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# EAST AND WEST

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## WILL US TROOPS LEAVE EUROPE?

As of 2026, the United States still maintains roughly tens of thousands of troops in Europe, with the largest concentrations in Germany, Italy, the UK, and increasingly Poland and the Baltic region. Germany alone hosts around 35,000–40,000 U.S. personnel, including critical infrastructure like Ramstein Air Base, which functions as a global logistics and command hub. These forces are not symbolic; they are embedded in NATO's operational system and U.S. global power projection.

And yet, in the last few years, American politics has repeatedly reopened the question of whether this presence is permanent.

Donald Trump has been the most explicit voice in this debate. During his first presidency, he ordered plans to reduce troops in Germany by roughly 9,500, a move that NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed was an "intention" but not implemented at the time. Stoltenberg also stressed that "no final decision" had been taken on how such a withdrawal would be carried out, underlining how bureaucratically complex even partial reductions are.

More recently, Trump has revived the issue in much sharper form. In April 2026, he openly floated troop reductions in Germany and even suggested broader NATO conditionality, saying in interviews that he might pull forces from allies like Italy and Spain depending on political disagreements. Reporting from the same period noted he also referred to the possibility of leaving NATO itself, while criticizing allies for not supporting U.S. operations in the Middle East. At the same time, he has also made contradictory statements. In 2025, for example, he said during a meeting with German Chancellor Friedrich Merz: "The answer is yes" when asked whether U.S. troops would stay in Germany, referring to the roughly 45,000 personnel then stationed there. This tension—between threat and reassurance—reflects a broader pattern in U.S. politics: Europe is no longer treated as an unquestioned strategic constant, but as something that can be re-evaluated.

European leaders have responded differently depending on context, but there is a clear shift in tone compared to the early post-Cold War era. Emmanuel Macron has been the most explicit in challenging the assumption of automatic U.S. security guarantees. In 2019, he warned that Europe was experiencing "the brain death of NATO," arguing that the alliance was becoming strategically directionless without clearer European autonomy. That comment caused much controversy at the time, but it captured a growing European

concern. In 2024, Macron again pushed this logic further when he said that sending Western troops to Ukraine "cannot be ruled out," a statement that triggered immediate reactions across Europe and highlighted how European strategic thinking was shifting beyond purely defensive assumptions.

Other European leaders have taken a more cautious tone, but with similar implications. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk has repeatedly stressed that there is "no alternative" to NATO, but Poland itself has simultaneously become one of the strongest advocates for increased U.S. troop presence on its territory—an implicit acknowledgment that American forces are not guaranteed everywhere in Europe equally, even if they remain within the alliance framework.

The question is not whether the United States will suddenly abandon Europe. That scenario is extremely unlikely because the infrastructure is deeply embedded: bases, command systems, nuclear deterrence coordination, intelligence integration, and decades of logistical investment. Even partial withdrawal would require years of planning and enormous cost.

The more realistic trend is something less visible but more important: selective concentration and political conditionality.

We already see this in practice. Since 2014, and especially after 2022, U.S. forces have not simply decreased or increased—they have shifted eastward within Europe, reinforcing Poland and the Baltic states while maintaining Germany as a logistical backbone. This is not retreat, but redistribution based on perceived threat levels.

At the same time, European governments are increasingly aware that this posture depends on U.S. domestic politics. A NATO official quoted in earlier discussions of Trump's remarks put it bluntly: allies are now preparing for scenarios where American engagement becomes less predictable, even if formal commitments remain intact.

So what does this mean in practical terms? U.S. troops are not leaving Europe in any imminent or complete sense. But the assumption that their presence is unconditional is no longer valid. The presence itself is becoming more negotiated, more politicised, and more reversible in principle, even if not in practice. And that is the real shift: the slow transformation of a military architecture into something more contingent—still present, still powerful, but no longer taken for granted.

# France and Poland simulate nuclear strikes on Russia during exercises

On April 23 and 24, France and Poland simulated nuclear strikes on targets in Russia and in Belarus in joint military exercises. Polish F-16s were tasked with long-range reconnaissance and target designation, including simulated cruise missile strikes with JASSM-ER systems toward high-value objectives in the Saint Petersburg area, while French Dassault Rafale B aircraft—equipped with ASMP nuclear cruise missiles—simulated the nuclear strike phase itself.

The prospect of extending France’s nuclear deterrence to Poland marks a consequential shift in European security. Joint Franco-Polish military exercises involving nuclear-capable systems have triggered a lot of political signaling, and strategic ambiguity.

