



Munich Security Conference 2025  
**Speech by JD Vance**  
**and Selected Reactions**

Volume II of the Series  
“Selected Speeches held at the Munich Security Conference”

edited by Benedikt Franke

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Foreword

## Foreword by the Editor of this Volume

For over six decades, the Munich Security Conference (MSC) has provided a platform for frank dialogue and bold ideas, often expressed in speeches shaping the trajectory of global security policy. This small book — part of a growing series of volumes dedicated to capturing these pivotal moments for those interested in following up on them — focuses on one speech in particular: the address of the Vice President of the United States, JD Vance, to the 61st Munich Security Conference in February 2025.

Even though many weeks have passed since the Vice President stepped on our stage after the opening remarks of Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, his speech continues to reverberate throughout Europe. Its content and delivery caught almost everyone — in the room and beyond — by surprise and its consequences are continuing to accumulate, from emergency meetings of European leaders to unprecedented policy shifts across the transatlantic alliance.

The Munich Security Conference has long been a place where history is not only debated but occasionally even made. The speech by JD Vance adds a new chapter to that legacy and a new volume to our young series of selected speeches held on our stages over the years. In curating this volume, we sought to place the Vice President's remarks in the broader context of the reactions they sparked — both on the main stage, within the halls of the Bayerischer Hof, and far beyond.

The selected responses presented here offer a diverse tapestry of perspectives, capturing the ripples of discourse that

followed in the wake of the Vice President's words. The reactions take various forms: speeches delivered on our stages, interviews conducted at the conference and beyond, as well as thoughtful op-eds and articles published in the days that followed. By including the official readout of the MSC 2025 authored by our own Tobias Bunde and Sophie Eisentraut as well as other reactions from our own organisation we have tried to further anchor his words within the conference's framework, offering readers our perspective of the moment as it unfolded.

Needless to say that the speech is more than just another "Munich Moment" for us. We strongly believe that it and the reactions it sparked have underscored the importance of organisations like the Munich Security Conference as a space for leaders to regroup, recalibrate, and reinforce the partnership that has underpinned global security for decades.

Now that this partnership is under stress, talking with each other, re-building bridges, re-establishing trust, and keeping channels of communication open is more important than ever. So is taking each other's concerns more seriously. We Europeans simply have to accept that many, if not most, Americans are no longer convinced by the intrinsic value of the transatlantic relationship and that we must do much more to communicate its unquestionable benefits while investing more of our own resources into saving and developing it. At the same time, Americans must accept that many, if not most, Europeans are watching the new U.S. administration and its actions with trepidation and growing concern for the world order we have jointly built over the last 75 years. Both sides would thus do well to re-create a better sense of a mutual understanding and a shared vision of where the world should be going.

As we present this second volume on the occasion of our Munich Leaders Meeting in Washington, D. C., we have our work cut out for us. If we fail to align visions and, in the process, to

address the many elephants in the room — including particularly uncomfortable and difficult topics such as immigration or the future relationship with Russia — we will find ourselves divided and, ultimately, conquered — maybe not militarily but certainly with regard to our power to set global standards and further develop the rules-based international order. Given what we have already achieved together, that would be a tragedy — not just for us but for the rest of the world.

It is my hope that this volume, like the one before it, will serve as both a mirror and a beacon — a reflection of where we are and a guide to where we must go. Many of the concerns raised in the speeches and statements featured herein are legitimate and many of the questions are valid. Let us take them seriously, and let us continue to engage with each other on their resolution. The MSC will try to provide as many opportunities to do so as possible.

Let me end by extending my deepest gratitude to the editorial team, Nardine Luca and Ronny von Gülich-Thurow, who have once again outdone themselves. I would also like to thank the entire MSC team, without whom there would have been no MSC 2025, no speeches, and thus no second volume of this series at all. They deserve all the credit they can get.

*Benedikt Franke*

April 2025

Chapter 1

# SPEECH BY JD VANCE

2025



# JD Vance

Vice President of the United States of America

One of the things that I wanted to talk about today is, of course, our shared values.

And, you know, it's great to be back in Germany. As you heard earlier, I was here last year as a United States senator. I saw Foreign Minister — excuse me, Foreign Secretary David Lammy and joked that both of us last year had different jobs than we have now.

But now it's time for all of our countries, for all of us who have been fortunate enough to be given political power by our respective peoples, to use it wisely to improve their lives.

And I want to say that, you know, I was fortunate in my time here to spend some time outside the walls of this conference over the last 24 hours, and I've been so impressed by the hospitality of the people, even, of course, as they're reeling from yesterday's horrendous attack.

And the first time I was ever in Munich was with my wife, actually, who's here with me today, on a personal trip. And I've always loved the city of Munich, and I've always loved its people.

And I just want to say that we're very moved, and our thoughts and prayers are with Munich, and everybody affected by the evil inflicted on this beautiful community. We're thinking about you, we're praying for you, and we will certainly be rooting for you in the days and weeks to come.

[...] I hope that's not the last bit of applause that I get.

We gather at this conference, of course, to discuss security. And normally, we mean threats to our external security. I see many great military leaders gathered here today.

But while the Trump administration is very concerned with European security and believes that we can come to a reasonable settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and we also believe that it's important in the coming years for Europe to step up in a big way to provide for its own defense, the threat that I worry the most about vis-à-vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor. And what I worry about is the threat from within, the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values — values shared with the United States of America.

Now, I was struck that a former European commissioner went on television recently and sounded delighted that the Romanian government had just annulled an entire election. He warned that if things don't go to plan, the very same thing could happen in Germany, too.

Now, these cavalier statements are shocking to American ears. For years, we've been told that everything we fund, and support is in the name of our shared democratic values.

Everything from our Ukraine policy to digital censorship is billed as a defense of democracy, but when we see European courts canceling elections and senior officials threatening to cancel others, we ought to ask whether we're holding ourselves to an appropriately high standard. And I say "ourselves" because I fundamentally believe that we are on the same team. We must do more than talk about democratic values. We must live them.

Now, within living memory of many of you in this room, the Cold War positioned defenders of democracy against much more tyrannical forces on this continent. And consider the side in that fight that censored dissidents, that closed churches, that canceled elections. Were they the good guys? Certainly not and thank God they lost the Cold War.

They lost because they neither valued nor respected all of the extraordinary blessings of liberty, the freedom to surprise, to make mistakes, to invent, to build.

As it turns out, you can't mandate innovation or creativity, just as you can't force people what to think, what to feel, or what to believe. And we believe those things are certainly connected.

And unfortunately, when I look at Europe today, it's sometimes not so clear what happened to some of the Cold War's winners.

I look to Brussels, where EU commissars warn citizens that they intend to shut down social media during times of civil unrest the moment they spot what they've judged to be, quote, "hateful content."

Or to this very country, where police have carried out raids against citizens suspected of posting anti-feminist comments online as part of, quote, "combating misogyny on the internet, a day of action."

I look to Sweden, where, two weeks ago, the government convicted a Christian activist for participating in Quran burnings that resulted in his friend's murder. And as the judge in his case chillingly noted, Sweden's laws to supposedly protect free expression do not, in fact, grant — and I'm quoting — "a free pass to do or say anything without risking offending the group that holds that belief."

And perhaps most concerning, I look to our very dear friends, the United Kingdom, where the backslide away from conscience rights has placed the basic liberties of religious Britons, in particular, in the crosshairs.

A little over two years ago, the British government charged Adam Smith-Connor, a 51-year-old physiotherapist and an army veteran, with the heinous crime of standing 50 meters from an abortion clinic and silently praying for three minutes — not obstructing anyone, not interacting with anyone, just silently praying on his own.

And after British law enforcement spotted him and demanded to know what he was praying for, Adam replied, simply,

it was on behalf of the unborn son he and his former girlfriend had aborted years before.

Now, the officers were not moved. Adam was found guilty of breaking the government's new "buffer zones" law, which criminalizes silent prayer and other actions that could "influence" a person's decision within 200 meters of an abortion facility. He was sentenced to pay thousands of pounds in legal costs to the prosecution.

Now, I wish I could say that this was a fluke — a one-off, crazy example of a badly written law being enacted against a single person. But, no, this last October, just a few months ago, the Scottish government began distributing letters to citizens whose houses lay within so-called "safe access zones," warning them that even private prayer within their own homes may amount to breaking the law.

Naturally, the government urged readers to report any fellow citizens suspected guilty of thought crime.

In Britain, and across Europe, free speech, I fear, is in retreat.

And in the interest of comity, my friends, but also in the interest of truth, I will admit that sometimes the loudest voices for censorship have come not from within Europe but from within my own country, where the prior administration threatened and bullied social media companies to censor so-called misinformation — misinformation like, for example, the idea that coronavirus had likely leaked from a laboratory in China. Our own government encouraged private companies to silence people who dared to utter what turned out to be an obvious truth.

So, I come here today not just with an observation but with an offer. And just as the Biden administration seemed desperate to silence people for speaking their minds, so the Trump administration will do precisely the opposite, and I hope that we can work together on that.

In Washington, there is a new sheriff in town. And under Donald Trump's leadership, we may disagree with your views, but we will fight to defend your right to offer them in the public square, agree or disagree.

Now we're at the point, of course, that the situation has gotten so bad that, this December, Romania straight up canceled the results of a presidential election based on the flimsy suspicions of an intelligence agency and enormous pressure from its continental neighbors.

Now, as I understand it, the argument was that Russian disinformation had infected the Romanian elections, but I'd ask my European friends to have some perspective. You can believe it's wrong for Russia to buy social media advertisements to influence your elections. We certainly do. You can condemn it on the world stage even. But if your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country, then it wasn't very strong to begin with.

Now, the good news is that I happen to think your democracies are substantially less brittle than many people apparently fear, and I really do believe that allowing our citizens to speak their mind will make them stronger still.

Which, of course, brings us back to Munich, where the organizers of this very conference have banned lawmakers representing populist parties on both the left and the right from participating in these conversations.

Now, again, we don't have to agree with everything or anything that people say, but when people represent — when political leaders represent an important constituency, it is incumbent upon us to at least participate in dialogue with them.

Now, to many of us on the other side of the Atlantic, it looks more and more like old, entrenched interests hiding behind ugly, Soviet-era words like "misinformation" and "disinformation," who simply don't like the idea that somebody with an

alternative viewpoint might express a different opinion, or, God forbid, vote a different way, or, even worse, win an election.

Now, this is a security conference, and I'm sure you all came here prepared to talk about how exactly you intend to increase defense spending over the next few years in line with some new target. And that's great, because as President Trump has made abundantly clear, he believes that our European friends must play a bigger role in the future of this continent. We don't think — you hear this term, "burden sharing," but we think it's an important part of being in a shared alliance together that the Europeans step up while America focuses on areas of the world that are in great danger.

But let me also ask you, how will you even begin to think through the kinds of budgeting questions if we don't know what it is that we're defending in the first place?

I've heard a lot already in my conversations — and I've had many, many great conversations with many people gathered here in this room — I've heard a lot about what you need to defend yourselves from, and, of course, that's important. But what has seemed a little bit less clear to me and certainly, I think, to many of the citizens of Europe, is what exactly it is that you're defending yourselves for. What is the positive vision that animates this shared security compact that we all believe is so important?

And I believe deeply that there is no security if you are afraid of the voices, the opinions, and the conscience that guide your very own people.

Europe faces many challenges, but the crisis this continent faces right now, the crisis I believe we all face together, is one of our own making.

If you're running in fear of your own voters, there is nothing America can do for you. Nor, for that matter, is there anything that you can do for the American people who elected me and elected President Trump.

You need democratic mandates to accomplish anything of value in the coming years. Have we learned nothing, that thin mandates produce unstable results? But there is so much of value that can be accomplished with the kind of democratic mandate that I think will come from being more responsive to the voices of your citizens.

