Insider Reports: EU Getting DELUSIONAL about War with Russia | Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Current Member of the European Parliament, Michael von der Schulenburg, joins Pascal to discuss Europe's diplomatic impasse over Ukraine and Russia. Drawing on his United Nations experience, he argues that European leaders have trapped themselves in unrealistic war aims while Washington pursues withdrawal. They examine NATO, Ukrainian state fragility, divisions within Europe, and the risks of escalation. The conversation also explores Georgian neutrality and alternative channels for dialogue, including experienced independent figures who could reopen communication and help create practical opportunities for de-escalation and peace. Michael's Links: Website: https://michael-von-der-schulenburg.com YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/@MichaelvonderSchulenburgMEP 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 Europe's missing peace talks 01:54 Trump's approach and Europe's war aims 12:32 Inside the European Parliament 18:13 US withdrawal and Europe's negotiating dilemma 25:30 Ukraine, NATO and the danger of state collapse 29:21 Escalation risks and routes out of the impasse 45:55 Georgia and the neutrality debate 49:10 Opening alternative channels for peace

#Pascal

Welcome back, everybody, to Neutrality Studies. Today, we have an update with the wonderful Michael von der Schulenburg, a member of the European Parliament for the BSW party and a longtime high-ranking United Nations officer who's worked in conflict zones all around the world, including in Afghanistan on horseback and so on. He's somebody who really knows how to negotiate peace with all types of people. The absence of peace talks between Europe and Russia is what we're going to talk about today. Michael, welcome back. Thank you very much. Thank you.

Great having you. We really need to talk about why there is no real talk about peace. I mean, what we saw last week was that the Norwegian prime minister and the Finnish president actually called Vladimir Putin. And that's like the first time in many, many years that European leaders actually talked to the leader of Russia. But otherwise, there's absolutely nothing there. And even this initiative doesn't seem as if it's going anywhere. I would like to just ask you: can you maybe give me the genealogy of what happened? I think we should think about this moment.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

You know, I've done a lot of peace negotiations or ceasefire negotiations, all these types of things, but never on a scale as big as this war, which includes, of course, superpowers. That wasn't the case, but it's very similar. I would like to talk to you about why I think Europe today is as isolated as it is. It will have a huge impact on the future of the European Union, on NATO, and so on. We are now on the losing side. We don't know how to speak with the Russians. We will have no chance to talk to the Russians. But let me start with when things really went wrong for Europe—or, to be more precise, the European NATO states. It went wrong when Trump was elected. We knew that Trump, in November 2024, when he became president again, said he wanted to end this war.

He spoke about 24 hours, of course. It's not realistic, whatever. But somehow he has kept to the policy, with all the ups and downs, that he wants to withdraw the United States from the war in Ukraine. That's very clear. And this is not reversible. What the Europeans should have done at the time, you know, at the end of 2024, beginning of 2025, was jump on board, because this is a war on the European continent. And if anybody should have an interest in ending this war and talking to the Russians in order to end this war, it should be the Europeans. I mean, our economy depends on this, our security depends on this, and all the rest of it. But no, the Europeans became hardliners. You know, they even aligned with the neocons against Trump in Washington, you know, these people, and so on.

And, of course, with Zelensky. We used Zelensky to torpedo all the initiatives by Trump. You can say that many things were irrational or were not clearly worked out. But anyway, Trump's aim was very clear: to get out of this war. Trump stopped paying for the war. He didn't provide weapons anymore. The only thing they continued to do was provide intelligence through the CIA. But all the rest, not anymore. So I think there was a huge change. What did we do? I mean, what did the Europeans do? We set four conditions for talking to the Russians. And if you take these four conditions together, it means that we basically asked Russia to capitulate first, and only then would we want to talk to them.

We said Russia would have to withdraw from all territories, even including the Crimean Peninsula. It would have to accept reparation payments. It should accept a special court to judge Russian war criminals, as they call it. And fourth, there must be a prospect of Ukraine becoming a NATO member. That is a demand for capitulation. But it ignores the realities on the battlefield. And that's what we do to this day. So I think we are now in a situation where, until recently, we still thought we were winning the war. The latest example was on the 26th of July, when Mrs. von der Leyen went to Kiev and made a big announcement that the war had now turned and Ukraine now had the initiative. Russia might have only six months left to continue the war, and it would all collapse—the economy would collapse, and so on.