Following high-level political contacts between Emmanuel Macron and Donald Tusk in April 2026, defense cooperation between Paris and Warsaw has moved into a more operational phase. At the core of this development are joint air exercises over northern Poland and the Baltic region. These exercises involve French aircraft such as the Rafale, capable of carrying nuclear-armed ASMP cruise missiles.

For now there is no indication of permanent nuclear deployment on Polish territory. Instead, French nuclear-capable systems would appear only temporarily, in the context of exercises or rotational presence.

The logic behind this cooperation lies in deterrence—specifically, the signaling of credible military response options. France possesses an independent nuclear arsenal, including air-launched systems and submarine-based missiles. Estimates suggest dozens of ASMP missiles are available for airborne deployment.

In the proposed framework, Polish forces would not control or deploy nuclear weapons. Their role would instead focus on reconnaissance, target identification, and conventional support operations. Decision-making authority would remain strictly national: any use of nuclear weapons would be authorized solely by the French president. Unlike NATO’s “nuclear sharing” arrangements, France does not transfer operational control or co-ownership of its arsenal.

For decades, nuclear deterrence in Europe has relied primarily on the United States through NATO structures. The French proposal

does not seek to replace this framework but to complement it. French officials have framed their approach as an additional layer of security for European allies, particularly those on NATO’s eastern flank. At the same time, the initiative reflects a long-standing French ambition: to position itself as a central actor in European defense, especially in areas where the European Union lacks unified capabilities.

Yet ambiguity persists. Some analysts emphasize that the French offer does not constitute a formal “nuclear umbrella” in the American sense. There is no automatic guarantee, no shared command structure, and no institutionalized burden-sharing.

Instead, what is emerging is a hybrid model—part political signal, part military coordination, part strategic experimentation.

The timing of these developments is not accidental. The exercises and discussions are widely interpreted as a response to the deteriorating security environment in Eastern Europe, particularly tensions involving Russia.

From this perspective, the presence—even temporary—of nuclear-capable French aircraft in Polish airspace serves a symbolic function. It signals that deterrence is not confined to distant strategic assets but can be projected closer to potential theaters of conflict.

However, such signaling is inherently double-edged. While intended to reinforce stability through deterrence, it may also contribute to escalation dynamics or reciprocal military posturing.

Despite the political attention, several constraints shape the practical impact of this initiative. First, the absence of permanent deployment limits its operational immediacy. Rotational presence and exercises enhance readiness but do not fundamentally alter the balance of forces.

Second, the centralized nature of French nuclear decision-making introduces uncertainty. Unlike NATO’s collective structures, the French system ultimately depends on national judgment, which may or may not align with allied expectations in a crisis.

Third, the initiative remains in an exploratory phase. Many details—frequency of deployments, scope of exercises, long-term commitments—are still undefined.

## No going back to normal with Russia, says EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas

At a meeting of Nordic and Baltic foreign ministers in the Estonian town of Kuressaare on April 30, Kaja Kallas warned that Europe should not return to normal relations with Russia once the war in Ukraine ends. Pointing to continued heavy battlefield losses—cited by Ukrainian and Western sources at more than 1,300 Russian soldiers per day in late April—and to a scaled-down Victory Day parade on May 9, she argued that sustained pressure, including sanctions and security measures, would remain necessary. Her remarks were welcomed by allies such as Radosław Sikorski, while drawing criticism from other commentators who accuse European leaders of closing the door to future dialogue.

Kallas’s intervention is part of a broader shift in tone among several European governments, particularly in the north and east of the continent. For these countries, the central concern is that a rapid normalization of relations could recreate the pre-2022 pattern: crisis followed by gradual reintegration, without addressing deeper strategic tensions. A divergence in perception shapes not only how the war is understood, but also what kind of post-war order is considered realistic. If one side sees a weakened adversary, continued pressure appears effective and justified. If the other sees resilience and long-term capacity, the logic of indefinite confrontation becomes more questionable.

Within the European Union, Kallas’s position highlights an existing fault line. Countries such as Poland and the Baltic states tend to support a firm and consistent approach, rooted in historical experience and geographic proximity. Elsewhere, the picture is more nuanced. Governments in Southern and parts of Western Europe, while aligned on sanctions and support for Ukraine, are often more cautious about defining relations with Russia in permanently adversarial terms.

The issue, ultimately, is not whether the war has changed Europe’s relationship with Russia—it clearly has—but how far that change should go.

