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**The Future of The Transatlantic Relationship, Europe's Perspective**

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**Enrique Mora Benavente, Deputy Secretary-General for Political Affairs/Political Director, European External Action Service**

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**Jens Plötner, Foreign and Security Policy Advisor to the Chancellor, Germany**

***Moderator: Peter Spiegel, U.S. Managing Editor, *Financial Times****

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Peter Spiegel:

Thank you Anya. Anya always asked me to do the European panel and it's great joy for me to do it. I spent 10 years in Europe, including six in Brussels. As many of you know, just a couple hours ago the French government fell so Clément Beaune,, if you have to go be prime minister, just give me a signal, let you know. Okay? Okay, good. Let me start, Jens, I'm going to start with you. Like I said, I've been doing panels on European transatlantic security. Gosh, I was in Munich for the famous Rumsfeld appearance about just before the war with Jka Fisher and there is always talk of a crisis in transatlantic relations and obviously the Iraq war was a high one. I will say though there feels a little bit different this time. You do have an incoming president, of course we've had him before, but who on the campaign trail seem to suggest that Article five is a transaction, not a treaty requirement, that unless European states pay more, it doesn't matter.

I also say this panel is supposed to be from the European perspective, and I think there is also what is different from 2016 is in Europe's own house, for lack of a better word, there are oras rising, not only in Hungary but Fiso in Slovakia. We don't know what's going to resolution in Romania, but it's not just the new member states, right? It is vilders in the Netherlands. It is alternative Deutsche land in your own country, obviously lap pen and France. Am I exaggerating too much that we have talked about crises in transatlantic relations for so long, but there is an order of magnitude difference to this one and are you worried about that?

Jens Plötner:

So thanks for the question and I would agree with the underlying assumption of your question that these are indeed particularly challenging times. We heard about the timing issue that somehow at the beginning of next year a lot is changing and that is not a good thing. I was always worried that in the time between the US elections and the new president taking office, this is an excellent time for all kinds of bad people to do bad things and I don't know what we're seeing in Syria now, whether that is part of that, but in any case, I think it is urgent that we have a functioning new American administration. It's good that the new European Commission now

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has gotten off and is starting to inhabit their offices and working on their agenda. And then obviously I think there is beyond the timing issue, there is this very strong underlying current of liberal democracies being under pressure, being challenged, and I think we have a lot of soul searching to do as to the deeper reasons.

Now, I don't want to compare what is happening in some European countries with the shifts we have seen here in American politics, but I do believe that some of the reasons probably are linked that people feel that the institutions of democracy as we know them, are not taking into considerations what they feel are their most pressing issues, that there is a declining faith in institutions of our democracies. So these are things we all need to tackle together, but I am not so pessimistic because I'm utterly convinced that at the end of the day that is what makes our democracy strong, that they have the power of regeneration and questioning themselves coming up with answers and healing. And the only thing I would suggest is that we should try and do this soul searching and finding solutions together because together we are stronger.

Peter Spiegel:

I want to follow up on that, what you said about bad people doing bad things at times of transition and it gets to, I think the core of my first question, which was not only are we going through a transition here, but obviously both the engine of Europe, both France and Germany are going through their transitions now. And I had an old friend of mine from the commission who texted me on the day after the election who said the difference between 2016 and now is Merkel was still at the height of her strength largely in 2016 2017. Macron would just months later get elected height of his powers and yet France and Germany right now are both inward looking in turmoil. How concerned are you that if Europe needs to stand up particularly in Ukraine and do its own on its own, that the engine of Europe is no longer in a position to do that for the next several months?

Jens Plötner:

So I think Merkel herself who is, I don't know whether she's still in, she was in the US a few days ago for her new book, I think she herself was very reluctant to accept this title of leader of the Free World after the first election of President Trump. I think that was way out of what is in the realm of the realistic and German leadership in Europe is something very, very complicated. If it's not there, people ask for it. If it's there, people say, is that really a good thing? I would say speaking for my country, I mean we're just having elections. That's something quite new and I think despite differences there might be and which will kind of be a bit be represented a bit more strongly during an election campaign. I would say that the Democratic mainstream parties of Germany when it comes to being pro-European, being Protrans Atlantic, being pro support for Ukraine, 18 90%, there is agreement. And so I would expect however the elections turn out in February that you will see continuity and we hope that our French brothers and sisters will overcome the difficult situation they are in. But I think Europe has somewhat matured beyond the point of needing one member state to kind of lead. We have a Polish government which is very pro-European and which is willing to assume a more active creator role in the European endeavor. So just take this one example. So it's a challenge. I agree, but I wouldn't say it's a huge problem.