If you're going to enjoy competitive economies, if you're going to enjoy affordable energy and secure supply chains, then you need mandates to govern, because you have to make difficult choices to enjoy all of these things. And, of course, we know that very well in America.

You cannot win a democratic mandate by censoring your opponents or putting them in jail — whether that's the leader of the opposition, a humble Christian praying in her own home, or a journalist trying to report the news. Nor can you win one by disregarding your basic electorate on questions like who gets to be a part of our shared society.

And of all the pressing challenges that the nations represented here face, I believe there is nothing more urgent than mass migration.

Today, almost one in five people living in this country moved here from abroad. That is, of course, an all-time high. It's a similar number, by the way, in the United States — also an all-time high.

The number of immigrants who entered the EU from non-EU countries doubled between 2021 and 2022 alone. And, of course, it's gotten much higher since.

And we know the situation, it didn't materialize in a vacuum. It's the result of a series of conscious decisions made by politicians all over the continent, and others across the world, over the span of a decade.

We saw the horrors wrought by these decisions yesterday in this very city. And, of course, I can't bring it up again without

thinking about the terrible victims who had a beautiful winter day in Munich ruined. Our thoughts and prayers are with them and will remain with them. But why did this happen in the first place?

It's a terrible story, but it's one we've heard way too many times in Europe and, unfortunately, too many times in the United States as well: an asylum-seeker, often a young man in his mid-20s, already known to police, rams a car into a crowd and shatters a community.

How many times must we suffer these appalling setbacks before we change course and take our shared civilization in a new direction?

No voter on this continent went to the ballot box to open the floodgates to millions of unvetted immigrants. But you know what they did vote for? In England, they voted for Brexit. And agree or disagree, they voted for it. And more and more, all over Europe, they're voting for political leaders who promise to put an end to out-of-control migration.

Now, I happen to agree with a lot of these concerns, but you don't have to agree with me. I just think that people care about their homes. They care about their dreams. They care about their safety and their capacity to provide for themselves and their children.

And they're smart. I think this is one of the most important things I've learned in my brief time in politics. Contrary to what you might hear a couple mountains over in Davos, the citizens of all of our nations don't generally think of themselves as educated animals or as interchangeable cogs of a global economy, and it's hardly surprising that they don't want to be shuffled about or relentlessly ignored by their leaders.

And it is the business of democracy to adjudicate these big questions at the ballot box.

I believe that dismissing people, dismissing their concerns, or, worse yet, shutting down media, shutting down elections, or shutting people out of the political process protects nothing. In fact, it is the most surefire way to destroy democracy.

And speaking up and expressing opinions isn't election interference, even when people express views outside your own country, and even when those people are very influential.

And trust me, I say this with all humor, if American democracy can survive 10 years of Greta Thunberg's scolding, you guys can survive a few months of Elon Musk.

But what German democracy — what no democracy, American, German, or European — will survive is telling millions of voters that their thoughts and concerns, their aspirations, their pleas for relief are invalid or unworthy of even being considered.

Democracy rests on the sacred principle that the voice of the people matters. There is no room for firewalls. You either uphold the principle or you don't.

Europeans, the people have a voice. European leaders have a choice. And my strong belief is that we do not need to be afraid of the future.

You can embrace what your people tell you, even when it's surprising, even when you don't agree. And if you do so, you can face the future with certainty and with confidence, knowing that the nation stands behind each of you.

And that, to me, is the great magic of democracy. It's not in these stone buildings or beautiful hotels. It's not even in the great institutions that we have built together as a shared society.

To believe in democracy is to understand that each of our citizens has wisdom and has a voice. And if we refuse to listen to that voice, even our most successful fights will secure very little.

As Pope John Paul II — in my view, one of the most extraordinary champions of democracy on this continent or any other — once said, “Do not be afraid.”

We shouldn’t be afraid of our people, even when they express views that disagree with their leadership.

## Chapter 2

WANG YI  
BORIS PISTORIUS  
JONAS GAHR STØRE  
KAJA KALLAS  
OLAF SCHOLZ  
VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY  
FRIEDRICH MERZ  
MICHAEL MCFAUL  
ALEXANDER STUBB  
MARK RUTTE

# A SELECTION OF REACTIONS AT THE MSC

# Wang Yi

Minister of Foreign Affairs of China

Speaking right after JD Vance, Wang Yi used his remarks to elaborate China's self-understanding as a steadfast constructive force in a changing multipolar world.

The world we live in is an increasing mix of turbulence and transformation. Many people are asking the same question: Where is it headed? If I may borrow the theme of this year's Munich Security Report, it is headed toward multipolarization. When the United Nations was founded 80 years ago, it had only 51 member states; today, 193 countries ride in the same big boat. A multipolar world is not only a historical inevitability; it is also becoming a reality.

Will multipolarity bring chaos, conflict and confrontation? Does it mean domination by major countries and the strong bullying the weak? China's answer is, we should work for an equal and orderly multipolar world. This is another major proposition put forward by President Xi Jinping, and it represents our sincere expectation for a multipolar world. China will surely be a factor of certainty in this multipolar system and strive to be a steadfast constructive force in a changing world.

Here, I want to make four points.

First, it is important to advocate equal treatment. Rivalry between big powers had brought disaster to humanity, as evidenced by the lessons of the two world wars in the not-so-distant past. Whether it is the colonial system or the core-periphery



structure, unequal orders are bound to meet their demise. Independence and autonomy are sought across the world, and greater democracy in international relations is unstoppable. Equal rights, equal opportunities and equal rules should become the basic principles of a multipolar world.

It is in this principle that China advocates equality among all countries regardless of size and calls for increasing the representation and say of developing countries in the international system. This will not lead to “Westlessness,” but will deliver more positive-sum results to the world. The Munich Security Conference has invited more participants from Global South countries in recent years. This is a wise thing to do. Every country should have its voice heard. Every country should be able to find its place and play its role in a multipolar paradigm.

Second, it is important to respect international rule of law. As an old Chinese saying goes, circles and squares cannot be drawn without compasses and rulers, which means nothing can be accomplished without following norms and standards. The purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter provide fundamental guidance for handling international relations. They are also an important cornerstone of a multipolar world. The world today is witnessing incessant chaos and confusion, and one important reason is that some countries believe might makes right and have opened a Pandora’s box marked the law of the jungle. In reality, all countries, regardless of size or strength, are stakeholders in international rule of law. The multipolar paradigm must not be a state of disarray. Without norms and standards, one may be at the table yesterday but end up on the menu tomorrow. Major countries must take the lead in honoring their words and upholding rule of law, and must not say one thing but do another, or engage in zero-sum games.

It is based on the above points of view that China resolutely upholds the authority of international rule of law and actively fulfills its international responsibilities and obligations. It is a member of almost all universal intergovernmental organizations and a party to over 600 international conventions. It never practices exceptionalism, still less cherry-picking. It is providing the greatest certainty in this uncertain world. I wish to emphasize that there should be no double standards in observing international law. Respect for all countries’ sovereignty and territorial integrity should mean support for China’s complete reunification.

Third, it is important to practice multilateralism. In the face of emerging global challenges, no country can stay unaffected, and the “we first” approach in international relations only leads to a lose-lose result. The U.N. is at the core of practicing multilateralism and advancing global governance. This edifice has shielded all countries from wind and rain for nearly 80 years and is all the more needed in the multipolar world of the future. We should cement its foundation, rather than destroy its pillars. We should take up our responsibilities on governing global issues, rather than seek self-interests only. We should tackle common challenges in solidarity, rather than resort to block confrontation.

It is from this understanding that China upholds true multilateralism and advocates the vision on global governance featuring extensive consultation and joint contribution for shared benefit. We have firmly upheld the authority and stature of the U.N. and contributed to more than 20 percent of the U.N. regular budget. We have acted earnestly on the Paris Agreement on climate change and built the world’s largest clean power generation system. We have also proposed and delivered on the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, providing public goods for improving global governance.

Fourth, it is important to pursue openness and mutual benefit. Development holds the key to addressing various problems. The multipolar world should be one where all countries develop together. Protectionism offers no way out, and arbitrary tariffs produce no winners. Decoupling deprives one of opportunities, and a “small yard with high fences” only ends up constraining oneself. It is important to pursue open cooperation and support an equal and orderly multipolar world with a universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization.

It is for this goal that China stays committed to sharing development opportunities with all countries. An Australian scholar called China an “enabler,” which I find very fitting. With a five-percent GDP growth last year, China contributed to nearly 30 percent of the world economic growth. It has served as an important engine for global economic growth and shared with the world the benefit of its supersized market. China is willing to synergize high-quality Belt and Road cooperation with the European Union’s Global Gateway strategy, so as to empower each other and empower the entire world.

China has always seen in Europe an important pole in the multipolar world. The two sides are partners, not rivals. This year marks the 50th anniversary of China-EU diplomatic relations. Taking this opportunity, China is willing to work with the European side to deepen strategic communication and mutually beneficial cooperation and steer the world to a bright future of peace, security, prosperity and progress.

## Boris Pistorius

Minister of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany

During JD Vance’s speech Boris Pistorius sat in the second row of the audience, arms crossed, visibly upset, shouting: “That is unacceptable”. Two hours later, he officially replied in his introduction to a panel on European Defence with a statement spontaneously rewritten under the impression of JD Vance’s speech.

I will begin my speech in German.

*[speaking German]* I had prepared a speech on the topic of today’s event. A speech that was actually supposed to be about security in Europe. But I can’t start as planned originally. I am a convinced transatlanticist, a passionate transatlanticist, a great friend of America. The American Dream has fascinated and influenced me from an early age. That is precisely why I cannot go back to business as usual. That’s why I can’t leave the speech we heard earlier from the U.S. Vice President uncommented.

“We also fight so that you can be against us”, that is the self-understanding of the German Bundeswehr which also stands for our democracy. This democracy was called into question earlier by the U.S. Vice President for the whole of Europe. He spoke of the annihilation of democracy. And if I have understood him correctly, he is comparing conditions in parts of Europe with those in authoritarian regimes.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is unacceptable. That is not acceptable. And that is not the Europe and not the democracy in which I live and for which I am currently campaigning. This is not the democracy that I experience in our Parliament. In this democracy, every opinion has a voice. It allows partially extremist parties like the AfD to campaign normally, just like any other party. That is democracy. If the Vice President had had the opportunity to switch on the television when he arrived yesterday, he would have seen a leading candidate from this party on prime-time German television. Media outlets spreading Russian propaganda are also admitted to our press conferences, and representatives of the German government have to answer their questions. Nobody is excluded just because they don't share our wording.

*[continues in English]* However, democracy does not mean that the loud minority is automatically right and determines the truth. Democracy must be able to defend itself against the extremists who want to destroy it. And I tell you as it is: I am happy, grateful and proud to live in a Europe that defends this democracy and our way of living in freedom every day — against its internal enemies and its external enemies. That is why I strongly oppose the impression created by Vice President Vance that minorities are being suppressed or silenced in our democracy. We know not only against whom we are defending our country, but also for what purpose. For democracy, for freedom of expression, for the rule of law and for the dignity of every individual.

But unlike the Vice President, I would also like to focus my speech on the most pressing questions of European and transatlantic security. The last days have confirmed what many had speculated for month. The United States is pushing for a quick peace settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and it expects Europe to take the lead in securing any agreement

that follows. These negotiations can be a turning point for our continent and for transatlantic relations a historic turning point that can go into very different directions.

The choices we make now will determine whether we live in peace or in crisis, they will determine our future and the future of the next generation in Europe, but also beyond. We must ensure that Ukraine is not left alone, ladies and gentlemen, because one thing remains. There will be no lasting peace in Europe without a strong and free Ukraine. There will be no sustainable rules-based order if aggression prevails, we must equally make sure that Russia does not emerge from this war as an even bigger threat than before a fragile peace that only postpones. The next war is not an option. Yesterday there was strong consensus among NATO allies that imperialist powers will only respond to deterrence and strengths. Be it in Europe or in the Indo Pacific. Therefore, we must and we will negotiate from a position of strength.