# CAN EUROPE UNITE?

## The prospects of the European Union becoming a real federation are distant. But not impossible

Mario Draghi's recent warning that the European Union must become a "genuine federation" or face deindustrialisation and decline landed with a peculiar weight. It was not merely another intervention in the long, almost ritualized debate about European integration. Draghi is not a federalist intellectual in the mold of Altiero Spinelli, nor a romantic believer in a United States of Europe. He is a central banker, a crisis manager, a figure whose authority comes from having stabilized the euro when it was on the brink. When such a man begins to speak the language of political transformation, it is usually because he believes the existing machinery is no longer adequate to the scale of the problem.

Europe, taken as a whole, is losing the ability to reproduce its own material power. Industrial capacity is eroding under the pressure of energy costs, regulatory burdens, and global competition; innovation ecosystems lag behind those of the United States and China; capital remains fragmented along national lines, unable to flow at the scale required for technological breakthroughs. The European Union, in this reading, has perfected the art of regulation but not the capacity for decisive action. It can legislate standards for artificial intelligence, but it cannot produce an OpenAI; it can impose emissions targets, but it struggles to build the industrial base required to meet them without external dependence.

If the problem is fragmentation, then the solution could be unity—not rhetorical, but institutional. A federation would imply a centralized fiscal capacity capable of issuing common debt at scale, a coordinated industrial policy able to direct investment into strategic sectors, a defense structure that reduces dependence on external actors, and a political system in which vetoes give way to majority decisions. The United States and China act as coherent economic entities; Europe does not.

There is a brutal clarity to this argument, and it explains why it resonates among policymakers and analysts who are less interested in identity than in output. The global economy is increasingly organized around blocs with the capacity to mobilize resources quickly and decisively. Washington can pass a massive subsidy program and reshape supply chains within

months. Beijing can align financial institutions, state-owned enterprises, and political priorities in a coordinated push toward technological dominance. Brussels, negotiates. It balances. It mediates. Slowness, in a context of accelerated competition, begins to look like weakness.

But the European Union is not an unfinished nation-state waiting to be completed; it is a compromise formation, the product of decades of negotiated sovereignty. To transform such a structure into a federation would require not only institutional reform but a reconfiguration of political identity.

One can see the fault lines immediately. Fiscal integration, which lies at the heart of any meaningful federation, implies redistribution. It means that some regions will be net contributors and others net beneficiaries, not temporarily, as in crisis mechanisms, but structurally and permanently. This is not an economic problem; it is a political one. The eurozone crisis already revealed how fragile solidarity becomes when framed in terms of transfers. The language of "frugal" and "profligate" nations, of moral hazard and fiscal virtue, did not emerge by accident. It expressed underlying divergences that have not disappeared. To imagine that these tensions could simply be dissolved within a federal framework is to underestimate their depth.

Nor is the issue limited to economics. Sovereignty, in Europe, retains a density that is difficult to translate into federal terms. National governments remain the primary locus of democratic accountability. Elections are fought and won on national issues, even when the consequences spill over into the European arena. The European Parliament, for all its formal powers, does not command the same emotional or political investment. A federation would require a shift in this balance, a transfer of authority that would inevitably be perceived—at least in part—as a loss.

There is also a more subtle objection, one that is often overlooked in discussions dominated by grand designs. The European Union's current form, for all its inefficiencies, allows for a degree of flexibility that a federation might reduce. Integration in Europe has often proceeded through differentiation: not all member states participate in all policies; coalitions form around specific projects; progress is

uneven but continuous. This "multi-speed" dynamic is frequently criticized as incoherent, yet it has also been a mechanism for managing diversity without forcing uniformity. A federation, by contrast, would impose a higher level of standardization, and with it the risk that political conflicts become more acute.

At this point, the debate tends to crystallize into a familiar opposition. On one side, those who argue that without a leap toward federal unity, Europe will become irrelevant—a regulatory appendage to more powerful actors, condemned to manage decline rather than shape its environment. On the other, those who contend that such a leap is not only unrealistic but potentially destructive, threatening to fracture the delicate equilibrium on which the Union rests. Both positions contain an element of truth, and both, taken in isolation, are insufficient.

What, then, is the likely trajectory? Europe rarely moves through decisive ruptures; it evolves through crises that generate partial, often improvised solutions. One can already see the contours of such an evolution: joint borrowing mechanisms that would have been unthinkable a decade ago, tentative steps toward defense coordination, ongoing efforts to integrate capital markets. None of these amount to a federation, but together they indicate a gradual shift toward greater centralization in specific domains.

