

Europe Subjugated & Propagandised for War

Sahra Wagenknecht is a prominent figure in German politics, a former member of the Bundestag and the European Parliament. Wagenknecht discusses Europe's subordination to the US, the need for an external enemy, the demonisation of Russia, and war enthusiasm that is destroying Europe. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glennndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the channel: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/Diesen79> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdiesen Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f>

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Hi everyone and welcome. Today my guest is Sahra Wagenknecht, one of the most prominent figures in German politics and, I would say, also a valuable voice in all of Europe to help understand some of the challenges we face with neoliberalism, globalization, and also the direction of the European Union. Everyone more or less agrees that the European states have to work together to solve common problems, but we still have disagreements in terms of how this cooperation and integration should look. So, welcome to the program. Thank you very much for the invitation. I am pleased to be here. So, I wanted to focus on the European Union today because I remember the great optimism about the European Union in the 1990s and 2000s. But now we see these growing economic problems, social problems, and political problems. I thought a good place to start would be the economic problems. What do you see as the root causes of Europe's economic challenges and the difficulties in turning this around?

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Well, I think the main problem is that Europe is really pursuing an extremely foolish policy—meaning the EU—and in many respects. For one thing, with the Maastricht treaties and the decisions made back then, they basically tied their own hands when it comes to industrial policy, targeted joint efforts to promote new technologies, and much more. That was already problematic. The EU is pursuing a climate policy. Now, I also support protecting the environment and trying to develop new technologies for climate neutrality, of course. But the EU's climate policy is destroying industry and driving it away. These were all problems we already had years ago.

And now, what was basically the worst of all came: the economic sanctions against Russia. Europe is massively dependent on Russian raw materials, on Russian energy—especially Germany, our industry. It has basically been the very condition for our industry's existence that we get cheap energy from Russia, especially gas. We have cut ourselves off from that and have now placed

ourselves in complete dependence on the United States, especially with the most recent agreement or "deal," as it's called. By the way, this is not a deal with Trump that Ms. von der Leyen made there. Rather, it is the subjugation of Europe.

In the coming years, we will be buying huge amounts of expensive American energy, which, by the way, is also lower quality and dirtier energy—it's fracking gas, after all. And under such conditions, our companies simply can't produce competitively anymore. On top of that, we also have a bad trade agreement: the Americans can export their goods to Europe duty-free, while European goods are subject to tariffs of 15%. So this is all a policy that makes no sense at all and really just shows that many European politicians are obviously in a true vassal position toward Washington, completely submitting to whatever the wishes of the American administration are. And of course, this comes at the expense of the people in Europe.

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Yeah, you mentioned this status of being vassals. And it is interesting because the European Union used to aim for what it called strategic autonomy or European independence. But now it seems that the EU is making itself more dependent on the United States, especially with this very bad trade agreement. Now, the common solution is to diversify economic partnerships—I mean, have good contacts and trade with the US, but not be too dependent. But how do we explain what happened with this strategic autonomy? What is preventing Europe from diversifying its economic partnerships?

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Well, the only way I can explain it is that the European politicians who are currently in charge—especially in Eastern Europe, but unfortunately now also Western European politicians—have completely surrendered themselves to directives from Washington and are obviously also part of certain networks. In many cases, these are politicians who were promoted as global young leaders, who are involved in other networks and lobbying groups. People always say that's just a conspiracy theory, but of course, the U.S. does this. They try to influence politicians internationally. They try to involve them, because otherwise it can't be explained. So this is a policy that is completely against the interests of Europeans. What Ms. von der Leyen is doing is a disaster. And there are very few in Europe, very few statesmen as well, who stand up to this.

Now, I'm really not a fan of Viktor Orban because his domestic policy is far to the right, but he is one of the few who at least still defends the interests of his country and says, yes, we will continue to buy Russian oil because we need it. And he has also tried to set different priorities in peace policy. But I can only explain it by saying that there are people involved who are part of certain networks. Also, in Germany, we once had chancellors—I think of Willy Brandt, Helmut Schmidt, even under Kohl, and also Gerhard Schröder. They stood up against certain things that came from Washington.

At least in those cases, they rebelled. They said, no, we have different interests here, and we will stand our ground. And we no longer have people like that in German politics, and hardly any in European politics.

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Well, it does appear that the days of Brandt and Schmidt are definitely in the past. But I also therefore want to ask you what your thoughts are on the leadership of Friedrich Merz, and more specifically, his spending plans and ambitions to make Germany the leading military power in Europe. Because there seem to be many dimensions to this. First, it entails restoring Germany as the leading military power in Europe, but also the economic plan. It appears to reflect some military Keynesianism—the idea that one can build the economy by building weapons instead of cars. But lastly, how do you see these ambitions moving forward, given the agreement to buy American weapons? Wouldn't this undermine the whole platform of militarizing to revive industries?

