and national levels and strive to bring them together. And these ambitions must also include populations outside the EU. Let us not forget the people in Ukraine, Russia, Moldova and Turkey. The specific demands must be understood in the same way across the continent (Zeller 2024a).

3.2 Europe is funding Russia's war

This challenge of a European concept of security based on solidarity is closely linked to energy supply. Several countries in Europe still source gas from Russia, thereby contributing to the financing of the war machine and to investments in the expansion of the Putin regime's fossil fuel infrastructure. From the entry into force of sanctions against Russia on 5 December 2022 until the end of November 2025, the EU was the largest buyer of Russian LNG, accounting for 49 per cent of Russian LNG exports. China and Japan follow with 22 per cent and 18 per cent respectively. The EU was also the largest buyer (35 per cent) of pipeline gas from Russia, followed by China (31 per cent) and Turkey (27 per cent) (Raghuunandan 2025).

An analysis by urgewald concludes that, in 2025, EU member states imported over 76 per cent of Russian LNG exports from the Siberian Yamal Peninsula, which was slightly more than in the previous year. In February 2026, the EU even accounted for 100 per cent of these LNG exports. Russia generated an estimated €7.2 billion from these deliveries by the end of 2025. The EU's importing countries thereby helped to finance Russia's most important LNG export terminal. It is a central pillar of Russia's strategy to expand LNG production and its entire fossil fuel infrastructure. As transport through the Arctic Ocean requires specialised vessels and other export markets are geographically difficult to reach, Russia is dependent on this 'logistical lifeline'. The EU member states continue to willingly allow it to breathe. The EU therefore holds a strategic lever against Russia, which it is deliberately choosing not to use. For years, the LNG terminals in Zeebrugge in Belgium, and Montoir and Dunkerque in France, have played the leading role in these transactions. Here, the gas is transhipped or, once liquefied, delivered via pipelines to further destination countries. One shipping company from the UK and one from Greece each provide the bulk of the specialised icebreaker tanker fleet (urgewald 2026b, 2026a).

For years, the EU's sanctions regime against Russia has deliberately allowed for the import of gas, oil and uranium, and accepts that companies in the EU continue to supply Russia with strategically important goods via third countries in Asia (Brooks 2024; Zeller 2024b). European states are still far from having exhausted all legal and political means to effectively sanction Russia's shadow fleet of oil tankers. Indeed, in the first three quarters of 2025, Russia still derived just under a quarter of its government revenue from the extraction and sale of fossil fuels (Brooks, et al. 2026).

With the 19th sanctions package in October 2025, the European Council agreed to accept Russian LNG supplies for a further year, until the end of 2026 (European Council 2025). Following some negotiations, the European Parliament confirmed this decision on 17 December 2025, with pipeline gas from Russia even permitted until the end of September 2027 (European Parliament 2025). Everyone knows that this decision does not hinder Russia's war efforts. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, European states have been complicit in financing Russia's war against the Ukrainian people and in the development of new oil and gas infrastructure.

For environmental reasons, LNG consumption must be drastically reduced immediately. The opposite is happening. Consumption and imports are increasing. Due to the sanctions against Russia, European LNG imports from other countries have risen sharply. By far the largest supplier of pipeline gas is Norway, which has increased its share from just under 40 per

cent to just under 52 per cent in the third quarter of 2025 since the start of the Russian war in Ukraine. The US has established itself as the largest supplier of LNG with a share of just under 60 per cent. Prior to the invasion, this stood at around 30 per cent, with a particularly sharp increase in 2025 at the expense of Russia and Qatar. However, even during the war year of 2024, Russia still held a share of 15 to 20 per cent and did not see a decline to just under 13 per cent until 2025 (Eurostat 2025). As the EU and its member states are making no effort whatsoever to reduce gas consumption or even phase out fossil fuels, they are replacing their energy dependence on Russia with dependence on the US, which is just as problematic. After all, the Trump administration's blackmail tactics are affecting Europe not least of all. Many governments are adopting increasingly radical rhetoric on 'energy security', which has intensified massively since the attack on Iran.

An alliance of various environmental NGOs is running a campaign to boycott Russian gas and oil (Razom We Stand 2024). This campaign should be supported from an ecosocialist perspective. Of course, the aim is not to replace Russian pipeline and liquefied natural gas with gas from other regions. Rather, phasing out Russian gas must pave the way for a complete phase-out of fossil fuels.

