

Ex-Foreign Minister EXPOSES NATO's Dirty Tricks | Evarist Bartolo

Former Maltese foreign minister Evarist Bartolo explains from experience how the US manages its extended empire and how even fellow EU members work as enforcers of the transatlantic (dis)order. Kyoto University Symposium 2026: "Geopolitics in the Time of Monsters" Keynote 1: Evarist Bartolo Evarist examines how small states can defend their sovereignty in an increasingly militarized world. Drawing on Malta's experience of independence, neutrality and the removal of foreign bases, he argues that diplomacy offers alternatives to dependence on powerful allies. He also critiques Europe's leadership and foreign policy. The audience discussion explores NATO, nuclear risks, relations with Africa, economic power, corruption and the practical limits of independence. Recorded at the Kyoto Symposium 2026, with questions and answers. Evarist's Links: Official website: <https://evaristbartolo.mt/bio/political-career/> Kyoto Symposium programme: <https://neutralitystudies.com/events/kyoto-symposium-2026> Neutrality Studies Links: Neutrality Studies Substack: <https://pascallottaz.substack.com> Support Neutrality Studies: <https://neutralitystudies.com/donate> Neutrality Studies shop: <https://neutralitystudies.com/shop> Time Stamps 00:00 Introduction: power and the "time of monsters" 02:13 Malta's road to sovereignty 08:20 Support Neutrality Studies 10:22 NATO bases and nuclear risk 18:04 Europe's leadership and lost alternatives 29:49 Q&A: Europe, NATO and diplomacy 40:05 Europe, media and political influence 56:46 Capital, sovereignty and small states

#Pascal

Thank you.

#Evarist Bartolo

It's nice to be here and meet in person people who I follow in my insomniac nights. I'm really glad to be here. Geopolitics in the time of monsters. Has there ever been any time without monsters? Is it now that the West is getting a taste—the power elite of the West are getting a taste of their own medicine—that they've discovered monsters? Because I think for many centuries the monsters have been there, but it depends who was feeling the pain. At Davos, Mark Carney discovered monsters and said, "It's more than a rupture." I quote, he said, "Oh, it's terrible now. There are double standards. The rule of law is finished. There are sanctions."

I can't understand how he did not mention that, in the last—between 1971 and 2001—38 million people were killed because of the sanctions that were imposed on them by the US and the EU. If we were to take just from 1945 up to today, to see the amount of political assassinations, coups d'état that have been carried out against those countries and those leaders who tried to make a point of, "Let's kill the monsters that have been devouring us for so many years." And I think that the biggest

clash that we have now is that on one hand we have the power elite of the West that wants to continue living over others, and the rest who say, "We are ready to live with others. We are not going to accept anymore to live under others." And the clash is between those two. But it has been going on for centuries. It's not since the Second World War. And I happen to come from a country.

It's very small. Yesterday, the passport official, with a smile on her face, told me, "Oh, Malta, Malta, it's very, very small. It's actually smaller than this, you know, in different parts of the Mediterranean. If you want to say that something does not exist, you say, 'Malta yok.'" But we exist. We exist. We have existed at least for 8,500 years, but have been sovereign and independent only in the last 64 years, which means that if you compress 8,500 years in 24 hours, we've been sovereign in the last 10 minutes. But the last 10 minutes have been the best for the Maltese population, not because we've had excellent governments running us, but finally, since 1964, decisions have started being taken in Malta for the Maltese and not to serve the strategic military bases of those who have conquered us for 2,000 years, successive ones.

If I were to just focus on the last 200 years, when there was strong competition between the British Empire, the French Empire, and the Russian Empire, and ultimately the British Empire prevailed, right from the very beginning, even before this was formalized, Britain made it very clear to the Maltese, you know, now forget your national aspirations. Don't talk about democracy. Don't talk about liberty of the press. We need you as a base, and nothing else. And for practically 200 years, Malta served only as a base. And as it is so small, if you have fortresses, if you have runways for military airplanes, if you have bases, where do you put your hotels? Where do you put your factories?

Where do you develop your trade, especially? And then the British made it very clear, "We're going to run you like a diarchy." So you have two rulers at the same time. The real serious stuff, the big stuff, is decided in London, and you take care of some roads. But even roads, you have to be careful. Before you pass a road, you have to make a military impact assessment on whether it hurts our strategic interests. So everything, everything was devoted towards that. And what does this mean? That for, actually, for the Maltese to have a decent life in their own country, they needed sovereignty. Before that, we had half of our population migrating to different places.

#Evarist Bartolo

But sovereignty was not enough.

#Evarist Bartolo

It had to be real sovereignty, and with it, neutrality and the closure of foreign military and naval bases. It was only after this happened that, in the last 23 years, if you take the United Nations Human Development Index, Malta is classified as one of the most advanced countries in the world in terms of income, in terms of education, in terms of health. But this has only been possible because we have become sovereign, neutral, and have no military and naval bases. It goes together, in our

case, definitely. Foreign policy is the continuation of domestic policy. Totally, totally, totally. But this has been done, not haphazardly.

I do not subscribe to the great man theory of history, but leaders are important. Without leaders, without a vision, as long as it's a vision that expresses the needs of people, we wouldn't have come to this point. And that vision belongs to Dom Mintoff. There are about 10,000 islands in the Mediterranean. Only 230 of them are inhabited. Only one of them is neutral, sovereign, and without military bases, and that is Malta. And that is because Mintoff worked for that vision to happen. It doesn't mean that he always believed that. In fact, it's interesting because Malta is a very interesting test case in the study of colonialism.