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Yes, it's not even proper military Keynesianism. But even that, as you rightly pointed out, is being undermined by the fact that weapons are primarily being purchased from the US. And let me be very clear: even military Keynesianism is not what our country needs right now or what will move us forward. We have been facing major problems in Germany for years. Our infrastructure is decaying—roads, bridges, rail networks. For years, or you could almost say for several decades—almost two decades now—there has been a lack of proper investment because Germany has a very rigid debt brake. There has always been a refusal to take on government loans to invest in this infrastructure.

We have a relatively poor education system, so we have many problems. We have an acute housing shortage, for example, also because we have had a very large number of immigrants in recent years. Germany is short 800,000 apartments, so there would be many reasons to invest in Germany, even as a government, and taking out loans for that would actually be quite reasonable, because it would put the country back into a better state. But that's not being done. The infrastructure program is also very much focused on the military. And even though the arms industry is booming in some areas—Rheinmetall just opened another new munitions factory—that doesn't bring prosperity.

That may create a few jobs, but nothing is being produced that benefits people or improves life in any way. And Friedrich Merz is, of course, another example. He spent many years at BlackRock and is heavily influenced by that experience. Much of what he does also benefits companies like BlackRock, because they hold these stocks and profit from them. For example, with the power grids—we operate our power grids through private providers so they can make massive returns. BlackRock is one of the players there. So you can see time and again that politicians are also lobbyists, that they are involved. And unfortunately, we also have—this is something I would add to your previous question as well—a press that massively supports this policy.

That is truly alarming. If we had critical journalism that would challenge the government every day, that would basically also attack Merz for all these wrong decisions—just as it started before under the Scholz government, when the insane rearmament began—then the government might be under a certain amount of pressure. But the really bad thing is that the mainstream press in Germany is constantly calling for us to prepare for war, to invest more in weapons, to buy American weapons. Even the problem of our dependency, for example in the digital sector—we are completely dependent, we are basically a digital colony of the Americans, all of Europe is, but especially Germany—is not a topic in the mainstream press.

And because of that, they can just keep going without any pressure arising. And yes, people are already somewhat disappointed. Mr. Merz is not exactly popular right now. He has already broken one election promise after another, even in just this half year that he has been in office. But so far, this pressure hasn't manifested itself in people taking to the streets or protesting. And unfortunately, that's also a big problem. As a result, he just keeps going as before. And it really is a policy that is very, very negative for our country and is already noticeably making people's lives harder, reducing their prosperity. And many really have to struggle to make ends meet with their income. Yes, and unfortunately, there's also far too little pressure from the streets.

We don't have mass demonstrations in Germany where people fight back, where they call on politicians and Merz to change their policies. And for this reason, we are calling for a large peace rally on September 13 in Berlin, at the Brandenburg Gate at 2 p.m. We have a great alliance of artists joining us, and a well-known singer who is truly famous in Germany, Peter Maffay, has also called for participation. Dieter Hallervorden will be there as well. He's a cabaret artist who is basically the most renowned in Germany, along with two rappers, Bausa and Massiv, and Gabriela Krone-Schmalz, the former ARD correspondent in Moscow. I will also be there. So we hope that we can really pull off a major event there to put pressure on the government to change its policies, its war policies.

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Well, when a lot of the European countries are now struggling with all these domestic problems, there is an interesting development, which is that a lot of European leaders—not just Merz, but also Macron or Starmer—seem to focus excessively on foreign policy, if not almost exclusively. I find this to be quite interesting. And of course, this is now mostly revolving around war. This is what they tend to speak about. And, well, Europe used to be very careful and used to try to restrain US efforts.

So whenever the US wanted to push, for example, NATO expansion, it was Merkel and Hollande and these others who would try to hold back a little bit. But now the roles appear to have shifted. That is, Europeans seem to be more eager now to fight Russia, while it's the Americans who seem to be trying to push towards a settlement. How did we end up in this situation where the Europeans do not even want to sit down and talk to the Russians and only see military solutions? Again, this is a massive shift in a relatively short time. I was wondering what your perspectives were.

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Yes, that is actually a completely different—yes, that is indeed a complete change. For example, when the Minsk agreement was concluded, the Americans—who were also the main actors in Ukraine—tried to support the Maidan coup. The Europeans tried to balance things out somehow. That's when the Minsk agreement came about. Even before that, when George W. Bush wanted to bring Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, it was actually the Europeans who said, "Careful, we want to avoid a war." And that is, in fact, the fundamental interest. If a war with Russia—meaning between NATO and Russia—were to break out, it would be fought in Europe and would probably make Europe uninhabitable.

