

# Critics Warn of Rising European Fascism as Security Conference Begins in Germany

Amy Goodman : 20-25 minutes : 2/14/2025

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As the annual high-level Munich Security Conference gets underway, the Russia-Ukraine war is dominating the agenda, and we speak to two guests protesting the conference. Economist, progressive leader and former Greek Finance Minister Yanis Varoufakis says the European project started with a noble goal of promoting peace but finds itself today “cornered” between Russian and NATO militarism. “Europe has been caught in a frenzy of warmongering,” says Varoufakis.

We also speak with German lawyer Melanie Schweizer, who was suspended from her job at the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs after being doxxed in an article published in the German tabloid *Bild*, owned by media giant Axel Springer SE, for her pro-Palestinian online statements. She is running for German parliament with the progressive party MERA25 in this month’s elections and warns the country’s political establishment is increasingly adopting the rhetoric and policies of the far right. “We see fascism playing out in real time, and it’s getting worse by the day,” says Schweizer.

## TRANSCRIPT

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**AMY GOODMAN:** This is *Democracy Now!*, [democracynow.org](https://democracynow.org), “War, Peace and the Presidency.” I’m Amy Goodman.

We turn now to Munich, Germany, where a high-level security conference with dozens of world leaders is underway. At the top of the agenda, Russia-Ukraine war. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is expected to meet with Vice President JD Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio today. Earlier this week, President Trump said he would hold bilateral talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the nearly three-year-long war. The announcement stoked fears in Europe that Ukraine would be sidelined in the talks. This is chancellor — the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz speaking last night at a news conference in Berlin.

**CHANCELLOR OLAF SCHOLZ:** [translated] Nothing should be decided about Ukraine without the Ukrainians, and nothing about Europe without the Europeans. That is a given. We agree on this with all our friends and partners in Europe. ... One thing is absolutely clear to me: Any negotiated solution must enable Ukraine to have armed forces at its disposal in the future that can repel any renewed Russian attack. This is a considerable challenge, financially, materially and logistically. This would exceed Ukraine’s financial capabilities for the foreseeable future. We Europeans and our transatlantic and international partners are needed here.

**AMY GOODMAN:** On Thursday, President Trump walked back his initial comments and told reporters Ukraine would “of course” be a party to talks with Russia.

Vice President JD Vance told *The Wall Street Journal* that the U.S. could slap Moscow with sanctions and even use, quote, “military tools of leverage” if Vladimir Putin does not agree to a deal guaranteeing Ukraine’s long-term independence. Vance told *The Wall Street Journal* he plans to tell European leaders to embrace populist parties, stop mass migration and curb progressive policies. Vance will not be meeting with the German chancellor, who’s the host of the conference.

Meanwhile, over 40 protest rallies are planned against the security conference in Munich this weekend.

For more, we’re joined in Munich by two guests. Melanie Schweizer is a lawyer who works at the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, a member of the progressive party MERA25, running for a parliamentary seat in the elections later this month. And we’re joined by Yanis Varoufakis, former finance minister of Greece. His most recent book, *Technofeudalism: What Killed Capitalism*. He’s scheduled to speak at one of the protest rallies in Munich Saturday. Their slogan, “Peace-capable instead of war-capable!”

Yanis Varoufakis, we'll start with you. What exactly does that mean? And what is your overall message in Munich right now, where you have the new vice president of the United States, the new secretary of state? Of course, they're not the only members. The message, the top story now is the Russia-Ukraine war.

**YANIS VAROUFAKIS:** Well, Amy, Europe used to be a wonderful peace project. The whole point of bringing together different nations into the European Union was supposedly to make sure that there would be no more war in Europe. Unfortunately, cornered by two different authoritarianisms — the authoritarianism of Putin, on the one hand, and the expansionary, warmongering forces within the U.S.-led NATO alliance — Europe has been caught in a frenzy of warmongering, essentially. To think about it, Amy, that our — that is, the European Union's — chief defense and security spokesperson, the former prime minister of Estonia, Kaja Kallas, only two weeks before she got this position, had advocated the breakdown and the breakup of the Russian Federation. This was like a call for war.

So, we are here in Munich to demonstrate this conversion of the European Union into the war union. And don't forget that this Munich Security Conference, so to speak, is effectively a very bizarre bazaar for weaponry. All the most ambitious war merchants and arms dealers of the world have gathered here supposedly to discuss peace. We're here in order to impose a peace narrative upon them.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Can you talk about what Trump is talking about with making a proposal around the nuclear stockpiles of China, Russia and the United States, Yanis?

**YANIS VAROUFAKIS:** Well, Trump's motives are always suspect. And his negotiations may come to naught. But the idea of a negotiated climb down from the heights of this nuclear confrontation — remember that the nuclear clock is very, very close to midnight now, the nearest it has been in the last 50 or 60 years — that is not a bad idea to have this kind of tripolar, if you want, triparty negotiation. But, of course, who knows what that might lead to, given that Donald Trump is constantly flooding the zone with uncertainty for a number of very, very suspect objectives?