This incrementalism is often dismissed as timidity. In reality, it reflects the constraints within which Europe operates. The Union cannot move faster than the political willingness of its members allows, and that willingness is uneven, contingent, and subject to reversal. The result is a system that advances by accretion rather than by design, layering new competencies onto old structures without ever fully resolving the underlying tension between unity and diversity.

Europe's fragmentation is indeed a source of weakness when measured against the demands of a world dominated by large, coherent powers. But it is also a source of resilience, a way of accommodating differences that might otherwise lead to disintegration. The challenge is not simply to choose between federation and fragmentation, but to find a configuration that preserves the latter's flexibility while mitigating its costs.

# Germany's Churches Ready for War

A recently leaked "ecumenical framework concept" shows that even Germany's churches are getting ready for war.

By Pascal Lottaz

Dr. Ulrike Guérot shared with me a so-called "ecumenical framework concept" in a recent talk. It's a scary read, because it shows how far the war-psychosis has already gone in Germany. Dated September 2025, the "ecumenical framework concept" is considerably more than a document of pastoral planning. It is a sober preparation document for the eventuality of war — and as such, a telling indication of how seriously German institutions, including the churches, now regard the possibility of military conflict in Europe.

The document's starting point sets the framing for everything: according to the assessments of all relevant actors from the military, intelligence services, and academic research, Russia could be in a position to attack NATO territory before the end of this decade. Germany is already preparing institutionally for this scenario — through a National Security Strategy published in 2023, a Bundeswehr operational plan for Germany, and framework guidelines for comprehensive national defense. The churches' framework concept is explicitly presented as a contribution to this broader societal preparedness logic, which the state has consolidated under the concept of "integrated security," in which ecclesiastical actors are expressly designated as civil-society partners.

The concrete demands of the paper are radical. It calls for the systematic preparation of all fields of church pastoral care — from parish and hospital chaplaincy to military, police, and prison chaplaincy —

for scenarios involving large numbers of wounded soldiers, fallen combatants, prisoners of war, and refugees. The churches are not expected to improvise; rather, they are called upon to establish crisis management teams now, to keep notification chains current, to clarify lines of responsibility, and to train personnel in advance. The guiding motto is telling in its directness: "In a crisis, know your people."

Particularly revealing are the concrete scenarios for which the document prepares the churches. In the alliance case — assessed as the most probable scenario — Germany would function as a logistical hub for NATO forces. This entails the transit of troops and materiel through German territory, the repatriation of large numbers of wounded and fallen soldiers, refugee movements from Eastern Europe, and potential attacks on critical infrastructure and cyber systems. Drawing explicitly on lessons from the war in Ukraine, the document anticipates that casualty figures will be very high. Hospital chaplains are expected to prepare for triage situations; emergency chaplains for mass traumatization events; parish chaplains for accompanying bereaved families on a scale previously unknown in peacetime Germany. The paper further demands close institutional coordination between church structures and state authorities at both federal and state levels. Church offices attached to state governments are to function as permanent institutional interfaces. At the federal level, the establishment of an approximately

ten-member ecumenical crisis staff is under consideration. The churches are to know precisely who holds supervisory authority in an emergency — over emergency chaplains, hospital chaplains, and church employees who simultaneously serve in volunteer fire brigades or the Federal Agency for Technical Relief. This clarity is anything but self-evident; it presupposes extensive legal and organizational preparatory work.

Taken as a whole, what this document makes visible is a society that is — at the institutional level — preparing for war, without publicly naming it as such. Churches are being called upon to become part of a national preparedness infrastructure. While the paper is careful to assert that it does not touch the peace-ethical commitments of either church, it nonetheless enacts a substantial operational reorientation in practice: away from an abstractly peace-ethical posture and toward concrete crisis planning within a state-coordinated framework of comprehensive national defense.

For Germany, this means that preparation for a possible war is no longer a purely military affair. It now increasingly permeates all societal institutions — reaching all the way down to the individual parish.

*This article was originally published on the author's Substack*

<https://pascallottaz.substack.com/p/german-ys-churches-ready-for-war>

## This Week in History: May 2–May 15

On 2 May 2011, Osama bin Laden was killed in a U.S. operation in Abbottabad, Pakistan.

On 4 May 1970, the Kent State shootings saw U.S. National Guardsmen kill four students during protests against the Vietnam War.

On 6 May 1937, the Hindenburg disaster in New Jersey destroyed the largest airship ever built, ending the age of passenger zeppelins.

On 7 May 1945, Nazi Germany signed its unconditional surrender at Reims.

On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman delivered the Schuman Declaration, and laid the groundwork for what would become the EU.

On 11 May 1997, IBM's Deep Blue defeated world chess champion Garry Kasparov, a milestone in artificial intelligence.