We're one of the few members of the European Union which have been colonized rather than colonizers, though we do have a Stockholm syndrome regarding colonialism, our colonizers, because we're still in love with the Knights of Malta and I think even to a certain extent with the British. But it was very clear when, in the fifties, Mintoff told the British, "We'll either be like you and equal to you, or go our own way without you." Obviously, the logic of imperialism and colonialism dictated that they would not want the colonized to be like them and equal to them. And then the national movement for independence took off, but together with it, the concept of neutrality. And Mintoff, in 1958, wrote a very famous article called "Malta, the Switzerland of the Mediterranean," where he said, "Listen, this is our way. We will not accept any more military and naval bases."

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#Evarist Bartolo

The British used the Catholic Church to keep him out of power. In the '60s, it was a mortal sin to read Labour papers, to contest politics in Malta. You couldn't marry in church. But in '71, he came to power. And immediately he started negotiating a new agreement, a new defense agreement with Britain. The first principle was that since 1800, Britain hadn't paid one sterling for the resources, the facilities, the buildings occupied, the land occupied, used for military and naval and Royal Air Force purposes. They hadn't paid not even one cent. And he said, you know, you must now pay up so that we transform our economy, which was 60% based on the presence of the military forces, so that we can have trade, we can have industry, we can have tourism, we can have financial services. And he started working on that.

In the meantime, it's important to note some things which I think are also very relevant today. So, for example, in 1953, at that time there was Dr. George Borg Olivier, who was a kind of a center-right party, but in the Christian Democrat tradition, not in the conservative British tradition. On the

eve of Christmas of 1953, he was visited by the British governor, and he told him, "Tomorrow I'm going to give Christmas greetings to the Maltese population, and I'm also going to tell them that the Southern Command Center of NATO is going to be based in Malta." And the prime minister then told him, "But how are you going to do that? You haven't even consulted us. And you're just—part of the greetings would be, you know, have a good Christmas, and also NATO is coming here without negotiating anything with the Maltese."

And the British governor said, you know, that's not your business. These are reserved matters. NATO will come in. And NATO came in, and together with NATO came eventually the U.S. Sixth Fleet, and also using the runways for the Royal Air Force and for the U.S. Air Force, taking the little bits of land in Malta from the farmers also to build these. So that actually, that kind of stealth actually helped to fuel the independence movement, and that independence wasn't just sovereignty, but also getting rid of the military and naval bases. At the same time then, something interesting which we got to know only in 2023 was that in 1959, there was a secret report carried out by the British authorities of what would happen if a small atomic bomb was dropped on Malta to neutralize and destroy all the nerve centers of NATO in Malta.

And they said it would wipe out two-thirds of the population, and the country would be completely not only unlivable, but just a piece of rock. This never came out. It came out only in 2023. But at the same time, very cynically—and I remember as a boy, I was born in 1952—very, very cynically, they were carrying out drills all over the country on how to survive a nuclear war. You know, that we don't have shelters for you, but if you put a wet blanket, you know, on the windows and the doors, and you put newspapers and you hide under a table, you will survive. But their report actually said two-thirds of the population would be completely wiped out. A similar thing happened on HMS Tiger in 1974, when two torpedoes fell on nuclear bombs that HMS Tiger was carrying.

But this was never made public until the documents were declassified in 2001, I think. In the meantime, what was interesting is that, without knowing this, in 1988, the dockyard workers, which were the backbone of the Labour Party, actually stopped the HMS Ark Royal from coming into the Grand Harbour because the captain wouldn't say that they didn't have nuclear armaments. And they stopped it. So this has been good. And again, it shows leadership. I think I'm very interested in seeing how small states can survive in the world. I know very much, perhaps it's very cynical, but if you remember when Stanley Kubrick was shooting Dr. Strangelove, he said, "Great states behave like gangsters, and small states behave like prostitutes."

I would like to think that we are not only prostitutes. We can do a bit more than that. But it depends on leadership. It depends on leadership. And I'm very interested to see what I would call the weapons of the weak. What weapons of the weak do small states have? And I think those are crucial. And we have used them. Mintoff was a master at them in two things. Number one is that he built a very strong relationship with the dockyard workers and with the military workers, with the workers of the military forces in Malta, Maltese, who, by the way, were paid less than half the wages of the British people working in Malta doing the same job. But he built such a strong relationship

with them, telling them, listen, we need to make a sacrifice to get the British forces out of Malta and NATO out of Malta so that we can have a better life.

It wasn't easy to persuade them on that. The only way we can have a better life—he's telling this to people who, for them, it was a privilege to have a job with the armed forces because otherwise you had to emigrate. But they believed in what he was doing, and they supported him in getting the forces out of Malta. Without that strong bond, he wouldn't have managed, because he was actually putting at risk the livelihood of those who supported him. But they supported him because they believed him, because they believed that he was doing it for them. And I think this is a great lesson for those who have dreams. But the dreams cannot be just individual dreams, cannot be abstract ideological principles, but to improve the lives of people in their work, employment, education, health.

And he was a master at bargaining. I'll just give you an anecdote which has never been published. When he was negotiating in 1972 with Lord Carrington in London, he told his deputy prime minister, who was called Joseph, he told him, "Joseph, go to Tripoli. While I'm in London, go to Tripoli." And the deputy prime minister wrote him, "But what will I do in Tripoli? Shall I talk to Colonel Gaddafi?" He said, "No, no, no, no. Just stay at the hotel over there. At seven o'clock in the evening, we'll talk to each other in Maltese over the phone. I'm sure that MI6 will be following, and like that, they will report to Carrington what you tell me every evening."

And Joseph Kassar was telling him, without meeting Gaddafi during his stay, every evening he was telling him, "Don't bother, don't waste your time with Lord Carrington. The colonel is ready to give you everything. Everything. What you ask for, he'll give you everything." So in the morning, Mintofoff would turn up with Carrington, and Carrington would tell him, "But Dom, you have something up your sleeve. There's something you're not telling me." "No, no, no, I'm telling you everything. I'm telling... we're sure that Gaddafi is going to fork out the money that we will not fork out, and that you will then become a Libyan colony, and eventually a Soviet colony, and you will threaten the balance of power in the Mediterranean."

