

Security for Europe

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Article by Heiko Maas, Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs, on Security for Europe

The President of the United States withdraws his troops from north-east Syria without consulting his closest partners. Turkey intervenes, paying no heed to warnings from Europe and the USA. The President of France declares NATO brain-dead. All this within just a few days, as if world history is unfolding in fast motion. This raises fundamental questions – as regards the reliability of our partners, the strength of our alliances, the security of our country and the right way forward into the future.

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall we have still not experienced the end of history; the future seems more open-ended, less predictable, less secure than ever. Washington has long since viewed East-West relations as one issue of international politics and no longer as the issue, regardless of who controls the White House. That is how things are in the world. It is thus right that Germany has taken to discussing foreign policy these days.

What is at issue now? It can no longer be taken for granted that we in Germany live in peace and security. It has been said repeatedly over the past years that Germany must assume greater responsibility for peace and security in the world. At this historic moment we see that this duty is overshadowed by a second, even more urgent mission: we must assume responsibility if we wish to preserve our own security in Europe and in Germany at all.

Therefore, centre stage must be given to the political question of what international framework we need to establish in order to safeguard peace and security for Europe and for our country, now and in the future. Three points are crucial:

First, President Macron was right to put a strong and sovereign Europe at the heart of his considerations. In the future, we Europeans will have to assume far greater responsibility for our security. We are therefore working at full speed with France on a Europe that cooperates far more closely on security policy. The Treaty of Aachen, the ever closer cooperation on capacity development, the European Intervention Initiative, and the strengthening of civilian crisis management are milestones. A lot of tedious policy work lies ahead of us, especially during the forthcoming EU Council Presidency.

Second, we have to agree with our French friends on the way to best achieve the goal of a strong and sovereign Europe. In Germany's opinion, it would clearly be a mistake to undermine NATO. Without the United States, neither Germany nor Europe are in a position to protect themselves effectively. That was recently illustrated very clearly by the Russian violation of the INF Treaty. It would be irresponsible to pursue a foreign and security policy without Washington, and dangerous to decouple European security from American security. We will need NATO for many years to come. It represents burden sharing, it stands for international cooperation and multilateralism. And when Europe is one day able to defend its own security, we should still want NATO. We do want a strong and sovereign Europe. But we need it as part of a strong NATO, and not as a substitute.

Third, we must not divide the Europeans on security matters. Germany will not tolerate any special arrangements, not vis-à-vis Moscow and not on any other matters. Our neighbours in

Poland and the Baltic can trust us to take their security needs as seriously as we take our own. The Europe that we need cannot successfully take shape if they are not consulted. On the contrary, our eastern neighbours would then seek to ensure their future by enhancing their bilateral relations with Washington. So yes, a strong and sovereign Europe is a project that Germany and France are committed to. However, it is a project on which nobody may be left behind.

In these dramatic times, we have to steer a firm course towards a strong Europe – not to supersede the transatlantic alliance, but as a motor to revitalise it. Not just as a Franco-German project, but as a community project involving all the Europeans. Only in this manner will there genuinely be security for Europe. As a country at the centre of Europe, Germany must play a central, mediatory and balanced role – within Europe and vis-à-vis the United States. If we do not assume this leadership role, nobody will. Serving as a voice of reason here is our prime responsibility in the field of foreign and security policy today.

We are taking concrete steps in this direction – in the Ukraine crisis, for example, and by supporting the constitutional process in Syria; likewise on the Iranian nuclear programme, with a view to stabilising the violence-plagued Sahel, and in the negotiations on a ceasefire in Libya. One idea that I am working on with my French counterpart, and which I believe has a key place in the German EU Council Presidency, is representative of this course: it's the idea of a European Security Council. This is not a project to be completed tomorrow, but is a beacon on the horizon. We need such a council to serve as the one venue where Europeans' foreign and security policy actions are pooled, within the EU's institutional framework and beyond it. The UK must be involved, even if it leaves the EU. And Washington must be a key partner. This is the venue in which we can create the nucleus of the future European foreign and security policy that we will need in turbulent times.