The climate movement, trade unions and left-wing organisations should rally behind the demand to stop importing fossil fuels – as well as enriched uranium – from Russia. Their broad support would send a strong signal of solidarity with the people under attack in Ukraine. A broad Europe-wide alliance could push this demand through. This would weaken Putin's war machine and provide vital support for the Ukrainian resistance. This demand must be linked to a commitment to moving beyond the fossil fuel economy altogether (Zeller 2024b).

3.3 We need a European ecosocialist strategy

Social, environmental and security concerns are therefore closely intertwined at the European level and require an equally integrated European response. How, then, can the challenge of ensuring comprehensive social, environmental and military security for the whole of Europe be addressed through a continental ecosocialist strategy?

We need a vision of solidarity for the entire European continent. This vision includes massive support for the Ukrainian resistance. The fact that the countries of Europe and the US have so far provided Ukraine with too little support is due to political and economic reasons. Some key sectors of

capital continue to aim to resume 'reasonable economic relations' with Russia.

In view of the systematic terror of bombing and missile attacks against the Ukrainian population, it is right to demand that European states ensure Ukraine can defend itself. Together, European states could provide Ukraine with significantly more air defence systems to protect the population from missile attacks. They are not doing so because – just like the Trump administration – they are banking on reaching an understanding with the Putin regime, albeit on terms more favourable to themselves. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy announced that Ukraine needs at least 25 Patriot systems in the short term. In November 2025, he proposed that European states transfer their Patriot systems to Ukraine and purchase new systems from the US in return. They could accept long delivery times. Ukraine does not have that much time (Blackburn 2025). This proposal by Zelenskyy deserves support. Supporting Ukraine does not require a general rearmament, but rather targeted arms production, the supply of existing weapons capable of halting Russia's missile terror, and, above all, the effective imposition of economic sanctions on Putin's dictatorship (see also 'Towards barbarism? Climate, war and ecosocialist security dilemmas', Zeller 2026a). The attack by the US and Israel on Iran has made it abundantly clear that the US was withholding weapons systems in order to deploy them for its own imperialist campaigns.

We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. The more successful Ukraine is in its resistance against Russian imperialism – and the more we contribute to this – the better our chances of countering the general wave of rearmament and the rise of fascism in Europe and worldwide. Conversely, should Ukraine be defeated by the Russian occupying forces, leading to widespread demoralisation among the Ukrainian population and the flight of many Ukrainians, and should, as a result, national-conservative and fascist forces in Russia, Ukraine and elsewhere in Europe gain massive strength, with the Putin regime actually launching further revanchist attacks, our resistance to rearmament would become significantly more difficult. A victory by the 'Petro-state' of Russia against the people of Ukraine would embolden other autocratic rulers to launch military campaigns. Ultimately, all social and environmental struggles in Europe – and indeed worldwide – would face even more difficult conditions. The US-Israeli war against Iran presents us with the challenge of combining solidarity with the resistance against the dictatorial regime with our opposition to this war.

4 Why we need an ecosocialist, anti-militarist military policy

Socialists, ecosocialists and the entire Left are not only lacking in a clear vision when it comes to Europe, but have also barely discussed military policy for around thirty years (cf. Silberstein 2025). They have failed to adapt their ideas and concepts to current developments. Since compulsory military service was suspended in France in 2002 (having already been decided in 1997) and in Germany in 2011, this ignorance of the military challenge has intensified and become entrenched. Influential figures in the German peace movement claim to have maintained a critical engagement with rearmament and militarism. Yet their geopolitical orientation and grotesque trivialisation of Putin's dictatorship have contributed significantly to this disorientation. Whilst their approach was already highly questionable in many respects in the 1980s, it is now completely out of step with the times and is even taking on reactionary traits. In this respect, it is not surprising that leading figures in the peace movement are also prepared to collaborate with nationalist forces and those who downplayed the pandemic.

