



Yanis Varoufakis on Why European Rearmament Will Weaken Europe

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Yanis Varoufakis: Hello, this is the 10th of March 2025, and I'm Yanis Varoufakis with my message to you on European rearmament and why I believe very strongly that European rearmament will weaken rather than strength in Europe and in the process make the world less safe. Under the slogan "Peace through Strength", Europe is rearming, with Germany at the forefront of this rearmament effort. The result will be an even weaker, more totalitarian Europe, a deeper economic crisis for European countries, a far-right that will continue to gain strength by magnetising the increasingly impoverished working and lower middle classes and I am very much afraid of the fragmenting the European Union in complete geopolitical disrepute.

Looking back, the only strategic goal European Union leaders agreed to consider once Russia invaded Ukraine was a successful NATO-assisted war effort on behalf of Ukraine by which Russia would be forced behind its pre-2014 borders while paving the ground for Ukraine to join NATO. That was the plan. Plan A, and the only plan that Europe had. However, long before Donald Trump was re-elected, that goal evaporated. Since then, in the absence of a Plan B, and in the midst of panic, the European Union has proclaimed rearmament as the panacea. Alas, European rearmament will soon prove a solution worse than the original problem.

Before we get to that, it's important to mention the three reasons why the European Union's Plan A failed, evaporated. First, the transformation of Russia into a war economy has strengthened rather than weakened Putin's regime. Second, even Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, despite his false promises to Zelensky, never seriously considered bringing Ukraine into NATO. And thirdly, it was clear that in the United States Congress, both parties, Democrats and Republicans, did not even want to hear of the idea that NATO troops would be fighting alongside the Ukrainians. So, in a display of lamentable hypocrisy, despite the frequent statements that Putin is the new Hitler, the cowardly West continue to send weapons to the exhausted Ukrainians so that the Ukrainians could defeat the new Hitler on their own, on the behalf of Europeans, but on their own, the Ukrainians entirely and utterly on their

own. Inevitably, and despite the valiant resistance of the increasingly exhausted Ukrainian soldiers, the European Union's sole strategic objective disappeared, dissolved, evaporated. Regardless of who won the United States presidential elections last November. Donald Trump simply told the truth, with a bluntness that reflects his long-standing contempt, not just for Volodymyr Zelensky, but for the European Union itself.

And now, well now, Europe, weakened by two decades of economic stagnation, is struggling to come to terms with the fact that President Trump has abandoned Europe to its illusions and delusions. And thus rearmament became the go-to knee-jerk reaction of European leaders. Going even further back, you may recall that in 1938, after the Munich agreement, Winston Churchill wrote to the then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain saying: "You had a choice between war and disgrace. You chose disgrace and you will have war." Well, in their anxiety not to make the same mistake as Chamberlain, EU leaders are ready to repeat it but in reverse. Their choice to pursue a never ending war in Ukraine, more and more war until some kind of victory, will inevitably give way to the humiliating peace that Trump will impose upon the Europeans and upon the Zelensky government when the Europeans and Zelensky finally crawl to the White House – or is it Mar-a-Lago – begging.

Given all this, undoubtedly, Europe must rise to the occasion. It has to do better than what it is doing. The question is, do what? What exactly is the European Union missing? What is it, the greatest dearth, that it faces? What prevents the European Union from being taken seriously on the geopolitical chessboard? Incredibly, European decision makers will do anything to avoid acknowledging the obvious answer. Europe lacks a proper treasury. Europe lacks the equivalent of the State Department, of a foreign office. Europe has no parliament with the power to fire the executive, the European Council. Worse still, there isn't even a debate in Europe on how to fill these huge holes in Europe's flimsy institutional architecture. Military Keynesianism, the bastard child of proper Keynesianism, that of course John Maynard Keynes would immediately deplore, will prove the pretext for shrinking social transfers everywhere – in France, Italy, Greece, Spain – across Europe.

Which brings me to two questions that I ask of my fellow Europeans: do we really want a Germany that is arming itself by spending mountains of borrowed money as well as money grabbed from the already emasculated working people, who are thus turning to the ultra-right, to the neo-fascists? Do you truly think that it is a good thing for Europe and Germany to combine a German military Keynesianism with an increasingly authoritarian state? The German state is becoming increasingly authoritarian. Proof of that, they have no hesitation in sending thousands of police officers to break up gatherings of citizens, including German Jews, who oppose the Palestinian genocide. And does anyone believe that Vladimir Putin will be deterred, will be shaking in his boots, at the prospect that Europe may have a few more missiles and rockets? The same Europe that is falling deeper and deeper into political paralysis? And the political dynamic that bolsters the neo-fascists and the AFD in Germany in particular.

I think the answers are self-evident. No. Europe's rearmament will give rise to an even weaker Europe, to member states in deeper economic crisis, with the far-right gaining strength as they magnetise the increasingly affected working and lower middle classes, pushing the European Union, the horror of the European Union, further into complete geopolitical irrelevance and disrepute. And the alternative, I hear you ask? The alternative is to travel in exactly the opposite direction. Instead of European rearmament, we should work towards putting together Europe's own multidimensional, non-aligned, three-pronged peace process. First, clearly and unequivocally reject Donald Trump's predatory attack on Ukraine's natural resources. Second, with a carrot of sanctions relief and the prospect of returning to Moscow its 300 billion dollars of frozen assets negotiated with the Kremlin, hopefully with Beijing's participation, a new comprehensive strategic agreement under which Ukraine will become what Austria was during the Cold War. Sovereign? Neutral? And as integrated with Western Europe, and with the rest of Europe, as its citizens, the Ukrainian people desire. Third, instead of a permanent confrontation of heavily armed armies along the Russia-Ukraine border or line of control or ceasefire line, we should propose a demilitarised zone of at least 500 km deep on each side, the right of return of all displaced persons, an agreement on the governance of the disputed territories on the model of the Good Friday Agreement that ended the war in Northern Ireland, and yes a green investment programme for the affected areas to be jointly funded by the European Union and Russia. As for the many outstanding issues, those should be referred to negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations. If we really want to strengthen Europe, the first step is not rearmament at the expense of the social fabric but a rational peace process that will put a brake on stagnation, on debt, on warmongering, on authoritarianism, totalitarianism and the new austerity brought about by military Keynesianism. This is Yanis Varoufakis, signing off on the 10th of March.

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