

THERE IS NONE SO DEAF AS THOSE WHO WILL NOT HEAR

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EDITORIAL



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When the United States (U.S.) administration unveiled its new National Security Strategy a few days ago, the first [reaction](#) from the European Union (EU) came from High Representative Kaja Kallas. It was a [baffling statement](#) in which she downplayed the gravity of what was a frontal assault on the very nature of the EU and on European democracy and announced that the U.S. remained Europe's "biggest ally". Kallas clearly was in autopilot mode here. It took days before European Council President Costa put the record straight and took a more principled stance by qualifying the Security Strategy as unacceptable. The upcoming December European Council offers an opportunity to explain to Washington that the EU is not for sale.

The Kallas episode raises serious questions about how the EU leadership communicates. Proper coordination between the actors seems to be lacking. It is odd that, in such a major political crisis, the High Representative should react first and with such a bland message.

Beyond the procedural missteps lies a much more fundamental question: what posture should European leaders adopt in the face of the systematically hostile stance towards the EU adopted by the U.S. administration? So far, the general line seems to have been to please and appease President Trump. We have seen this with the adoption of the 5% military spending ceiling and the Turnberry capitulation on trade. And even when the U.S. State Department proudly presented a paper on [the need for "civilizational allies."](#) some months ago with a massive attack on the EU as such, the reactions in Europe were muted. Under normal circumstances, when a partner country insults you and announces that it will do everything to undermine your system, the

Ambassador of that country is called in to explain themselves. To my knowledge, none of the EU Member States has done that, nor have the Council and the Commission. I even saw a [post on LinkedIn](#), just days after the issuing of the American paper, where the Luxembourg Foreign Minister and the new U.S. Ambassador to Luxembourg were beaming into the camera, congratulating themselves on the close cooperation between Luxembourg and the U.S., and looking forward to the multitude of opportunities ahead.

One can understand a degree of tactical caution on the part of our political leaders (EU and national) because of the situation concerning support for Ukraine and the historical links between America and Europe. But this tactic clearly has not worked. It undermines our credibility at home and worldwide. It alienates those Americans who disagree with Trump and feel dismay at Europe's weak response. The only time the Europeans have had an impact on Washington's position was when they rejected Trump's unilateral concessions to Putin on Ukraine. We should draw lessons from this. The U.S. Security Strategy is more than a policy document; it is a gratuitous slap in the face, the application of the Monroe doctrine [1] to Europe, and a dog-whistle to the extreme right-wing forces within the EU. Trump's ally, Elon Musk, explicitly calls for destroying the EU, with the help of like-minded forces in Europe itself.

The U.S. has helped build and supported the European project because it served its strategic interests. But what used to be a win-win situation has now turned into something quite different: an onslaught on what we are and how we choose to live and a naked interference into our affairs.

Europe should, calmly but firmly, confront

[1] The call in 1823 by President Monroe to establish the U.S. as the dominant power in the Americas and ... to prevent European interference. Trump seems to consider that American hegemony should extend to Europe and expects it to align with his idiosyncratic understanding of 'democracy.'

President Trump and his advisers with these simple questions: do you really want to 'lose' Europe? Are you ready to discard the transatlantic bridgehead in Eurasia that American diplomacy, business, and security policy have patiently constructed over decades? Do you genuinely believe that you can "make America great" by attacking your closest historical allies like Canada and Europe?

The EU must acknowledge the world as it is, not as we dream it to be. This means defining our interests and values independently of the whims of Washington or any other power, and in particular China. It also means taking the necessary steps towards strategic autonomy, be it in defence, in the digital area, or elsewhere.

But there is one other aspect that requires a change of mindset. We should be proud of what we have achieved over the past decades: a democratic union of democratic states. It is something valuable and precious; it is time that we recognise this. It is infinitely better than what went on in Europe before 1945. It is a delicately balanced union of states and peoples. And while it might have a complicated multilevel governance and slow-moving processes, these elements are in fact assets because they protect various actors and stakeholders and help achieve stability and sustainability. We should be wary rather than envious of 'decisive leaders.' When they are on the wrong course, they can do a lot of damage.

Many think the EU should move towards a more classical state-like model. I do not share this aspiration, at least not for the moment, but I respect it. What I find more problematic is judging the present EU against the yardstick of an imaginary United States of Europe. In communication terms, we sometimes seem to live in an 'as if' world.

The Spitzenkandidaten idea, for instance - the idea that the President of the Commission should be chosen on the sole basis of a majority in the European Parliament - assumes that there is one single parliamentary legitimacy in the EU, namely that of the European Parliament, and that the Commission is a kind of European government. Both assumptions are wrong. Talks about a 'geopolitical Commission' conveys the wrong impression: that the Commission oversees the political direction of the EU. It does not; that is the role of the European Council. The problem is that communication that disregards the constitutional reality of the EU inevitably collapses under its own pretence. The EU needs a narrative grounded in what it truly is, not what some wish it to be. Yet, that should not prevent people from proposing changes to the system and lobbying for a different kind of Union.

Finally, some quick thoughts on communication. It cannot replace political action and governance, but it is still important to convey the right messages both to the outside world and to the EU's own citizens.

- Citizens do not connect with technocratic jargon or slogans that bear little resemblance to lived reality. At moments of crisis, Europeans want to know that there is a pilot in the cockpit, and that the pilot is aware of the turbulence outside. In the unfolding of the crisis around Ukraine over the past years, the European leaders initially underestimated the geopolitical forces at work and failed to prepare their people for the dramatic events that followed.
- Brussels often emphasises successes and avoids asking tough questions. One-sided narratives are not credible and sound defensive; they should be avoided.

- Complexity is not an excuse for opacity. The EU must explain why compromises take time, who is involved, and what the outcome means. People can accept complexity; what they resent is being left in the dark.
- The EU does not need a single 'European voice.' But it does need a communication system that ensures coherence, clarity, and context. Today, each institution acts as its own newsroom; as a result, no one provides the full picture. The EU's online presence is a labyrinth of competing websites, each presenting its own, partial, and sometimes contradictory version of reality. A way forward could be to create one EU website with links to the various institutions,

with a team of independent experts and communicators (chosen by the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament) delivering factual and accessible explanations of key dossiers from an overall EU perspective.

The latest U.S. National Security Strategy was a warning shot. The EU cannot afford to conform to the old English saying, "There is none so deaf as those who will not hear." It must hear and then speak with dignity, clarity, and realism. Not to please Washington. Not to posture for Beijing or Moscow. Not to preach to the rest of the world. But to be true to itself and uphold European interests and our values.

All the opinions expressed in this publication are the sole view of the author, and do not represent the position of the Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) or of its Members.

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