Of course, the *'Rearm Europe'* programme must be rejected. In the spring of 2025, various left-wing organisations formed the *'Stop Rearm Europe'* alliance; however, with its pacifist orientation, this alliance ignores both the Ukrainian resistance against the Russian occupying forces and Russian imperialism (cf. Vola 2025). Whilst large sections of the so-called peace movement do criticise the suffering caused by the Russian invasion, they downplay or conceal the Ukrainians' ongoing resistance against the partition of their country. Groups on the so-called radical left justify their opposition to the defence of Ukraine by invoking, in an ahistorical and abusive manner, so-called revolutionary defeatism, as propagated, for example, by Lenin before and during the First World War (cf. Silberstein 2025), whilst being well aware that Lenin expressly supported the struggle for national self-determination, even under the leadership of bourgeois forces. Furthermore, Lenin adapted swiftly to political requirements. Within a few years, he advocated four different variants of revolutionary defeatism, not as an ironclad principle, but in order to intervene and alter the balance of power (Draper 1953). The Zimmerwald Manifesto expressly rejected the occupation and annexation of countries, defended the right to national self-determination and thereby also legitimised resistance against occupying powers (Trotsky 1915).

Li Andersson, a Member of the European Parliament for the Finnish Left Alliance (Vasemmistoliitto), argues that, rather than advocating abstract pacifism, we must defend democratic freedoms, pluralism and hu-

man rights whilst at the same time opposing the imperialist and authoritarian right. Authoritarian governments and movements pose a real and fascist threat. This also gives rise to the need for an adequate defence capability in Europe and an energy policy that overcomes dependence on both Russia and the US (Andersson 2025b, 2025a). Whilst this line of argument is understandable, it is too heavily oriented towards existing state and European structures and overlooks the imperialist and authoritarian ambitions of conservative, liberal and social-democratic governments in Europe.

Over the past four years, the dynamics of Russia's war against the Ukrainian population and Ukraine's defence efforts have completely transformed the nature of the conflict on multiple occasions. Both the Russian invading forces and the Ukrainian defenders have had to repeatedly adapt their military strategies and tactics to the new circumstances.

The rapid development of electronic warfare and the flooding of the battlefield with swarms of relatively inexpensive reconnaissance and combat drones – controlled in combination using artificial intelligence – presents both the attacking and defending armies with unprecedented challenges. Technological development is progressing so rapidly that the nature of warfare changes every few weeks.

The significance of deploying various drones, remotely piloted vehicles and artificial intelligence renders previous doctrines of warfare obsolete, whilst at the same time underlining the importance of ingenuity and creativity. Without the creative use of new technologies, Ukraine would not have been able to defend itself effectively. And this approach becomes all the more effective the more the population is involved in it.

The trend towards wars of attrition is likely to increase. The warring parties seek to systematically weaken their opponents' infrastructure and the morale of their population. The revolution in military technology, with the rise of remotely controlled air, sea and land vehicles and the use of artificial intelligence, is opening up entirely new possibilities for undermining the opponent's military and economic potential by destroying strategic military and civilian infrastructure across the entire territory. The comparatively inexpensive, concentrated and precisely targeted swarms of drones are intended to destroy the opponent's critical economic and social infrastructure. This means that it will become increasingly important to hold one's ground in a war of attrition (Zaloujny 2025).

However, this is by no means a purely military matter any longer. In such a situation, a society's capacity for innovation and social resilience become decisive factors. These capabilities depend on how society and the de-

fence system are organised. The broadest possible democratic participation, a fair distribution of the burdens of war, and the extensive involvement of the population in defence efforts – which extend far beyond the immediate military theatre of operations – strengthen a democratic society's defences against external and internal enemies. In Ukraine, drones are produced not only by large companies but also by small businesses and self-organised collectives, which, working closely with army units, adapt the drones to rapidly changing conditions on the ground. In Ukraine, for example, numerous kamikaze drones are also in use, which have been hand-crafted using electronic components from household appliances.

These lessons from Ukraine show that a country's defence capability depends less on whether it spends 1 per cent, 2 per cent or 5 per cent of its GDP on potentially very expensive but inappropriate weapons systems, and more on the democratic participation and innovative capacity of its resilient population. Unsurprisingly, Ukrainian experts believe that European states are spending vast sums preparing for a war that no longer exists. European states are lagging far behind in their understanding of drone warfare (The Economist 2025). Defence cannot be left to the generals and an authoritarian officer caste; it must be based on the broad working population and their democratic participation (Bendyk 2025). A key requirement of a defence system supported by the population is the dignity and rights of soldiers, as well as democratic participation within the combat units (Novak 2025).