#Evarist Bartolo

And Mintofoff would say, "No, no, no, no. We just negotiate, negotiate."

#Evarist Bartolo

And he did manage to negotiate a good deal, also with the support of Italy. And this is something that I'd like to stress, because it also ties with the pitiful state of European leaders today. People like Aldo Moro and Giulio Andreotti, I'm sure they would have loved to have Italy neutral. I'm sure. I got to know also top political leaders at the time. I was young, but I was very close, and I was following a lot of what was happening in Italy. They would have liked not to be in NATO. They would have liked to have a neutral Italy with very strong ties with the Mediterranean and North Africa.

Remember that one of the leaders—he's one of my heroes, actually, and he's also very relevant today—Enrico Mattei.

Enrico Mattei needs to be studied again today. What he was doing way back in the '50s and '60s was revolutionary. Imagine, if you go to Tehran today, you will find a big picture of him at the National Oil Corporation because he was a hero. Because he agreed with them a 75-25 agreement. He used to tell them, "The resources that you have, the oil that you have, is yours." And that is one of the reasons, obviously, why they love him. He persuaded Mossadegh to nationalize the oil. And, you know, the rest is history, what happened over there. And Mattei was a big, big, big dreamer, but a very practical dreamer. And those are the best. You know, you need to be practical, but you also need to dream.

He used to have these arrangements with Algeria, with Tunisia, with places in Africa, with China, with Russia, and the seven big sisters did not like this because he completely broke the model of the monopolies. And he not only had 75-25 or 50-50 agreements, but he built an institute in Italy to train the technical people of these countries to be able to run the resources themselves. So even from the West, there are decent people who are ready to build good relations, equal relations with the South, but he was done away with. The question is who killed him, not whether he was killed or not. And the same for Moro. Moro had a different idea of what Italy should do. And on the point of reaching a historic compromise with the Italian Communist Party, he was assassinated. Because he was called by Kissinger, you know, "You're Italy's Kerensky, and there is no way we want you to form a government with the Italian Communist Party."

So these stories, even of assassinating Moro, for example, also serve to explain what I would call the political dwarfism of today, of the European leadership, that they've become so small. For two reasons, I think. One is that right after the Second World War—and I am sure of this, though I know now I'm confident with the declassified documents, and seeing them after, it's always easier because with the benefit of hindsight, then you start seeing everything fall into place—but the American U.S. foreign policy after the Second World War was based on these three premises. Number one, NATO. Number two, the European Union, as long as it was subordinated to NATO. And only number three, OSCE. Never believed in it.

And if you see the documents that have been declassified, this is very clear. You know, NATO, the EU subordinate to NATO, and then OSCE just to please a bit the Soviets who supported the idea, and some of the softies in Europe, like Brandt, like Genscher, you know, but really will not work at it. And in fact, this is what has happened. I mean, you know, the Ukraine war could have been averted very easily if instead of, you know, the two roads, you know, the two roads diverge: either go to NATO or go to the OSCE. With an OSCE, or collective cooperative security, it wouldn't have happened. But what was chosen was NATO. The times I served in the European Union and Foreign Affairs Council were quite sad, actually, because at no point was there any attempt for diplomacy, completely.

I mean, I personally was seen as a rebel, I imagine, for the simple reason that when, on the eve of the invasion, Lavrov wrote to all of us as foreign affairs ministers, I was the only one to answer. And I answered in line with the documents that he was referring to, for cooperative security, the Charter of Paris, the Helsinki process. And they said, "No, you shouldn't have done that. That is terrible, you know, because like that, you're soft, you're playing into the hands of the enemy." So one of the monsters that we have today is, if you remember the famous dictum of Andrei Gromyko, you know, that better to negotiate for 10 years than one day of war. Today we have pit bulls that say we negotiate by bombs.

So diplomacy and bombs, now there is a whole continuum. And one of the people who embodied this for me was the French foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian. In my years as foreign minister, I had the luck to meet people like Lavrov, Wang Yi, Jean-Yves Le Drian, Liz Truss, which was obviously—meeting Liz Truss was very, very special. She didn't say anything. You just looked at her and she looked at you. And then she went to Moscow to lecture Lavrov on history and made a fool of herself. But what amazed me about Jean-Yves Le Drian was that I noticed that at certain moments throughout the year, there would be a crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean: Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Egypt. Then France would sign a new armaments deal, and the crisis would subside.

So obviously it was part of the way to sell arms, especially to Greece. And I was talking to one of his friends, and he told me, "But how naive are you?" And I said, "Don't you know where Jean-Yves Le Drian gets elected?" He said, "Look at his constituency in France. That is where the French military-industrial complex is concentrated." So they provide jobs, they provide exports, they provide profits. And he boasts of being the best French arms dealer. So you can imagine, if you're a foreign affairs minister and you boast that you are an arms dealer, what kind of diplomacy you're going to have. And I think this—and I'll end on this note—this shows why Europe is so lost today, why the European Union is so lost today.

Number one is that the leadership, they don't even know what their national interests are, what the respective national interests of their countries are. And this reminds me of a good point that the British and New Zealander economist Dudley Seers makes, that if leaders do not know what the national interests of their countries are, and if their heads are stuffed with what he calls foreign ideas. Now, in the case of—I think in the case of the European Union—and this is very similar to how empires operated, not just in Malta. But for us, it was very clear in Malta what was done. I mean, Mintoff himself was a Rhodes Scholar because he was groomed to run Malta, but to perpetuate the British Empire, you know, to run Malta along those lines.

