

Many NATO members are as opposed to Ukraine membership as is Russia

By Conrad Black

Since my column last week where I attempted to examine President Trump's Gaza proposals in terms that would be more plausible to Europeans than his initial presentation, two senior members of his administration, Vice President JD Vance and Defence Secretary Hegseth have been in Europe and have caused further ripples with their remarks on other subjects. The vice president expressed his concern about the state of European democracy, emphasizing that shared democratic values are the core of the partnership between Western Europe and North America. He referred to the cancellation of a Romanian general election on the implausible grounds of minor interference on the internet from Russia, supposedly producing a result disagreeable to the authorities. But Romania has little democratic tradition and it has been a habit in the European Union to ignore unfavourable referendum results and simply re-put the question. This is not easily reconcilable with democratic values, but nor is it, in itself, an invalidation of Euro-democracy. Nor did Vance represent it as such.



US Secretary of Defence Pete Hegseth explaining to central Europeans what the US policy is in Ukraine. Not everyone is happy. (Photo by Omar Marques/Getty Images)

More worrisome, though it only ostensibly concerned a single person, was the case that the vice president cited of a physiotherapist and army veteran in England who was arrested and charged with a serious offense for standing alone and without interacting with anyone else at some distance from an abortion clinic and engaging, he said, with no reason to disbelieve him, in three minutes of silent prayer for an unborn child he and his former girlfriend had aborted many years before.

This is a full-on assault on fundamental liberties that every Englishman has taken as his birthright for a thousand years. Charging a person with thought-crime for silently exercising the freedom of worship and the freedom to access to a public place is an illustration of the autocratic dangers of extreme woke-ism. The comparatively modest progress that the United States had made on the same downward trajectory is now, with wide public approval, being systematically and dramatically uprooted and discarded in almost every area of public administration under the Trump administration. This was no rap on the European Union, of which the United Kingdom is no

longer a member. But it is a comment on the degeneration of European democracy and on the accuracy of Dostoevsky's famous comment that "Tolerance eventually reaches a level where everyone is terrorized by imbeciles."

Defence Secretary Hegseth, speaking to the Ukraine group of NATO in Brussels, indicated that early Ukrainian membership in NATO was not an option and that Ukraine would have to give up some territory. Many NATO members are practically just as opposed to Ukrainian membership in the organization as Russia is and it is rank hypocrisy to accuse the Americans of pulling the rug out from under the Ukrainians on this point. My old friend Carl Bildt, former prime minister and Foreign Minister of Sweden and high representative of Europe in the former Yugoslavia, and holder of almost every conceivable office in the European power structure, who has referred to Europe as "a regulation superpower" in the same category as the United States is a military and economic superpower, accused Hegseth of making pre-emptive concessions. The defence secretary's formulation of the issue was much more diplomatic than the usual treatment of the same subject by German leaders or the prime minister of Hungary among other prominent national leaders in the EU.

Since the Ukrainians, despite a tremendous and courageous effort, have been unable to dislodge the Russians from most of the positions they occupied, while successfully defending and repulsing the Russians from approximately 90 per cent of their country, despite the heavy imbalance of numbers and forces between the two nations, and since neither the Europeans nor the Americans wish to escalate the war by entering into direct combat with the Russians themselves, which they are certainly not obliged to do and would be inadvisable, the suggestion that Russia will gain some territory from this illegal and nasty war cannot come as a startling surprise. What the defence secretary envisioned was that a group of NATO members would guarantee Ukraine sovereignty in its revised borders as

Russia would, and as the United States will remain a member of NATO, it clearly will be standing behind the European NATO guarantors of a Ukrainian peace. This cannot possibly be construed as anything but a very substantial victory for Ukraine, which began the war with no plausible guarantees of support from anybody and was generally assumed, including by the incompetent former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, General Mark Milley, to be subject to complete Russian occupation within a few weeks.

It is not practical for the West to humiliate Russia more fully than such a peace effectively does, and it is not in the Western interest to antagonise Russia so severely that when the Ukraine conflict ends, it will not be possible to entice Russia out of the potentially deadly and strategically very dangerous embrace of the People's Republic of China. It has always been, next to the conservation of a sovereign Ukraine, the leading strategic goal at least of the Republicans in the United States and other sensible western parties, to preserve the possibility for a reasonably swift postwar resumption of constructive relations with Russia. Nothing that Vance or Hegseth said in Europe last week justifies the simulation of people rushing about with their hair on fire that was the widespread reaction of officious Europe, with the conspicuous and distinguished exception of the NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, who grasped entirely the American defence secretary's position and effectively endorsed it. Europeans should be rejoicing that the United States is now governed by such a purposeful administration, emancipated from the delusional miasma and chronic enfeeblement that afflicted its predecessor.

First published in the [Brussels Signal](#)