Workers in infrastructure, hospitals and key production sectors are keeping operations running despite the attacks. The army, too, is made up of workers who, until their conscription, could scarcely have imagined leading a life as soldiers and were equally ill-prepared for it. In Ukraine, the lack of preparation for the necessary defence has led to great suffering and high costs. Oleksandr Kyselov reminds us how unprepared the Ukrainian left was for the wars of 2014 and from 2022 onwards. Like most people in Ukraine, it called for dialogue. When the Russian army then launched its invasion, it was taken by surprise, and the political positions it had previously held proved to be useless or even harmful. 'Fascism cannot be fought with open arms and flowers,' is how Kyselov soberly summarises the challenge (Kyselov 2025).

Based on these considerations, we must overcome the often-postulated contradiction between social security and military security. An emancipatory policy must also include a policy of defence by and for the broad working-class population (in other languages, this is called 'people's defence').

How can we realise our aspiration to change society without considering how we can protect it?

5 Controlling the military-industrial complex

Arms production is driven by capital's pursuit of profit. The arms industry focuses almost exclusively on states as customers. States and government policy are therefore a key variable in corporate strategies. It is therefore not surprising that lobbying and all forms of influencing political decisions – ranging from associations and interest groups to the media and even corruption – have a strong impact on the dynamics of the industry. This close interdependence between the arms industry and state institutions is often expressed by the term 'military-industrial complex' (Schmid 2024; Serfati 2024, 2025). The economic and political interdependencies within military-industrial systems are so close, and their internal dynamics so pronounced, that they can be characterised as the totalitarian core of contemporary capitalism. The absence of any form of democracy is a central feature of the arms industry and the entire military-industrial system (Serfati 2026).

What the industry produces is not determined by the security needs of the population, but by the demand from states with deep pockets. That is why the major weapons manufacturers focus on profitable export markets. Authoritarian regimes and dictatorships are strategically important customers for this industry. The profitability of the arms industry has risen significantly since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine and the increased threat of war in other regions. Major financial institutions and funds hold substantial shareholdings in arms companies and, through dividend payments and rising share prices, appropriate a large proportion of the companies' profits – that is, the surplus value generated by the workers. It is the companies, not the states, that export weapons. However, through their diplomacy, national governments lay the groundwork for these deals, and the companies often receive financial guarantees from their 'own' state. National markets are characterised by a monopsony (one buyer, multiple suppliers). The arms company must therefore maintain 'good' contacts with government bodies. For the arms industry in most countries, export markets are of crucial strategic importance in order to achieve economies of scale.

To free arms production from the logic of profit, the arms industry and the financial sector must be socialised. But that is not enough. The central question is who can actually implement a democratic military policy, within

the framework of a social orientation based on the self-organisation of the working classes. The focus on the social appropriation of the arms industry and its entire value chains and financing mechanisms aims at a comprehensive democratisation of all relevant structures and processes that serve the defence of society, not of the state. However, this is only possible based on a broad and comprehensive mobilisation of the working classes.

Russia's war of aggression and Ukraine's defence, as well as the threat to other states posed by various forms of hybrid warfare, reveal that the defence of our societies – not states – must be reimagined. On the one hand, the existing bourgeois armies and security apparatuses will do little to defend our democratic and social achievements; this is particularly true of professional armies. On the other hand, under pressure to defend international competitiveness and hold their own in imperialist rivalry, even conservative, liberal and social-democratic parties in government will resort to authoritarian forms of rule and stifle these achievements.

If we were to succeed in placing arms production under the democratic control of the population, this would require replacing the mobilisation of resources for the manufacture of tanks, aeroplanes and ships with the production of drones, ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and missile defence systems. Self-managed mass production would have to be combined with controlled storage that serves the defence system supported and organised by the population. We are, however, entering uncharted territory when it comes to determining the scale at which this democratic appropriation and self-management of arms production could actually be possible, sensible and enforced in accordance with the balance of power. A democratically controlled arms production would also quickly face the question of to whom weapons should be supplied. In contrast to armed or pacifist neutrality, a perspective of transnational solidarity would seek to support threatened social and liberation movements. These movements will themselves acquire and manufacture drones.³ The coming armed popular uprisings against dictatorships and occupying powers will rise up with the help of supplied drones and those manufactured locally (Hardy 2025). From an emancipatory perspective, it is essential to support these uprisings.

