

## WHAT I HEARD IN MUNICH: GOODBYE AMERICA - HELLO EUROPE!

*A few weeks ago, on February 13-16 2025, the Chair of the ISDP Board Dr. Anna Wieslander, once again participated in the Munich Security Conference (MSC). Here are her reflections from those turbulent days and discussions at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel in Munich.*

“We have to smile when we can.” President Zelenskyy’s words after having made a joke about Putin and Trump at the Munich Security Conference still ring in my ears. In my head, I can see his brown eyes as he spoke; tired but still energetic, soft but also determined.

However, few things have given Europe a reason to smile in the weeks that have passed since the Munich Security Conference took place.

Rightfully, President Zelenskyy got standing ovations both when entering the stage and upon leaving. He appeared as one of the first leaders in Europe to fully understand the consequences of U.S. Defense Secretary Hegseth and Vice President J.D. Vance’s messages in the previous days. Europe must create a joint armed force and produce everything that Europe needs in Europe, Zelenskyy argued. “Vance told you yesterday: from now on, things will be different and you have to adapt!” For Europe to be respected globally, it needs its own army. Let’s focus on Europe and speak with one voice!

In other words: goodbye America! Europe, you are on your own.

That was also what I heard already from some American and European leaders, during a small dinner before the official program had even started. “We are at a historical moment”, a member of

parliament in a big European country declared. The call between President Trump and Putin, initiated by Trump without prior consultations with neither Ukraine nor allies, had triggered harsh reactions.

Furthermore, Defense Secretary Hegseth’s speech at NATO Headquarters, clearly stating that European security had no priority for the Trump administration, and that the United States would block Ukrainian NATO membership, give up Ukrainian territory to Russia and not be engaged in any security guarantees for Ukraine, sent shock waves among those attending.

A military leader who had been present in the room said that “the biggest difference was the tone of voice.” His assessment was that under the Trump administration, NATO would be moving toward a nuclear alliance in which the U.S. mainly provided the strategic deterrence while the Europeans had to provide the rest. He hoped that this would “not be burden-dumping, but burden-shifting”, in an orderly way allowing for Europe to fill in on the necessary missing capabilities for larger war-fighting operations.

In the past years, after attending the Munich Security Conference, I have written reflection pieces sharing my main impressions from the speeches and discussions in the Bayerischer Hof Hotel in central Munich. At the 2022 Munich Security Conference, just days before Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the discussions were marked by a mixture of Western [naivety and arrogance](#). One year later, [four fears hampered action](#) and a coherent response.

Last year was characterized by soul-searching and a brutal awakening for Europe. The increased realization in Berlin and Paris of Russia as a threat, and Europe’s insufficiency to counter it, came at a time when Russia was advancing on the battlefield. I even [noted](#) that in the corridors of the Bayerischer Hof Hotel, fear loomed “that at the MSC in 2025, Europe would be squeezed between a fascist Russia and an undependable United States—a Europe that would be pretty much on its own.”

Little did I know that this scenario would become reality.

While Vice President J.D. Vance in his speech addressed the right-wing extremist and populist voters not only in Germany but also in Romania, Sweden, the UK and other countries, the professor in international relations sitting next to me wrote in her notebook that this was “the end of the international liberal order”. Vice President Vance delivered a range of tough messages, basically signaling that from now on, the transatlantic relationship as Europe knew it, was no more.

The big question then looms – what will be the implications for NATO? Despite everything, the Trump administration insists that the United States is dedicated to NATO and article 5. Hegseth said in Brussels that “the U.S. is committed to building a stronger more lethal NATO”.

But the way the U.S. acts, threatening the annexation of Canada, attacking Denmark as a “bad ally” and requesting to take over Greenland using 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial manners, while aligning with Russia to make a peace deal above the heads of both Ukraine and Europe, casts major doubts in European capitals on

the trustworthiness of the United States as an ally.

An alliance is about a lot of things: common adversaries, common values, joint institutions and trust. President Zelenskyy captured it in his MSC speech the following way: “if Ukraine is not allowed into NATO, let’s build another NATO!”

Actually, many of the discussions I took part in during the conference behind closed doors, focused on independence from the United States and did not shy away from difficult topics such as the possibility of a European nuclear deterrent.

Past weeks European states have had intense discussions on how to stand more on their own feet in defense – and the need to do it quickly. If it is goodbye America, it might also be hello United States of Europe. Put differently, the much debated European pillar in NATO, could in the end become a NATO pillar in the European Union, with countries outside of the EU such as the UK, Canada, Norway and even Turkey, connecting to European defense structures.

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