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Peter Spiegel:

Lemme ask you the same question Jens is not wrong. I mean I remember so distinctly from my diamonds of Brussels about the conflict about German leadership of Europe. France has never had that problem and as a matter of fact, when I first got there, Sarkozy was president, the first Ukraine crisis. He was very active on a leadership front and again, Macron in his first term was also a leader there. France is not in a position to do that right now at a critical time where we could see the US back away from support of Ukraine. How concerned are you that without Germany, without France, that Europe is going to be struggling to form its own support of Ukraine and other crises in the region?

Clément Beaune:

Well, thank you very much and thank you for invitation. A bit like Jens think I've got less experience in French German affairs and European affairs and Ys, but it's always a bit the same story. It's about French and Germany going together as the description of the transatlantic relation. It's always the worst time ever in 12 years now working directly on French, German and EU affairs. Every couple of chancellor and presidents in Berlin and Paris are described as the worst ever in terms of how they get along, how productive they are, how they manage to work together. Just take the example of 2016, 2017 as you described. I think not so rightly, when Donald Trump was elected for the first time, France and Germany were supposed, as you say, to be stronger than they are now. Not so sure we were dealing with Brexit half of our time, so we had less time probably to focus on the trans-Atlantic relation.

Merkel went through very difficult times, even at that moment migration crisis. And so in France it was not so easy. When Macron was elected, of course he had more I would say stamina supports. But 2016, when Donald Trump was elected, we still had Franco Huan. It was a time when he was very weak in political terms domestically and we had a commission which was ending its term now it's a commission which is starting its term, so it has five years ahead. Not saying that it's easy, but I don't believe in the story that France and Germany would be out of the map that France and Germany would not be able to work together. It goes also beyond President and Chans law fortunately, and if we want to have reaction on trade, if we want to have a reaction on Ukraine, I will revert to that. I think we have the possibility to do so.

I think there would be two or three mistakes not to commit in the appreciation of the trans-Atlantic relation. The first would be to think that with the election of Donald Trump, everything would change because I think there are long-term trends, of course, including trends that are worrying for us Europeans for instance, the focus on China, which is a transport and bipartisan thing. The fact that there is a growing gap in terms of competitiveness between EU and the us. It is not something new with a new administration, with IRA and I would've done the same as a US official. It was good for the US economy, but for Europeans it was a big challenge. Let's be honest, the trade tensions will probably increase in the months to come, let's be honest. But they didn't disappear in the last four years. So I'm not saying it's not a change, but I'm saying that the kind of approach we have, whether it's eu, whether it's Frenchman relations, whether it's transatlantic relations saying that it's day or night, I think it's not exactly what will happen.

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Peter Spiegel:

Jens made the argument that even with the rise, again my phrase of Oras in the east and elsewhere in Europe, that German parties in general tend to be more pro Europe. That is not necessarily the case with lap pen and whatever is called now, how concerned are you that given the electoral success in the last national assembly elections of the lap, penna for lack of a better word, and the potential of a presidential election coming down the line, that France itself is going to be subsumed by the same Trumpism urbanism that we're seeing elsewhere at the end of the world,

Clément Beaune:

If I'm honest, in the next two years, two to three years until the next presidential election, 2027, I don't believe one second that there will be a kind of anticipated or snap presidential election, so it'll be 2027. Between now and 2027 it'll be a bumpy road. As we saw this afternoon, we, for the first time in 60 years, the parliament ousted the prime minister, but tomorrow or maybe Monday there will be a new prime minister and the president will remain and he focuses on European policy, foreign policy. The big trends will remain so it'll be a pro-European government, a pro-EU government working with Germany, working with all the partners, working with Brussels and the commission working with the us. As you know, there is a difference between Donald Trump and Emmanuel Macron and a lot of topics, but President Macron was one of the first to call Donald Trump after he was reelected.

I think the president-elect will be in France the day after tomorrow for the Notre Dame reopening, but also having a discussion with President Macron. So this will go on. So in the fundamental elements of French European commitment, NATO commitment, foreign policy, this will remain the same. To be frank. There will be some changes in economic policy maybe, but not the main elements on the bulk of it. The real concern, if I'm really honest, is 2027 because I think it's a difference with our German partner in Germany. There will be elections, they can be changed, we'll see. But the fundamental elements will probably in the decade to come, hope so, never been challenged in France. It can be challenged. It can be challenged by the far left or by the far right, not chance that the far left is in office, but the far right can be Lapin could be, or another player of her party.