³ However, criminal organisations of all kinds are also arming themselves with drones, thereby creating new types of threats. See, for example, Henry Ziemer: "Illicit Innovation: Latin America Is Not Prepared to Fight Criminal Drones", Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 11 June 2025 <https://www.csis.org/analysis/illicit-innovation-latin-america-not-prepared-fight-criminal-drones>

6 Consider the nature of the army and conscription

The entire left-wing spectrum is ill-prepared to face the challenge of how to defend Europe's democratic and social achievements against external and internal threats posed by authoritarian states and forces. The question of the nature of armies and compulsory military service is increasingly at the centre of debates. Socialists have scarcely addressed this issue over the past thirty years or so. Many reduce the threat to the fascist right in their own country or, at most, to the authoritarian measures of the Trump administration or the EU. At the same time, they deny the threat posed by Putin's tsarist-fascist dictatorship, which is, however, much more of a political and social threat than a military one.

On 5 December 2025, the German Bundestag, and on 19 December the Bundesrat, passed the Military Service Modernisation Act (WDMoG), introducing compulsory medical conscription with effect from 1 July 2026. This will facilitate the reintroduction of compulsory military service should the need arise (Fleischer 2025). The so-called peace movement, the Left Party and most small radical or revolutionary groups oppose the reintroduction of conscription. School strikes took place at numerous schools. The fact that young people who have grown up without conscription reject it and take to the streets is just as obvious and understandable as the resistance to general rearmament.

However, the arguments against the reintroduction of compulsory military service need to be critically re-examined. The debate over the reintroduction of compulsory military service is raging, particularly in Germany. Some base their opposition on a pacifist stance, whilst others argue that they do not wish to defend this bourgeois state. Many simply justify their opposition on individualistic grounds without giving any thought to the democratic rights that still exist or the social situation, whether in their own country or, for example, in Ukraine.

It is striking that opposition to conscription and rearmament is mostly justified with arguments that are limited to Germany. After all, they say, Germany is not under threat. Others believe that, by supporting Ukraine, the German government is risking a war with Russia. This is wrong on two counts. Firstly, Germany's support, measured against GDP, is smaller than that of the Nordic countries; secondly, Germany is far from being involved in the war. Opponents of conscription fail to place the issue of security within the broader European context and, consequently, do not frame the discussion from a transnational perspective of social solidarity. It is obvious that people in Ukraine are under attack on a daily basis. However, if we recognise that people in the Baltic states and Moldova may also be under

threat, and that Russia and other authoritarian states and organisations threaten our societies through various forms of hybrid warfare and support for reactionary forces, we must consider a number of further points.

A consistent pacifist stance would be to reject the army on principle. However, only radical pacifists argue in this way. On the left, opposition to conscription effectively amounts to accepting a professional army. We have learnt from the history of the labour movement that this position is highly problematic. Even after the abolition of conscription, the army remains an instrument of capitalist rule. Through the recruitment of contract and professional soldiers, as well as through professionalisation, armies have in fact reinforced their role as instruments of domination.

The debate on conscription is not new. Interestingly, on the eve of the First World War, Rosa Luxemburg did not reject conscription but instead advocated for a militia – specifically as a transitional demand pointing beyond the existing power relations (Luxemburg 1913: 217, original in German).

All capitalist states, large and small, are now caught up in the maelstrom of the arms race. [...] It is a hopeless utopia to expect that our propaganda for disarmament will cause the capitalist states to cease arming themselves. Armaments are a fatal consequence of capitalist development, and this path leads into the abyss.

We must pursue a quite different aim, one which clearly and unambiguously sets out our historical task: the militia system, the arming of the people, as demanded by our programme. We have a duty to tell the people that they must cease to show blind obedience, that they must look after their own interests. However, the demand for a militia is something quite different from the disarmament of the ruling class; the militia system can arise solely and exclusively from the initiative of the proletariat. We are under no illusions; we do not believe that we can introduce the militia overnight. A military organisation in which the armed people decide whether or not they wish to go to war is incompatible with the rule of the Krupps and the arms cartels. To introduce the militia, we must overthrow the ruling classes; that means a revolution, a colossal task in the course of history. But should that be a reason to keep our demand carefully tucked away in a cupboard like a family heirloom, to be brought out only on particularly solemn occasions?

