

The myth of the “peaceful and benevolent European Union”

by Pierre Lévy,* France



Pierre Lévy. (Bild <https://ruptures-presse.fr>)

We can be grateful to Donald Trump for inadvertently provoking interesting admissions: when he argued that the EU was founded to “cheat” on the US, pro-European politicians cried out in outrage, pointing out that the bloc was created under Washington’s auspices.

Once again, the diplomatic-military events in the Ukraine conflict are accelerating. So once again, caution is advised before analysing a situation that is more volatile than ever. However, one thing is certain: the European Union is being left out of the game – and that’s good for peace.

No matter how desperately they may struggle, its leaders have not been invited to the important meetings. And they seem doomed to the role they feared more than anything else: that of spectators.

To avert this disappointment, they are devising a plan called “re-arming Europe”. On 6 March, the European Council confirmed the principle of a plan with this name, which the European Commission had proposed two days earlier, in the amount of 800 billion euros. Some capitals even believe that this astronomical figure is not enough. By contrast, on 12 March, the Dutch parliament spoke out against the plan in question because three of the four parties in the government reject the principle of joint debt.

“Re-arming Europe” and not “arming Europe”. The expression has the advantage that it recalls – no doubt unintentionally by its authors – the origins of the “European construction”: the unification of Europe (then Western Europe) arose from and in the Cold War.

In 1949, under the aegis of the United States, the Atlantic Alliance was established, followed a year later by the creation of its militarily integrated instrument, NATO. The “Schuman Declaration” was also proclaimed in 1950: This marks the symbolic beginning of the European integration process, which led to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, initially forming the basis for the European Economic Community (EEC). The first attempt at a military Europe, the European Defence Community (EDC), was made in 1954. This was thwarted at the last minute by the French parliament, where Communist and Gaullist MPs joined forces to vote against this US-inspired project.

But its supporters never gave up. The EEC (later the EU) and NATO developed like twin sisters, with the latter naturally reserving the leading role for Washington. The DNA of both institutions was the same, the successive “expansions” ran parallel, and they often exchanged leading figures. One of the most well-known examples was Javier Solana, who was successively Secretary General of NATO (1995–1999, during the Yugoslav wars and the NATO bombings) and then High Representative of the EU (1999–2009) for foreign and defence policy.

It is also worth recalling that the successive European treaties explicitly mention NATO as a privileged partner. And that a clause of the Treaty of Lisbon, which governs the current EU, provides for an automatic military commitment of the member states if one of them is attacked – a clause that is even more binding than its counterpart for the Atlantic Alliance.

In short, the EU was never a “peaceful and benevolent union”, as its propagandists often praised it and whose loss some well-meaning citizens’ regret. Far from being a departure from a generous project, Brussels’ current belligerence is the faithful continuation of political Europe since its inception.

And we can be grateful to Donald Trump for inadvertently provoking interesting admissions in this regard. In one of his provocative statements, which he is so good at, the US president had, to justify his policy of tariffs on European goods,

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argued that the EU was founded to “cheat” on the United States.

Outraged, pro-European politicians and major media outlets cried out in scandal, rightly reminding us that European integration was born at the initiative and under the auspices of Washington. The editorialist of “Le Monde” (11 March 2025), for example, wrote that the United States had “encouraged the construction (of Europe) from the outset” “to secure markets and contain communism”.

This reminder is welcome as it contrasts with the propaganda that has often portrayed the EU as a means of counterbalancing the United States

and freeing itself from its tutelage. In France in particular, this was one of the arguments used by supporters of the Maastricht Treaty (which was narrowly adopted in 1992) and then the Constitutional Treaty (which was largely rejected in 2005) in the referendums.

It took a war for some outraged European leaders to display their Atlanticist nostalgia, evoking the original links between allegiance to Uncle Sam and the European Union; and for the latter, now desperate for military power, to openly assert its true nature...

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