On 13 May 1968, the May 1968 protests in France escalated into a general strike, paralyzing the French state and exposing a generational revolt against authority, capitalism, and social hierarchy.

On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel declared independence, immediately triggering regional war.

On 15 May 1988, the Soviet Union began its withdrawal from Afghanistan, foreshadowing the broader unraveling of Soviet power.

# 100 intellectuals denounce Ukrainian professor for questioning narrative about war

On April 28, the Ukrainian newspaper *Ukrainskaya Pravda* published an open letter signed by more than one hundred scholars of Eastern Europe concerning a recent book by Ivan Katchanovski, a Ukrainian professor based in Canada. The book, *The Russia-Ukraine War and Its Origins: From the Maidan to the Ukraine War*, questions much received wisdom about the Russia-Ukraine War, challenging widely accepted interpretations of its origins and of the political crisis that preceded it.

Rather than offering a conventional academic review, the signatories presented their intervention as a public warning. Their concern was not about factual disputes or methodological disagreements. They argue that the book advances a broader thesis in which Russia's invasion is not primarily explained by Russian policy, but by developments inside Ukraine and the actions of Western governments. In this reading, as Katchanovski himself writes, Russian imperialism appears only as "a significant but a secondary factor." From there, the article moves to the standard consequential claim: that such an interpretation is "often congruent to the Kremlin's propaganda," particularly in the way it reframes responsibility for the war. "Our statement is related not so much to the exact content of Katchanovski's book as to the volume's central message and its seemingly very wide reception, which is atypical for a non-fiction book under the imprint of an academic publisher", write the authors of the text. In their view, the influence of such interpretations cannot be separated from their political consequences during an ongoing war.

The controversy is closely connected to Katchanovski's earlier research on the Maidan shootings of February 2014 in Kiev. Those events occupy a central place in the political memory of post-2014 Ukraine. The dominant interpretation, supported by official Ukrainian investigations, holds that security forces loyal to President Viktor Yanukovich were primarily responsible for the killing of protesters.

Katchanovski has long argued that the events were more complex. Drawing on video recordings, witness testimonies, ballistic evidence, and other material, he has questioned whether responsibility can be attributed so unequivocally to one side alone. In particular, he has argued that some shots may have originated from buildings under the control of Maidan protesters, including the Hotel Ukraina during the final phase of the clashes on February 20, 2014.

**The book advances a broader thesis in which Russia's invasion is not primarily explained by Russian policy, but by developments inside Ukraine and the actions of Western governments. In this reading, as Katchanovski himself writes, Russian imperialism appears only as "a significant but a secondary factor."**



**As long as the war continues, debates over its origins are likely to remain intensely politicized. The boundary between historical analysis, public discourse, and geopolitical conflict has become increasingly difficult to separate.**

Among the signatories of the letter were figures such as Andreas Umland, Anders Åslund, and Andreas Kappeler. The

underlying issue is larger than a disagreement over one book. Since the beginning of the large-scale Russian invasion in 2022, interpretations of recent Ukrainian history have become deeply entangled with contemporary geopolitical conflict. Questions surrounding Maidan, NATO expansion, Western policy, Ukrainian nationalism, and Russian strategy are no longer treated simply as historical subjects; they are increasingly viewed through the prism of legitimacy, responsibility, and wartime information struggles.

Katchanovski responded publicly on social media shortly after the publication of the letter. His reply rejects both the substance and the framing of the accusations. He describes the article as a coordinated attempt to discredit him rather than to engage with his research, writing that it amounts to "a smear campaign." The opening line sets the tone: "They have no decency left." According to his response, critics have avoided direct engagement with his empirical material and instead relied on moral and political denunciation. He portrayed the controversy as evidence of a narrowing intellectual climate in which certain interpretations become unacceptable because of their perceived political implications.

The dispute reflects two overlapping conflicts. The first concerns historical interpretation: how to understand the Maidan uprising, the collapse of Yanukovich's government, the war in Donbas, and the chain of events that culminated in the Russian invasion of 2022. The second concerns the role of scholarship during wartime and the extent to which academic arguments should be evaluated not only on evidentiary grounds, but also according to their possible political effects.

For the signatories of the letter, narratives that redistribute responsibility for the conflict risk reinforcing geopolitical narratives favorable to Moscow. For Katchanovski and his defenders, the reaction illustrates the danger of turning historical inquiry into a domain regulated by political loyalty and wartime consensus.