I'm not saying this is my prediction, I think it's avoidable and we will fight for that. But it is a key question of 2027, and if Lapin or far right member of her party, a member of the far right party is elected, it's a big change, especially in the relation to the EU and maybe nato. To be fully honest, even this party has changed on these elements to be a bit more nuanced because if, I hope not, but if Lupin or somebody like her is elected in France, it'll be necessarily reaffirming our commitment to be a member of the European Union, of the Euro area, of the transatlantic alliance. There's no chance that she can be elected with a different and intelligence still. It could be a very different cause for our country and even some elements of our foreign policy and economic policy.

Peter Spiegel:

Kasja Enrique, I want to talk with you and focus a bit more specifically on Ukraine. Kaisa, if I could start with you, because you worked for a long time with Mark Ruta who is now the NATO Secretary General, and there's long been this theological debate, which I think will become

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much more relevant now about if Europe is to take on its own security as Europe, what is the vehicle for that? And part of the reason that Rutte I think is Secretary General is because the Dutch have always viewed it as nato. They have been already the most Atlantic of the original founding members of NATO in the eu, and yet there is now a move for Europe being the EU to be the pointy head of the spear for a European pillar, however you want to call it. Where did the Dutch en route to himself sit on that? Because it is an uncomfortable place to be some times if you are trying to argue that we have to use NATO as the main vehicle for European security and you have Enrique and his troops arguing that the EU has to take the initiative, where does that resolve itself?

Kajsa Ollongren:

I think we are today in a different place simply because of the world, because of geopolitics, because of the threats that we are facing and that we have a large scale war on the European continent raging in Ukraine. So that has, in so far as we hadn't had the wake up call, this was the real wake up call for us. So we feel threatened. Some countries in Europe on the eastern flank, they are threatened, let's face it. And that means that we have to step up our game. We need to use both NATO and the eu. I think that every European NATO ally would say that NATO is there for our collective defense. We have seen two EU countries becoming members of nato, Sweden and Finland. Why? Because they felt threatened, because they felt they need the security umbrella of NATO to feel safe. The EU itself is also relevant.

The EU is a big peace project really, but it was meant to stop any wars between members of this union and the member states of the European Union. They're not going to have a war with each other, but we do have the threats and possibility of war outside the European Union. So coming to Mark Uten, I've worked with him for a very long time, what I think is the most relevant, besides that, I think he's a good secretary general, but it's also because he knows the European Union from the inside and he knows NATO from the inside. And whereas there used to be some kind of feeling that nato, the EU shouldn't interfere with our business and vice versa, the EU felt that it had its own role to play in security. Now I sense that the new commission, the president of the commission, the new commissioner for defense and also the high rep and rotta as a SEC gen, it's a completely different message.

They are saying, what can we do? What is complimentary to the other one? So what can the EU do to improve security, to improve our collective defense and to improve the European pillar in nato? Because there is of course European pillar in nato, is it transatlantic alliance? Most of the allies are European countries, and that means that this European pillar has to be very strong. We have to have a much stronger defense industry. We must do more as European countries. So the 2% is not debated anymore. Most countries are at the 2%. Most European countries are spending 2% or more. We need to spend it more efficiently. We need to work more together. For instance, Germany and the Netherlands, our armies, they're almost completely integrated. It makes us very strong and it also makes NATO stronger. So the EU is not going to interfere in that military part.

But what the EU can do is to use its regulatory instruments is to use its budgets to sort of tempt its member states and its industries to do more, to do more in a more efficient way because that way we will improve the European security. And I think it is very, you see various weak or stronger signals. I think France has now signaled that if we build this European defense

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industry, if we spend more money on it, we know that we have to engage other important countries like the UK and Norway and the US of course, because these are our friends and allies. So we will not do it without them, but we have to do it in a smart way. And we have to make sure that this fragmentation that we see in the European defense industry, that we stop, that we create European champions that can be global players, and that is also in the interest of the us. So coming back to your question, NATO for the collective defense, but the eu, we needed to get that defense industry in Europe up to speed and we needed, we need and we need who understand each other to focus on those things that we need from both organizations to improve security really for all of us.