Three things are crucial for that first European and Ukrainians must play an active part in the negotiations. Only united we will be able to stand strong. Only united will we negotiate a stable and long-lasting peace.

Second Ukraine needs to negotiate from a position of strength. Germany will, therefore, remain the largest supporter of Ukraine on this continent and we will continue in our engagement in the near future and beyond.

Third the Transatlantic Alliance must not take anything off the table before the peace talks have even started discussions about Ukraine's NATO membership or territorial issues must take place at the negotiating table with careful consideration and in close coordination among allies at the same time. Secretary Hexad made it very clear that the U.S. will remain engaged in NATO and in Europe, but the recent statements are also a strong reminder of what has been clear for many

years. If we are honest, we Europeans have to contribute the lion's share to conventional deterrence and defense in Europe. We need to shape the reality we live in before it shapes us. Yesterday in NATO we agreed to develop a roadmap that was my proposal, a roadmap to organize the burden shifting from the United States to Europe in the years to come and to avoid at the same time by orchestrating it, that we run in capability gaps, which are critical. It is time for fewer promises now and more action. That is why my French colleague, Sebastien le Cornu, and I established the group of five together with the United Kingdom, Poland and Italy at the end of last year to chart a cause for a strong Europe. We will use this format to develop the roadmap in the upcoming month and discuss it with our allies, especially with the United States. Ladies and gentlemen, in order to make European responsibility a reality, we are taking strong measures in all important areas of defense with regards to money material and operational readiness.

Last year, Germany committed two percent of its GDP to defense. Within just two years, we nearly doubled our investments in procurement, other European nations have made similar successful efforts. Security guarantees the future for all of us and for the next generation. We have the responsibility to invest in the future for Germany. That means further increasing our defense spending. We need substantial financial means that cannot simply be cut out of the current budget. Excluding defense spending from our national debt limit is, therefore, inevitable. Security is not a short-term expenditure, it is a long-term commitment. That is why I am developing a ten-year program. We need to make defense spending more predictable. That means achieving next-generation security at the European level. We need to act in a similar way.

We must ensure that all countries can effectively strengthen their security. That should involve adapting the Maastricht

criteria to allow nations that face tight budgetary restrictions a greater flexibility to defense investments and it would also involve a shift towards defense in the priorities of the European Union's multi annual financial framework, just as was mentioned earlier by Mrs. von der Leyen. Earlier more cash, that's the truth, must of course translate into more capabilities. It's not about money, it's about capabilities. Germany has launched a defense industry strategy to create the right political, economic and regulatory framework to quickly make our defense industry more innovative, agile and resilient. We streamlined our procurement processes and together with industry, we are expanding our production capacities while pushing for a stronger European defense industrial base. Because one thing is Europe needs a strong, more sovereign defense industry, we cannot afford excessive dependencies. This has never been clearer than today.

As we see the geopolitical landscape shifting, maintaining our technological advantage is crucial, particularly in areas such as artificial intelligence, space and quantum technology. These investments generate positive spillover effects across our entire research landscape and overall economy. We need more European solutions while maintaining strong cooperation with our transatlantic partners, we need both in order to increase our defense capacities as quickly and comprehensively as possible. While building and maintaining a strong industrial base, simply put, we Europeans must develop together, build together, buy together, deploy together, even if that involves adapting and merging certain industries and setting aside national interests. In some cases, this requires better coordination of who produces what to avoid duplicating efforts. We have proved that we are capable of this. The European sky sheet initiative is an example. The same is true for the European long range strike approach initiated by Germany

and France. And let me mention one more example, the German Norwegian Submarine project. Soon German crews will be able to sail on Norwegian submarines and vice versa. This is European defense integration in action. We are also inviting additional nations to join from across the Atlantic. This will boost NATO's naval presence from the shores of the Baltic Sea across the Atlantic, all the way to the Arctic with the latter being more and more in the focus of NATO's adversaries. Projects like these are the future of procurement. They show what we can achieve when we act together and overcome national constraints. That brings me to operational readiness after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

We have significantly scaled up our efforts to secure NATO's eastern flank. We increased our presence in the air, on land and at sea. As of this year, 35,000 personnel stand prepared at the highest readiness level to defend NATO's territory. If needed in Lithuania, we are moving from a rotational to a permanent presence together with our allies. We have as many as 1,400 boots on the ground today as part of the multinational Lithuania battle group. We are in the midst of preparing the deployment, permanent deployment of a full combat ready brigade. We will have roughly 5,000 personnel permanently in Lithuania in the years to come. On this note, thank you very much, President Nausėda, for being such an exemplary partner in the historic endeavor. But our commitment on the Eastern Flank does not and will not stop in Lithuania.

Also, and especially after a potential peace in Ukraine, we are well aware that Russia will remain a threat. We are assuming more leadership responsibility in the North-Eastern multinational corps to bolster deterrence and defense in the region. This is a true example of our shared commitment to security. Ladies and gentlemen, this week has been a week of decision. Next week it will be the German voters who make

a choice. A lot is at stake in this election. I trust that the German voters will send a strong message. Germany will remain a reliable ally. Germany will continue to work towards a stronger and more secure Europe and Germany will continue to take on more responsibility and leadership in Europe. The challenges of the coming months and years will be enormous, but so is our ability to tackle them. As long as we stand together, as long as we remain committed to our security and our values of liberal democracy, I have no doubt that the future is ours to shape.

# Jonas Gahr Støre

Prime Minister of Norway

In a panel discussion on Democratic Resilience on Friday evening, Jonas Gahr Støre elaborated his stance on JD Vance's speech in a dialogue with moderator Katrin Bennhold, International Correspondent of the New York Times.

**Katrin Bennhold**

Mr. Støre, I would like to come to you. You're the Prime Minister of Norway, one of those countries that we all look to and think, wow, they're rich, they have great welfare states, they've sort of got something right. So, in some ways it is a haven of social democracy. It long has been. But even in your patch of the world, far right parties are gaining, anti-immigrant parties are gaining ground. But as somebody who stands for a party that is on the center left, tell us a little bit what that message is that the left needs to stand for. How can the left, which is globally in crisis, I think is fair to say, and has been losing the trust and the votes of its traditional constituency, working class people, which partly is because that term has lost meaning somewhat in today's economy. But what is it that the left needs to understand about today's politics in order to be attractive again?

**Jonas Gahr Støre**

Well, it's a big question. I'll try to come at it from a few angles here. First of all, I think all societies and all political systems are under tremendous pressure from technology, from what the Munich Conference has identified as the main challenge

in today's world. Pretty similar to what the World Economic Forum did, putting on number one misinformation, fake news, and all of that coming at us at the core of democracy, which I think is a huge challenge, especially when political parties take a grab at that approach to politics to really manipulate facts. So that is pressure on the social fabric, so to say.

**Katrin Bennhold**

Although just to jump in there, I mean, JD Vance, I thought had a point today when he said that that kind of interference only really works when there's at least some basis to the grievance and the problems that misinformation hits into. I mean, there are some underlying issues.

**Jonas Gahr Støre**

Absolutely. So that's what I want to come to. And where I believe that the left, the social democracy that I present, really, we have the elements to put together the answer. But I think the Senator pointed at this. You don't eat democracy for breakfast. It is not democracy that fix your children when they don't succeed at school. So, this is about the real reality of what your daily life is. If you go through as we do as a political party in cooperation with sister parties, you in our part of the world, the number one theme on people's concern this last year has been cost of living and purchase power going down. And until you fix that and give security to that, everything else becomes a bit irrelevant and you become vulnerable to misinformation, to quick fix, which does not necessarily reflect. So, for me, I think what we've had over this last year, with the inflation coming back, it's a cancer in the system functioning of democracies speedily going up and rapidly coming down, it should be said. But this is destabilizing the social fabric of our countries. So, for my government, it has



been top priority to get inflation down and, in the meantime, have social policies that really are there to make welfare state work for those who really need it. So we have taken down the price of kindergartens, childcare, we have increased pensions for those with the lowest incomes throughout, and a lot of social spending on that side of the equation so that people can see that we are working for their position, their dignity, their ability to manage their lives when you get back stability. And we've been able to go through that inflation phase without increasing unemployment. But still in our country, which is a stable country, you can sense the instability that inflation is creating because cost of living is getting out of control. So that's where we have to get back then. I think the second dimension for me here, if I may, is that I'm picking the example from Timothy Snyder's recent book on freedom. He was in Oslo, and he was on the panel, I was on a panel with him, which is this balance between freedom to and freedom from. And if freedom only becomes a discussion of freedom from, we are not safeguarding democratic sustainability. There must also be freedom to. Freedom to take an education, freedom to get a decent job, freedom to be at work with a decent work, not to be, you know, put aside. And Schneider's example is from this Ukrainian village that had been deoccupied. Russians had pulled back. So, the question is, are they free now? Well, they are free from occupation, but they are not free to enjoy what you need to do to enjoy a decent life. So I think these issues about securing people's ability to live decent lives, combined with managing their daily economic outcome, safety of their children, investing in, you know, sports, leisure and activity for children, so they get, you know, to be involved in community, that is part of where the center left should be. And that's where we aim to be. And that's where we also aim to win elections on that basis.

#### Katrin Bennhold

And I see this sort of fundamental dilemma in this argument, which I think makes a lot of sense. People do want security. They want public services that work. They want free and good, strong public education, all of which requires man and woman power. And in Europe, increasingly, immigration, because our populations are shrinking. And we're faced with this, on the one hand, voters who are very hostile, quite opposed to immigration, and at the same time, they want welfare states that function and they want growth. And both for functioning welfare states and for economic growth, you need some immigration. So how do we, as politicians, particularly on the left, sell that?

#### Jonas Gahr Støre

But I think, you know, here's one issue I have with the Vice President's speech. I have a few, but this one, let's mention this one. He speaks as though we are not focused on immigration in Europe. I mean, this is the big theme in every country, that we want to have control of our borders, we want to have controlled immigration. And this is a key theme, I think, all across Europe. But then he makes the remark that there was a significant increase of immigrants, unvetted immigrants to Europe in recent years. Where did they come from? Ukraine. Look to Poland. Two million or more Ukrainians have been accepted into Poland because there is a bloody war going on, which he did not mention, which I think is not really addressing reality, which is, which is coming to Europe. But we have to, in Europe, country by country, but also as a community, to have a very thorough discussion about controlled immigration. And as you say, we cannot close Europe because Europe's challenge in the future would probably to have enough people to, to do the jobs we need to.

Katrin Bennhold

And to pay taxes.

Jonas Gahr Støre

Exactly. But again, in my country, we have 100,000 people from Ukraine. Now, if you take that per capita, it would mean in The German setting, 2 or 3 million, you know, in every municipality. So, you know, how do you do it? This is a part of the, of the solidarity that you have to mobilize spontaneously. And those Ukrainians coming, men, women and children, they will turn up at some kindergarten, in some school at some medical office, and there will be discussion. You know, what are they doing here? Are they taking our places? But if you really explain why we do this in this very dire situation, it can also be understood. And I'm proud to see that, you know, that has not unleashed negative reactions in my country.

## Kaja Kallas

Vice President and High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Commission

In a Townhall debate on the Middle East moderated by CNN's Chief International Anchor Christiane Amanpour, Kaja Kallas reacted to JD Vance's speech.

Christiane Amanpour

Vice President JD Vance delivered a pretty tough speech — should we say — to Europe, pretty much scolded Europe. I mean, that's what I'm thinking, because I saw it and I heard some reaction from Europeans. He didn't much mention Ukraine in his speech, but did talk a lot about your [Europe's] internal politics and essentially said that the biggest threat he saw was European internal politics: that you're not listening to your people and, therefore, we have this big problem and this big weakness. What's your reaction to that?