As long as the war continues, debates over its origins are likely to remain intensely politicized. The boundary between historical analysis, public discourse, and geopolitical conflict has become increasingly difficult to separate, particularly when interpretations of the past are immediately drawn into contemporary struggles over legitimacy and international opinion.

# European Peace Project – “We want more peace!”



**European Peace Project**  
May 9th 2026 @ 5pm

This year as well, the European Peace Project is taking place. On May 9, participants aim to take the future of Europe into their own hands through a “performative speech act” and to send a signal against the erosion of fundamental European principles such as peace, democracy, freedom, and mutual understanding between peoples. The European Peace Project was launched a year ago as an independent and decentralized art initiative opposing the rearmament and increasing militarization of Europe.

“Last year, we had 17,000 participants,” says Peter van Stigt, one of the organizers, in an interview with the Swiss blog Globalbridge. “We know there are many more Europeans who want peace, and we want to reach them and have 100,000 peace doves on our map. Last year, we received more than 800 photos and videos, and we created a gallery from them with hundreds of videos on our YouTube channel. We want more peace!” The actions of the European Peace Project take place across Europe. Participants can register on the project’s website, after which their location will be marked on an

interactive map. Anyone wishing to take part only needs to read aloud the text of the European Peace Project’s manifesto, wherever they are—whether on a balcony at home or in a public square. Participants can document the moment with photos or videos and send them to the organizers. After May 9, the submissions will be published in a digital gallery on the official website—as a visible sign that many citizens of Europe stand for peace rather than war.

The European Peace Project is an initiative of independent individuals from academia, the arts, and business—not an organization or NGO. Behind it lies solely the desire for sustainable peace, mutual understanding between peoples, dialogue, and the balancing of interests through addressing the root causes of conflict. The initiators are Ulrike Guérot, a renowned political scientist and publicist from Germany; Isabelle Casel, artist, activist, and founder of Peace Lab Europe; and Peter van Stigt, a committed entrepreneur from the Netherlands and a specialist journalist focusing on Eurasia. The manifesto and further information

can be found on the European Peace Project’s website.

The European Union was originally conceived explicitly as a peace project. Peace was regarded as one of the great achievements of a united European community. Yet today, when EU leaders speak, war is all too often the subject. Only a few years ago, this would have been unthinkable. The European Union, which once emerged as the European Economic Community from the ruins of the Second World War and saw itself for decades as a guarantor of peace, now speaks of rearmament. It is constantly argued that we must prepare for war. Anyone who dares to oppose the relentless calls for military strengthening in the face of an allegedly unmistakable Russian threat is defamed as a “false pacifist,” “pro-Russian,” or even a “useful idiot of Putin.” Europe’s political elite today appears unwilling even to consider peaceful coexistence with Russia. Yet for many European citizens, peace remains the most important priority. Europe and Russia do not have to be condemned to a civilizational confrontation.

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# The European Commission wants to decide what's European and what's not

By Fedja Pavlovic

One of the fundamental misconceptions of the Western Balkan countries – the product of decades of propaganda – is that the European Union today is the legal and political bearer of European culture (or, in our parlance: the motherland of Europeanism), and that as such it is in some privileged relationship with what our politicians are accustomed to calling 'civilisational values'.

Let us put aside the fact that the very concept of 'civilisational values' is an Orientalist construct, the purpose of which is to justify colonial dependencies by invoking the need to civilise the native population. Ask the people who live in the former European colonies in Africa or Southeast Asia what they think of the "civilisational values" of today's EU member states – or, if Asia is too far away, ask your own ancestors what they thought of the Austro-Hungarians and their *mission civilisatrice*. Our tendency to uncritically adopt a vocabulary that reproduces colonial power relations – that is a separate matter. But anyway, where does the idea that the EU is some kind of exclusive guardian of European culture even come from? The situation is quite different. For decades, EU institutions have sought to strip "European-ness" as an identity marker of any meaningful connection to European culture – to the achievements of European literature, philosophy, art, the mythology

and spirituality from which the European civilisational code is woven, insofar as it can be spoken of at all. Instead, over the past few decades, EU institutions have worked diligently to tie the meaning of Europeanism entirely to the concept of "European values" – or rather, to a set of ideological postulates which European liberals, in a specific historical conjuncture, declared to be European values.

And why? Well, among other things, because a Europeanism whose content is polysemous and rich, whose foundations simply cannot be defined in the register of legal-political norms, necessarily thwarts the ruling class's efforts to turn it into a political doctrine and, in the next step, format it according to its own day-to-day political needs. Meanwhile, this one-dimensional, culturally and historically emptied Europeanism is incomparably easier to privatise from a position of power. If European identity is reduced to "European values", and those European values to a list of "principles" which the European Commission will translate into a set of political directives, then ultimately it is the European Commission that decides who is a European and who is an anti-European.