Peter Spiegel:

Lemme follow up because you, I guess discovered under the secret reason I asked you the question because part of the reason I've always believed that the Dutch had been so Atlantis and been somewhat more skeptical about the EU is, let's be honest, the Dutch tend to live up to stereotype. They worry about resources, they're a little bit cheap. And the issue of resources, the issue of resources is a major issue for Donald Trump, right? This is going to come up and it's not, again, let's be honest, it wasn't just Trump. I remember I was in Brussels when Robert Gates is his farewell speech in Brussels under the Obama administration. He said, beware, I am of the generation, the last of the generation that fought side by side with the Europeans on this continent. You're not going to have that again. Talk to me about that concern because you said 2% is no longer a question, but if you see a withdrawal of the US, and it's not just in Europe, it's the same thing the Japanese are dealing with in Asia, Europe will have to spend more for its own defense. And for Ukraine, is there the political will in the Netherlands and elsewhere to step up and fund that defense?

Kajsa Ollongren:

Well, it depends on who you ask, I would say. But I think that for me, the main point is that the threat is real. And because the threat is real, we have to make sure that we have the defense and the deterrence in place and that costs money. The 2%. I'm also convinced it's not enough. And if the Europeans need to do more, that means we have to spend more on defense. I do believe we can spend it more efficiently, we can do more together. We can do more jointly. We could do joint procurement, joint capability development so that we can create economies of scale. All of that we have to do, but for me also helping Ukraine, making sure that they get the arms and the ammunitions that they need. We do it for Ukraine, but we also do it for our own safety in Europe.

So it is a question of political will. It is a question of how to convince our voters that this is the right thing to do, to have a longer term perspective because it might seem nice on the short term, have PC in Ukraine, you don't have to spend all that money on the ammunitions and the weapons for Ukraine. But a short term ceasefire in Ukraine, that means that the risks for Europe are only increasing because it means that Putin gets what he wants and that means that he will not stop in Ukraine. It means that the other countries in the region and also NATO countries like the Baltic countries for instance, are at risk. And if you look at it that way, then it's smart to spend more and we will give President Trump the credit for incentivizing us to spend more on Ukraine. And I think also it was late, the wake up call with the large scale invasion.



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There had been wake up calls before where we pressed the snooze button, but now it's for real. In my own country, in the Netherlands, we always have coalition governments. And even in this coalition where the party of her builders, you mentioned him, he is part of this government, but the others have forced him to continue the sport for Ukraine and to continue our commitment to nato. And we will always have coalition governments. And I think there is a broad societal and political consensus that this is the right thing to do. So yes, we may be frugal or that is what they call us, but we are willing to do this.

Peter Spiegel:

Enrique, lemme ask you the same question, but a slightly different way. You have a new boss too. The high representative kales who is from one of the Eastern European countries, essentially eastern countries that you mentioned has been very tough on Russia and Ukraine. I must say in the short time I've been away from Brussels, I've been amazed at the ability of the EU to pull together and create a fund for aiding Ukraine. And yet in the house, the Hungarians in particular have made the ability of EU to distribute and collect those funds incredibly difficult. And you have France, you have the Netherlands, you have increasingly, I mean Italy seems to have gone the right way. We were worried about Meloni for a little bit, but she turns out to be on the right side. How difficult is it within the European project to continue to be as aggressive as the EU has been surprisingly aggressive on Ukraine when you were starting to have these, I don't want to say Russian agents, but elements within our political system that clearly are trying to work against the overall effort?

Enrique Mora Benavente:

Yep, thank you. There is no other option. I mean, as you said, we have been over the last five years, when Russia aggressions against Ukraine, we define a clear policy which was completely different from the past. For the first time in history, the European Union provided weapons to a country fighting. The reason is clear is Russia and Vladimir Putin is an existential threat for the European Union, is what you said is reality. If Putin wins, we will lose. All of us will lose. So we have to avoid that. We engage financially, militarily, diplomatically in every single way. And that has to continue as you mentioned. Now the new secretary, high representative is particularly vocal on that the policy is going to continue. We are going to continue supporting Ukraine in every single respect. If allies do different things, we will be obliged to increase our effort and we will do it because it's not a question of choice, it's a question of whether European Union can stay in the way it is, the project it is or not. We have internal problems, yes, in every single subject. It's not just Ukraine. In every single piece of policy, we have internal problems, internal discussions, but at the end, the collective will has been what has been and that will continue that I'm completely sure