Kaja Kallas

When we meet in person, then we have very good and frank discussions. The U.S. is our great ally. And the Americans are also saying that they remain our great ally. When listening to that speech, it seems like they try to pick a fight with us. But we don't want to fight with our friends. We have other threats coming from outside. And I think, you know, in domestic politics, we have all kinds of issues and we are settling those ourselves. But we need to work with our allies with the bigger threats that there are in the world, that we have together with



the United States regarding Russia attacking Ukraine. Or the international order really not functioning. Or other aggressors in the world having appetite for their neighbours' countries. Or critical raw materials, the protection of these. I mean, there are so many issues that we can work on and will work on.

## Olaf Scholz

Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany

In his speech Olaf Scholz rejected any external interventions in German democracy and called for greater efforts to ramp up European defense capabilities.

Here, twenty kilometers separate us from the Nazi concentration camp of Dachau. Dachau is one of the places where immeasurable crimes against humanity were committed — by Germans and in the name of Germany. The American Vice President visited Dachau the day before yesterday and then made a very important statement. The memorial site there, he said — and I quote verbatim — “shows why we should make sure that something like this never happens again.” I am very grateful to Vice President Vance for this important statement.

Because this “never again” is the central lesson that we Germans have drawn from the horrific experience of Nazi terror rule after the Second World War, thanks in no small part to great American support. This “never again” is the historic mandate that Germany, as a free democracy, must and wants to continue fulfilling every day. Never again fascism, never again racism, never again war of aggression.

That is why an overwhelming majority in our country resolutely opposes those who glorify or justify the criminal National Socialism. The AfD is a party whose members have downplayed National Socialism and its monstrous crimes —

crimes against humanity such as those committed in Dachau — as mere “bird droppings” in German history. A commitment to “never again” is therefore incompatible with support for the AfD.

That is why we will not accept interference from outsiders in favor of this party in our democracy, in our elections, and in democratic opinion formation. That is simply not appropriate — especially not among friends and allies. We firmly reject this. The future of our democracy is for us to decide.

Today’s democracy in Germany and in Europe is based on the historical certainty that democracies can be destroyed by radical anti-democrats. That is why we have created institutions that make our democracies resilient against their enemies and rules that do not restrict our freedom but protect it.

Defending freedom and democracy against their enemies is what has always united us as a transatlantic community, and it is what brings us together today here in Munich. As supporters of freedom and democracy, we stand by Ukraine, which is under attack. That is why I am very pleased that the American government has reaffirmed our shared goal of preserving Ukraine’s sovereign independence. This sovereign independence must also be reflected in negotiations. That is what we mean when we say: Nothing about Ukraine without Ukraine.

It is right that Ukraine is now also directly involved in talks with Russia. I, too, have repeatedly held talks with the Russian President to make it clear to him that we expect a just peace in Ukraine and what that means for us. I believe we can all agree: Russia’s war against Ukraine must end as soon as possible. Hundreds of thousands are dead or wounded, millions have been displaced. What immeasurable suffering!

Added to this is Putin’s increasing escalation and globalization of the conflict: drones from Iran, cannons and soldiers from North Korea, mercenaries from Yemen. This escalation

also includes Russia’s dangerous actions against states of the transatlantic alliance — active measures such as the sabotage of undersea cables and other infrastructure, arson attacks, disinformation, and attempts to manipulate democratic elections.

Even after three years of war, one thing remains clear: Whoever seeks to shift borders by force is striking at the very foundation of our peace order. Borders must not be moved by force. This principle must apply always and everywhere, to everyone. A Russian victory or a collapse of Ukraine would therefore not bring peace but would further endanger peace and stability in Europe and beyond. Peace will only exist if Ukraine’s sovereignty is secured. A dictated peace will never have our support. We will also not accept any solution that would lead to a decoupling of European and American security. Only one person would benefit from that: President Putin.

We Europeans will confidently and resolutely represent these interests in the upcoming negotiations. We Europeans are the strongest supporters of Ukraine — and we will continue to support it for as long as necessary.

By the way, this “as long as necessary” does not end when the weapons fall silent. At the end of any negotiated solution, Ukraine must have armed forces capable of repelling any renewed Russian attack. Financially, materially, and logistically, this will be an enormous challenge. Ukraine will not be able to manage this task alone in the foreseeable future. That is why we Europeans, along with Ukraine’s transatlantic and international partners, will continue to be needed — just as we have borne great burdens together so far.

According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, the United States and Germany are by far the largest supporters of Ukraine. In absolute terms, the U.S. leads. However, in relation to economic strength, Germany’s support is four times higher than that of the United States. This is effective burden-

sharing among allies and friends. We want to continue this burden-sharing — for example, through the G7 loan of 50 billion dollars.

We in Germany are also capable of continuing to support Ukraine at the high level we have maintained so far. The debt brake enshrined in the German constitution provides exceptions for emergency situations. A war in the middle of Europe is an emergency — what else could it be? I am certain that after the upcoming Bundestag election, there will be a majority in the German parliament for this as well, even if some prefer to avoid the issue before the election.

It is also beyond doubt that our defense spending must continue to increase significantly — not only to ensure that Europe remains an equal partner to the U.S., but also to ensure that we Europeans can continue to live in peace. The benchmark must be the threat posed by Russia and the achievement of all NATO capability targets derived from it. It has always been clear to me that the 100-billion-euro special fund we created for the Bundeswehr after the Zeitenwende was only a first step. Just to maintain NATO's two-percent target, we will need an additional 30 billion euros per year starting in 2028. Every additional percentage point we spend on defense corresponds to another 43 billion euros per year.

These are enormous sums. By the end of this decade, we are talking about triple-digit billions. Anyone who claims this can be covered by small cuts here and there in the current budget is not telling the citizens the truth. That is why, immediately after the upcoming Bundestag election, we must reform the debt brake in our constitution by exempting investments in our security and defense. And I tell you today: There will also be a majority for this after the election.

These national efforts must be embedded in strengthening European capabilities. This explicitly includes keeping and

establishing key security-related technologies in Europe. We also need a strong European defense industry with permanent production of essential munitions and weapon systems in Europe. This is only possible if we bundle orders at the European level and do not unnecessarily restrict cooperation between our defense companies. At the same time, I want to be clear: We are not giving up the transatlantic integration of our defense industries. We will continue purchasing new American defense equipment in the future.

And here, too, we must answer the question of how to finance this in Europe. I therefore propose introducing an exemption in the EU Stability Pact for all defense investments above our previous NATO target of two percent — temporarily and while maintaining fiscal responsibility in all member states. Germany is ready for this. Peace and security in Europe are at stake. That is why this must be Europe's moment. Strengthening European capabilities must take place within a clearly defined timeframe. This would be, quite literally, a win-win-win strategy: It would relieve the U.S. in Europe, it would significantly strengthen Europe within NATO, and it would strengthen NATO as a whole — in its entire transatlantic dimension.

I believe that the Munich Security Conference is the ideal place to discuss such ideas. A realistic look at the world shows us: It is high time for this.

# Volodymyr Zelenskyy

President of the Ukraine

Right after Olaf Scholz, Volodymyr Zelenskyy used his much-anticipated address to make a passionate call for European unity and the creation of “Armed Forces of Europe.”

At the start of the Conference, every country usually shares its stance, priorities, whether officially, openly or through informal talks with journalists, with partners. And, this year, a country that was not even invited still made its presence known. A country that everyone talks about here — not in a good way.

The night before Munich this year, a Russian attack drone struck the sarcophagus covering the ruined fourth reactor of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant. It was a modified “Shahed” drone — a Russian drone, a technology Iran passed on to Russia. Its warhead carried at least 50 kilograms of explosives.

And we see this as a deeply symbolic move by Russia, by Putin. Just recently, in Ukraine, we discussed the crucial role of nuclear energy in keeping the country running despite Russia’s constant attacks on our Ukrainian energy infrastructure. We are now preparing a project to expand our Khmelnytskyi Nuclear Power Plant — just one day before the Munich I was there, on the plant — with involvement from American businesses, including Westinghouse. The project will strengthen the energy security of not just Ukraine, but our entire region of Europe.

And we also recently spoke with President Trump and his team about nuclear energy and Europe’s largest nuclear power plant — our Zaporizhzhia plant, which is currently occupied by Russia. And Russia responded — by sending a drone to hit Chornobyl’s sarcophagus, which holds radioactive dust and debris.

And this is not just madness. This is Russia’s stance. A country that launches such attacks does not want peace. Not. They don’t want it. It is not preparing for dialogue. Almost every day, Russia sends up to a hundred, even more “Shahed” drones at us. Each day. And regular ballistic missile attacks. And a steady increase in aerial bomb strikes. But that’s not all.

This year, Moscow plans to create 15 new divisions, adding up to 150,000 soldiers. That’s more than the national armies of most European countries. Russia keeps opening new army recruitment centers every week. And Putin can afford it — oil prices are still high enough for him to ignore the world.

And we have clear intel that this summer, Russia plans to send troops to Belarus under the pretext of “training exercises”. But that’s exactly how they staged forces before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine three years ago. Is this Russian force in Belarus meant to attack Ukraine?

Maybe. Or maybe not. Or maybe — it’s meant for you. Let me remind you: Belarus borders three NATO countries. It has effectively become a foothold for Russian military operations. According to both Putin and Lukashenko, Belarus now hosts banned weapons — medium-range missiles and even nuclear arms.

Putin clearly sees Belarus as just another Russian province now. And we need to be realistic — if someone is setting up a military launchpad, we need to ask: what should we do about it?

And more importantly: what can we do before the next attack, the next invasion? Remember, there have already been

provocations on the Polish and Lithuanian borders with Belarus migrant crises staged by Russian intelligence to stir up chaos in Europe.

But what if, next time, it's not migrants? What if it's Russian troops? Or North Korean troops? Make no mistake — North Koreans are not weak. They are learning how to fight now, how to fight the modern war.

And what about your armies? Are they ready? And if Russia launches a false flag operation or just straight up with no insignia from Belarus — like how Crimea got taken in 2014 — how fast will the allies respond? And will they respond at all?

Yesterday here in Munich, the U.S. Vice President made it clear: decades, he said, decades of the old relationship between Europe and America are ending. From now on, things will be different, and Europe needs to adjust to that.

I believe in Europe. And I'm sure you believe too. And I urge you to act — for your own sake, and for the sake of Europe — people of Europe, your nations, your houses, your children, and our shared future. For this Europe has to become self-sufficient — united by common strength, Ukrainian and European.

Right now, Ukraine's army, supported by global aid — thank you so much — is holding back Russia. But if not us, then who will stop them? Really! Let's be honest — now we can't rule out the possibility that America might say "No" to Europe on issues that threaten it.

Many, many leaders have talked about Europe that needs its own military, and army — an Army of Europe.

And I really believe that time has come. The Armed Forces of Europe must be created. This is not harder than standing firm against Russian attacks — as we have already done.

But this isn't just about increasing defense spending as a GDP ratio. Money is needed, of course, yes — but money alone won't stop an enemy assault. People and weapons don't come

for free, but again it's not just about budgets. It's about people realizing the need to defend their own home.

Without Ukraine's army, Europe's armies will not be enough to stop Russia. It's a reality for today. Only our army in Europe has real, modern battlefield experience.

But our army alone is not enough too. And we need what you can provide. Weapons. Training. Sanctions. Financing. Political pressure. And unity.

Three years of full-scale war have proven that we already have the foundation for a united European military force. And now, as we fight this war and lay the groundwork for peace and security, we must build the Armed Forces of Europe.

So that Europe's future depends only on Europeans, and decisions about Europe are made in Europe.

That's why we are talking with European leaders and with the United States about military contingents that can ensure peace, and not just in Ukraine, but across Europe. And that's why we're developing joint weapons production, especially drones. Especially.