The Brussels political elite, therefore, are not institutional affirmers of European culture, but active participants in the process of its marginalisation. And this process is plain to see. Anyone who has been in the countries of the European Union in recent years could

have noticed that in the perception of the average German, Frenchman or Italian, the meaning of European identity is measured less and less by their attitude towards Dante, Goethe and Molière, Wagner and Verdi, Rembrandt and Picasso, Proust and Thomas Mann, Fellini, Fassbinder and Godard, and more and more by their stance on the war in Ukraine.

This banal politicisation of Europeanism represents a great tragedy for Europe and Europeans. But it is also a clear political strategy. It is for this very reason that the leaders of the European Commission do not see the autonomy of the European cultural space as a value to be protected, but as a threat that must be sanctioned. Just as the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro resented any Montenegrin identity that did not fit their party ideology, so too do Kaja Kallas and Ursula von der Leyen resent a Europeanism that refuses to submit to their geopolitical agenda. And we, who did not allow the DPS to define Montenegrinism for us, it seems we will allow Brussels to define Europeanism for us.

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## New Federal Data Confirms: Trump's War of Choice in Iran Is a 'Disaster' for US Economy

*New Federal Data Confirms: Trump's War of Choice in Iran Is a 'Disaster' for US Economy*

*"Working families looking for relief certainly won't find it under this administration," said one policy expert. "It's no wonder Trump's economic disapproval ratings are at an all-time high."*

By Jake Johnson

Federal data released Thursday provided further confirmation that US President Donald Trump's war of choice in Iran is harming the nation's economy and working class, with prices continuing to rise as paychecks fail to keep pace.

"The data is clear: Trump's illegal war in Iran is a disaster for Americans' budgets at home," Alex Jacquez, chief of policy and advocacy at Groundwork Collaborative, said in a statement after the US Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) announced that the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index rose to 3.5% year-over-year in March—the highest rate since May 2023.

The BEA estimates that US consumer spending increased by \$195.4 billion in March—with "gasoline and other energy goods" making up \$81.3 billion of that total. Trump's war on Iran has hurled the global

energy market into chaos, pushing US gas prices above \$4 per gallon on average.

BEA also released data showing that US gross domestic product rose at an annual rate of 2% during the first three months of 2026—a smaller rebound than expected after the final quarter of 2025, when GDP rose by just 0.5%.

Additionally, the Bureau of Labor Statistics on Thursday released its Employment Cost Index for the first quarter of 2026. The index, which measures wages and benefits paid to workers, increased 0.9%—well behind PCE inflation.

"Paychecks are lagging behind prices, and economic growth remains sluggish thanks to the president's gross mismanagement," said Jacquez. "Working families looking for relief certainly won't find it under this administration. It's no wonder Trump's economic disapproval ratings are at an all-time high."

Rep. Brendan Boyle (D-Pa.), the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee, said in a statement Thursday that "Trump promised to lower costs on day one, but today's report is more proof that was just a lie."

"His so-called 'Big Beautiful Bill,' his reckless tariffs, and his war of choice in Iran are driving up costs on everything from groceries to gas to healthcare," said Boyle. "Republicans control the White House, the House, and the Senate, and they only have themselves to blame for this cost-of-living crisis. The American people deserve better than their chaos, corruption, and total economic incompetence."

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# Cognitive Warfare

NATO is no longer thinking about war as something that begins with troop movements or ends with a ceasefire. Over the past decade, and with increasing clarity since the mid-2010s, it has begun to treat the human mind itself as a strategic domain. The term it uses — cognitive warfare — is not rhetorical flourish. Within the conceptual framework developed by the NATO and its affiliated research bodies, it signals a shift away from influencing what people think toward shaping how they think, how they process information, and ultimately how they construct reality.

The most explicit articulation of this approach has come from the NATO Innovation Hub, a transatlantic think tank embedded within NATO structures. In a series of reports and workshops involving military planners, behavioral scientists and private-sector actors, the Hub has outlined a vision of future conflict in which the decisive terrain is not physical but cognitive. The premise is stark: modern societies are so deeply mediated by digital systems that perception itself can be engineered, fragmented or destabilized at scale. War, in this sense, becomes less about defeating an enemy's army than about pre-configuring the mental environment in which decisions are made.