He obviously didn't do that, like a number of other African leaders who were sent to study at Oxford and at Cambridge and came back and said, "Ah, democracy is good, but why can't you have it in Malta? I mean, in Malta and in the other countries, and sovereignty is good." In the case of the United States, there was a program, definitely, in the last eight years to capture Europe, to capture

the European Union, also through scholarships, through visits, through think tanks. I myself went through that. Once we were told, "There's an advanced course in journalism in Tunisia. Why don't you go?" And I was chosen to go because I was a journalist at the time.

And once we get there, there is, yes, the façade of the Tunisian Ministry of Information. But then we noticed that it was a German foundation and the American foundation working together, bringing 71 journalists from all over the world. Then three of us were picked to go to Stanford. And then you are groomed and cultivated to make sure that you perpetuate that. And then you get away from that and you learn the tricks and you try to use it as one of the weapons of the weak, not to be a slave of the powerful. I think I'll stop here and can have a chat about some of the points that I made. Thank you.

#Pascal

But actually, you even have more time. So if you want to talk more about one of these points, please feel free to do so. But we are opening the floor now. I forgot to introduce Andon. My wonderful assistant is also working on all of my videos, and he actually flew here from Bangladesh in order to be with us. And his mother gifted us with all the cookies.

#Pascal

Emrys, you spoke about this political dwarfism of Europe at the moment, and I think this is one of the things that interests a lot of us right now. But I will first collect a couple of questions. You will bring the mic, and there's all of my mics so that the recording can hear you. Who would like to ask?

#Evarist Bartolo

Yes, thank you very much for your presentation. My question was about political dwarfism. I'd like to know your thoughts on why there are so many dwarfs around. Is it the education? Is it the path they take into politics? Is it because the system filters out qualified and competent people? I'd like to know your thoughts on this question.

#Evarist Bartolo

It's a bit of all of those. And it is interesting. And on purpose, I use the word dwarves because in an exchange between Kissinger and Willy Brandt, at one point Kissinger tells him, "We prefer to have a Europe of dwarves squabbling against each other, but within a framework, other than to have the European Union as a giant." So that was a very predetermined objective. So even when you had top American diplomats and secretaries of state saying, "We support the European Union," but always with inverted commas, as long as it was subordinated to NATO and to the American project. At the same time, there was a very vicious project to make sure that no alternative politicians would lead their respective political parties.

In the case of Aldo Moro, it was an extreme action that was taken, that he had to be assassinated. In Italy, there had also been the Gladio movement to capture the state and to make sure that the left—first of all, to try and keep the socialists and communists away from each other. But then the plan was always, let's make sure that an alternative vision for Europe is defeated. So, for example, even with Willy Brandt, they were not happy that Willy Brandt had the Ostpolitik, and they always tolerated him within limits. It became worse for the generation after Willy Brandt. Genscher, they made life miserable for him because Genscher kept on believing that it was possible to have, even though he didn't call it like that, a common European home, which would include also Russia.

There is a declassified document where Bush tells Kohl, don't bring Genscher to Camp David because he's an old believer in Ostpolitik and that. So this was before Ukraine and before even the enlargement of NATO. And there was the plan, obviously, to enlarge NATO and to do away with all those leaders who would stand in their way. Then leaders gave up in the sense that for you to succeed, you had to follow that. And this is what we have today. And it's pathetic. It's pathetic, honestly. I can't single out, honestly, and I say this with sadness, I can't mention one foreign affairs minister who can command your respect. Not to talk about Kallas, because then she's the ultimate, no? But at least Borrell.

Sometimes he jumped on both sides of the... But it was terrible. I mean, I can tell you, meeting, for example, meeting Lavrov was really one of the highlights of my career because you saw how he prepared. Not necessarily agreeing with what he was telling you, but you knew that this chap, even though he was meeting the minister of a tiny country with no consequential effect on Malta, you are sure that he went through 40 years of files because he was giving me details that I myself wasn't even aware of. So he takes his work very seriously. And the most important thing is respect. If he knows that you respect him, he'll respect you back. And you can argue about everything. The same with Wang Yi.

When I met Wang Yi in Chengdu, because one of the lucky things that I had was COVID. With COVID, very few ministers were traveling because also they had problems even within their own countries. In my case, I had no problem traveling, so I had no problem getting appointments with all the ministers of the world that I wanted to. So I made the most of COVID. With Wang Yi, on purpose, I put on the agenda human rights. And I know some of the other ministers saying, "Are you crazy? You're going to discuss human rights with Wang Yi?" I said, "Yes, why not?" I said, "I subscribe to the idea of human rights, of we'll try to create a world where we are free from fear and want, no? And that human rights are social, political, and economic. Now, the West talks only about political rights. Let them eat elections, no?"

As long as you have elections, then you're okay. And then the East sort of says, yes, but what about housing? What about jobs? What about...? We should have both. And Wang Yi was very ready to discuss that. One thing that I want to stress, and this is about the dwarfs: they are dwarfs with the U.S., but they can be bullies with the smaller states within the EU. You know, we are one family, but there is domestic violence in the EU. We had an interesting discussion, episode about migration. You

know, Malta, the way we are in the center there, especially those who go away from Tripoli towards Italy, in the beginning of 2020, we had about 1,200 irregular migrants coming to Malta. Now, 1,200 coming to Malta is over a million entering the European Union.

And we couldn't cope. And I wanted to have good relations with Libya, with Tripoli especially, and the only way to do that was through Turkey. You know, we spoke with Erdogan, we spoke with Çavuşoğlu, and we said, "Please help us." At that time, Greece especially pushed the idea of the EU naval mission to enforce a blockade on armaments to Libya. It basically meant armaments to Tripoli, because the east, Benghazi, was getting all the armaments overland, with aeroplanes, but naval was only Tripoli. And the previous minister had negotiated—I didn't agree with it—that Malta would participate in this naval mission, and in fact the boarding party, to check whether arms were on board or not, were going to be Maltese soldiers.