No! We must demand the militia as part of our daily programme of action; ...

Rosa Luxemburg thus opposes illusions in disarmament programmes and calls for the democratisation of defence. Although the realisation of this

perspective ultimately requires the removal of the ruling bourgeoisie from power, she argues that this demand must be raised in everyday political life and adapted to the specific conditions. This is the task we must now set ourselves.

To illustrate the key characteristics of a professional army, I draw on a sociological study of the composition of the French army (Coton 2017): Whilst the situation in the French army, with its colonial tradition and numerous deployments in West Africa, cannot be generalised to other armies in Europe, it does, at its core, demonstrate how socially dangerous professional armies are. The study paints a picture of a closed, authoritarian society. The officer caste is led by an elite trained at the Saint-Syr Officer Academy. Only a small proportion of colonels have risen through the ranks from the ranks of the enlisted personnel and have not graduated from this elite academy. The caste of the senior military hierarchy thus reproduces itself. Neither operational experience nor participation in 'live fire exercises' has any influence on promotion prospects (p. 53). Contract officers are thus almost exclusively relegated to less prestigious posts in support units (p. 175).

Despite the social heterogeneity of the officer corps and the recruitment process, its functioning gives rise to relatively impermeable hierarchical strata. Thus, a 'class culture' combined with a 'Saint-Cyr culture' prevails (p. 232). This culture even reproduces itself across generations, and in a very direct manner. The author's survey revealed that the children of officers make up the majority of pupils at the country's six military secondary schools. The vast majority of former officers who completed the preparatory classes for the Saint-Cyr officer training school have a father who is a manager or holds a higher intellectual profession (pp. 234–235). Only a vanishingly small minority of 2 per cent are children of manual workers or office staff. The author mentions the 'religious and bourgeois social life' of the Saint-Cyriens and the 'anti-democratic political views' they expressed in the course of her research (p. 241). Unsurprisingly, the literary preferences of the former 'Cornichons' interviewed are also strongly influenced by the nationalist far right (p. 222).

An army that is professionally trained and led by a caste of officers is less permeated by social life and its contradictions. It is therefore much more compliant and can be deployed as a force of order and repression against social movements, and as an instrument of imperialist adventures in other parts of the world. In the 1990s and 2000s, governments considered the risk of major wars in Europe to be low, but wanted flexible, professional armies that could be deployed rapidly anywhere in the world to carry

out their imperialist projects. Conscript armies were too cumbersome and too expensive for this purpose. Sending conscripts to Mali, Chad, Afghanistan or Iraq would have forced governments to constantly justify their actions. For this reason, several European states abolished conscription and instead built up smaller, more effective professional armies.

It is noteworthy, however, that it is precisely those EU states with a long tradition of military deployments abroad that do not have conscription, or that abolished it from the late 1990s onwards, opting instead for more authoritarian and efficient professional armies. These include Germany (abolished in 2011; registration and medical examination to be introduced from 2026), France (abolished in 1996), Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal. For other reasons, neutral Ireland, tiny Luxembourg and Malta do not have compulsory military service. Similarly, the Central and Eastern European countries of Poland (with a comprehensive training programme), Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Hungary abolished compulsory military service following the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships. By contrast, the smaller states of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Croatia (from 2026), Latvia, Lithuania, Austria, Sweden (selective) and Cyprus do have some form of conscription (Lazarou and Politis Lamprou 2025).

The situation in countries outside the EU confirms this picture. Norway has compulsory military service, which has been gender-neutral since 2015. Together with Finland, Switzerland probably has the most comprehensive and broadly based conscription system in Europe, which also includes annual refresher courses. Switzerland did not introduce a civilian alternative service until 1992. The UK abolished conscription in 1960. British Army operations in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in the world have been and continue to be carried out by an all-professional army. Some countries, such as Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Switzerland, have taken measures to promote cyber-specific conscription in order to prevent and respond to cyber-attacks (Lazarou and Politis Lamprou 2025).