So we thought, in what we call our strategy—I would call it only wishful thinking—we said, okay, Europe is much larger, with more people, a bigger economy, and more technology. Taken together, we have more armies than the Russians. So we will win. Over time, we will win. We will wear Russia down. We will break up Russia. There was even a resolution adopted by a majority in the EU

Parliament in 2024 calling for the dismantling of Russia into separate states. I mean, we were so confident that we would win this that we did all these types of things. And, you know, we said we would smash them economically with our sanctions and use our wonder weapons, like drones. And now it's all changed.

None of those things happened. I think we now suddenly realize that we are actually losing the war. We don't say it yet, but we realize it. And since September, the language has changed. For the first time, we say that we seek a ceasefire. We say we want to have an unconditional ceasefire. Now, when someone says something to me like "an unconditional ceasefire," I can only laugh, because a ceasefire is never unconditional. There are always conditions attached to it. To get a ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq War, in which maybe one million people died—I mean, a big war—the UN negotiations went on for three years. I mean, a ceasefire basically determines the winner and loser, or at least what the balance of power is afterwards.

It's not something you switch on and suddenly have electric light in your room. So I think this explains how unprofessional the Europeans are. Now, what we did then with the Americans was say we would prepare a joint U.S.-European proposal. First, we negotiated in Miami. The Ukrainians were present, but they left these negotiations early because they were upset about the deal with Trump. So they left in protest. Then the whole discussion moved to Oslo. We met in Oslo. Zelensky also came, and we came up with a proposal. We don't know exactly what's in it. And then comes this very sad thing: not a single European went to Moscow. Witkoff, the American, had to present it.

And if you look at these discussions, at least one thing is absolutely sure: I think it was finished in 10 minutes, and they didn't discuss it because it's simply unrealistic. And if we believe what was in the Financial Times about it, we said, "If you give up on these two cities in the Donbas, Ukraine would not become a member of NATO, at least for the time being." For the time being—not an agreement. "But if you do that, then we will take it immediately." It's completely silly. And I was wondering whether I should believe these sorts of stories because they were only in the newspaper. And I think I believe it, actually, because that's exactly how the Europeans think. That's exactly how we think.

#Pascal

Hey guys, Autumn Spirit is here, and we've launched our new merch. For instance, the monster from our Kilt Symposium has arrived on T-shirts, tumblers, and magnets. The little fella is really cute. Check it out. Any purchase helps us directly to keep the lights on. So thanks a lot, and see you soon.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Why?

#Pascal

Where is this insane level of confidence coming from? I mean, the Europeans still speak to and about Russia as though they had already vanquished the Russian armies and so on. I mean, the rhetoric is in no way, shape, or form in line with what is actually happening on the battlefield, with what has actually happened over the last four and a half years. And if they spoke like this back in 2022, in March, April, or May, I would still understand it because you could have the expectation that... Yeah, but after the...

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

The offensive in 2023 failed, with all the support from US generals and all these things. I mean, it was basically a Western-organized thing. You know, we might have realized that this war is not going to end in a victory for the West or for Ukraine. Actually, it's about whether NATO wins or not. Ukraine's only role in this is to shed its blood. Nobody in the EU or elsewhere is interested in Ukraine. So we now have a situation that has turned out exactly the opposite of what we expected. We thought it was a drone war. There would be upheaval in Russia. The economy would go down. People would protest against Putin because they were tired of the war. The opposite has happened.

I think we proved to the Russians how dangerous it would be if Ukraine became a NATO member, because then these things would not only be drones. If you shoot from there deep into Russia, Russia sees that as an existential threat, whether we agree with it or not. Their position is: "We cannot allow Ukraine to become a NATO member or be militarily beefed up by NATO with rockets and all these types of things. It is too dangerous for us. We have to win this war." And they will win this war now. For us, things like this look very different. You know, in our calculation that we would break Russia, we forget that the essential point is Ukraine.

You know, this whole strategy depends on Ukraine beating Russia militarily. It's Ukrainian soldiers. It's a Ukrainian battlefield. And what we have now is a Ukraine that is definitely sliding into a failed state. I mean, if I use the UN's definition of a failed state, I would say that you can see a lot of those elements in Ukraine. I say it with great sorrow, great sorrow. You know, these Ukrainians have not deserved this. The number of people killed, the decline in the population, the declining control over the country, the huge numbers of desertions—I mean, these are all signs of a failed state. And then you have the security services actually battling for control in Kyiv, even with rockets.

And then we have Trump, who now says Zelensky has to go. I mean, what authority does this man have? And Zelensky is now going back, and he will not get the $70 billion. So it's a country without money, where things are failing. It's really in terrible, terrible shape. And we in Europe still want to continue this policy. You know, Pascal, this will have consequences for us. I think the future of NATO and the future of the European Union are at stake here. It's at stake. I cannot see how the European Union can survive. I'm not anti-EU. I mean, I'm not one of those. But what we're doing now—von der Leyen and the others—it is unbelievable. I mean, we're basically committing suicide here.

