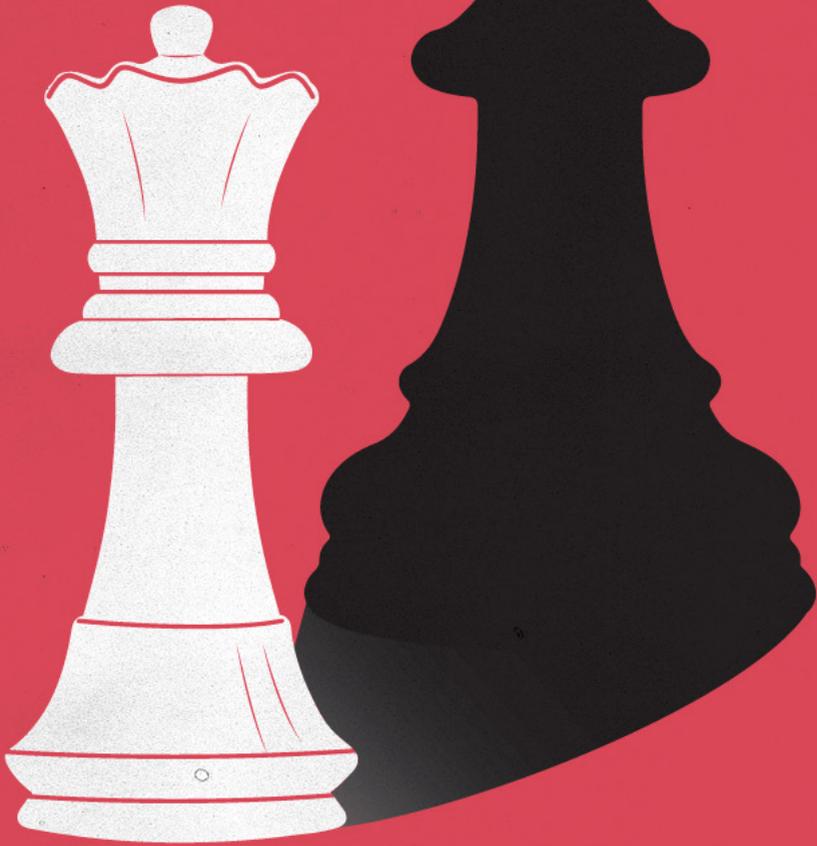


**ROSA  
LUXEMBURG  
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WEST AFRICA OFFICE



# **WHY THE LEFT MUST NOW FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**ARMIN OSMANOVIC**

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Author : Armin Osmanovic

Cover Illustration & Editorial design : Yessine Ouerghemmi

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Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz's speech at the Munich Security Conference revealed that those in power are finally realizing: the United States has become an adversarial power. Trump and his followers are actively attempting to rewrite the postwar order. They want to return the world to the period before the outbreak of the First World War, when great powers divided the world among themselves. Back then, Europeans were the aggressors; now the old continent risks becoming a mere pawn - a bargaining chip between the United States, Russia, and China.

Trump, like Putin, aims to weaken the EU. Washington therefore shows little hesitation in making territorial claims against NATO ally Denmark, attempting to destabilize elected European governments via far-right parties, or undermining the EU's climate policies in coordination with other gas and oil suppliers using mafia-like tactics. Doubts have long existed about whether the United States and other Western countries -including Canada, Australia, and the European Union - truly align on major global political issues. The 2003 Iraq War already demonstrated that the United States cannot be relied upon as a guarantor of a rules-based world order. At the time, the U.S. government falsified information to justify the war against Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Germany's Red-Green federal government under Gerhard Schröder, unconvinced by the documents presented on Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, rightly refused to join the war, together with the conservative French government of President Jacques Chirac.

Doubts about whether the U.S. hegemon genuinely respects a rules-based world order — that is, limiting its own national sovereignty for a global legal framework — existed even earlier. This was evident when the United States refused, in the late 1990s, to support the Rome Statute that established the International Criminal Court in The Hague. To this day, the United States, alongside Russia and China, rejects the International Criminal Court, unwilling to submit to international jurisdiction.

The old world order, with the United States as Western hegemon, was imperfect; yet only with U.S. support was it possible to overcome historical hostilities, such as those between France and (West) Germany after World War II. NATO was never merely an alliance against the Soviet Union and its satellites; it also served to permanently contain aggressive German militarism once and for all. Thousands of U.S. soldiers were - and remain - stationed in Europe for this purpose.

