

Spirals: The Ukraine War and the Toppling of the World

Hello, welcome, everybody. I am **Anatol Lieven**, Director of the Eurasia Program at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft. It is a great pleasure and honour today to speak with **Dr. Pierre Lellouche**, a leading French conservative politician and thinker.

Before we begin, I would like to briefly introduce the **Quincy Institute**. For those who are not familiar with us, we are a relatively new think tank in Washington, D.C., founded five years ago. Our mission is to advocate for restraint in U.S. foreign policy, to avoid international adventurism, and to promote international cooperation wherever possible.

Pierre, welcome, and thank you for coming. Pierre Lellouche served as Secretary of State for European Affairs and later for Foreign Trade in the French Foreign Ministry from 2009 to 2012. He was elected five times as a French parliamentary deputy and served as France's Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

He is the author of numerous distinguished books, the latest of which I hope will soon be available in English¹: *La Guerre d'Ukraine*, which I believe is best translated as *Spirals: The Ukraine War and the Toppling of the World*, published in November last year.

So, Pierre, welcome again. I'm very glad to have you here, especially at this moment when U.S.-European relations have taken a drastically new turn since the Munich Security Conference.

I would like to ask: how has this new policy, and the speeches of members of the Trump administration, been received in France? How has the French establishment, the media, and the public reacted?

¹ Ask your copy, En version : message@pierrelellouche.fr

Pierre Lellouche

It's really the equivalent of an atomic bomb. It has blown up the entire European system. People are in shock—they are lost. Public opinion is confused and worried; they don't really understand what's happening.

As for the elites, the governments, they seem like rabbits caught in headlights. You know, when you drive at night and see rabbits frozen in the road—they don't know what to do or where to go. I don't think they grasp the fundamental shift taking place.

This is a complete 180-degree turn in traditional U.S. policy. For 80 years, Russia was presented as the enemy, while the U.S., as the "big brother," ensured security, allowing Europe to focus on economics and building the European Union. All of that is now gone. The security foundation that made the EU possible has vanished. Trump denounces Zelensky as a problem, even a dictator. The rhetoric today is astonishing.

Then you have Mr. Vance, who is very smart and capable, coming to lecture an entire group in Munich—senior experts, journalists, politicians. They were in a state of shock. They realized they had been neglecting public opinion, which, by the way, is true. They don't listen to their people. Instead, they focus on organizing ideological and electoral blocs to keep out those they don't like.

Much of what Vance said rang true for many Europeans. But, of course, the elite closed ranks and claimed this was an unacceptable interference in their internal affairs. His words were poorly received in Germany, in France, and elsewhere.

And then, it all happened in a very short period of time. If you think about it, it has been less than a month since the new president's inauguration. He spoke with Putin on February 12. Six days later, his negotiators were in Riyadh talking to the Russians. And in between, over the weekend, Vance was lecturing the Europeans. Then, they learned that even if the Europeans wanted to support Ukraine militarily, the U.S. would not be there—it would be outside Article 5, and so on.

So, it was a wave of incredible news that hit these governments, which had been quietly following Biden for years. And what is astonishing is that the rhetoric remains unchanged. Today, it was announced that we are adopting our 16th block of sanctions against Russia. We continue to use the same language: No peace unless Ukraine decides on peace. No ceasefire. A ceasefire is not enough. We want to be part of the negotiation. But the tragedy is that the Americans don't even bother to listen.

There will be no place for the Europeans, nor for the Ukrainians. The two sides—the Americans and the Russians—are saying, No, you don't get a seat at the table. And European leaders have no way to impose their presence. They have no leverage. It's like a poker game where they have zero chips—nothing to bargain with.

And it's even worse than that. In fact, they are highly dependent on customs and trade pressure because, as you know, Europe has developed a significant trade surplus.

So, Trump can pressure European leaders on the trade surplus. And we are totally dependent on the American tech industry—it's all controlled by the U.S. The degree of dependency is enormous, and the margin of maneuver is very small.

Today, there was an announcement from the French president stating that we would look at increasing our defense efforts. They've been talking about rearmament, European defense, European sovereignty, and European strategic autonomy. But for three years, nothing has happened—not a single cent, not any serious increase in defense spending.

In the middle of a war, with Russia invading Ukraine, no decision was taken. And now, the same people are suddenly saying, *We will do it*.

My sense is that, knowing them, they will try to cling to what's left of NATO and probably won't do much. Their options are very limited.

Madame von der Leyen is going to propose some kind of technical gimmick to allow defense spending. Did you know that European banks, under what they call *taxonomy* in Brussels—a barbaric name—are prohibited from investing in what is considered harmful? And what's deemed harmful? Oil, gas, and weapons manufacturing. So, believe it or not, European banks cannot finance the weapons industry. As a result, we have no weapons. She may try to change that.