#Pascal

Yeah. No, I see it just like you do. And the irony of it is going to be that maybe, at the end of the process, you know, the European Union will break up over Russia. Yes. You know, what still strikes me as so difficult to understand is: why is it that all of these leaders inside the European Union—and actually, not just the leaders, but also the parliamentarians—are like this? You told me more than once that you are one of a handful of people who are in favor of talks with Russia in the entire EU Parliament. And this is, like, what, 700 people? And only 20, sometimes only 10 people vote against these types of things. I mean, where is that conviction coming from that you can do it? Not just that you want to, but that you can. Because there seems to be this detachment from reality that goes beyond just a couple of people—you know, Ursula and Kaja Kallas and Macron and Merz, right? It's not just these people. It's the entire political setup of the European Union that, to me, seems dead set on going this route.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

I have no answer to this one. It is a denial of reality. You know, the other day, I went into the parking lot in the evening. There weren't many people there. A huge Mercedes was parked just in front of me. And a woman came out with a handbag that had SPD, Socialist Party of Germany, written on it. We were both Germans. She refused even to say hello to me. I mean, we went in the same elevator. She pretended that I wasn't there. I mean, I'm not for a war. I don't want to kill anybody. I'm basically standing up for the UN Charter, saying that we have to negotiate. And she, from the socialists, doesn't want to talk to me. She refuses even to say hello to me. This is the atmosphere in the European Parliament.

I think it says a lot about this European Parliament. I think the European Parliament is completely irrelevant. Luckily, I mean, these decisions don't matter. It is in a bubble. It is a huge complex of buildings. It's extremely well financed, and these deputies are extremely well paid. If I compare it to the United Nations, it's unbelievable how much money is thrown at us. It is very politicized. You know, people like us would not get the information. We would be kept out. We would not be allowed to speak in many cases. So there is this whole thing. And, you know, in the end, we actually risk our communities being wiped out by the attitude we take.

#Pascal

So, I mean, I'm sorry to say that, but the European Parliament and a couple of these other places strike me as political theater. It's what you do to put on a show of democracy, whereas the actual decisions are taken in completely different chambers. And I don't know who makes them. Who decides that the 27 European countries will take a certain course and not another one?

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

But don't forget, this war was intended to turn Russia into a small state, a regional power, you know, to limit its potential because it had huge economic growth and all the rest of that. We didn't want Russia to be one of the superpowers. The European Union should be the superpower. That's the whole idea von der Leyen has expressed, especially among the Germans, you know, that the European Union should expand further.

I mean, it should go from the Black Sea to the Atlantic, from the Mediterranean to the North Pole. I mean, that should all be the European Union, and more and more decisions should be taken at the center and by majority voting so we can actually act. And she takes over a lot of competences that are not foreseen in the treaty. I mean, I think she will fall over this in the end. But we wanted to have the superstate. And if you see how Mrs. von der Leyen stands in front of the Parliament and gives a State of the Union address—I mean, von der Leyen is the president of an administration. I mean, the Commission is an implementer. It's not a state. It's not at all. But she comes there, and not Costa, for instance. She comes there and talks as if she is the president of the United States of Europe.

Unbelievable things. And many states will not like that. They will not say anything because of all the trouble. But she is setting herself up for a downfall with all these types of things. And, you know, for instance, when the Canadian prime minister was there, she told him—he was probably not even aware—"We want to make you our first associate member of the European Union." I mean, she has no right to do this. In addition, associate membership is not foreseen in any of the treaties. So we would need a change to the treaties. But she has never addressed the member states. She has addressed the Parliament, where she knows she has a majority to help her make this a reality.

#Pascal

Let me give you this interpretation, Michael: she doesn't have the right to do that, but she has the power. Power is not based on rights. Power is based on the ability to do something. She has the ability to stand in front of the cameras, announce this, and survive it, even if it doesn't become a reality.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

She has the ignorance and arrogance to do that. But in the end, she doesn't have the power to do it.

#Pascal

But she's still there.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Nobody is trying to get rid of her. Ms. Kallas has hardly anything to say in foreign policy anymore. I mean, she's hardly invited anymore. Let me just say something about the United States, which is very important. You know, I've done this for 34 years and had a lot to do with the United States. Usually, countries that are at war don't talk to each other. That's the big thing the UN does, you know: to make them talk to each other. With one exception: when they want to withdraw. And this is exactly what we want. You know, when we look at the United States' various wars—Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, for instance—let's only take these three. The United States started talking to the North Vietnamese when they wanted to withdraw. And what we signed in Paris was a peace agreement. It wasn't a peace agreement.