Peter Spiegel:

I am by my employment contract required to ask you a question about the uk. But I think it's relevant in this case because I had an old friend of mine who was well source of mine in the commission who was through New York, and I said to him, God, isn't it too bad that at this time when along with France, Britain is probably the most capable military and the most aggressive frankly on Russia, Ukraine, that they're not in the house anymore. And his reaction was very

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interesting. He says, no, that's a good thing. They were always the problem child. Do you really think the EU would have been able to pull together, create the fun if Britain was in the house? Let me put that to you because I do think as we see the Hungarians and others rise and cause problems within the family, I would argue having Britain inside with storm shadows and being a voice inside the house would've been better. I'm curious if you have a view on Britain, in or out, whether there had been better or worse at this time of crisis.

Enrique Mora Benavente:

Brexit was a nightmare. It was something that we didn't want. Obviously people, British people voted for that. From then we had been, let's say, adapting to realities. And this is the key. There are realities. The world, as you said before, it's much more complex. It's incredibly difficult for us. And it's also for the United Kingdom. Already with the conservative government, we experienced this approach. The moment that Brexit was there, it was implemented that there was no way back. Everybody felt okay, now we have to approach back again because it doesn't make any sense the opposite with the new labor government, this is even happening faster. So we will cooperate. It's a question of you mentioned before defense and the European Union, basically it's about for the time being an industrial thing, listen, at the time of the pandemic, we discovered that we didn't produce a gram of paracetamol. Do you remember what the doctor told you when you got covid? Go home and take paracetamol. We didn't produce a gram. When the war in Ukraine started, we realized that we didn't have ammunition enough to provide to Ukraine and industrial powerhouse. We didn't have the capacity to produce that ammunition. This is what European defense is about now, and the British are instrumental in that and we will cooperate on that. And Brexit is a different thing because now what we have is a common threat and we will act together.

Peter Spiegel:

Clément, you want to address that?

Clément Beaune:

No, I have to apologize to your country because I was one of the nasty negotiators of American from France, not to uk you mentioned, sorry, because I was one of the tough guys in the room when we had to negotiate for four years the Brexit deal. But at the time, even President McCall proposed that we have a security cooperation within this agreement that we signed late 2020. It was not possible for different reasons, also for domestic reasons in the uk. Ians at the time didn't want that. And probably on the EU side, we didn't push strong enough for that because the necessity of this security cooperation and an organized framework of cooperation was not as strong as it is today and after the start of the Ukraine war. But we definitely need that. It's strange to think that we have summits from the EU with China every two years with the us, every year with Canada, with Asan and so on.

We don't have anything with the uk. I'm not a big fan of having a diplomatic meeting for having a diplomatic meeting. But it says something which we have not enough worked on the security framework we need to have as EU with the uk, and I think we should definitely compliments as soon as possible the treaty we signed with the UK with a secret chapter saying that whenever we have sanctions and Russia for instance, we need to coordinate. We do actually, but in a



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more organized manner. If we want to ramp up our efforts in support of Ukraine, which we will need on the European side, Europe meaning EU plus UK, obviously we need to have an organized format and so forth on climate, on trade. If we have a trade tension with the US, probably it'll also apply to the UK. So we need that. So really on that, I'm a big, big, big proponent of having a security treaty chapter, whatever you call it, and formats. We do it in an informal manner and it works of course, but we need to go further with the UK and in the EU, UK security and defense cooperation for sure. And the new administration in the US is probably a trigger or something which speeds up the necessity of this.

Peter Spiegel:

Lemme go back to you, and I know this is probably unfair because every panel I moderate when I was in Brussels and the German minister was on, they've always complained, why was everyone criticizing Germany? And I used to say, I'm American welcome to being a superpower. And in many ways, Germany is the biggest economy in Europe and is always looked to for leadership. And I think the narrative is that post 2014 and the original Ukraine crisis, it was Merkel. And I know you said that she never liked the term being leader of the free world under the Trump administration, but she was looked to as that. And the criticism has been that Olaf Schultz has not been that he has in many ways downgraded Germany's status in that regard, particularly when it comes to the Ukraine war. He has only just gone to Kiev when other leaders have gone multiple times. Is that an unfair criticism of the way Schultz has led or not led Europe on this crisis?