And I said, "This is crazy. This is not in our interest. We should keep away from this mission." So it came to a vote. And the French, and the Greeks especially, were very angry at us because they thought that we were going to stop the mission by not voting the budget. Macron threatened us with pulling out the biggest investment, the microchip factory over there, that exports practically half of Maltese manufactured goods. And he said, "If you do that, I'll take the company out." The Greeks were telling us, "We'll tell the Greek ship owners to leave your register." And it was heavy. I can tell you, it was heavy. But at the same time, we wanted to safeguard our own national interest. At least we found the Turks and the Libyans very understanding.

And they were happy with us saying Malta will not participate in such a mission. So we reached a compromise. We did not participate in the mission, not at all. The mission went ahead. Turkey was very optimistic, and I think facts have proved that it was useless. It was a useless mission because they didn't stop any arms from going to Libya. And the sad thing about Libya today, I don't know how much you follow what's happening over there, is that it's getting very, very, very serious. And there's quite a movement of trying to split it into three, if not two. You know, to have Cyrenaica on its own, and Cyrenaica would be an axis together with Israel and Greece. But we'll see what's going to happen.

#Pascal

Thank you. Then I'll gather a few questions and then hand it back. So, Ulrike first.

#Speaker 1

One comment, if I may, underscoring what you said, and then a question. First, going back to what you said about Willy Brandt, Ostpolitik, and then all this sort of Heartland theory, where we can see since, whatever, 120 years, that there is a strategic interest of both the U.S. and the U.K.,

apparently, to cut Germany especially, but Europe, from Russia, but also basically from the Arabic countries. So it's the two. And perhaps, just because I have experienced similar things to you, I just would like to point the audience to how subtle, in a way, the U.S. are doing it.

Because, as you know, I worked for the German Marshall Fund of the United States between 2004 and 2007, and then was running the Berlin office of the European Council on Foreign Relations between 2007 up to 2013. And you may imagine that I was sort of in the bath of the transatlantic community, which by then was still allowing criticism. You must also admit this, because today we are in the YouTube times. Internet changed. YouTube came up in 2004. So the sort of critical Internet YouTube bubble we today know wasn't present at that time. And so Internet digital things made a lot to what you would today say to the critical community.

So before 2013, it was different even in the U.S. That's very important to understand. And with respect to Germany, I should perhaps point here that there is a report of Andrew Lowenthal, who is Australian, who wrote a censorship report for Liber-net. Liber-net is an international institution doing studies about shrinking space for freedom and public opinion. And he can show by data that the sort of hijacking of press started in 2013-14 with Maidan, precisely, then with the upcoming, you know, first mandate of Trump, '16, and Brexit, and then Corona, and then Ukraine, and then Gaza.

So what we can basically show, at least for German slash European press, is that the real hijacking of public radio and so on started openly in 2013-14. So that's very important, what I'm going to say, because what I just wanted to say, to underscore what Evariste has been saying and perhaps to give you some things for research, is that when I worked for the German Marshall Fund in 2004, and when it started with, you know, 2004 Orange Revolution, Maidan, because it has a long history behind, the Americans were quite aware of the fact, because what you were saying basically is the undermining of European press and pushing away Genscher and Brandt and Olaf Palme and Kreisky and so on and so forth. How could this happen?

Because remember that Putin spoke in the Bundestag and had a huge sort of applause, standing ovation. And that was the same moment when Europe wanted to come to grips. I mean, the EU Europe, meaning getting a constitution, doing enlargement, doing the euro. I mean, basically gaining power, what you said, instead of, I mean, breaking through the divide-and-rule game that the U.S. was imposing on the dwarfs of Europe. And finally, the EU was there saying, okay, now we do a constitution, a money enlargement, sort of get it right. And if you all remember, we had two books on the market. One was by Jeremy, I think it was Rifkin, who wrote "The End of the American Dream" and the empowerment of how the European dream will eclipse the American dream was precisely the book by 2003 when the Americans did Iraq.

And Europe was standing there saying, okay, now we take over the world's sort of rule, but we do it with soft power and with rule of law and not like the Americans invading Iraq. So there was that moment in time. And it was the same moment, by the way, when the ECFR was founded, so the European Council on Foreign Relations, with Mark Leonard, and he wrote the book Why Europe Will

Run the 21st Century. He wrote it in 2003. So now we are 20 years later. Europe is vanishing from the scenery, doesn't run anything, but just to get you back to what we were doing by then. And now coming back to my time at the GMF, because I think it's important.

The Americans were doing a study, a polling called Transatlantic Trends. And the polling was that, imagine you are German, you have 10 countries like the U.S., like Russia, France, U.K.—where do you have the most sympathy points for? And I was managing this for the Berlin office. And you could clearly see that after Putin in the Bundestag, so Gorbachev effect, unification, blah, blah, blah, plus Iraq, you had a shift, a clear shift from sympathy towards the U.S. to sympathy to Russia in the German population. And by 2003-4, it was 50-50. So the U.S. were losing the peace dividend. All the money they spent in militarization and in money and, you know, the martial money, they were losing Europe in a way. Yeah?

And the reaction was—and I put this together with Hauke Ritz in my book from 2022, Endgame Europe—and you can clearly see that after Putin's speech at Munich Security Conference in 2007, there was this shift of press organized by PR agencies all over Europe, yeah, to basically downgrade Russia, downgrade Putin, and so on and so forth, yeah. So this is evident. And the interesting thing is that it comes so subtly that persons like me who are, say, somehow smart and intelligent, working for the German Marshall Fund—and we were before the YouTube time of today and critical press—you know, I got a position for European director at the German Marshall Fund. So you're 40 years old, you get a position, I'm European director.