The Danish model, for example, of pooled investments for arms production in our country is already working well, very, very, very successfully. Last year alone, thanks to Ukrainian and partner efforts, we produced over 1.5 million drones of various types. Ukraine is now the world leader in drone warfare. This is our success. But it's also your success. Of course. And everything we build for our own defense in Ukraine also strengthens your security. And the same should apply to artillery, air defense, technologies, and armored vehicles.

Everything needed to protect lives in modern war should be produced in Europe — fully. Europe has everything it takes. Europe just needs to come together and start acting in a way that no one can say "No" to Europe, boss it around, or treat it like a pushover.

This isn't just about stockpiling weapons. It's about jobs, technological leadership, and economic strength for Europe.

Last fall, in my Victory Plan, I proposed replacing part of the U.S. military presence in Europe with Ukrainian forces — if Ukraine is in NATO of course. If the Americans themselves decide to go that way, decreasing their presence — it's not good, of course, it's very dangerous — but we all in Europe need to be ready. And I started discussing this even before the U.S. elections because I could see where American policy was heading. But America needs to see where Europe is heading.

And this direction of European policy shouldn't just be promising — it should make America want to stand with a strong Europe. This is absolutely possible. I'm sure of it.

And we must shape that course; Europe must decide its own future.

We need confidence in our own strength so that others have no choice but to respect Europe's power. And without a European army, that is impossible.

Once again: Europe needs its own Armed Forces.

And I know, I know Mark Rutte, my good friend, is listening to me right now. Mark, my friend, this isn't about replacing the Alliance. This is about making Europe's contribution to our partnership equal to America's. And we need the same approach when it comes to diplomacy: working together for peace.

Ukraine will never accept deals made behind our backs without our involvement. And the same rule should apply to all of Europe. No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe. Europe must have a seat at the table when decisions about Europe are being made. Anything else is zero. If we're left out of negotiations about our own future, then we all lose.

Look at what Putin is trying to do now. This is his game. Putin wants one-on-one talks with America — just like before

the war, when they met in Switzerland and looked like to carve up the world. Next, Putin will try to get the U.S. President standing on Red Square on May 9th this year not as a respected leader, but as a prop in his own performance.

We don't need that. We need real success. We need real peace. Some in Europe may not fully understand what's happening in Washington right now. But let's focus on understanding ourselves — right here, in Europe. We must give strength to Europe first.

Does America need Europe? As a market — yes. But as an ally? I don't know. For the answer to be "Yes", Europe needs a single voice — not a dozen different ones. Even those who regularly come to Mar-a-Lago, need to be part of a strong Europe — because President Trump doesn't like weak friends. He respects strength.

Some in Europe may be frustrated with Brussels. But let's be clear — if not Brussels, then Moscow. It's your decision. That's geopolitics. That's history. Moscow will pull Europe apart if we, as Europeans, don't trust each other.

A few days ago, President Trump told me about his conversation with Putin. Not once did he mention that America needs Europe at that table. That says a lot. The old days are over — when America supported Europe just because it always had. But President Trump once said: What matters is not the family you were born into, but the one you build. We must build the closest possible relationship with America, and — yes, a new relationship — but as Europeans, not just as separate nations.

That's why we need a unified foreign policy — a coordinated diplomacy — the foreign policy of common Europe. And let the end of this war be our first shared success in this new reality. And we are already working to make sure that on February 24<sup>th</sup>, the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion,



we can gather together in Kyiv and online. All European leaders. All key partners who defend our security. From Spain to Finland. From Britain to Poland. from Washington to Tokyo.

This meeting must deliver a clear vision for our next steps — on peace, security guarantees, and the future of our collective policy. And I do not believe in security guarantees without America — yes, it will be just weak. But America will not offer guarantees unless Europe's own guarantees are strong.

I also will not take NATO membership for Ukraine off the table. But right now, the most influential member of NATO seems to be Putin — because his whims have the power to block NATO decisions. And that's despite the fact that it was Ukraine's army that stopped Russia — not a NATO country, not NATO troops, but only our people and our army.

There are no foreign armies fighting on Ukraine's side in this war. But Putin has lost almost 250,000 soldiers in this war. Over 610,000 have been wounded.

Just in the Battle of Kursk, our troops eliminated nearly 20,000 Russian soldiers. We completely destroyed the North Korean units that Putin had to bring in because his own forces weren't enough to hold back our counteroffensive. For over six months now, Ukrainians have been holding a foothold inside Russian territory, even though it was Russia that wanted to create a "buffer zone" inside our land, in Ukraine.

I am proud of Ukraine. I am proud of our people. But now, I ask you — each of you — to honestly answer this question: if Russia came for you, could your army fight the same way? I don't want anyone to ever have to find out — God forbid. That's why we are talking about security guarantees. And that's why we believe that the core of any security guarantees for Ukraine must be NATO membership. Or — if not that — then conditions that allow us to build another NATO, right here in Ukraine.

Because at some point, there will be a border between war and peace. Where that border is drawn, and how strong it is — is up to us. My proposal: Ukraine's eastern border, Belarus's eastern border, the eastern borders of the Baltic states, Finland's eastern border. That is the strongest security line for all of us in Europe because that is the line of international law.

And do we still remember what international law is? Let's be honest, international law — these two words — already sound a bit outdated. But I believe that Europe's mission is to make sure international law still matters.

And finally — one last point. What security guarantees can Putin offer? Before the war, many doubted whether Ukraine's institutions could withstand Russian and Putin's pressure. But in the end, it was Putin who faced an armed rebellion from within. He was the one who had to defend his own capital from his own warlords. That alone shows his weakness. So, what happens to the million Russian troops currently fighting in Ukraine? Where are they going to fight if not in Ukraine?

This is why we cannot just agree to a ceasefire without real security guarantees, without pressure on Russia, without a system to keep Russia in check. To fight us, Putin pulled troops from Syria, from Africa, from the Caucasus, even from some part of Moldova. And right now, he faces a shortage of fighting forces.

And if this war ends the wrong way, he will have a surplus of battle-tested soldiers who know nothing but killing and looting.

And that is yet another reason why this war cannot be decided by just a few leaders — not by Trump and Putin, not by me and Putin, not by anyone here in Munich sitting down with Putin alone.

We must apply pressure together — to make real peace. Putin cannot offer real security guarantees. Not just because

he is a liar — but because Russia, in its current state, needs war to hold power together. And the world must be protected from that.

So, first. The Armed Forces of Europe as an upgrade to NATO. Second. A common European foreign policy. Third. The level of European cooperation that Washington has to take seriously. Fourth. International law. And fifth, keeping all pressure on Russia because that pressure is what guarantees peace, not Putin's words, not just some papers. Putin lies. He is predictable. And he is weak.

We must use that — now, not later. And we must act as Europe and not as a bunch of separate people. Some say that the New Year comes not on January 1 but with the Munich Security Conference.

This new year starts now — and let it be the year of Europe — united, strong, secure and in peace. Peace for Ukraine. Peace for Europe. Peace for all the world. For all your families.

*Glory to Ukraine!*

## Friedrich Merz

Chairman of the Christian Democratic Union

[In a panel discussion on European support for Ukraine, Friedrich Merz commented on JD Vance's speech, addressing the "elephant in the room".](#)

If you allow, I would like to set up the bigger framework. There is an elephant in the room here. And the elephant is the transatlantic relationship. And I think I should give some brief comments on what we have heard yesterday and today on our relationship.

My first comment goes to the outcome of the elections. We respect the presidential elections and the congressional elections in the U.S., and we expect the U.S. to do the same here.

My second comment goes to our shared values and shared powers. We stick to the rules which are given by our democratic institutions. This includes our own legal approach to deal with, for example, published information and opinions. Free speech remains free speech and remains part of our open democratic society. But fake news, hate, and offenses remain subject to legal restraints and controlled by independent courts. And I think I should say that in front of the events, which took place in D.C. yesterday: We would never kick out a news agency out of the press room of our chancellor. And our legal framework in the European Union is and remains valid for all private persons and private companies doing business in Europe independently of where they come from and where their headquarters are based.



We look for close cooperation with the Trump administration and with the American market. And we strongly believe in free trade, open markets. And that's the reason why we would like to see tariffs brought down to zero as fast as possible. We don't believe in trade conflicts or even trade wars.

And my last comment goes to the foreign security policy. We know that we have to catch up quickly with our spending on defense. And we know that this is triggered by the events we are seeing for three years now. But I fully agree with Matte Fredriksen and others here on the podium. By the way, I wish all the social democrats in the European Union were as clear as we have heard here from the podium. But this is something which is not challenging just the territory of Ukraine. This is challenging the entire political order which we had set up after 1990. So, this is the reason why we are standing behind Ukraine, not just because of Ukraine, but because of our own security on our European continent. And I absolutely share the view, which was mentioned here, that we have to do everything what we can to bring the country, to bring Ukraine into a position of strength. And as soon as they start to negotiate, they have to sit on the table as the key country. And we as the Europeans have to be strongly behind them. And it's absolutely unacceptable that Russia and the United States of America are negotiating without Ukraine and without the Europeans at the table.

## Michael McFaul

Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Professor of Political Science at Stanford University, and Director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies

[At the Politico Hub, McFaul reacted to Vice President Vance's speech, delving into its implications for transatlantic relations and global security in a conversation with Jack Detsch, who is a defense reporter at Politico.](#)

### Jack Detsch

Just curious to casually chat about what we just saw. The Munich keynote [speech] was always kind of something that echoes in history a bit, but not the speech we were expecting. Certainly, a discourse from the Vice President about free speech, about what's going on in Europe. Very little mention, if any mention, of Ukraine, NATO, some of the big topics and confusion that's on the mind of European politicians here.

### Michael McFaul

I'll have to read the speech and think about it. My initial reaction was three different things. So number one, as an American, and I want to be clear, as an American citizen listening to my elected official, and I'm, you know, he won in a free and fair process, but for him to come to Europe and say the biggest threat to Europe is your lack of democracy, is your censorship, I just think is analytically incorrect. The greatest threat to Europe is Russia. I was just with some Ukrainian soldiers literally before his speech, an hour before his speech.

They, by the way, consider themselves European. That's their identity. Censorship and those kinds of threats are not the things that they think are the biggest threat. I just think analytically, some of the things are legitimate. I think talking about what happened in Romania is legitimate, but to say that that is the biggest threat to Europe at this moment when everybody else at this meeting thinks we're in a major crisis in terms of the transatlantic relationship was wrong.

Number two, the irony of elected officials from the United States of America coming here and talking about individual problems of democracy when President Trump called the last election illegitimate. He said it was not a fair election. He then inspired people to storm our Parliament, our Capitol building, and then when he was elected President, he let all those people out of jail. I'm sorry, but there's a hypocrisy to be lecturing Europeans about how well they are practicing democracy when we are struggling with the practice of democracy at home.

And the last thing I'll say in terms of immediate reactions, these guys are all about sovereignty when we're talking about America. Sovereignty, America first, right? We get to govern the way we want to govern. And yet to come here and to lecture an entire continent, he didn't even talk about individual countries. He lectured an entire continent about their flaws. I just would point out there's some real hypocrisy about our sovereignty we're going to defend, but your sovereignty, it's free for us to tell you what to do. And it's free for us to have the richest Americans be very directly involved in your election as he joked about it. But it's, you know, that's not actually a defense of sovereignty. That's something else. Other than that, I love the speech.

**Jack Detsch**

As a footnote, of course, JD Vance did not accept the results of the 2020 election.

**Michael McFaul**

Yes, he did not.

**Jack Detsch**

I'm just curious sort of where this, you know, how you see the administration sort of coming into this moment and making this type of speech. Was this misreading the room? Was this misreading the audience? What confusion does this leave in the minds of Europeans after not addressing some of the key issues here? Ukraine, NATO, did not really make any noise in this speech.