Jens Plötner:

I tried to make the point earlier on that the way I look at the EU today, it has developed, and I mentioned the example of Poland, Italy, as you said, with Prime Minister Maloney playing a strong pro-European role. So I think it's a different setup than 10 years back or whatever. When Mrs. Mackle was chancellor on Ukraine. I think we have all collectively lived up to the responsibility. I think a lot of countries have undertaken tremendous efforts. Our Dutch neighbors and friends have Poles, Baltic countries, and Germany is the single biggest spender when it comes to aid to Ukraine and also when it comes to military aid. And I would invite you to consider that for my country, the way we moved from being a country which due to historic self restraints, never delivered weapons into areas of conflict to now delivering weapons to the value of 7 billion Euro delivering weapons, even our own army doesn't have yet because they are top notch prioritizing delivery to Ukraine.

When it comes to where does air defense system go to the Bundes view or to Ukraine? So I think Chancellor Schultz has taken the German population with these historic innovations we have for a long ride into uncharted territories. And while doing so, he was always mindful of maintaining public support in order for this support for Ukraine to be lasting and not to erode quickly because we lack public support. And today, I mean the polls go back and forth, but roughly I would say 60% of the Germans say right on, that's the good course 20 say it's too little 20 say it's too much. But as long as we have this kind of very solid structure, we are able to continue supporting Ukraine, diplomatically, militarily and financially. And I think that is so important because being able to tell Putin, like the chancellor told him a few weeks ago in this phone call, listen, if you only watch the news, democracies might seem messy, but do not

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underestimate our standing power. You cannot wait us out. We will continue to support Ukraine. And so I think having done that, I mean voters will judge in a few weeks, but having lived it from the inside, this was quite a rough ride. Germany went on and I think we can say, I hope one will say later on, we lived up to our responsibility.

Peter Spiegel:

I just want to say for historic reasons, listening to a senior German official praise Polish leadership from a historical perspective is an amazing thing. I'm reminded by Red. Of course. He gave a speech about five, six years ago when he was still in government saying, as a Polish defense minister at the time, I'm a Polish defense minister, more concerned about German inaction than German action. And that is an amazing change I think the U has brought to bear. Kaisa, let me turn to you again. I'm slightly unfairly rely on you for as a proxy for Mark root. I guess you are different parties. I know you're D 60 60 VVVD, but I want to get back at this question about Article five again as one of if not the most transatlantic countries in the original founding members of the European members of nato, the Dutch have as a small country too, always relied on the collective defense. And article five is sacrosanct. It does seem like we have a president who does not embrace that. When you listen to that and you hear that on the campaign trail, what is the reaction in the Netherlands? What is your reaction? And if you could say, how does Ruta think, hear that?

Kajsa Ollongren:

Well, as you said, I cannot be the spokesperson for Marta, but as the Secretary General of nato, I mean that is what he does today. That is keeping all the allies together. And the alliance will only work if every ally adheres to Article five and to the whole treaty. So you cannot say, I'm only in it when I want. So let's say that it was a fair point that not all allies were paying up. And then in villus we agreed that the 2% was the floor. So the minimum requirements, everybody signed up to that. So I think that point is gone except for a couple of countries who are not there yet, but they will eventually, politically the point is gone and we are all doing more. So I think that Article five, it is extremely, extremely vital for nato, for collective defense and for the deterrence of the alliance.

If there is any doubt about Article five, deterrence is gone. And that is an open invitation to Putin. Let's say there is some kind of ceasefire in Ukraine and Putin and the Russians get the time to build up again. They have a war economy, they have an immense production of weapons and capabilities. This is a real threat to NATO countries. So I think it is very important that we engage as allies with the new Trump administration of what Article five means. It means if you want to have the strongest military alliance in the world, which NATO is, you need to have the trust that Article five really will be triggered. And that defending every inch of NATO territory will include the US in doing that. And I think also you mentioned the European pillar. In nato, we will be able and we must be able to do more, and we have to be able to take over also from the us, especially in the European Theater, to liberate some troops, to have those capabilities ourselves that we now rely on the US for like heavy lifting, large scale transportations, things like that. We have to invest in that. We have to build that. So whether we don't always have to ask the US to do this for us. And if we do that, then I believe that any administration in the US that really believes in the strong military alliance will also have to repeat and reiterate its belief in

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the treaty and that it will abide by the treaty. So that's the discussion that we're going to have. And if not, I think we're all in trouble, not only the European countries but also the us.