So this is a truly, truly horrific development that we are witnessing here. And that's why it's actually incomprehensible. One really gets the impression now that Trump actually wants to end this war, not because he is such a peace-loving person, but simply because it is a lost war for the U.S. that only costs a lot of money, and he wants to focus more on the conflict with China. But it would be a blessing if this war were ended, because it is extremely dangerous. It can expand, it can spill over into Europe. And the fact that Europeans are now really doing everything to torpedo, disrupt, and make a possible peace agreement impossible is alarming.

Especially since, by now, the costs of the war are almost exclusively being borne by Europe. So even now, in total, Europe has spent more on Ukraine—for weapons and support—than the U.S. And currently, the U.S., or rather Trump, has almost completely withdrawn from it. I can only explain it by saying that, of course, an external enemy, as we have unfortunately seen often in history, is always a good way to distract from internal problems. Europe has major problems, including Germany; social division is significant. Many people—so we actually have growing poverty in Germany, even among people who have jobs but receive very, very low wages.

We have increasing old-age poverty, we have major social conflicts and contrasts. This is partly due to the high level of immigration in recent years. There are also cultural problems, and of course, an external enemy distracts from these issues. So now it's like, "We all have to stand together, because at some point, Putin might invade us." Unfortunately, this works on a part of the population. If you consume media in Germany, you get the message every day: we are on the brink of war with Russia. It's subtle, but it's repeated constantly.

We have to prepare for war. We need more tanks. Putin will attack us soon. He's preparing for it. And in this way, a mentality is being created, just like we saw several times in the 20th century. When I was younger, I always wondered in history class how it was possible that people went off to World War I with such enthusiasm and into death. I always thought, that can't be true. What kind of people were those? Today I understand how something like that works, because people are told things like this every day, and a monstrous figure is built up. So Putin is portrayed in the German press as being beyond any rationality. He's basically a monster.

And the Russian is once again being built up as an enemy image. Mr. Wadephul, the foreign policy expert, says Russia will remain our enemy forever. Given German history, that's something I wouldn't have thought possible five years ago—that we'd be having such a debate. But that's the only way I can explain it to myself. And it's similar in France. I mean, Macron is unpopular. France also has major social problems. In France, of course, Le Pen is now also very strong as a counterweight. That's actually partly the case in Germany with the AfD as well. But that's not—at least not what I would wish for—as a counterweight.

But it does resonate with a part of the population, and it's extremely dangerous because if the Germans or Europeans in general—this so-called coalition of the willing, or actually the coalition of the willing to go to war, as one should say—if they actually send troops to Ukraine, that would mean war with Russia, because Russia will never accept that. Those aren't peace guarantees they're debating; those are war guarantees. The whole Ukraine war broke out in the first place to prevent NATO military presence in Ukraine. And if the Europeans threaten that as soon as the weapons fall silent, they'll station troops there, then the weapons won't fall silent. That's the logic behind it.

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It seems to me that the European Union could play an important role in peace, simply because one of the key complaints from Russia, in terms of addressing the root causes of this war, was the lack of a role for Russia. That is, after the Cold War, they argued that a new Europe was created without the Russians. So essentially, the new Europe consists of two pillars: NATO and the European Union. And the idea is that all European countries should eventually join, with the exception of Russia. And this is a bit problematic because they have the largest territory, the largest population, now the largest economy in purchasing power parity, and also the largest military. So from their perspective, this is something that revived the Cold War logic of bloc politics. What do you think could be done between the European Union and Russia?

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Yes, it always comes back to the fact that we need to make ourselves independent from the directives coming out of Washington. Because back then, it was the case—there are quotes about this—that American policymakers were very concerned after the end of the Cold War that the vision Gorbachev had at the time, a "great European house," a new European order of peace, might actually be realized. The Americans have always seen that a connection between Europe and Russia—that is, European technology, European industry, Russian resources, and also that vast country—would be a power that could challenge their global dominance. Today, American world dominance no longer exists, but for entirely different reasons. In many parts of the world, they are no longer a hegemon.

But it has always been in the Americans' interest to drive a wedge between Europe and Russia, for geostrategic reasons. That is certainly interesting and plausible, but it has never been in the

Europeans' interest. And of course, it would be desirable for a new generation of politicians to take the helm in Europe who would actually revive that earlier vision of a common European house from Lisbon to Vladivostok, meaning the integration of Russia as well. That would be important for economic reasons, but of course also for security reasons. There is no security in Europe against Russia; there is only security with Russia. And all these war games that are now being played out and fantasized about are madness.