**Michael McFaul**

Just one more comment thinking about the speech. The fourth thing, it's related to that. There was a hypothesis in the speech that the voices of Europeans and democracies are not allowed to speak and are not being represented. I'm not an expert on elections in all of European countries, but I know a little bit about it. And I don't think that hypothesis is shared by data. The people that have his views in Europe are represented in all kinds of parliaments all across the continent. They're competing in elections in this country in nine days. So this notion that there's censorship, that he kept, he talked, he used the word commissars to describe the European Union. I know a little bit about real commissars. I studied the Soviet Union. That is just insulting, and it's just empirically not true. But then he left out the places where it is true. You know, Russia: If you're worried about censorship, if you're worried about jailing your opposition, if you're worried about killing the leaders of the opposition, that's what happened here a year ago in Munich when Alexei Navalny was killed. The fact that he would focus just on the crisis in Europe on these things and not speak about Russia, I thought was a big missed opportunity.

But to your point, he obviously made a decision that he was going to give a political speech about, you know, the values that he aspires to. And, you know, that's okay. But I think the audience, and most certainly I, was waiting for clarification about what right now is a very convoluted set of statements that the Trump administration has made about their involvement in a peace process with respect to Ukraine and their negotiations with Putin. This would have been a fantastic opportunity to clarify that. He himself has made contradictory statements compared to the Secretary of Defense. This speech could have been a moment of clarification, and he chose not to do that. He chose to do a different speech.

#### Jack Detsch

Right, we saw Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, of course, at the Ukraine Defense Contact Group earlier this week, make some statements about how Ukraine would end up at the end of the war not whole, and then of course walked those comments back later. It seems like this is creating a lot of confusion among the Europeans.

I mean, what message do you think people may be taking away from, of course, the convoluted messaging earlier in the week from the administration and now this speech, which of course doesn't seem to be on some of the major topics that are for debate here?

#### Michael McFaul

Well, one takeaway I had is that our Vice President's not going to be involved in foreign policy, right? So when I was in the government the 2009 speech was delivered by a Vice President, Vice President Biden, uh, and when he came to this conference, it was very clear that he was going to be a major player in foreign policy. Whether that would have good outcomes or

bad outcomes is for others to judge, but that was a very clear signal. His speech was about security. This speech was not, which suggests to me that the Vice President's going to be involved in these issues back home and not involved in foreign policy.

The second thing, the takeaway is that they are not going to be afraid to take, you know, Trumpism abroad. He was, you know, his definition of values that are not neutral. They're, they're very partisan from my point of view and he's decided that that's, they've decided that this is going to be part of their foreign policy. That is something very new.

#### Jack Detsch

And where does this leave the Europeans, of course, because they had a lot of questions, of course, about the peace deal. They had a lot of questions about what would come after the peace deal. Would it be peacekeepers on the ground? Would it be some sort of armed force? They had questions about the 5% mark that we didn't hear any answers to. Does this send the message to the Europeans that potentially they have to lead on these issues and, and maybe factor the United States out of the equation?

#### Michael McFaul

Yes, I mean, my hope is that that will not be the case. And, and I, as an American, I hope I won't be censored by these folks, right? I, I hope I'll have the chance to articulate a different perspective in a democratic society, in a democratic country. My hope is that we will have a debate about these issues, because most Americans don't want to move, pull out of NATO. By the way, the polling on that is very clear. Most Americans actually support assistance to Ukraine. Polling's very clear on that. The last vote we had on it, it was crystal clear. Majorities

in both houses voted for that. So we should have that debate, and I hope it is not a premature conclusion that we're leaving. But they're sending the signals that they want to leave. They want Europe to be in the lead. And so if Europe is supposed to be in the lead, then one, Europe has to be part of the negotiations. And I think it was just a tactical mistake that the president, President Trump, called Putin before he called anyone in Brussels, before he called anyone in any of the major countries in Europe, and before he called Zelensky. Because ultimately, if they're supposed to be in charge of their own security, they have to be part of the negotiation. And I hope that message is clear and I welcome that. I think that would be great. The European speakers that spoke today also said the same thing. I think this is a turning point where from my point of view, somebody also believes in democratic values, we need a stronger Europe. And, um, I hope that is a result of this conference.

#### Jack Detsch

In the last 40 seconds I have with you, obviously, this was going to be an agenda setter. Where does Vance's speech leave the agenda for the rest of the conference?

#### Michael McFaul

My guess is most people at this conference won't have much to say about that speech. That speech was orthogonal, that was off to the side. That was a speech I think intended in many ways for American domestic audiences more than this audience. Maybe I'll be surprised by that, but my guess is we'll be waiting to hear about the, what I consider to be the much more immediate threats to security. You know, he somehow thinks it's censorship. I actually think it's Russia and my guess is most people here still think it's Russia.

## Alexander Stubb

President of the Republic of Finland

During the conference, Finnish President Alexander Stubb sat down with Foreign Policy's Editor-in-Chief and FP Live host, Ravi Agrawal, for an in-depth interview, sharing his insights on Vice President Vance's speech. Below is an excerpt from their conversation.<sup>1</sup>

#### Ravi Agrawal

One of the big topics this weekend at the Munich Security Conference is the speech that Vice President JD Vance gave at a public session. And if I may paraphrase, he lectured the audience about democracy, he lectured the audience also about free speech. Many European leaders I have spoken to off the record were absolutely gobsmacked by that speech. How did you feel?

#### Alexander Stubb

Well, I think the foundation of American democracy and free speech is very strong. I can only speak for myself and my own country, and of course I've, you know, looked at something like the index of free speech. Number one is Norway, number two is Sweden, number three is Denmark, number four is Netherlands, and number five is Finland. So I think obviously we need to improve. I think that speech was more for a domestic audience than for a European audience. The good thing with free speech is that you can have a different view of what

it actually means. For me, free speech means responsibility, it means fact-checking, it means an open dialogue between different ideologies and identities. And if that is what Vice President JD Vance meant, it's a good thing.

## Mark Rutte

Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Speaking on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte gave CNN's Chief International Anchor Christiane Amanpour his reaction to Vice President Vance's speech.<sup>2</sup>

Christiane Amanpour

Defense Secretary Hegseth said that Europe cannot expect to see U.S. forces on its territory forever. In other words, for I don't know how long they want to turn to China, which is what we've heard from several different administrations. And you all have said throughout these years of defending Ukraine that it is also your defense because Putin will try to bite off another chunk somewhere if he has the opportunity. Vance said that he doesn't consider the external threat to Europe as important as he calls the threat within your own democracy.

Mark Rutte

These are two different issues.

Christiane Amanpour

But he said that.

Mark Rutte

You are totally right with the first issue. There is an absolute irritation with the Americans which I completely buy that

Europe for years has not paid the bill, and we have to grow up and take care of our own responsibility together with the U.S., and by the way, as NATO we also have to make sure that we understand that not only Russia is a threat but that we also have adversary more and more with China ramping up its defense-industrial base. And then the second issue is the Vice President giving a more philosophical speech here, where he very much stressed the unity of the U.S. and Europe, that we are really one family, and indeed where we alluded to our common values of free speech, of democracy, etc., and these are values which bind us.

## Chapter 3

THE GUARDIAN  
LE MONDE  
THE NEW YORK TIMES  
DONALD J. TRUMP  
URSULA VON DER LEYEN  
GIORGIA MELONI

# A SELECTION OF REACTIONS BEYOND THE MSC

# Le Monde

On February 17, 2025, the French newspaper “Le Monde” published the following editorial.<sup>4</sup>

## Europe’s historic challenge

U.S. Vice President JD Vance’s speech at the Munich Conference shook the transatlantic relationship. Europe must now realize that the continent’s security depends on Europeans alone.

The rift between Europe and the United States is deep and historic. Even before the battle over tariffs, the Trump storm has swept across the Old Continent, and the damage is considerable. It was on full display from February 14 to 16 at the Munich Security Conference, an annual gathering of the Western political, diplomatic and defense establishment. Three days that shook the transatlantic relationship, a pillar of the international system since WWII.

There was, of course, the shock of the openly authoritarian and hostile speech delivered by American Vice President JD Vance, which was marked with the ideological MAGA stamp. His far-right discourse accused European democratic practices of restricting freedom and compared European political leaders to Soviet political commissars. Then, there was the inadmissible interference of a supposedly allied power in an election campaign in Germany, where the U.S. Vice President lent his support to the candidate of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party while refusing to meet with the chancellor.

There’s also the uncertainty over the fate of Ukraine and its aggressor, Russian President Vladimir Putin, at the hands of a U.S. president in a hurry to make peace so he can extricate

himself from Europe and focus on his rivalry with China. Can the U.S. and Europe work together to achieve a “just and lasting” peace in Ukraine, while at the same time waging an ideological war?

## Rhetoric of truth

This is a critical issue for the future of Europe. It is belatedly realizing that it is trapped by its security dependence on an ally that behaves more like an adversary than a friend. In Munich, the shock imposed by the Trump administration in an appalling climate raised awareness of the inadequacy of the resources allocated to defense. A rhetoric of truth is emerging, notably among German leaders, on the need to educate the public about defense budget increase.

Against this backdrop of uncertainty about the Trump team’s intentions, Europe’s economic and military support for Ukraine must remain the priority, so that it is in a position of strength when negotiations begin. Similarly, Ukraine must be kept on the path to the European Union and, ultimately, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Meeting these goals requires massive financial commitments to sustain the defense effort. Europe must keep joint borrowing on the table, despite Germany’s resistance, and consider fully using frozen Russian assets, rather than just their interest, to fund Ukraine.

Unanticipated, the prospect of losing U.S. protection is potentially devastating for Europe’s unity. On the contrary, it calls for a leap of faith, the first act of which could be the emergency summit meeting to be held in Paris on Monday, February 17. Getting Washington to renounce complete disengagement from Europe presupposes that Europe is willing and able to invest in its own defense. In Munich, Europe’s blindness came to an abrupt end. From now on, the security of the continent depends essentially on Europe itself, and its ability to maintain cohesion.



# Donald J. Trump

President of the United States of America

A few days following JD Vance's remarks in Munich, U.S. President Donald J. Trump was asked to share his perspective during a brief Q&A session in the Oval Office.<sup>6</sup>

Reporter

I can just follow up on Jackie's question about Munich: Vice President Vance's speech to the conference has ruffled quite a few feathers in Europe.

Donald J. Trump

What did he say to ruffle them? I don't know.

Reporter

He was talking about the freedom of speech and migration in Europe. Do you believe that European leaders have a fundamentally different view of the world than this administration?

Donald J. Trump

You're talking about JD's speech, right?

Reporter

Yes, sir.

Donald J. Trump

I heard his speech, and he talked about freedom of speech and, and I think it's true in Europe. It's losing, they're losing their wonderful right of freedom of speech. I see it. I mean, I thought he made a very good speech, actually a very brilliant speech. Europe has to be careful, and he talked about immigration, and Europe has a big immigration problem. Just take a look at what's happened with crime. Take a look at what's happening in various parts of Europe. I thought his speech was very well received, actually. I've heard very good remarks.

# Ursula von der Leyen

President of the European Commission

Following U.S. Vice President JD Vance's speech at the MSC 2025, the European Commission issued a press statement. President Ursula von der Leyen announced the "ReArm Europe" plan, aiming at strengthening Europe's defense and reducing external dependencies.<sup>7</sup>

We are living in the most momentous and dangerous of times. I do not need to describe the grave nature of the threats that we face. Or the devastating consequences that we will have to endure if those threats would come to pass. Because the question is no longer whether Europe's security is threatened in a very real way. Or whether Europe should shoulder more of the responsibility for its own security. In truth, we have long known the answers to those questions. The real question in front of us is whether Europe is prepared to act as decisively as the situation dictates. And whether Europe is ready and able to act with the speed and the ambition that is needed. In the various meetings in the last few weeks — most recently two days ago in London — the answer from European capitals has been as resounding as it is clear. We are in an era of rearmament. And Europe is ready to massively boost its defence spending. Both, to respond to the short-term urgency to act and to support Ukraine but also to address the long-term need to take on much more responsibility for our own European security.