**AMY GOODMAN:** I want to bring Melanie Schweizer in this conversation, member of the progressive party MERA25, running for a parliamentary seat in the elections later this month. I said that you worked for — a lawyer working for the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. Can you talk about the pressure you've been under and what's happened?

**MELANIE SCHWEIZER:** Yes. Thank you very much. Hi, Amy. Thank you for giving us space to speak here.

I think the situation in Germany at the moment is really dire. There is a blatant attack on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly. We see a dismantling of the rule of law in Germany at the moment, a crisis of democracy. And we really very much fear the upcoming elections in 10 days, and we actually think that this might be the last election before fascism, because the center parties, especially the Social Democrats, the Green Party, also the Left Party, have — they have taken over the rhetoric of the far right — not just the rhetoric, but also the policies.

So, they have made two new resolutions against freedom of speech. They have banned Francesca Albanese from speaking at universities this and next week, the politics — the politicians. So, they have done a crackdown on the protests and antiwar movement, anti-genocide violence movement. Last week, it was banned to talk any language except English and German, and that was due to lies spread by Axel Springer, the biggest right-wing newspaper in Germany, that is constantly going after people, doxxing people. So, anyone, basically, who speaks out in Germany at the moment against the Israeli war crimes, against the government, is being subjected to political repression and also private and political doxxing, where people lose their jobs, but when on the other side you can express genocidal rhetoric without fearing any consequences.

So, this is why I'm a candidate. This is why I became politically active, because I think this is really very serious. And as a German with the German history, you know, I feel compelled to speak up when in the face of oppression and injustice, and especially being a lawyer being trained to uphold the Constitution and, thereby, international law.

Just to give you two recent examples of, like, how this is being normalized here, this hate speech, there was just recently a Jewish person, a journalist, being accused of incitement of hatred because he was simply saying a sentence that "We, as Jews, we don't — we are not victims," you know. So, whenever someone speaks up against this whole witch hunt, they become prosecuted. And then, just yesterday, the Ministry of Interior tweeted a tweet, proudly saying that now in Germany we're the only country who deports people to Afghanistan. And they were proud about this. And there was a huge backlash about this post, that "How can you be proud as a European country to deport to Afghanistan?" And they were saying, "where the Taliban is ruling," you know? And

today, the chancellor was giving an interview, and the journalist was asking him, “So, what do you do, you know, if the International Criminal Court comes to the conclusion that this was genocide in Gaza?” And he said, “I’m not going to answer these questions. It’s not possible. It will not happen.” And he said, “It’s absurd. It’s just not going to happen,” you know? And this is not —

**AMY GOODMAN:** Melanie Schweizer, have you been suspended from the German Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs?

**MELANIE SCHWEIZER:** Yes, actually, I have. So, I had been voicing my opinion, and this on Twitter with my name. And then I had been doxxed and found out that I was working at the ministry. And then I was on holidays in December, and as soon as I was supposed to come back in January, I was suspended from work with immediate effect. So, ever since this newspaper article from Axel Springer in *Bild-Zeitung* came out, I never set one foot again into the ministry. And I still have no idea why, actually, because I was — the only thing that I am aware of is that I was expressing my opinion about the ongoing genocide and that I’m not — that this has to stop and that Germany has to stop delivering weapons and that there have to be sanctions against Israel.

**AMY GOODMAN:** I wanted to go back to Yanis Varoufakis and talk about — talk about Elon Musk. Some are calling him the “X president” — not the former president of the United States, but the letter “X” — as he owns one of the largest, obviously, social media platforms in the world, X, and stands next to the president in the Oval Office, seems to be making a lot of the decisions, also leading a meeting with foreign leaders and, in Germany, just held this two-hour freewheeling conversation with AfD, supports AfD. If you could describe this party in Germany that has risen so rapidly? Would you describe it as a neo-Nazi party? And the role, as you talk about technofeudalism, of Elon Musk?

**YANIS VAROUFAKIS:** Well, to begin with the Alternative für Deutschland, the Alternative for Germany, it is a party which started life as a Euroskeptic party against the idea of a common currency. It used many tropes and many turns of phrase that alluded to a Nazi past. It would be wrong to call it a Nazi party or a neo-Nazi party. It would be right to refer to them as another conservative, racist, xenophobic party which alludes to the dark era of the Nazi period.

Regarding Musk as a technofeudal lord, you have to remember that Musk is one of the latecomers to the, what I call, technofeudalism. Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, you know, Google, Microsoft were the pioneers of technofeudalism. They created these digital systems in which we are encased, and, you know, there is massive exploitation of everyone, of people who sell stuff on Amazon, of newspapers and media outlets, like your good selves, whose work is being usurped. But Musk, Musk was a standard capitalist. He was producing cars. He was producing rockets — not a very standard product, but nevertheless industrial-era product. And then he jumps on the bandwagon of Twitter. He buys it, because he wants to connect his capitalist empire with what I call cloud capital, with this algorithmic capital, which has this remarkable capacity to alter our behavior, to modify our behavior. And anyone who owns that capacity, that power and that capital, that cloud capital, can extract huge rents from the rest of society. And then, very quickly, he decided to do that which robber barons always did in the past, which is, of course, to cozy up to government and to gain access directly to political power. So, he’s a latecomer, but he does move quite quickly, doesn’t he?

