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## ***Europe Is Sidelined in Ukraine Peace Talks – Part 1: How Europe Took Itself Out of the Negotiating Room***

Following the NATO meeting and Munich Security Conference, Europe faces a deep existential crisis, raising crucial questions. We delve into these questions, providing insightful answers to some of the most pressing concerns.



The recent declarations by U.S. officials regarding the war in Ukraine and the emerging multipolar world order have left Europe in a state of shock and uncertainty. Statements from President Trump, Defence Secretary Peter Hegseth, Vice President D.J. Vance, special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Gen. Keith Kellogg, and Secretary of State Mark Rubio signal a major shift in the Russia-Ukraine conflict's solution and in the global power dynamics.

These officials have made it clear that Europe will not be included in negotiations between the U.S. and Russia, and that Ukraine will neither receive NATO membership nor NATO security guarantees. This sudden exclusion of Europe has triggered an emergency meeting among European main leaders in Paris, highlighting their desperation to remain relevant in the geopolitical arena.

Europe has no independent strategy for Ukraine and has relied entirely on the U.S. for decision-making

### **Why is Europe in Such a Weak Position?**

Europe's diminished role in international diplomacy stems from years of subservience to U.S. policies. Since the beginning of the Ukraine conflict, European leaders have largely followed Washington's lead, rejecting any engagement with Russia. Unlike Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who maintained diplomatic channels with Putin, most European nations adhered strictly to the Biden administration's stance of isolation and sanctions. This lack of independent strategic vision has now backfired, leaving Europe without leverage in the ongoing negotiations.

Moreover, Europe's dependence on American military and economic power has severely constrained its ability to act autonomously. The refusal to explore diplomatic solutions earlier in the war or the refusal to support a peace settlement between Ukraine and Russia achieved in Istanbul at the beginning of the conflict has positioned Europe as a passive actor, now struggling to reclaim relevance in the peace negotiations and in a changing geopolitical landscape.

Historically, Europe has played a leading role in global affairs, but its reliance on U.S. policies and security has weakened its strategic autonomy. Many experts argue that the European Union must develop a more coherent foreign policy that balances transatlantic cooperation with its own regional interests. The current crisis serves as a wake-up call for European policymakers to rethink their long-term strategy and prepare for a world where the U.S. may no longer be the ultimate guarantor of security.

According to a report from the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), European strategic autonomy remains largely aspirational due to internal divisions and inadequate defence spending and capabilities. Without significant policy shifts, Europe risks becoming geopolitically irrelevant in the evolving multipolar order (ECFR, 2023).

### **Why Does the New Generation of European Diplomats Care So Little About Diplomacy?**

The recent conduct of Europe's new generation of diplomatic leaders, particularly in Germany, France, and within the European Union, raises concerns about their diplomatic maturity.

While they claim their right to a seat at the negotiating table, their public assertions of President Putin undermine this position. For instance, I could collect from the last week: "I do not trust Putin at all", "Putin is our real enemy", "Europe should never trust Putin", "Putin

is a real danger for Europe. If we do not do anything now, he will invade Europe”, “Putin is a liar” and so it goes on. These are statements by the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European Union Foreign Affairs High Representative Kaja Kallas. While these leaders are entitled to their personal views, publicly vilifying Putin compromises their ability to engage in effective negotiations, as it erodes the trust necessary for any diplomatic resolution. By burning bridges through inflammatory rhetoric, European diplomatic leaders disqualify themselves from meaningful participation in peace processes and diminish Europe’s credibility as a neutral mediator.

Diplomacy necessitates a delicate balance between asserting one’s stance and maintaining open channels for dialogue. To restore their role in negotiations, European diplomats must adopt a more measured approach, refraining from public vilifying that could further entrench adversarial positions or simply refuse to negotiate with them.

### **Why Will Europe Not Be at the Negotiating Table?**

U.S. officials, including Defence Secretary Peter Hegseth and Trump’s special envoy to Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg, have explicitly stated that Europe will not participate in negotiations. The rationale is clear: Europe has no independent strategy for Ukraine and has relied entirely on the U.S. for decision-making throughout the conflict. Having refused to engage diplomatically with Russia during the conflict, European leaders now find themselves sidelined in discussions that will determine Ukraine’s future and Europe’s security.

Additionally, the European Union’s internal divisions further weaken its position. Countries such as France and Germany, while supporting Ukraine, have often displayed different strategic priorities from Eastern European nations like Poland and the Baltic States. This fragmentation undermines Europe’s credibility as a unified negotiating force.

As for the Ukrainian side, in October 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky signed a decree explicitly prohibiting negotiations with Putin. The decree states, “the impossibility of holding negotiations with the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin.” To this day, the decree remains in force. Consequently, aside from the fact that Zelensky’s presidential mandate expired in May 2024, this decree legally prevents Ukraine from engaging in negotiations. As a result, any potential agreement could be subject to future legal challenges or even deemed invalid. It is telling that this decree has not been repealed.

### **Why Did Europe not See This Coming?**

Many European analysts and politicians failed to anticipate this turn of events due to their unwavering faith in American commitment to the region and in Ukraine victory. Idealism

overtook Realpolitik. Media and political discourse largely dismissed the possibility of the U.S. prioritising its own geopolitical shifts over European security concerns.

Additionally, European policymakers underestimated the extent of war fatigue in the U.S. With growing domestic concerns, American public opinion has increasingly favoured disengagement from prolonged foreign conflicts. This shift was evident in Trump's rhetoric long before his administration made official policy changes.

Political scientist [John Mearsheimer](#) has emphasized the need for intellectual integrity in assessing international conflicts. He argues that [wishful thinking and ideological rigidity](#) have clouded Western policymakers' judgment regarding the conflict in Ukraine. Instead of pursuing pragmatic solutions, European and American leaders have often adhered to a rigid narrative of absolute victory over Russia, disregarding geopolitical realities.

Mearsheimer warns that failing to recognize hard power realities leads to policy disasters. He stresses that negotiations require acknowledging adversaries' perspectives rather than relying on ideological dogma.

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