It was an agreement with the other side that would allow the United States to withdraw from the conflict without losing too much face. That was all it was. And de facto, the United States had, with this agreement, handed over victory to North Vietnam. That's what it was. And in Afghanistan, it was the same thing. They agreed on a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan. I know Khalilzad, who did it. I think he was very capable in what he did at the time. Biden sort of screwed this up in the end. He didn't even tell the other Western allies. They just wanted to withdraw. And what did they do? They handed over victory to the Taliban. When you look at Iraq, they have now withdrawn all the soldiers during the time they had the conflict with Iran. But you know what really happened there?

Iraq is now dominated by Shiite forces. It's exactly what they didn't want to happen when they invaded. They didn't want Iran to have a Shiite ally on the other side. They didn't want that because of the threat this poses to Israel. And now we have withdrawn, and we have handed over the country to people we didn't want in power. This is what the United States does. And I tell you, in Ukraine, we are doing the same. We are negotiating. Don't forget, these negotiations sometimes took five years. Now we are negotiating with Russia, and we continue to withdraw. And basically, what I think the United States is doing, de facto at least, is handing over victory in Ukraine to the Russians. That's what's going to happen. And the Europeans have nothing to say in this whole thing.

Let me say a few things about the Europeans. Europe cannot negotiate. The first reason is that they could not agree on a negotiation strategy. Should they agree on this among the 27, the E5, or the E3? They would never agree on this. So they could not agree on who should be the chief negotiator either. And we could not give this chief negotiator the necessary flexibility to negotiate peace because, you know, in peace negotiations, you need a lot of flexibility. We could never agree on that. But even if we agreed, Pascal, we would face the next problem. What do we want to negotiate? All our newspapers still start with “Russia’s unprovoked war of aggression.” And we imply by this that this is a war about territory, that Putin invaded because he wanted to make Russia a bigger Soviet Union and all the rest of it.

But if we negotiate, we have to accept that the war is about security, not about territory. And by accepting that the war is about NATO expansion, in other words, we also accept the blame for this

war. You know, when you say Russia invaded because they have these big ideas of wanting to expand up to Berlin or whatever—but if we say it's NATO, then suddenly, why didn't we know this shit before? We go even one step further: the only solution we will have, which the Europeans would also have to agree to, is the neutrality of Ukraine, because they will now negotiate as losers. In these negotiations, they sit at the table as losers. They will have to accept the neutrality of Ukraine. If they do that, the next question would be: why have we not agreed to this before?

We didn't need this war. That's what the Russians asked for before. That's what they did in the peace negotiations with Ukraine in April 2022. So suddenly, we would have a result we could have had before. All these millions of people would not have had to be killed or maimed for life. All this destruction would not have been necessary. Suddenly, at the end of these negotiations, we would even say that this actually justifies Russia's intervention. It justifies it because they got the result they wanted to have before. So we will have a situation where the war is squarely blamed on us. And this is something our leaders could not accept, but they would have to accept if they started to negotiate. For America, it's very different.

America just withdraws and leaves these types of negotiations to the Europeans because they don't want to be in the same situation. So it's just perfect. And Europeans—I don't like these strong words, but we are so stupid, so utterly stupid, you know, that we want it. We have no leadership in Europe. We have no leadership. There are no statesmen anymore among them. You know, there's this film about de Gaulle. I have not seen it yet, but many people are watching it. We have this desire in Europe for a statesman. Not that I was necessarily a de Gaulle fan, but at least he was a statesman. What we have now is this little Macron. I mean, his wife—what's her name? Brigitte?—would be a better president than him. You know, it's unbelievable. I mean, all the things he says.

#Pascal

But, you know, the interesting thing is that, again, we are at this point in European history where a war is being fought on European soil that is essentially about the interpretation of reality. Because we have two interpretations of what this war is about, and one of them is about to lose. And those who hold it are clinging to their own interpretation until their very deathbed, right? And we've seen that so many times. I mean, had Hitler won the Second World War, we would remember the Second World War as this liberation from communism by the valiant forces of Germany, right? That's what we would remember. It just happens time and time again. And the question is how to surrender, right? So, how to surrender your claim to reality so that the other interpretation can take over and you can reestablish a common framework, a common narrative about what this thing is, what the future can be about.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

But you know, politics is about reality. If you deny reality, you're on the losing side because you make the wrong decisions.

#Pascal

You have to accept what is.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

You have to accept that Russia has won this war. Yeah. And that you can never, never win this war. And we can never break up Russia as we planned in a resolution of the European Parliament. I mean, the European Parliament and things like that. So I think we're in a really very, very, very difficult situation with this whole thing. But that's just me.