The composition of the armed forces is one of the most contentious issues for the stability and transformation of the social order. It has lost none of its contentious nature since the abolition of compulsory military service in some states. There is no justification for delegating direct military combat exclusively to marginalised sections of society who volunteer to serve as soldiers.

In the past, professional armies have always proved to be reliable pillars of capitalist rule – the ultimate guarantor of the bourgeoisie's power, so to

speak. Socialist organisations should tackle this challenge both in principle and strategically. In the current situation, merely rejecting compulsory military service amounts to accepting a professional army. If socialist organisations reject conscription and accept a professional army as the lesser of two evils, they are de facto relinquishing the prospect of a comprehensive democratisation of society and a radical transformation of power relations, including those within the economy and the army. In doing so, they would also be abandoning the prospect of the working classes taking power. Ultimately, capital and the bourgeoisie will, as a last resort, rely on the professional army as an instrument of power and do everything in their power not to relinquish control of it.

An army of conscripts, by virtue of its composition and social integration, makes it at least potentially possible to convince many soldiers – as workers in uniform – to the cause of the working classes. However, universal conscription in Switzerland also demonstrates that this specific form of organisation of the bourgeois army has enormous ideological significance for the integration of the population into the existing order. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the USA, in order to wage its war against Vietnam, also enforced a conscription system (‘the draft’) between 1965 and 1973 – albeit one that was socially highly selective and unjust.

Our concern is not the defence of the ‘fatherland’, but the defence of democratic and social rights and achievements against external attacks by authoritarian states, as well as against internal attacks by reactionary and fascist forces (cf. Perekhoda 2025; Silberstein 2025). This was also the position of revolutionary socialists in the countries threatened by Nazi Germany before and during the Second World War. This defence by the wider population must be integrated into a strategy of social emancipation. It is not constructive to reject defence on individualistic grounds; rather, it must be organised democratically, encompassing local, regional, national and continental dimensions.

The party Die Linke in Germany and other left-wing organisations are right to criticise the ideological component and, at times, bellicose rhetoric associated with the introduction of compulsory military service. Yet war-mongering and nationalist indoctrination can go hand in hand even more closely with the strengthening of a professional army and, moreover, be directed much more efficiently at military personnel and their communities. Insofar as socialist, feminist and left-wing organisations also have activists within the army, they can counter this indoctrination and encourage soldiers to organise themselves, just as they do in other areas of society.

It is imperative that revolutionary ecosocialists and anti-capitalist social movements develop their own military policy. There is no justification for leaving the defence of democratic and social achievements, and of a reasonably democratic space in Europe, to internal and external enemy armies – and certainly not to professional armies with authoritarian officer hierarchies. Nor can we assume that armies can simply be abolished, not even by governments with a radical socio-ecological reform programme.

That is why the question of reintroducing compulsory military service, with the right to social and civilian alternative service, must not be taboo. How can we reinterpret Rosa Luxemburg's remarks quoted above in the light of today's challenges?

A democratic and emancipatory defence against fascist threats from within and without is based, first and foremost, on self-organisation and the creation of independent structures. At the same time, it makes sense – both in terms of defending democratic and social achievements and from the perspective of the working class taking power – to train citizens who are simultaneously drone pilots, developers, manufacturers and users of various types of drones and infantry robots. Training, team cohesion, the acquisition of 'soft skills' and the exchange of knowledge require repeated gatherings over short periods. That is what happens in an army supported by its citizens. This new form of defence service would not be what generations of conscripts experienced in the 1960s to the 1990s with marching drills and parades. Soldiers' trade union rights, democratic participation and self-governance, as well as continuous innovation, must be the educational driving forces behind this new form of military service (Hardy 2025).

The recent decision in Germany to reintroduce compulsory medical examinations and the calls for the reintroduction of compulsory military service do not point in the direction of a democratic defence service. It is therefore understandable to reject these measures. However, it is not right to reject compulsory military service in general. The key consideration in determining one's position should be how democratic rights can be defended and expanded, and how the power of capital can be strategically challenged. An army of conscripts offers far better conditions for initiating an anti-capitalist break and an ecosocialist transition than a standing, ideologically entrenched, reactionary professional army.

