

## 1. GREECE LOOKS BEYOND TRANSATLANTIC CERTAINTY AFTER DAVOS...

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# Greece looks beyond transatlantic certainty after Davos spectacle

COMMENTARY | BY RONALD MEINARDUS\*

What turbulent days those were. First came the military threats, the attempts at extortion through new tariffs, the insults and humiliations. And then, at the end of the great Trump spectacle in Davos, the dramatic climbdown: The military threat was taken off the table and talk of annexing Greenland suddenly vanished as well.

Meanwhile, European governments are struggling to decipher the motives behind the American president's volatility, while at the same time warning that, given Trump's unpredictability, there is no reason for all-clear signals. With open contempt, the US president lashed out at Europe, celebrating the rule of the stronger – a principle he embodies like no other. Donald Trump relishes his role as the great destroyer. The traditional rules-based international order has no place in his worldview. At the same time, the first outlines of new international structures are beginning to emerge.

The dismantling of the old order and the emergence of a new one is not a single event. What is visible instead is a process, a novel dynamic in international politics. It affects not only the global system as a whole but, when broken down to the level of nation-states, the foreign policy of a large number of governments. Faintly discernible are the contours of a new dividing line: On one side, Trump's loyalists, who without much hesitation have followed him into his "Board of Peace"; on the other side – and they form the majority – are those governments that have lost confidence in what was once the West's leading power and are no longer willing to dance to the American president's tune.

The consequences of realizing that America can no longer be relied upon differ from country to country. Particularly painful – and dangerous – is the erosion of transatlantic solidarity for Denmark, traditionally one of the United States' most loyal allies. For Germany, the rupture with Washington is dramatic: Germans can watch in slow motion as a historic friendship is laid to rest.

According to the national narrative, Germans owe the Americans not only liberation from Hitler's fascism but, half a century later, the restoration of national unity as well. Under the protection of the American military, postwar Germany developed into a leading industrial nation. Now, so a widely held expectation goes, the country at the heart of Europe is supposed to assume continental leadership. How ill-prepared Berlin is for such a role is evident in its inability to provide Ukraine with the decisive assistance needed to repel ongoing Russian aggression.

And where does Greece stand amid all this geostrategic turmoil? "We belong to the West" – a declaration that succinctly captures the country's international orientation. The

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historic decision of the legendary statesman Konstantinos Karamanlis found practical expression in Athens' membership in NATO and the European Union. Politically, economically, and culturally, Greece is closely interwoven with Europe. When it comes to security – and Greeks think first and foremost of the threat posed by their revisionist neighbor to the east – Athens does not want to rely solely on its European partners. As a military protector and arms supplier, the United States remains indispensable in Greek strategic thinking.

The cracks in the transatlantic community are prompting fundamental strategic reassessments in Europe's capitals. Defying the chorus of skeptics, Germany's chancellor, Friedrich Merz, has not yet given up on the Americans, warning



US President Donald Trump gestures, as he leaves after a charter announcement for his Board of Peace Initiative aimed at resolving global conflicts, alongside the 56th annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, on January 22.

against "writing off the transatlantic partnership prematurely." Greece's prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, is also opposed to a radical break with Trump: "I am a strong supporter of the transatlantic partnership. I believe that if we remain united, firm yet constructive, a solution can be found."

When European politicians invoke European unity these days, they do so with a considerable dose of wishful thinking. Trump has declared war on the European Union. He despises the bloc because he sees it as weak – but above all because he holds in contempt the liberal and democratic values that, until recently, bound Europe and America together. Among the burdens he wants to shed are international law and the principle

enshrined within it of the inviolability of national borders. For Athens, this crosses a red line. For Greece, these principles are sacrosanct and constitute its most important political armor in the enduring conflict with Turkey. How could Athens fail to oppose Trump's annexation plans for Greenland while at the same time expecting the support of the international community against the Turkish occupation of northern Cyprus and Ankara's challenges to its maritime sovereignty in the Aegean and the Eastern Mediterranean?

Adding to the unease in Athens is Trump's demonstrative admiration for Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. One of the cornerstones of Greece's national strategy has long been the near-certainty that, in the

event of a looming military escalation, Washington would ultimately bring Ankara's leadership to its senses. Trump's military saber-rattling against NATO member Denmark, and more recently the withdrawal of protection for the embattled Syrian Kurds – long-standing allies of Washington – have fueled doubts about American reliability.

Athens is not observing the tectonic shifts in the world and in its neighborhood passively. Work on a new, alternative security architecture has advanced; its origins predate Donald Trump's second inauguration. This includes novel forms of military cooperation with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, as well as a massive rearmament program by Greek standards, in which France plays a central role. No less significant – though far less noticed by the public – is the new quality of military relations with Israel. Over the past several years, the Jewish state has gradually become a central pillar of Greek security policy. With the inclusion of the Republic of Cyprus, a military network has emerged in the Eastern Mediterranean that complements the existing structures of the EU and NATO – without formally replacing them.

It was a matter of coincidence that, at the same moment Donald Trump was in Davos undermining the foundations of the Western alliance, Israel's defense minister, Israel Katz, was received with full honors in Athens. The two sides agreed to deepen their partnership, which Katz described as "an anchor of stability in the Mediterranean." Together, he said, they intended to prevent that stability from being undermined from the outside. He did not specify where the threat was coming from. But when Katz, alongside Gaza and Syria, mentioned the Aegean Sea by name for the first time in this context, it was clear to all that the Greek-Israeli alignment is meant as a deterrent signal directed at Ankara.

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