Peter Spiegel:

Absolutely, absolutely. Enrique, I might ask you to have the final word on this, to do some crystal ball forward looking. I know your new boss has only been in, you've only had a new boss for a couple days now, but there was a discussion in Brussels by Wanderingly perhaps, but people around her about should we create a defense commissioner should the eu, which was set up as Kaia said, as basically a peace project and it's foreign policy was mostly aid in trade. Should it have more pointy head of the spear elements to it, look forward to the next commission potentially having to deal with a US retreating from the war in Ukraine, from Europe more broadly, is the EU of the vehicle to be more pointy head of the spear, or is that not the role for Europe, particularly at a time when there are national governments in trouble for being too European?

Enrique Mora Benavente:

This commission has set two priorities. First, economic security, second defense. As I said before, it's mostly for the time being a project about industrial base of the European defense. But we need it. We badly need it. Apart from that, we are facing Russia in Ukraine, and I said before, it's an existential threat. If somebody else diminished the contributions, we will be obliged to increase the contribution at the end of the day, as you said, it's member states, they have different problems, they internal whatever, but ultimate will is clear when they face the threat. And there can be endless discussions very well. The European Union, there is a commodity is ours to discuss, but at the end there has to be a decision. And this commission has set defense as put a commissioner in charge of that. And it's going to happen because it's not something that is started two days ago with the commission.

We come from a period five years in which we have the pandemics, then we have the Russia's aggression against Ukraine. And at the end, the European Union has changed in the sense that now the main point is protecting our citizens, defending our member states, and this is the way and this is the way to continue. But again, we cannot imagine, as you said before, that is not going to be a trust Atlantic endeavor. Listen, I travel a lot around the world in political dialogues, visits everywhere. I said, listen, the European Union, in this complex world, we need friends, we need partners. And you probably need the same in here in the United States. This is our friend, this is our partner. By definition, is that going to change? We don't believe so. We don't believe so it's going to be difficult of course. But that goes inside the European Union too.

Peter Spiegel:

Before Niamh gives me the hook, can I just ask you the same question? Because there was always someone said to be, a British friend of mine once said, the reason the French and the Americans fight all the time is because they were so similar. And if there was one country that views sovereignty over, its particularly its military forces, it is France in Europe, there's always been a slight awkwardness in the integrated command structure within NATO that Sarkozy brought you back into. But even the nuclear forces lay outside of that. Does an EU that is pushing for a more integrated defense structure within Europe help the pro-European forces

***\*\*Note that this is an automated transcription and may contain inaccuracies. Please refer to the [original YouTube recording](#) as well\*\****

within France? Or does it hurt in that it gives fodder for the lap pens of the world to say, ah, see these European bureaucrats are trying to steal our prized jewels?

Clément Beaune:

No, on defense, but more broadly speaking, I think it would be an illusion to things that we would defeat the anti-EU parties, political forces with more shyness on Europe. To be frank, I'm not saying we have to be crazy to say that we will centralize everything and we don't mean that and so on. But we saw that in 2016, don't want to be back in the Brexit moment, but 2016 when President Macron created from scratch political party, political platform. It was a time when Brexit had happened and when Donald Trump was elected for the first time, and he said, I'm pro-EU, which was totally crazy to be pro-EU in French politics at that moment and to talk about European sovereignty. I'm not saying it's been easy. I'm not saying it's easy now, but I think defense is a good example. We need to push for more integration.

And to be very honest, I would be happy to have the debates maybe in the next 10 forums as a day when we will be worried about EU being too powerful in terms of defense. I think maybe that be the day. I think we're quite far from that. So it can help only help to, but just to final note on, on the French German dimension of this European defense, which is NATO, which is EU with its own tools, which is also national efforts, Angela Merkel and Emmanuel Macron 2016 decided to launch a cooperation on two big industrial projects. This cooperation and Y knows about it is a nightmare saying that, no, I'm honest saying that, saying it's a bad idea. It's a very good idea, but it's very difficult because we start from nowhere. Our industrials don't like working together, have no habit of working together, and our ministry of defense is the same, but it's vital that we go to the end of this project because if we don't have the habit of cooperating together on industry, France and Germany, but beyond with Poland or the players Netherlands and others, we will never create a strong European pillar of defense.

So even if it's complicated, we have to go through this

Peter Spiegel:

On that positive note. It's been so few positive notes at the day today. Let me give you a round applause. Thank you all our panelists here on a really, really stimulating discussion. Thanks very much.