Socialists and feminists should therefore consider how they can develop a political practice for the self-organisation of soldiers within the armed forces. We can draw inspiration from the democratic soldiers' movements of the 1970s and early 1980s in several European armies. These movements brought social rebellion and a spirit of resistance into the armies. From the

mid-1970s to the early 1980s, soldiers' committees caused disruption to military operations in several countries. They managed, to some extent, to improve the position of soldiers and secure at least minimal democratic rights. They helped serving soldiers to produce their own newspapers, offered legal assistance against abusive orders and repression, and ensured wider public awareness. More importantly, the soldiers involved learnt to defend themselves and organise – often clandestinely – in the face of severe repression. They gained valuable experience of working alongside people from other backgrounds, walks of life, social classes and regions whom they would otherwise never have met.⁴

Unfortunately, these experiences have been forgotten and currently play no role either in the so-called peace movement or in left-wing organisations. The rapidly changing global situation, the new dimensions of insecurity – disasters caused by global heating, the rise of authoritarian powers and fascist movements, wars over territory, hybrid warfare and massive social insecurity and uncertainty – as well as the trend towards rearmament and militarisation in society – are forcing us to consider, on the one hand, how we might begin to organise people within the armed forces from a democratic perspective and, on the other hand, how we might develop a comprehensive understanding of ecological, social and physical-military security.

7 Conclusion: Addressing the challenge of security comprehensively

Ecosocialist forces must address the issue of security if they wish to play a part in the upcoming conflicts. They must develop a comprehensive ecosocialist security concept that integrates social, ecological and military security at the European level. The starting point is the apparent trilemma between solidarity with the Ukrainian resistance against Russian occupation, the commitment to social security, disarmament and opposition to imperialist wars, and the necessity of a socio-ecological transformation of the industrial and energy systems. I argue that only at the continental level can a consistent strategy be developed that combines transnational solidarity, disarmament and resistance to imperialist wars with socio-ecological transformation.

⁴ I myself have followed this classic anti-militarist approach and gained relevant experience in the Swiss Army.

The accelerating global heating, the intensifying global imperialist rivalry, large-scale and local wars, the persisting fossil-fuel-based industrial and energy system, and the rising authoritarian and fascist forces form the starting point. Neither the nationally fragmented European bourgeoisies and their governments nor the EU apparatus, shaped by conservative, liberal and social-democratic parties, are capable of responding coherently to the challenge. Their internal contradictions could even become so great that they cause their own European project to fail. Large sections of the Left allow themselves to be influenced by a top-down, geopolitical camp mentality, ignore the military threat to security, or cling to elements of an abstract pacifism. An emancipatory politics must, however, recognise that the defence of democratic and social achievements against authoritarian attacks – from both outside and within – includes military components.

An ecosocialist perspective must, as a matter of principle, stand alongside oppressed populations, defend the right to national self-determination and, at the same time, fundamentally challenge fossil-fuel capitalism. Solidarity with trade unions, feminist initiatives and environmental organisations, socialists and anarchists in Ukraine who are taking part in the resistance against the Russian occupying forces is a central pillar of this orientation. Ukraine must be provided with the weapons it needs for its defence and to repel the Russian occupying forces.

However, the massive rearmament of European states does not serve Ukraine, but primarily their own imperialist ambitions. The military-industrial complex follows its own logic, beyond any democratic control. Arms production, too, is subject to the primacy of profit. In order to democratically regulate arms production, the socialisation of the arms industry, the financial sector and the energy system is necessary. Military security is not measured by the level of defence spending, but by democratic participation, social resilience and capacity for innovation. These are the lessons to be learnt from Ukraine's defence struggle.

An appropriate stance on conscription can only be found by fundamentally considering the nature of armies. Professional armies reinforce authoritarian structures. Conscripted armies are more exposed to social contradictions and offer, at the very least, the opportunity to subject the armies to democratic mechanisms through the self-organisation of the soldiers.

Finally, I advocate putting forward for discussion a transnationally organised, European strategy for ecosocialist forces within social movements. Only by linking social emancipation, socio-ecological restructuring and deconstruction, and democratically organised defence capabilities can social

security in Europe be realised in place of imperialist insecurity. In the proposal for an *'Ecosocialist strategy for social, ecological and military security'*, I distil these considerations into a European programme that sets out a short-, medium- and long-term orientation (Zeller 2026b).

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