The harsh truth is that Europe failed to end the violent wars in former Yugoslavia

during the 1990s. Only U.S. military intervention put an end to aggressive Serbian nationalism. Following the failed U.S. intervention in Somalia (1993), France and the UN's inability to prevent the Rwandan genocide (1994), and the hesitant conclusion of the Yugoslav wars (1991–2001), international law was institutionally strengthened. The *Responsibility to Protect* doctrine aimed to ensure that the international community would no longer stand by - as it had in Rwanda and Bosnia-Herzegovina - in the face of genocide, grave human rights violations, and breaches of humanitarian law, but would instead intervene to protect populations from criminal regimes.

Hope that grave injustices would no longer go unpunished emerged in the late 1990s trials of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (1993–2017) and for Rwanda (1994–2015), as well as proceedings before the International Criminal Court since 2002, which focused primarily on African cases. The recent arrest warrants issued by the International Criminal Court against Vladimir Putin (2023), for the deportation of Ukrainian children, and Benjamin Netanyahu (2024), for the starvation of civilians during the Gaza war, are part of this development. The Trump administration's aggressive measures — imposing sanctions on ICC judges and prosecutors and seeking immunity for heads of state from international criminal law — underscore that significant progress had been achieved.

## THE EU – TURNING IT INTO A LEFT-WING PROJECT

An EU capable of defending itself independently — including through an integrated European army as well as rapid rearmament — will not be enough to prevent Europe from becoming a pawn in this emerging world order. Moreover, it will not suffice to achieve the dream of a better life for

all. Without a common fiscal policy, the EU cannot withstand attacks from external adversaries or their nationalist allies inside, who exploit high inequality both within and between member states to undermine European integration and target migrants.

The EU faces a monumental challenge, comparable to the wartime efforts of the United States and Great Britain during World War II. At stake is nothing less than rebuilding the infrastructure ruined by neoliberalism since the 1980s and transforming the economy toward a climate-neutral circular economy. If we take global climate and biodiversity protection seriously, a socially just contraction of European economies will be unavoidable, as our carbon budget is virtually

exhausted. Environmental degradation and the mounting waste problem can only be addressed through a swift transformation of production and consumption patterns. Only at the European level can production and consumption accordingly be effectively managed, with working hours radically reduced and redistributed within a shrinking economy transitioning toward climate neutrality.

For a long time, the simultaneous expansion of the welfare state and private ownership of the means of production posed no problem. In light of external threats and the necessity of fundamental transformation, state planning will become necessary in the future. A democratic planned economy must eventually replace the social market economy. This is inevitable: as climate and environmental changes intensify, the state will have to intervene to regulate access to increasingly scarce natural resources.

What must the Left do to accelerate this necessary transformation of the European Union's economy? How can it counter economic liberals, conservatives, and far-right actors who mislead the public by rejecting or downplaying scientific evidence?

Encouragement comes from citizens' initiatives such as the Berlin initiative *Deutsche Wohnen & Co enteignen*, the Hamburg climate referendum, the French initiative against the reauthorization of dangerous pesticides (*loi Duplomb*), and citizens' assemblies — whether in Germany, where the conservative President of the Bundestag has recently abolished them because of their progressiveness, or in France, where the Citizens' Climate Convention presented far-reaching reform proposals that economic liberals, conservatives, and the far right have tried to ignore. These examples — along with many other grassroots initiatives — disprove the dominant narrative that people are tired of reform. On the contrary, support for progressive politics in major cities is substantial. Meanwhile, in rural areas, unrest is rising as the accelerating climate crisis becomes increasingly visible across the EU.

The obstacle is not the citizens themselves, even though many in rural regions are incited against ecological transformation by the lies of right-wing and far-right politicians and closely aligned media outlets. Democracy itself has become the brake.

### **But what does that mean?**

Faced with the rise of the right and far-right, part of the progressive camp — especially Social Democrats and Greens — has retreated to merely defending

democracy, instead of engaging the public in debates on building a better society. Meanwhile, democratic socialists and communists, whether in Germany or France, remain uneasy about the EU, alternately denouncing it as a site of market radicalism, imperialism, and militarism. After Putin's war of aggression, Trump's geopolitical ambitions, and Xi Jinping's pursuit of global power, it should also be clear to the Left that Europe's nation-states alone are insufficient for achieving a better life— and that our future hinges on the success of the European Union.