This is why today I have written a letter to Leaders ahead of Thursday's European Council. This is why we are here together today. And I have outlined in this letter to the leaders the ReArm Europe Plan. This set of proposals focuses on how to use all of the financial levers at our disposal — in order to help Member States to quickly and significantly increase expenditures in defence capabilities. Urgently now but also over a longer time over this decade. There are five parts to this.

The first part of this ReArm Europe plan is to unleash the use of public funding in defence at national level. Member States are ready to invest more in their own security if they have the fiscal space. And we must enable them to do so. This is why we will shortly propose to activate the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact. It will allow Member States to increase significantly their defence expenditures without triggering the Excessive Deficit Procedure. For example: If Member States would increase their defence spending by 1,5% of GDP on average this could create fiscal space of close to EUR 650 billion over a period of four years.

The second proposal will be a new instrument. It will provide EUR 150 billion of loans to Member States for defence investment. This is basically about spending better — and spending together. We are talking about pan-European capability domains. For example: air and missile defence, artillery systems, missiles and ammunition drones and anti-drone systems; but also to address other needs from cyber to military mobility for example. It will help Member States to pool demand and to buy together. Of course, with this equipment, Member States can massively step up their support to Ukraine. So, immediate military equipment for Ukraine. This approach of joint procurement will also reduce costs, reduce fragmentation, increase interoperability and strengthen our defence industrial base. And it can be to the benefit of Ukraine, as I

have just described. So this is Europe's moment, and we must live up to it.

Third point is using the power of the EU budget. There is a lot that we can do in this domain in the short term to direct more funds towards defence-related investments. This is why I can announce that we will propose additional possibilities and incentives for Member States that they will decide, if they want to use cohesion policy programmes, to increase defence spending.

The last two areas of action aim at mobilising private capital by accelerating the Savings and Investment Union and through the European Investment Bank.

To conclude: Europe is ready to assume its responsibilities. ReArm Europe could mobilise close to EUR 800 billion for a safe and resilient Europe. We will continue working closely with our partners in NATO. This is a moment for Europe. And we are ready to step up.

## Giorgia Meloni

Prime Minister of the Italian Republic

[At the 2025 Conservative Political Action Conference \(CPAC\), Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni delivered a noteworthy speech, offering her reaction to Vice President JD Vance's remarks at the Munich Security Conference.<sup>8</sup>](#)

You know how much I value this gathering, and I couldn't miss this edition, even if only from afar. And today I address you with the pride of representing, as Prime Minister, an extraordinary nation that is Italy, a nation with a deep, unbreakable bond with the United States. And this bond is forged by history and shared principles, and it is embodied by the countless Americans of Italian descent who for generations have contributed to America's prosperity. To them, allow me to say thank you. Thank you for being exceptional ambassadors for Italian passion, creativity, and genius. To this incredible nation. Italy, I dedicate my full energy.

Our government is tirelessly working to restore Italy's rightful place on the international stage. We are reforming, modernizing, and reclaiming our role as a global leader. We aim to build an Italy that once again amazes the world. Let me tell you, we're proving it. The mainstream propaganda machine predicted that a conservative government would have isolated Italy, deleting it from the map of the world, driving away investors, and suppressing fundamental freedoms. They were wrong. Their storytelling was fake. The reality is that Italy is

thriving. Employment is at a record high, our economy is growing, our fiscal policy is back on track, and the flow of illegal migration has decreased by 60% in the last year. And most importantly, we are expanding freedom in every aspect of Italians' lives. Why? Because we conservatives do what we say. We do what is right. We fight for what we believe in, and moreover, we trust people, not fear them.

Unlike the globalist elite who believe the government should educate the people, forcing them to accept policies they never asked for, we believe in democracy. We serve the people, we do not rule over them. CPAC understood this fight, and again, I want to thank you for that. You have never given up, even in the toughest moments. You have fought for a new victory. You have built a global network that has given a voice to millions who were silenced so that conservatives everywhere would know they are not alone. And we are not alone, right? CPAC understood before many others that the political and cultural battle for conservative values is not just an American battle, it is a Western battle. Because, my friends, I still believe in the West, not just as a geographical space, but as a civilization. A civilization born from the fusion of Greek philosophy, Roman law, and Christian values. A civilization built and defended over centuries through the genius, energy, and sacrifices of many. When we say West, we define a way of understanding the world where the individual is central, life is sacred, all men are born equal and free, the law applies equally to all, sovereignty belongs to people, and freedom comes before everything else. This is our heritage, and we will never apologize for it.

My question for you is, can this civilization still defend the principles and values that define it? Can it still be proud of itself and aware of its role? I think so. So we must say loudly and clearly to those attacking the West from the outside and

those sabotaging it from within with the virus of cancel culture and woke ideology, we must say to them that we will never be ashamed of who we are. We affirm our identity and work to strengthen it. Because without a deep-rooted identity, we cannot be great again. The radical left wants to erase our history, undermine our identity, divide us by nationality, by gender, by ideology, but we will not be divided because we are strong only when we are together.

And if the West cannot exist without America, or rather the Americas, thinking of the many patriots fighting for freedom in Central and South America, then it also cannot exist without Europe. Our adversaries hope that President Trump will move away from us, but knowing him as a strong and effective leader, I bet that those who hope for divisions will be proven wrong.

I know some of you may see Europe as distant or even lost. I tell you, it is not. Yes, mistakes have been made, priorities have been misplaced, especially due to ruling classes and mainstream media that imported and replicated in the old continent the most reckless theories of American liberal leftism.

These are the same elites who were recently outraged by JD Vance's speech in Munich, in which the Vice President rightly stated that before discussing security, we must know what we are defending. He wasn't talking about tariffs or trade balances, on which we will each defend our interests while preserving our friendship. We don't need to say how interconnected our economies are and how the unpredictable results of a trade clash would play into the hands of other great powers. Vice President Vance was discussing something deeper: identity, democracy, freedom of speech, in short, Europe's historic role and mission.

Many pretended to be outraged, calling for European pride against an American daring to lecture us. But let me tell you,

as someone who is proud to be European, first, if those who were outraged had shown the same pride when Europe lost its strategic autonomy, tying its economy to autocratic regimes, or when European borders and our way of life were threatened by mass illegal migration, now we would live in a stronger Europe.

Second, these ideas are not new for many of us. Brave European leaders have been saying this for a long time. I've said them many times before, even from the CPAC stage, urging Europe to rediscover its true and deepest soul, which has been sacrificed on the altar of bureaucracy and mercantilism. These are common sense ideas now shared by a majority of European citizens, as election results have shown.

Europe is far from lost, and it will never be lost as long as conservatives remain in the fight. There is a growing awareness in Europe that security is now the top priority. You cannot defend your freedom if you lack the means or the courage to do so.

Throughout history, Europeans and Americans have shown they are heirs to priceless words: happiness depends on freedom, and freedom depends on courage. We proved this, when we stopped invasions, won our independences, and overthrew dictators, we have done it together. The last three years in Ukraine, where a proud people fight for freedom against brutal aggression, we must continue today working together for a just and lasting peace. A peace that can only be built with the contribution of all, but above all, with strong leaderships. And I know that with Donald Trump leading the United States, we will never again see the disaster we saw in Afghanistan four years ago.

So, border security, energy security, economic security, food security, defense, and national security for a simple reason: if you are not secure, you are not free. And when free-

dom is at risk, the only thing that you can do is to put it in wiser hands. That is why conservatives keep on growing and are becoming more and more influential in European politics. And that is why the left is nervous. With Trump's victory, their irritation has turned into hysteria, not only because conservatives are winning, but because conservatives are now collaborating globally. When Bill Clinton and Tony Blair created a global leftist liberal network in the 1990s, they were called statesmen. Today, when Trump, Meloni or Modi talk, they are called a threat to democracy. This is the left's double standard, but we are used to it. And the good news is people no longer believe in their lies. Despite all the mud they throw at us, citizens keep voting for us because simply, people are not naive as the left considers them. They vote for us because we defend freedom, we love our nations, we want secure borders, we preserve businesses and citizens from the green leftist insanity, we defend family and life, we fight against wokeism, we protect our sacred right to our faith and our free speech, and we stand for common sense. So ultimately, our struggle is hard, but the choice is simple: Will we surrender to decline, or will we fight to reverse it? Will we let our civilization fade, or will we stand up and defend it? Will we leave our children a weaker world, or a stronger one? Will we want the new generations to be ashamed of their roots, or will we recover awareness and pride of who we are and teach it to them? I made my choice long ago, and I fight every day to honor it. And I know that I'm not alone in this battle, that you are all standing with me, that we are all standing together. And believe me, this makes all the difference.

Chapter 4

# WESTLESSNESS RELOADED?

KEY TAKEAWAYS  
FROM THE  
MUNICH SECURITY  
CONFERENCE  
2025

# Westlessness Reloaded?

## Key Takeaways from the Munich Security Conference 2025

Tobias Bunde and Sophie Eisentraut

Issued after each MSC, the Munich Security Debrief captures the conference's defining moments and debates. This year's edition delves into U.S. Vice President JD Vance's speech, the state of Western unity, and the growing dynamics of multipolarization, offering sharp insights into the shifting geopolitical landscape.<sup>9</sup>

The annual Munich Security Conference is often described as the place to take the temperature of world politics and assess the state of the transatlantic partnership. This year, the only question was: How bad is it? After mixed messages from the new U.S. administration had already intensified concerns among U.S. allies, U.S. President Donald Trump's surprise announcement of a long phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, along with U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth's outline of a potential peace deal with Russia on the eve of the conference, put most attendees on high alert. The horrible terrorist attack in Munich, which claimed at least two lives, added further

tensions to the situation even before the conference officially began. Transatlantic Family Disunion? Enter U.S. Vice President JD Vance. While most participants had anxiously waited for additional details about the Trump administration's views on the future role of the United States in Europe, demands for increased European defense spending, a partial withdrawal of U.S. troops from the continent, and a preview of U.S. negotiations with Russia, Vance delivered a speech that sent shockwaves through Europe for different reasons. Scolding European democracies for their alleged departure from "shared values," the Vice President questioned Europe's interpretation of freedom of speech, criticized its unwillingness to rein in "out-of-control migration," and lambasted the German liberal-democratic parties' refusal to cooperate with the far right. As Vance put it, "the threat that I worry the most about vis-à-vis Europe is not Russia, it's not China, it's not any other external actor. What I worry about is the threat from within." While participants in Munich offered different interpretations of who Vance's intended audience was, the speech provoked strong responses from German leaders present in Munich. Defense Minister Boris Pistorius on Friday as well as Chancellor Olaf Scholz, CDU Chairman Friedrich Merz, and Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck on Saturday all rejected U.S. interference in Germany's upcoming elections and defended European democracies' right to regulate disinformation and hate speech. Together with other European leaders, they challenged Vance's accusation that he heard "a lot about what you need to defend yourselves from," but not enough about "what exactly it is that you're defending yourselves for." In a way, the speech thus also served as a unifying factor, stressing the commonalities both among German mainstream parties and among Europeans in general. As Pistorius put it: "We do not only know against whom we are defending our country, but also for what. For

democracy, for freedom of expression, for the rule of law, and for the dignity of every individual." In his opening speech, Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier had deplored that the Trump administration "holds a world view that is very different from our own," stressing that it was "not in the interest of the international community for this world view to become the dominating paradigm. The absence of rules must not become the guiding principle of a new world order." The debates in Munich bore out warnings about a growing "Westlessness" voiced at the MSC some years ago,<sup>10</sup> driven by competing visions of what the West represents and undermining the transatlantic partners' ability to act together. While Vance's speech was not about security at first glance, the divide it represented struck at the heart of the alliance. Both JD Vance and his European counterparts maintain that the other side has deviated from the normative core of their community. For most in the audience, this year's transatlantic family reunion felt like a disunion, with the members accusing each other of violating their family's core values.