You get a lot of money to organize conferences in Washington, present the European Constitution to the U.S. So you feel happy. I have, you know, freedom of everything, and working for U.S. thinking I can spread my European ideas, and I can go to the Congress and explain to the 20 senators how the European Constitution will work, happy as can be. So you need to be really smart to understand the subtlety of what you are doing, because when the German Marshall Fund, even by then, was attacked, sort of, you are crashing through the European enlargement agenda, and so Craig Kennedy, the boss, my boss, could always say, look, we have Ulrike Guérot, she's writing one article after the other on the European Constitution and how smart Europe is. How can you blame us to be anti-European, yeah?

But to basically see this, that's a very hard thing to do, yeah? And now the question is, because I wrote down—I'm sorry for that—but I just want to underscore the subtlety of what we are all complaining about and how subtly it worked for years and decades, because your question was: how can we still be dwarfs? Because it works like this, and you need to be really smart to detect that you are basically instrumentalized. Now that's what I wanted to say. So now, the national interest—you said the leadership, nobody knows what their national interest is, yeah? Once upon a time in Europe, we had a time when states and heads of government would know that the national interest of each and every European country is precisely to get a strong, emancipated Europe. And this is gone. So I want to question you on this. Sorry for being long.

#Evarist Bartolo

To complement what you're saying, what is important, very, very important, is to understand what happened when the Baltic states joined the European Union, and Poland as well. There, you had a complete shift in the European Union. The United States used it totally. Remember the words of New Europe and Old Europe? We will cultivate and support New Europe against Old Europe. And there is no doubt that since the enlargement, the EU lost completely its center, went eastwards, but not to embrace the East, but to oppose Russia. And it's very interesting.

Just have a look at the list of commissioners today in the EU. The most powerful ones are all Baltics. That is not a coincidence. That is also coordinated with the deep state, I think, in the U.S. And I can tell you that one of the obvious reasons—one of the obvious consequences—and this is something interesting, this is something which I have discussed both with Romano Prodi and with Lavrov: Romano Prodi tried to calm the Russians with the Baltics joining by telling them, "They will join our club and we will calm them." Lavrov said, "No, they're going to make you all fierce dogs against us." And this is what happened.

And I think that there is a complete use of the— because even if you look at the declassified documents of how the Europeans shifted away from the OSCE to NATO and to an EU which is not in favor of cooperative security, you'll see that it was the Baltic leaders who were actually telling the Americans, "Let's not work with the Russians. Don't trust the Russians." You have this over and over again in private conversations: "Don't trust them. Don't trust them." So the EU, actually, with the enlargement to the east, lost its center. I can tell you how difficult it was for us—when I say us, Italy, Malta, and Spain—to put the Mediterranean on the agenda.

To put Africa on the agenda, can you imagine Africa with the demographic suicide of the European Union and the demographic explosion of Africa, where we're going to a ratio of five to one, and where the European Union is losing one million of its workforce every year? For the next 25 years, the EU is going to lose, of workforce age, 25 million, whereas obviously in Africa there will be five billion people there. You try to put this on the agenda, no interest at all. I mean, and Africa is there. This is going to be a big issue. You don't even manage to put it on the agenda, let alone discuss it. When we had the EU-AU summit in Kigali, and all the 52, 53 foreign affairs ministers of Africa turned up.

Out of 27, only seven European foreign affairs ministers turned up. So you can imagine what the message is there. You know, for us, it's not important. If you see the Gateway project that Ursula von der Leyen has launched for Africa, it's not with Africa. And it's not for Africa. It's for Europe to continue seeing Africa only as a source of fuel and raw materials and earth, precious earth, and things like that. I used to tell my colleagues, even Borrell, I said, "But why don't you go to these countries? Go to these countries, you know." And they said, "But what do we tell them?" And I said,

"Can't you not say anything and just listen for, you know, it will help perhaps to start listening and not just talking." And again, I think symbolic of this was, you have three foreign ministers visiting Libya, visiting Mangush, the foreign affairs minister there.

And mostly texting while she's talking to them and being on their mobile without even listening to what she's telling them. So you can imagine what kind of message this conveys. And if I can stress this point, I know it's a controversial point, because there is no doubt that the only way the European Union is going to have an economy again, or if there is going to be a revival, it needs workers. It doesn't have enough people, and it needs migrants. This is not a great replacement conspiracy theory, but migrants are necessary. In our case, we know it because in Malta, from a land sending migrants overseas, now we have migrants coming to Malta, and we cannot do otherwise. But the way they are treated shows how Europe is not ready to embrace a multipolar, multi-civilizational world.

Because if you treat people like that in your country, what is your attitude towards them in the rest of the world? And I think, basically, I don't think it's an exaggeration: the mindset that started at least 500 years ago has not changed. Recently, I was having a look at the chronicler of Magellan, Antonio Pigafetta. He writes of the ship coming back from Spice Island. And there was dysentery and people were dying, so they had to throw corpses overboard. And he said the Christian corpses floated face upwards towards heaven. The Indians floated face downwards towards hell. I don't think that has changed. You know, we have different variations of it. Obviously, that had been buttressed by the Pope, papal bull, and the Doctrine of Discovery, no?

#Pascal

So, and thank you very much. We have at least four more people, and I will—yeah, can you keep it short, if possible?