This is not simply an evolution of classic psychological operations. During the Cold War, propaganda and information campaigns sought to persuade or demoralize. Cognitive warfare goes further by integrating insights from neuroscience, big data analytics and algorithmic targeting. It assumes that individuals are not stable, rational actors but highly malleable nodes within complex informational ecosystems. Social media platforms, search engines and recommendation algorithms are not just communication tools; they are levers through which attention, emotion and belief can be modulated in real time.

The strategic logic behind this shift is rooted in recent experience. Western military planners increasingly argue that conflicts are decided upstream of the battlefield, in the formation of narratives and the management of perception. Events such as the Arab Spring, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the ongoing war in Ukraine have reinforced the idea that political outcomes can be shaped by influencing public opinion long before any conventional confrontation occurs.

Cognitive warfare is framed not as an ad hoc response to disinformation, but as a permanent condition of geopolitical competition. The notion of a clear boundary between war and peace begins to dissolve. If societies are continuously exposed to

attempts at influence, then defense must also be continuous. The result is a doctrine that extends military thinking into domains traditionally considered civilian: education, media consumption, cultural production and even interpersonal communication.

This expansion raises difficult questions about the relationship between state power and private infrastructure. Much of the terrain on which cognitive warfare is conducted is owned and operated by technology companies such as Meta Platforms, Google and others whose algorithms structure the visibility of information. While formal cooperation between these companies and governments varies, the overlap of interests is evident. Efforts to counter disinformation, remove harmful content or promote authoritative sources often align with broader strategic objectives. The risk is that the distinction between legitimate content moderation and strategic influence becomes increasingly blurred.

NATO-affiliated documents occasionally adopt a language that reflects this ambiguity. One controversial formulation suggests that the individual can be considered the “fifth domain” of operations, alongside land, sea, air, space and cyberspace. In this view, the human being is not only a target but also a vector — something that can be influenced, mobilized and, in a sense, operationalized. Such terminology has triggered unease even among analysts broadly sympathetic to Western security concerns, because it appears to instrumentalize the very populations that democratic systems are supposed to protect.

Defenders of the concept insist that the alternative would be strategic blindness. They point to evidence of coordinated influence campaigns attributed to state actors like Russia and China, as well as to non-state networks capable of amplifying polarizing content. From this perspective, cognitive warfare is primarily defensive: a way of understanding and countering attempts to manipulate public opinion.

Yet the line between resilience and intervention is not easy to draw in practice. Initiatives aimed at “pre-bunking” or inoculating populations against disinformation often involve guiding users toward certain interpretations before they encounter competing narratives. Strategic communication campaigns, even when framed as defensive, inevitably privilege some perspectives over others. The more sophisticated the tools become — incorporating behavioral data, psychological profiling and real-time feedback loops —

the more difficult it is to distinguish between protection and manipulation.

This tension is particularly acute in Europe, where political legitimacy rests on the idea of open debate and pluralism. If the informational environment is treated as a battlefield, then disagreement itself can be recoded as vulnerability. The temptation is to manage that vulnerability by narrowing the range of acceptable discourse, or by subtly steering public attention.

There is also a geopolitical dimension to consider. As Europe deepens its integration with NATO's strategic framework, it becomes part of a broader architecture in which cognitive warfare is normalized. This has implications for the continent's much-discussed “strategic autonomy.” If the tools, concepts and infrastructures of cognitive defense are largely developed within transatlantic structures, Europe's capacity to define its own informational policies may be constrained. The debate is not only about security, but about sovereignty in the most intangible sense: control over the conditions under which reality is perceived.

The rise of cognitive warfare reflects a more general transformation of power in the digital age. Influence no longer flows primarily through institutions or mass media, but through decentralized, algorithmically mediated networks. This creates opportunities for a wide range of actors, from states to small groups, to shape narratives in unpredictable ways. NATO's doctrine can be seen as an attempt to impose some degree of structure on this chaotic environment — to map, measure and ultimately manage the flows of information that define contemporary life.

The very complexity of cognitive ecosystems makes them resistant to control. Efforts to steer public perception can produce unintended consequences, amplifying the very dynamics they seek to contain. Moreover, the assumption that populations can be reliably guided or stabilized may underestimate the autonomy and unpredictability of human behavior.

What is clear is that the concept of war is expanding into areas that were once considered outside its scope. Cognitive warfare does not replace conventional conflict, but it reframes it within a broader continuum of influence that has no clear beginning or end. For European societies, the challenge is not only to respond to external pressures, but to decide how far they are willing to go in adopting the same logic. The danger is not simply that minds become battlefields, but that the distinction between defending and shaping them quietly disappears.