#Pascal

Can I give you one more interpretation of mine, which is that had Ukraine been a NATO member, this war wouldn't have been possible? And as long as the Americans are inside Europe in NATO, it won't be possible to have an all-out war with Russia. I mean, the point is, this war is possible precisely because Ukraine is a partner but not a member. Therefore, you can fight a proxy war with the Russians without dragging in the whole of NATO, right?

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

But also for Russia, it was a decisive thing. They had to do it at this time because, you know, I think it was in November that the Americans signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement, which was very similar to becoming a member of NATO. I mean, they could not wait until Ukraine became part of NATO. So they had to do it before. And that's what's going to happen. I don't think that Russia will ever occupy the whole country, or even Kiev. But they might take Odessa, and then we have the problem of a failed state. You know, I have seen failed states. I have seen how that happens, you know. Suddenly there's an implosion of state authority, but that doesn't mean that there's no authority. In all these states, it's militias that run the state.

I mean, even in Syria, they made one of the militia leaders the president. I mean, this is a militia leader. He's not a president. You know, I mean, in Somalia, I've seen it. In Libya, I haven't seen it. I wasn't there. But it's always militias, and there are lots of militias in Ukraine. And they are very unsavory militias, you know, nationalist, whatever you want to call them. You know, this would be a terrible thing. And, you know, I remember the talk the Minister of Social Affairs of Ukraine gave, I think in May of this year, where he said, you know, we now have less than half the population we had before. Those who remain are either pensioners or people who have been injured in the war. And he says, you know, if this war ends, more people will leave.

That means we will have a new Ukraine, which is basically depopulated, but it has lots of weapons and a lot of people who want to make money with these weapons because it's the only thing they can do, because there's no other industry. So this is a problem. It's not so much a problem for

Russia, but for us. We will have them in our countries, coming here, back and forth. We won't be able to distinguish anymore who's a genuine refugee whom we have to help and who the others are, because it's so interwoven. We will have huge, huge, huge problems, also financial problems, in the future with this one. We really have set ourselves up for failure, for a massive failure in Europe. And this is not the only thing, Pascal.

Don't forget, when you compare Europe with the United States, China or Russia, most of the wars in the world are in our neighborhood. And all these wars are lost by people we actually feel closer to, like Israel, you know, in the Middle East or whatever. It is a frightening thing. Now we have this war in Sudan, with enormous killings there. We have these wars in Africa. We have Africa very soon being ten times the population of the EU. Nigeria alone will have a larger population than the European Union. It would create enormous demographic pressures, and we have no answers to any of these things, none whatsoever, except Kallas, who constantly criticizes other people for having telephoned and having said the wrong thing. She's just obsessed with this type of thing, but obsession is not a policy.

#Pascal

Obsession is not a way of leading any kind of place. But what do you think is the motivation, actually? I mean, okay, on the one hand, you want to avoid admitting that you were wrong. Yes, sure. But on the other hand, it seems to me that the drums of war in Europe are not getting any quieter, right? On the contrary, they're getting louder and louder. And I am almost certain there are people who would be willing to expand the war to European territory. I mean, listen to how they talk in the European Parliament.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

I mean, what they suggest is basically turning it into a European war. Really, it was so aggressive. I gave a one-minute speech there. The others were so aggressive, including those on the left, that I thought maybe I'd better not speak. I mean, I felt really frightened. And that's in the Parliament. So we have a group of people who've never seen a war. I've at least seen war. I know what it is. We don't like it, yet we wage war. And here, too, there's a loss of realism. Europe cannot fight Russia. We don't have the capacity for this. And, you know, the lucky thing is that Trump is not on our side in this one. That's a lucky thing. Whatever we think about Trump, on this one, I'm grateful he's not on our side.

And all we can do is provoke. We can provoke over Kaliningrad. We can provoke in the Baltic Sea, in the Black Sea, whatever. We can make all sorts of allegations of hybrid warfare and things like that, true or not. But we can't do more than that, really. You know, we are at the end, but that doesn't mean that it couldn't turn into a war, because we are silly enough to do this. I mean, we have just had maneuvers of the Coalition of the Willing in Poland. In Poland! Haven't they looked at the war in the Gulf—I mean, the current war with Iran, where it took 10 days to knock out all the military bases

of the United States because they were within range of these strikes? I mean, don't you realize that this will happen there too?