#Speaker 2

I'll try, Pascal. Thank you. Thank you so much, Mr. Bartolo. I'm fascinated by the point you make in regard to how there was the idea that the EU has to be subservient to NATO. And Alexander over there and his very funny friend have made this point. When you speak about what Alex calls the EU cool kids who are waiting to move from being president of a European country to work in NATO. And I remember Jeffrey Sachs demonstrating he felt it's very incongruous that someone would be leader of a European nation and their ambition thereafter would be to go and be an operative in NATO. I want to ask you what kind of thinking, from your experience, allows that. I can understand, from the point of view of an African, right, that we've been trained looking at Europe and the Global North as next to heaven. So I can understand how aspirational it would be for an African leader to say, "I want to leave Lagos, I want to leave Johannesburg, and go work in Brussels." But what kind of thinking

#Evarist Bartolo

It's the same. Completely. It's the same. It's cultural dependency. It's good jobs, good career moves, completely. And obviously they're closer to what there is in the network than to their people. But it's the same. It's the same process. A bit more sophisticated, but it's the same process. Thank you.

#Pascal

Thank you. Radhika, then Alex, and then...

#Speaker 3

Yeah, thank you for a great talk. There are so many things I could say, but I'm going to confine myself to just one point. And I just want to introduce, perhaps right at the beginning, the element—well, I could say the economic element, but actually I should say the capitalist element—into this. I think European enlargement was as much a neoliberal project as anything else. And by neoliberalism, I don't mean free markets and free trade. That's what it says on the tin, but that's not what it's about. What it's about is giving more and more power to big corporations. Under the covering fire of the rhetoric of free markets and free trade, what really advances is the interest of big, giant monopoly corporations. Dwarfism.

This has to do with dwarfism. In the days when we had better political leadership, it was simply because the political task was actually tough. You had to somehow reconcile the interests of capitalists with the interests of working people in Europe. In the first several decades after the Second World War, this was an act of political creation. It was an act of political creativity. Since the onset of neoliberalism, you've never needed that. You don't have to bother about the people. In the United States, it's done outright by money. You spend more money and you win elections. In Europe, money is less of a factor, although it is not a non-factor. But still, the effect is the same. So I just want to introduce this and ask for your comments. I mean, yeah.

#Evarist Bartolo

Yes, and what is happening now is that the EU has already moved away and is fast moving away from an intergovernmental institution where nation states still matter. That is being lost, and that worries me a lot for my country, because I think in a short while it would have gone from colonization to decolonization to recolonization. And I am very worried about that. And it's not just for Malta, but even for the other states, because with the EU developing into a superstate, power is being concentrated more and more in Brussels.

And we are, for me, some people thought that I was exaggerating, but I think now it's dawning on them that there is truth in it. We are becoming again a diarchy. Instead of from London, it's from

Brussels. And there is a great push to take away the veto power from the Council, heads of Council meetings, for countries to lose their veto. If that happens, and I'm now talking about Malta, we would have become a colony again. Because I believe every country has its own specific agenda and its own specific reality and needs to push for that. When we are not taking part in decisions that concern us, they are usually against us.

#Evarist Bartolo

I mean, this is normal.

#Evarist Bartolo

So that is going to be very interesting over the next few years with the EU. And this might hasten its collapse, but I don't think it will be a sudden collapse. I don't know, because sometimes it does happen. It's becoming more and more a house built from the roof down. You remember in Gulliver's Travels, those crazy people who built houses from the roof down? They fell, they collapsed. And this is happening, which means that you need to take away sovereignty, you need to take away democracy, and this is what is happening. This is all part of the same thing. So what you said with politics as well, where sovereignty becomes a dirty word. And it cannot become a better world. We need sovereignty. I think not just small states, but all states need sovereignty.

#Speaker 4

Well, Everest, thank you for all that you said. Just a few things very briefly to confirm what you said. My big take from your talk is that countries have choices, and they have the power to say no. Even countries that are supposedly weak, they can assert themselves. They're perhaps not quite as weak as people imagine. Weakness, in a sense, is a form of perception. Now, I wanted just to mention two things, two experiences that I've had, which go exactly to the point that you've made. One is that I visited Malta in the early 1970s with my family. This is the time of the dictatorship of the colonels in Greece, from which I was a refugee, by the way.

And it was extremely exciting and extraordinary to see a Mediterranean society, very like Greece in some ways. The difference in Malta, the sense of empowerment, the sense of energy at that time, and to contrast it with the situation at that time in Greece. And this was because Malta asserted itself. It was prepared to say no, whereas in Greece, we were always telling our masters, if you like, we were always saying yes. And the other thing I wanted to refer to is a conversation I had with Arta about a year ago in Georgia, when we met in Georgia. We had a discussion about Thucydides. And there was this famous passage in Thucydides, which comes from the debate in Melos, that of men we know and of the gods we believe, the strong do as they will and the weak do as they must.

And we both discussed this, and we both said this is a complete misunderstanding of what Thucydides was saying. It was, in fact, a warning to the people that that book was actually

addressed to, which is the people of Athens at that time. It was not an attempt to say that the weak must always submit. They do have the power to resist, and Malta in the early 70s resisted, and it became, at the time, a giant. As I well remember, it was far more important than its size might imply. Whereas countries like Germany, like Ulrike was talking about, when they always say yes, that's when they become dwarfs.

#Evarist Bartolo

That's what I wanted to say. I agree completely. I agree completely. And I do believe that small states do not have to resign themselves to permanent defeat. But you need leadership. And you need to create room for maneuver. And I agree with you totally that the smallness of geography is terrible, but the smallness of mindset, will, and ambition is even deadlier than the smallness of geography. So as long as small states, and not just small states, have ambitious leaders who are practical dreamers and who are ready and capable of mobilizing people, they can do things. I don't think we should accept that we simply have to be prostitutes, as Stanley Kubrick said.