Also, because if there were to be a war between NATO countries in Europe and Russia, it would not be a conventional war, since Russia is inferior in conventional terms. That means it would be a nuclear war, and that would destroy Europe. I still remember, as a teenager, I grew up in a time when people were very afraid of a world war. Back then, American travel agencies advertised with the slogan, "Visit Europe while it still stands." That was when the Pershings were deployed and the SS-20 debate was going on. It was a very dangerous situation, and fortunately, thanks in part to Gorbachev at the time, it was overcome. And now we're in a similar situation again, except that today no one is talking about it.

Instead, people act as if a war with Russia is something that, while not pleasant and maybe a bit destructive, is actually something that could be waged—something we could do. And then, somehow, Germany would still exist and Europe would still exist. That is a complete illusion. That's why, for security reasons as well, it's absolutely essential that there is a different policy toward Russia. The Russian presidents have repeatedly reached out. So we can actually be glad that Russia has, for the most part, been governed by rather pro-European presidents. Because now, of course, Russia is turning massively toward Asia. All the pipelines, economically, everything is now oriented toward Asia.

They have to. And of course, at some point, someone else could come to power. After all, Putin is still very much influenced by Europe. He speaks German and has repeatedly hinted that he actually wants to cooperate with Europe. That was clearly his strategy before the war in Ukraine. And if, at some point, someone were to come to power in Russia who is truly a very aggressive anti-European, then things would get really dangerous. That's why we actually have an existential interest in getting out of this arms race, out of this dangerous spiral of militarization, and also out of this economically disastrous course of separating ourselves from Russia, so that we can pursue a different policy again.

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I often think about the great American diplomat George Kennan, who, of course, was the architect of the containment policy. But in the 1990s, he was quite dismayed because he made the point that we had all these opportunities to create any kind of Europe we wanted after the Cold War. He saw this as a lack of political imagination—that the only thing we could imagine was a return to bloc politics: who should be inside, who should be outside. So again, there could have been a lot of very exciting opportunities in creating, as you said, this great Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok, which would still look very different from today. But I guess that brings me to my last question, which is:

Which path do you think the European Union took wrong? And what would be a better future for the European Union, given that, as I opened with, we still need a way for European states to work together for both shared prosperity and peace? What other paths can the EU take?

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So in addition to a different foreign policy and a different foreign economic policy, it would of course be important to change the rules in Europe. The European Union has become a very centralized structure. The Brussels Commission partly governs within the member states. That was also one of the reasons why, at some point, there was a majority in Great Britain to reject this. The slogan "Take back control" was central to that. It had a lot of support among the people because they didn't want to be governed from Brussels. And that's quite understandable, because the regulations imposed by the European Union are sometimes a tangle of bureaucracy that only serves certain lobbying interests, including those of companies.

They are given requirements that are not reasonable. For example, the green taxonomy doesn't benefit the environment; it benefits the financial lobby because they want to sell so-called sustainable financial products, among other things. So in some areas, we really do need decentralization. I liked the original idea of good cooperation, where the most important decisions are still made by the nation states. But when it comes to future projects, new technologies, or things like our own digital infrastructure or our own chip industry, we have to work together, because no single country can do that alone. So, maintaining cooperation, aiming for certain goals together, but also allowing countries to focus more on their own priorities.

Because the way things are going right now, I see the outlook as relatively negative. I actually think that Europe will eventually fall apart because of these problems. But simply falling apart is obviously not a solution. That would mean a return to nation states. But in today's world, those are, of course, too small to really be able to hold their own. So, decentralization—a return of powers to the nation states—because only there do we still have something that can be called democracy: free elections, where parties and politicians stand for election. The European elections, including the European Parliament, are so far removed from the people. And we've also seen—I mean, Ms. von der Leyen was never elected by anyone and is now a powerful Commission President.

So at the European level, the fundamental things that democracy needs simply don't work. There is also no public sphere at the European level. I myself spent five years in the European Parliament. I experienced it back then, and it's no different today. It is a parliament that is very, very strongly—in fact, even more than national parliaments—influenced by business lobbies. They come and go in the committees; they influence the votes, much more so than in the nation states. That's why we need a reactivation of European democracy through decentralization. But of course, we shouldn't just stop cooperating. Instead, we should focus on the things that we can really only do together, because a single country would be too small for that.

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Well, thank you so much for taking the time. It's a very critical time for Europe, so I really appreciate your insights. Thank you so much.

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Thank you.