"Although the audience in Munich seemed to agree that the messages from Washington represented a particularly loud wake-up call, many stressed that Europe had missed countless wake-up calls before."

Four years after President Joseph R. Biden announced that "America is back,"<sup>11</sup> the feeling among most European participants this year was that America is turning its back — on Europe and the idea of a transatlantic alliance based on shared democratic values. Despite Vance expressing his belief "that we are on the same team," the majority view at the conference was that the United States is not a team player anymore. Nowhere was this more evident than in the various sessions and side events that discussed the future of Ukraine and the looming negotiations over a potential deal supposed to end



Russia's war. The announcement that U.S. representatives would meet for direct negotiations with Russia, without the participation of Ukraine and its European supporters, as emphasized by U.S. Special Envoy Keith Kellogg in the MSC Town-hall, was fiercely criticized by European leaders in Munich. While the Europeans also want the war to end, President Steinmeier stressed, they also know that "how this war concludes will have a lasting impact on our security order." "No decisions about Ukraine without Ukraine. No decisions about Europe without Europe," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared in his speech. In a similar vein, Scholz stressed that borders must not be changed by force and that Europe would not support a "dictated peace." Both Ukrainians and their European neighbors are concerned about an emerging order whose founding principles may be closer to Yalta than to Helsinki, shaped by great-power prerogatives rather than national self-determination, as Finnish President Alexander Stubb highlighted. From the perspective of many in the audience, Trump's calls for territorial expansion and his predilection for deals with other great powers seem to suggest that the United States has given up on its role as a benign hegemon.

### America First, Europe Alone?

It was up to Zelenskyy to translate for the Europeans what the announcements by Trump and Hegseth as well as Vance's speech meant. As Zelenskyy urged, Europe needs to wake up to a world in which U.S. support can no longer be taken for granted: "The old days are over — when America supported Europe just because it always had." The Ukrainian President called for a unified Europe and a "European army," stressing that Europe was essentially on its own and faced a clear-cut choice — "if not Brussels, then Moscow." Zelenskyy also reminded the audience of the fact that Ukraine's army stopped

Russia and that another European country could become the next target of Russian imperialism: "If Russia came for you, could your army fight the same way?" Europe is in a dire situation — mostly of its own making. Having ignored complaints about unfair burden-sharing by U.S. leaders for decades,<sup>12</sup> European elites and publics are woefully unprepared for the United States following through on its threats. Almost ironically, just when Vance chose to focus on other issues, European leaders in Munich seemed to eventually get serious about defense spending and burden-shifting. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte acknowledged that the U.S. was right to ask for a rebalancing and announced that NATO's new spending target should be "considerably more than three percent." Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, suggested activating the escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact for defense investments. This message was echoed by Scholz, who proposed to exempt defense spending above two percent of GDP from the EU's fiscal rules and reiterated his calls for a reform of the German debt brake to finance rapid defense investments. Pistorius pointed to a new roadmap for burden-sharing among NATO allies that would reflect the need for Europe to assume the lion's share of the burden for defense and deterrence in Europe. In general, the European leaders attending the conference all agreed that Europe must get its act together and be ready to significantly strengthen its military power. But such a strategy of burden-shifting takes money, time, and political leadership. While the Europeans should be able to raise the money even if this comes with tough budgetary choices, participants in Munich voiced doubts whether Europe had enough time and the necessary political leadership for a comprehensive overhaul of its strategic posture. Although the audience in Munich seemed to agree that the messages from Washington represented a particularly loud

wake-up call, many stressed that Europe had missed countless wake-up calls before. As Zelenskyy and others underlined, a joint and forceful European response is key for meeting the threat. Against this background, the Trump administration's open support for anti-European — and, ironically, often pro-Russia and pro-China — parties appears particularly problematic, as they complicate the very emergence of a stronger Europe that can take care of its own security.

### A Welcome Shake-Up of the System?

The rifts in the transatlantic relationship, debates in Munich suggested, may not only have raised Europe's perceived need to become an independent pole in international politics. They have accelerated the process of "multipolarization"<sup>13</sup> diagnosed by this year's Munich Security Report in yet another way, as many in the so-called Global South were reeling from the perceived end of the U.S.-led order. But it was far less clear in discussions who would fill the leadership void that accompanies the shift towards a world with several power centers. While less reported on than Europe's distress, pressing global challenges from food and health security to accelerating climate change featured prominently at the conference, often raised by participants from outside the Euro-Atlantic community. As such, the fact that the conference was a "truly global" one, as the Chairman of the Munich Security Conference Christoph Heusgen emphasized in his opening remarks, was not only reflected in this wide range of issues discussed in Munich. Apart from global challenges like migration, it included debates about various regional hotspots, among them the situations in Gaza, Syria, and the Middle East more broadly as well as crises in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Sudan, and Venezuela. The global character of the conference was also evident in the background of its par-

ticipants, with around 30 percent of speakers coming from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and several countries, including Fiji, being represented for the very first time. After Vance's speech, international participants admitted that seeing Europeans being lectured about the state of their democracy was a welcome change from the past, when U.S. criticism had exclusively targeted countries in the Global South. For Beijing, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi suggested, the U.S. Vice President's remarks and recent U.S. policy adjustments have a particularly welcome effect: Accusations that China is "attempting to change the order," Wang argued, have become rather silent now that "there is a country that is withdrawing from international treaties and organizations." In his statement, Wang presented China as "a factor of certainty" and "a steadfast constructive force" in a changing world order. He emphasized Beijing's support for the international rule of law as well as its commitment to multilateralism, inclusive economic globalization, and to addressing the international order's security deficits. Although debates at the conference about tensions in the South China Sea pointed to the limits of China's claim to be a responsible stakeholder in the existing international order, Chinese participants openly engaged with conference participants in many different formats. Unlike Vance, Wang also adhered to the Munich Rule and took questions from the MSC's chairman. While participants from Africa and other regions of the world expressed concern about the abrupt and disruptive manner in which Washington is abdicating its global leadership role, their statements also reflected optimism about the opportunities involved in this shake-up of the global system — a shake-up that many claimed is moving the world towards greater multipolarity. According to India's External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, the future only looks like a jungle — a metaphor used in

the West to describe a more anarchic international order — when viewed from a very cozy place. Countries that have not experienced this coziness in the past, he suggested, are not worried about ongoing power shifts. Instead, they are embracing the opportunities these changes present. Along these lines, Celso Amorim, the chief advisor to Brazil's President, proposed not “to mourn the old order, but to build the new order.” Many participants from the Global South greeted the shake-up of the global system with pragmatism — some even highlighted opportunities.

Overall, pragmatism dominated the discussions among participants from the Global South. Just as Europeans emphasized the need for greater self-reliance in security and defense, countries affected by Washington's dismantling of foreign aid stressed the imperative of greater self-reliance in improving their domestic social safety nets. Others expressed optimism that the future order would see multiple new leaders emerge, non-state actors among them. In the U.S., for instance, governors continue to pursue a green energy transition even in the absence of a federal government committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Many also highlighted opportunities for new partnerships and formats of cooperation. “We are no longer a unipolar world. As bridges are burning, new bridges are being formed,” argued Ghana's President John Mahama. While he and others highlighted a desire to strengthen South South cooperation, others looked at Europe, expressing the hope that it would consider new partners in other parts of the world and move from cooperation that is overly conditional to much more pragmatic engagement.

### **The Global Costs of an Unraveling Order**

Yet, even participants from the Global South acknowledged the various risks of greater multipolarity. Above all, participants

highlighted the perils of weakened international rules and the growing absence of positive leadership, especially for smaller countries and the world's most vulnerable people. Although participants from Africa and beyond criticized inconsistencies in the way existing rules had been applied in the past and voiced the need for serious reforms, there was also a shared sentiment in Munich that an order with common rules was clearly preferable to one without any rules at all. “If the multipolar world does not have rules or guardrails, it's chaos. It's unpredictability, it's violence,” the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk stressed. Russia's war against Ukraine is not the only evidence of the emergence of an order in which bigger powers pursue spheres of influence and major powers make deals over the heads of smaller states. So is the situation Panama and Greenland currently find themselves in, both of whom had officials represented in Munich. Moreover, participants described the geoeconomic uncertainty that comes with the demise of global trading rules as worrisome. Growth, they argued, depends on reliable trade and investment, which in turn depend on reliable rules. Despite the optimism some participants expressed about the world moving to greater multipolarity, many also acknowledged that when it comes to global problem-solving, the system emerging is highly deficient. In this vein, Singapore's Minister for Defense Ng Eng Hen argued that “in the absence of a leader to protect our global commons [...] we must all expect that the progress and well-being of the global commons will suffer.” While discussions reflected awareness that the retreat of the United States opened gaps that required greater leadership from others, it was less clear who these actors would be. Moreover, the challenge of mobilizing adequate resources needed for collective goals was voiced on various occasions. In sum, this year's Munich Security Conference reflected

many challenges associated with the recalibration of the transatlantic relationship and the emergence of a new international order shaped by “multipolarization.” The old days are over, and a new era begins.

Key Points:

- JD Vance’s first major foreign policy speech as U.S. Vice President shook the transatlantic partnership to its core. To many participants, this year’s transatlantic family reunion felt like a disunion.
- The Trump administration’s policies may accelerate the world’s “multipolarization.” Europeans are seeing an ever greater need to become an independent pole to secure their own destiny, while many in the Global South seem to be reeling from the end of the U.S.-led order — and some are seeking to fill the void.
- The beginning negotiations on a peace deal for Ukraine — and the overall fate of the country — will provide a glimpse into the emerging order, which increasingly appears to be shaped by great-power deals rather than by international law.
- The defenders of an international order based on universal rules will have to forge new partnerships and increase their investments. But debates in Munich left unclear whether these actors are willing and able to do so.



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## Gratitude and Reflections

This second volume of landmark speeches from and beyond the Munich Security Conference is more than a collection of words — it is a testament to the power of dialogue and the weight of ideas in shaping global affairs. Year after year, the MSC serves as a stage for bold declarations, urgent warnings, and calls to action. The speeches captured in these pages are not just echoes of the past — they are moments when history unfolded in real time, offering future generations a window into the decisions and debates that shaped our world.

Vice President JD Vance's address has without a doubt now been added to the MSC's hall of fame of historic speeches — a recognition of its significance in shaping transatlantic discourse. His remarks sparked a necessary, if uncomfortable, debate on the future of the Western alliance. Whether met with praise or fierce criticism, the speech made waves and pushed the boundaries of international debate, earning its place alongside other defining moments in MSC history.

Bringing this volume to life has been a remarkable journey. The tireless efforts of Tamm Media GmbH and its Koehler Mittler Verlagsgesellschaft mbH deserve special recognition — under even greater time pressure than with Volume I, they rose to the challenge and delivered a publication that reflects both the urgency and gravity of these speeches. Their dedication ensured that this collection was not only completed on time but made with precision and care.

Equally, this achievement would not have been possible without the relentless commitment of the MSC team. In selecting these speeches and curating the content, the aim was to preserve these decisive moments. And the team did so with great attention to detail.

As we close this chapter, we look to the future with anticipation. The conversations sparked at the MSC continue to evolve, and we are already eager to embark on the journey toward Volume III, which will feature a collection of hidden gems from the MSC history.

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Munich Security Conference 2025

**Speech by JD Vance  
and Selected Reactions**

Over the last sixty years, the Munich Security Conference (MSC) has developed into the world's leading platform for debate on foreign and security policy. While its formats have evolved over the years, its mission has remained unchanged since 1963, namely to build trust, and ultimately peace, through sustained exchange between key decision makers. From the early days of Ewald von Kleist and Henry Kissinger to the more recent appearances of President Putin or President Biden, the conference has offered stages to hundreds of important speeches, many of significant historical value. This second volume in our series on selected key speeches focuses on the address of US Vice President JD Vance to the MSC 2025 and the many reactions it sparked – both at the conference and beyond.