#Pascal

But this means we are in a situation where people who don't know war and who are highly ideological are in positions to actually decide and maybe push everybody else into wars that they then have to fight, just as the Ukrainians had to fight while the Europeans could sit back, indulge in their grand rhetoric, and feel like Winston Churchill, despite the fact that Churchill himself was a goddamn monster. But they did want to feel like him. The guy killed millions of people.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

But these people, you know, Macron is a little schoolboy. I mean, he's probably still the same as he was in school, you know, the good student.

#Pascal

I mean, I cannot take him seriously when I hear him talking. But Europe really is locked in. I mean, Europe, on its own, with the way politics works on the continent, cannot extract itself from that, because the best thing we can hope for is that we don't go to war with Russia.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

No, this European Union has these so-called common policies, which we don't really have. It's like having put a rope around our necks. We cannot move anymore. If we make any move, we might fall and hang ourselves. This is a terrible situation, a terrible, terrible situation. Our governments are unable to find a solution for the time being, and that is very dangerous. We also shouldn't forget that we have not only insecurity from outside—all these wars, especially the war on the European continent—but now, increasingly, security issues on the inside as well. You know, we have right-wing parties that are now winning elections.

I mean, it’s not in Russia that we now have street battles. It’s in Europe, and it’s only starting. My guess is that there will be more. So we have a lot of insecurity inside, and we have no way of responding to this. There is no one who says, “We have to change our policy. We have to do something. We first have to bring peace to Europe in order to solve all the other things.” And if we want to have peace in Europe, we have to speak to the Russians. But we can’t. Witkoff went alone. Not one person accompanied him. And we have the telephone calls from Stubb and Støre, which were, I think, absolutely what you should do.

Absolutely. I mean, they all jump on them and criticize them and things like this. But, you know, how wrong can you go on these policies? And don't forget, these are policies that will decide our

survival. We're talking here potentially about a war that could turn nuclear. So it's not a small issue of talking about whether diesel should be allowed or not allowed. Of course, that's also a big issue. But we're talking here about war in a world where we have these very fast rockets and an abundance of nuclear arms that could destroy us all. I mean, we should take it seriously.

#Pascal

No, we should. But you know what? The reason they are so angry at Stubb and the Norwegian prime minister is that that's actually a way out, right? I don't think we can solve this at the European Union level. But if any one of the member states actually started talking to the Russians individually, well, you could circumvent the entire thing because, on paper, the member states are still sovereign, right? Even if the EU kind of supersedes them when it comes to regulations. So the way out is probably by empowering politicians on the ground or the member states. Foreign and security policy are clearly national competencies.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

What we have in the EU is only coordination. And that's also why, you know, Kallas and von der Leyen can't really speak up anymore or play a role in foreign policy. But I think the others can't either. Can you imagine Germany now taking the lead in talking to the Russians? I mean, the British would get mad because, for the UK, anything between Germany and Russia is a threat, because they are an island in the Atlantic. That's what their policy has been since the Crimean War, and it is still their policy today. Because, you see, the interesting thing is that Germany would probably be the country that would gain the most by talking to the Russians—not France and not the UK. But we can't do it. In the end, Jeff, if we don't have a war, national interests will prevail.

They will always prevail in the end. These ideologies we have now will not prevail. It will come. And, you know, the success of the AfD is largely due to their peace policies. I mean, the fact that they are at 40% and things like this has something to do with their saying, "No more weapons for Ukraine. We have to negotiate. We have to buy our oil from Russia," and all that type of thing. I mean, they say all these things, and it's quite popular. So, in Germany, we probably have one of the most aggressive governments with Merz, but we also probably have the strongest peace policy. And we'll talk to you next time about what we want to do with this.

#Pascal

It's very interesting.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

And that has something to do with our experiences with the division between East and West and things like that. It's very, very interesting. And there is hope in this whole thing. But it would, of course, break the European Union.

#Pascal

Yeah, but if that's necessary to maintain peace, then that's exactly what we should do any time of the day. Because the question to me is whether there is a way of helping peace break out despite and against the wishes of those at the EU level. So what can we do at the lower levels—and that might include civil society—in order to help bring about the inevitable peace between Russia and Europe, right? How do we make it so that these people at the top, Kaja Kallas and von der Leyen and the others, can run and scream and yell and shout, but it won't change the fact that we are moving toward peace? So, to change the course of the ship...

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Absolutely. I have no idea. Let me just say one more thing. You know, in all the articles I write, I never criticize the Ukrainians, not even Zelensky, because I think they are victims. They are victims of our desire to break Russia into smaller pieces, making it weak so that we are strong. And we misuse the Ukrainians for this, with a lot of bloodletting and things like this. We need to negotiate with Russia also, to say that ensuring Ukraine survives as a sovereign, functioning state is our joint responsibility—Russia's and Germany's. Now you make it a contradiction. We have to come to this understanding because we cannot leave such a large country in Europe to decline and become a failed state. It would be a disaster, first of all for the Ukrainians, but also for us.