#Speaker 5

Thank you very much. Okay, can you hear me? Yes. Thank you very much. Thank you for the presentation and for your many years of service for Malta too, of course. I have a question that wants to pick up on the word "state" that we keep saying, because I fully agree with your arguments in relation to external powers, but there is also a risk of externalizing all of the challenges that the state faces. And we're talking about the need for, you know, strong leaders who speak truth to power. But in the past few years, we're seeing what happens to people who speak truth to power: Daphne Caruana Galizia, Ján Kuciak in Slovakia, Victoria Marinova in Bulgaria. Those who stand up and try to call out corruption, clientelism, cronyism, nepotism have been facing, you know, a very difficult end.

And so, you know, there are thousands of people who have been on the streets in the past few months calling for democratic changes in our own country, in Malta, but in other places too. And therefore, whilst I'm on board with this, I feel like we should also be having a discussion about the fact that state doesn't mean that all our leaders or all those within the state have the best interests of Malta, Germany, others at heart. Some are serving these commercial interests or personal interests. And there is—you mentioned state capture earlier when you were talking about the risk of being captured by foreign interests.

#Evarist Bartolo

Even internally.

#Speaker 5

But there are internal, you know, and I think that we need to introduce that dimension into the discussion. So I'm wondering if you could speak a bit to that angle as well.

#Evarist Bartolo

I can talk from experience because I was Foreign Affairs Minister when Malta was greylisted by FATF. So I am very much aware that, and this is where good leadership is important, not just the way you confront outside, but how you run your state. Small states cannot afford to be corrupt because it makes them weaker, and it is so easy for the EU Commission, for the Council of Europe, for FATF to come in and say, "You have to put your house in order." While we were greylisted, I remember two speeches by Janet Yellen saying, "If you want to launder money, you don't have to go to a faraway small island in the Pacific or in the Mediterranean."

Come to the United States, because we can do it very well for you. Has the United States ever been greylisted? Of course not. It's part of the economic coercion, is that they take the opportunity of weaknesses like this. So leaders have a duty not to allow themselves to weaken their state even further. I agree with you. I've been writing about internal capture of the state as well because I'm very worried that what we have managed to achieve in Malta is all reversible. It's all reversible. And I think the current level of leadership on, you know, both government and opposition is frightening at a time when we can have a very exciting new chapter.

Because now we know that naval bases and military bases have become obsolete. Thanks to Iran and thanks to drones and thanks to special missions, they have become obsolete. So Malta has now lost its purpose of serving as a... But we can still become used in the network. And I've seen it happening with NATO and Israeli people coming to Malta to make us part of the network in a different way. They don't need to send planes. They don't need to send warships. But I agree with you totally. That is why good governance is important for small states as well, not just how you relate. Because listen, if you are serious in the way you relate with outside, you are serious internally as well.

So you are a weak leader, both internally, and I think this is happening. And apart from that, what is worrying is, I think, one of the ways that Malta has been captured now, and this ties both to what happens internally and externally, is for the Americans to have told the Maltese government, "We don't care whether you're corrupt or not. Do what we tell you. Do what we tell you, and we won't greylist you again. We won't create any problems for you again." I think that's the only way I can explain that Maltese foreign minister signed for Trump to be given the Nobel Peace Prize. Imagine how Mintoff—not turn in the grave—I think he would have liked to resurrect himself and go and choke.

#Speaker 6

I have one brief question. As you know, the great German philosopher Immanuel Kant said that one of the most basic questions of human existence is, "What can we know?" And in your talk, you often refer to declassified documents. And every time I consult declassified documents, I often wonder, like, what can we know and what can we not know from declassified documents? I don't expect an extensive answer, but I just wanted to raise the question. What do you think?

#Evarist Bartolo

You have also to see them in context. But declassified documents can help you a lot, especially if they're coming from different sources. But in our case, we got to know things about our history from the classified documents. Otherwise, we wouldn't have known them. And the fact that you know them should help you face the future. But that, again, is not—we cannot take that for granted. You know, unfortunately, one thing we learn is that we do not learn from history, unfortunately. But I think they are important.

#Pascal

Thank you. And then a last question and comment, and then we go to the break.

#Speaker 7

Thank you. Thank you for a very enlightening lecture conversation. Just one thing I wanted to bring up, following what Alexander said and your comment about the will and inspiration and ambition of the aspirational nature of small states. I think one thing we—I mean, we're all here to celebrate this resistance of small states in a way as well. I mean, that's what neutrality is. But at the same time, I think we've got to be sort of on guard against the statesmen of these small states when they don't know the structural limits to the power of their states, and they sort of think about the nation-state as something that is sort of a right that's given by God. I mean, Israel does that all the time, but it happens along many other vectors, like the Baltic states that you mentioned. So the category of small states is very challenging.

Because the statesman needs to know something structural about, you know, Malta will never be, for example, as much as we can celebrate it, sort of a great power, right? But it can have a lot of options by being multi-aligned, by doing certain things to have that independence and sovereignty. And my worry is that by lionizing this idea of sort of—we all have this egalitarian modern mindset that all states are the same theoretically, perhaps, but they're not. And so I wonder how we can actually guard against that, right? Because a lot of the challenges that we have with the recolonization project of the United States actually ties into this Wilsonian small-state sovereignty, using these small states to destroy the great powers that create balance, or middle powers that create actual balance. So I'll just stop there.

#Evarist Bartolo

No, I agree with you completely. And this is being used. Small states, I think even including Malta and the Baltic states, are at the moment being used by the U.S. to weaken further the EU. I mean, if it needs any further weakening. But it's happening. So it's not automatic that we—I agree with you—not to romanticize small states, not to romanticize them at all. It depends on what they're doing concretely. And they can only do, if they are really committed, to nurture their sovereignty and the common good of the people. If they don't do that, we will be lost. We will be lost.

#Pascal

In that case, thank you very much, Everest, and thank you very much for the discussion. We are closing this first session.