



By: *Joschka Fischer*

Europe must assert itself as a sovereign power



By now, it is obvious that Donald Trump's return to the US presidency has inaugurated a process of historical reordering. One of the first and largest casualties of Trump's policy initiatives is the transatlantic **relationship**, which has anchored the global order since it emerged from the Allied victory over Nazi Germany in 1945 (and which had been reinforced by the West's victory in the Cold War after 1989).

Thus, the current reordering (undertaken with little or no preparation) will come largely at the expense of the Old Continent. Even as Europeans face the return of war to their borders with the ongoing fighting in Ukraine, the new US administration apparently longs for the return of the American troops now stationed in Europe to the Americas.

What will become of us? This is a question that we Europeans must answer wholly on our own.

Make no mistake: the United States is withdrawing from Europe. A full departure may not yet have been decided, but all signs point to this outcome, and Europeans therefore should act as if it will happen.

Moreover, the US is not only pulling away; it is also giving up its roles as a guarantor power and the leading market within a global free-trade system.

Already, its unilateral economic **aggression** toward friends and trading partners has thrown the global economic order off balance. Protectionism has replaced free trade, and the losses are mounting. The world is heading toward tariff-based trade blocs that will mirror the new geopolitical blocs of the twenty-first century.

Since the end of World War II, Western Europe has sheltered beneath America's security umbrella. These countries shared values favoring democracy and a market economy – values that were embraced by almost the entirety of Europe after the Cold War. But America's looming withdrawal creates a radically different situation for

Europeans.

Answering the fundamental question

We must prepare for a future in which we are squeezed between an imperial, aggressive Russia and an America that can no longer be trusted. That means answering the fundamental question that this historical turning point has raised: Are we willing to do what it takes to transform ourselves into a viable power in our own right?

If the people of Europe answer in the affirmative, the mechanics of European sovereignty – the military, political, fiscal, economic, technological, and scientific underpinnings – must take center stage. To be sovereign means to trust in one's own strength and political will.

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The digital revolution and the rise of AI will have far-reaching consequences for all economies and societies, as well as for the multifaced relationships among them.

In the face of these disruptions, traditional European nation-states will be able to keep pace and prosper only if they come together to express a shared political will. Each on its own – even the largest (Germany) – is too small for the task.

The external pressures

The external pressures we face are difficult to overstate. Russian President Vladimir Putin

continues to wage war on Ukraine and threaten the rest of Eastern Europe.

The Trump administration has shown nothing but contempt for us, and is apparently committed to inflicting more economic pain on America and its trade partners. Meanwhile, China is steaming ahead in its own pursuit of AI and advanced military hardware.



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All these pressures will continue to grow in the months and years ahead. But Europeans still have agency. We can frame our plight as an opportunity to build anew.

The challenge is not only to overcome entrenched sources of internal and external resistance, but also to preserve our diverse identities.

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We must not waste this chance. Trump and Putin are not the founding fathers that we would have picked for this moment, but they are what we have.

Europe must assert itself as a sovereign power and move forward on its own. There is no alternative unless Europeans opt for a future of craven subservience.

We must unite Europe as a free, sovereign power

We must establish military deterrence, create the dynamic conditions needed for domestic digitalization and innovation, establish a single capital market, and muster some form of shared political will and the institutions to realize it in practice, based on common democratic values.

In short, we must unite Europe as a free, sovereign power. Failing that, we will be at the mercy of external actors who would like nothing more than to see Europe come apart and decline into a state of perpetual weakness and subjugation.

Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.