#Pascal

There was a prediction by a colleague who was actually with us in Tbilisi a while ago, Nikolai Petro. He said the turning point inside Ukraine will come when the ultra-nationalists—and I'm not going to use the other word that you can use to describe them—start to understand that the very survival of the Ukrainian state is now at stake. Once the threat to Ukraine is so large that Ukraine itself might perish and vanish from the map, that's the moment when these people will actually switch and say, "Maybe we need to negotiate with Russia." And that might be the moment when one could help the victim escape total destruction. How do you see that?

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Yeah, when you look at the last elections in which the Svoboda party, which sort of represented them, participated, they got 8%. The Ukrainians are not fascists. They're not nationalists.

#Pascal

No, they are not. But the problem is that they have a monopoly on violence. They have the weapons, and they will kill anyone who tries to...

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

They're not sent to the front line. They would fail there miserably. And this is also a way of cutting them down. This is a huge problem. It's a problem, unfortunately, we have helped to create. We have helped to finance these Azov brigades. We have helped to arm them by covering for them, saying that they're part of the army and things like that. And we also have to help solve this. We have to say, no, we don't want special praise for all these leaders from fascist times and things like that. We don't stand in solidarity with them. I mean, there is a problem we have to deal with. In this case, Putin is right. We also have to deal with this problem.

#Pascal

Yeah, no, we do, we do. It's just a question, to me, of how to unblock the process, right? Because the Europeans are really, really great at the moment at blocking any and all avenues. Whenever Trump actually tries to do something, they immediately team up with the hawks in the US, and they block him on all levels. Plus, one more level of complexity is that we now, of course, know that this entire war, from the NATO or American side, is run by the CIA, which is why we have Mr. Ratcliffe in Moscow. I mean, the CIA plays such a dirty game in this entire affair. And the CIA is essentially not under the control of the executive branch of the United States.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

No, you know, you see, the CIA has been working since 2004 to bring Ukraine into the Western realm. I mean, people work there who have spent their entire careers on this. It's very difficult for them to give up. But I think, in the end, their national interest will also come into play. And there's one issue that might have an impact on this: the recent meeting in Montreal between the EU and the Canadians, where the issue came up of whether to gang up—I would use the words "gang up"—with Carney, who wants these middle powers to become a superpower, you know, which is clearly directed against the United States. I can understand that because the United States wants to absorb Canada. I understand it, but is it good for the European Union to gang up with him on such an issue?

I tell you, it's not reported on much, but it will have a huge influence on both Democrats and Republicans that the Europeans suddenly arrive right on their doorstep and do something that is not in U.S. interests. And this is typical of the failure of the alliance. I mean, it will not happen—there's no ASEAN member—but, I mean, it's all there. And I think it will have an impact on this. You know, the Europeans are becoming a problem for the Americans. Whether that's right or wrong is another thing, but it's becoming a problem. I think that the split between us is so deep now that it will not be

repaired, not even in the next administration. Actually, that's what we always hope: we have to get through the Trump years, and then everything will be back to normal, or what we consider normal. It will not happen.

#Pascal

Of course not.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

And Biden—look, Biden was responsible for this war. No, no, no. He puts himself in a position to say that the referendum was rigged by the Russians. He had, in the meantime, put it back, no? And he wants to become a member of the European Union. The UK will not become a member of the European Union because there are many other states that don't want it anymore. And there will be a lot of internal problems. So he has set himself up for failure. But saying this also means that he admits that the special relationship between Great Britain and the United States is finished. It's finished. The UK has no special relationship anymore.

And it is a small state that doesn't have a navy, that doesn't have an army, and that pretends it's giving $10 billion to Ukraine—money they don't have because they're in a very dire financial situation. So I think that it's one further step toward the UK falling apart. There was recently a meeting in Wales between the prime ministers of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. And you know what they agreed on? All three agreed that their ultimate goal is to leave the United Kingdom. We should not forget this. We should not forget this. England is falling over its own internal arrogance, thinking that it can still be an international player in international politics. And over this one, they might break up.