**AMY GOODMAN:** Well, I wanted to [read](#) to you from Reuters and *The Wall Street Journal*, “The man likely to become Germany’s next leader warned ... Elon Musk would face consequences for boosting the far-right [AfD, Alternative for Germany], through his X social-media platform.” Friedrich Merz said, “What happened in this election campaign cannot go unchallenged,” Merz, the front-runner in the polls ahead of the February 23rd election, told *The Wall Street Journal*, “referring to what he sees as Musk’s interference in Germany’s election,” Musk repeatedly calling on X for Germans to vote for AfD, saying it could save the country. And your response, for example, when you’re looking at Germany right now and you look at what’s happened in the United States, that Nazi salute that Elon Musk gave several times at a Trump rally?

**YANIS VAROUFAKIS:** Well, it’s mind-boggling that we should be witnessing these scenes today, especially from the South African mafia behind the PayPal mafia, remember, people who grew up with apartheid in their heads.

But allow me to make a comment about Friedrich Merz, who will be the next chancellor of Germany, according to the opinion polls, and whom you mentioned as having turned against Elon Musk and having accused Elon Musk, quite correctly, for giving a platform to the leader of the Alternative für Deutschland, for Germany. Mr. Merz, even though he’s right in putting forward that criticism, is perhaps the epitome of hypocrisy, because you may have heard that only, what, 10 days ago, it was he, as the leader of the Christian Democratic party, that is the leading party in Germany, that went into bed, proverbially, with the Alternative für Deutschland in the parliament of the

Federal Republic of Germany in order to pass, together — his Christian Democratic Union party and the Alternative for Germany — to pass together a xenophobic, racist, toxic bill that was turning against asylum seekers. So, this very same man, who is going to be the chancellor of Germany, who is accusing Elon Musk of giving a platform to the ultra-right of the Alternative for Germany, is the one that has already got into political bed with the Alternative for Germany.

This is what we've come to. We are now caught up in this agglomeration, in this unholy alliance, between the center-right and the ultra-right. And I very much fear that after the federal election, in exactly the same way that we've already seen it in Austria, we've seen it in the Netherlands, the ultra-right and the center-right are going to be pushing the political spectrum deeper and deeper into the territory of weaponized misanthropy.

**AMY GOODMAN:** And, Melanie Schweizer, you're running in these elections for the progressive party MERA25, which is new. Explain what it is and the significance of Elon Musk's support and the rise of AfD.

**MELANIE SCHWEIZER:** Yes, so, MERA25 is a relatively new party. It was established in Germany in 2021. So this is the first federal election that we are taking part in. It is a socialist internationalist, anti-imperialist party that is founded, also is behind the movement, the European Movement of Democracy '25, so DiEM25. And it is a party that is firmly against militarization. And we believe that we need a movement, politically and outside of politics, to combat that warmongering that we are seeing the rhetoric, this preparation of war, that feels more and more like *1984*, the book, you know.

And so, what we see here is also it's an instrumentalization of our past, of our history, you know. And so, antisemitism and reason of state are used to instrumentalize and to weaponize against people who are against this war machine, you know? So, we are being — we are called radicals for wanting an end to the violence, for wanting to end weapons deliveries. So, you know, between 60 and 70% of the Germans do not want weapons deliveries to Israel anymore. And all the parties that are in parliament want that, actually, and support it, so they are not — they do not respect what their voters want, and they do actually not represent them.

And, you know, the same goes with — nowadays it is common sense in Germany that antisemitism is an Arab issue, when actually — and, you know, that somehow we have abandoned our history with that. And then it comes that Elon Musk with the Nazi salute, this is being downplayed and not called what it is. But when people in Germany speak up for the rights of the Palestinian people, their right to life, their right to dignity, they are called antisemites.

So, what we see now is it's really — we see fascism playing out in real time. And it's getting worse by the day, and it's really worrying and concerning. And it also appears, you know, the media is very much complicit in this. So, they would ask, for example — because we are completely anti this movement, they don't give us any space to talk. They don't give us coverage for the upcoming elections. So, we, as a party that is against this war movement, are being marginalized and actually threatened by the police, as well. We have been told that we have to inform them if we do any political activity beforehand the elections in Berlin.

So, yeah, it's just — and Musk working together with the AfD is so very telling about the global developments, as well. We are globally going into fascism. And that's why all the — and the Israeli government at the moment can also tell very clearly. It's a right-wing fascist government. So, this all goes hand in hand together.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Melanie Schweizer, we want to thank you for being with us, member of the progressive party MERA25, running for a parliamentary seat in the elections later this month. Yanis Varoufakis, former Greek [finance] minister, both in Munich. Yanis Varoufakis is leading one of the protests tomorrow.

Next up, well, today is Valentine's Day. We're going to speak with a reporter and an OkCupid security whistleblower behind a major new investigation, "Rape under wraps: how Tinder, Hinge and their corporate owner [Match.com] chose profits over safety." Stay with us.

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