#Pascal

So we are looking at a scenario where the EU might break up, where the UK might break up, and all of this is coming on the back of the attempt to break up Russia. I mean, you know, history often writes these ironies all by itself. This would just be another one. But, you know, Pascal, it's almost no longer a question of what happens.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

It's all happening. It is all already happening. It's not something that might happen in the future. It's happening. It's happening. You know, I have four children and five grandchildren. In French, we say "small children." You know, I'm thinking in French. And I'll probably have four more very soon. I mean, I'm concerned about the future. We are living in Europe. I'm a European. I'm a German. I'm not saying I'm not. I'm not trying to defend Russia's position. What I'm trying to defend is the idea that we should accept reality and pursue a policy that guarantees us a future and gives Europe some

sort of prospect in a multipolar world, where we are no longer the big players but where we can still have an important role.

#Pascal

One more question. I'm leaving tomorrow to go back to Tbilisi, Georgia, because there's a party there now.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

I'll tell them. Sorry? There's a street named after my family, Schulenburg Street, in Tbilisi.

#Pascal

I don't even know. I don't even know. I'll find out. But the question is, they now have a neutrality party. This neutrality party is now rallying support inside Georgia to gain seats in parliament. And the only thing they want to do is declare Georgian neutrality and kind of change the article in their constitution about joining NATO. That's what they want to do. And my question to you is, if Russia starts saying this is a good idea—that neutrality for Georgia could basically function as a model for neutrality for Ukraine—is that a way forward or not? No. No.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

I would keep my fingers out of it. I think trying to promote such a thing now is premature. I mean, you have a government there in Georgia that says our relationship with Russia is so important that we cannot pursue the policies of the European Union and the Russians. You know, when we flew from there to Moscow, these planes were packed. And they have, I think, five planes per day, going back and forth. I mean, the old relationship is still there. It just happens.

So I would say, because it's a small state, I would not bring this into the political arena and therefore make it more vulnerable. You know, when we say, "Oh, Russia wants to take over there," I think the best thing is to leave these developments as they are. They are de facto. They are not going to be a member of the European Union. They are not going to be a member of NATO. And that's a good thing. And I think we should just leave it there. We would make life more difficult for the current prime minister with this type of thing. So I would not participate in these neutrality things. I'm sorry.

#Pascal

That's okay. That's okay. That's why I am.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

I'm all for neutrality. Don't forget it. I'm just saying it's not politically opportune at this time.

#Pascal

No, I understand. But that's why it's good that we have different roles, right? Different people do different kinds of initiatives, and you see where they can go. But I will definitely circle back to you to ask for your opinion on how to help the process.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Maybe a lot of you go there. My heart is with Georgia because my great-grandmother comes from Georgia. That's why I'm looking a little bit more reddish here. Yeah, yeah, yeah. We have a relationship there. And as I said, we have to remember that one of the first ambassadors to Georgia after independence was a Schoenberg, and that's why they have a street there.

#Pascal

Well, you know, all of you are all over the place. The question is, how do we keep the peace? Because the connections are there. The connections are not the problem. But, you know, to make peace, connections are very important.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Peace is, in the end, made between states and ultimately among people.

#Pascal

Yeah. That's a beautiful way to end the discussion, actually. Is there anything on your mind that you would still like to share, or shall we call it a day?

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

I mean, only that we discuss with Russia how we can maybe open an avenue for talks. And next time, I hope you invite me again, and we can talk about this because it would be very important. And it cannot be the government. The government cannot do it, even if they wanted to. So we have to find an alternative way. And I have a lot of experience in the UN, of course, because when you go into a country at war on behalf of the UN, you have to do two things. It's very simple, really. First of all, you have to try to get these two sides to talk to each other. And the second thing is that the talks have to be organized in such a way that they have a positive outcome. That's not guaranteed, you know. The talks could even make things worse.

But in reality, this is very difficult. And you will see, I have written about these things, and that's what we try to do. There are two ways of doing it. One is to have an intermediary, a negotiator in

between. It will not happen here because four of the five permanent members are involved in this war. They will not allow this. But there is what we call the "graybeards," you know, people who have a certain standing in both countries, who start talking to each other—not in an aggressive way, not accusing any of the governments, but just saying, you know, "We suggest we take certain steps toward de-escalation," blah, blah, blah. And I think that's now very, very important. So next time, we can maybe talk about such a thing.

#Pascal

No, we can and we will. We definitely will, because we are at the point where all of us need to look for ways to sidestep the big boys on top in Brussels and find ways around them. Because, you know, one thing I've learned in IT, where I worked for a couple of years, is that if there's a bug in a system, there are always two ways of solving it. One is by resolving the bug. It goes away, and you have a straight path. The other is to create a workaround. You leave the bug where it is, but you work in a way that gets you to the desired result. I'm talking about going around it. Let's go around it. Michael von der Schulenburg, thank you so much for your time today.

#Michael v.d. Schulenburg

Okay, thank you. Bye-bye.