The French, who have absolutely no money but a massive pile of debt, are now asking for a special military fund to allow a minimal increase in defense spending. But we are paying for 30 years of unilateral budget disarmament. Stocks are at a bare minimum in England, Germany, and France—not to mention Italy and Spain, where the situation is even worse.

By the time the money is allocated and forces are rebuilt, it will take at least five years. And during those five years, it will be very difficult for Europe to influence decisions being made over its head by the U.S. and Russia.

This is a tragic moment—a historical turning point—and it is also extremely dangerous. After the ceasefire, Ukraine will be highly unstable, with many refusing to accept the truce. Politically, the situation will be fragile. Zelensky will be threatened in the presidential election—if there even is one. Economically, the country will be devastated, with many cities completely ruined. Rebuilding Ukraine will be an enormous challenge.

And let's not forget: Madame von der Leyen promised Ukraine a fast-track entry into the EU. This is now an immediate concern—a tremendous challenge. And unfortunately, Anatol, I do not see any Churchill or de Gaulle to lead us through this crisis—only very weak politicians.

The German Chancellor will visit next week. The British Prime Minister is struggling. The French President is a lame duck, extremely weak, with no majority and approval ratings down to 20%. We have no strong leaders. And in front of us, a series of massive problems. This is not a happy time for Europe.

Anatol Lieven

You do not believe that there is any chance of Europe continuing to support Ukraine militarily without the United States?

Pierre Lellouche

Well, they discussed that in Paris on Monday night, and the result was devastating disunity. Many countries don't want to get involved. The Italians, the Poles... The Poles argue, We've been there before—which is true. They have a complicated history with Ukraine, and deploying Polish soldiers there would be problematic. They say only the French and the British are considering it, and Macron has been toying with the idea for at least a year.

And it's a crazy idea. Because if you send military forces, first of all, Zelensky—who is now cornered and no longer has American protection—is turning to the Europeans, saying, Please give me an army of 200,000 European soldiers.

Except we don't have 200,000 European soldiers. At best, we have 50,000. The most the French army can deploy quickly, with sufficient equipment, is 20,000. I even doubt—yeah, I doubt—the British could field 20,000. So realistically, we're talking about 50,000 troops at most. And that depends on where and how they are deployed.

But if they have no support and no nuclear guarantee from the U.S., the danger, of course, is that they could be dragged into an escalation that we cannot control.

And as you remember, General de Gaulle's nightmare was to be drawn into a conflict that he could not control. And in a situation where conventional forces are very limited and the overall environment is unstable, the risk of escalation is high. If there is provocation, if people start shooting again, crossing the ceasefire line, we will find ourselves in that scenario.

It's not going to be an easy border—far from it. Many people will not accept the ceasefire, particularly the nationalists in Ukraine.

Remember, in 1945, when Stalin drew the borders of today's Ukraine, many UPA nationalists at the time continued their guerrilla resistance until 1955. We may be facing a similar situation, which will not be easy to manage.

So, aside from praying, there isn't much one can do. You can deploy forces and hope that nothing goes wrong—but that's not how you handle such a complex situation. The idea that Europeans will send in troops against Russia's wishes and without American support is completely unrealistic at this stage.

It seems to me that Europeans should think beyond this and consider rebuilding their own security system. But that's a tall order. We may discuss that later.

Anatol Lieven

It has seemed to me that, for many years, De Gaulle would have seized the opportunity to reach out to Russia—whether before this war or even years earlier—in an effort to pursue an independent French policy based on his vision of Europe.

Has this Gaullist idea disappeared in France, or does it still exist, for example, within the Rassemblement National?

Pierre Lellouche

Unfortunately, the strength of that school of thought still exists, but it is now a minority. People have been conditioned by the leadership to think in a certain way. All parties involved keep insisting that the solution lies in Brussels. And of course, that is dangerous because no real decisions are made in Brussels—only technical matters, norms, and regulations. Nobody in Brussels will decide on the life and death of French, British, or German soldiers. So, it has been a sham all along.

But, you know, every time these governments couldn't allocate funds or find the money to support their defense forces, they turned to Brussels, claiming they would create a European defense. But European defense doesn't exist. What

exists are national decisions to build weapons and field an army. And of course, that has been abandoned.

Slowly but surely, we scrapped military service. You know, during the post-Cold War years, for the last 30 years, we have spent money elsewhere—on welfare, on migrants. A country like France takes in 500,000 newcomers a year. It is very costly. And at the end of the day, there is no money left to buy weapons.

So, you postpone and postpone, and you end up with a bonsai army—good people, good weapons, but tiny numbers. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, you have a frontline 1,000 km long, with a million men on each side, and already a million casualties, dead or wounded.

One of the tragedies of this situation—and for France, a shock that nobody wants to talk about—is that possessing nuclear weapons does not prevent wars, even on your doorstep. We tended to believe that with a national nuclear deterrent, we could remain quiet and at peace. But no—the war is here, and something must be done about it.

So, we must rethink the balance between nuclear and conventional forces. We need to invest in more conventional forces—which is very expensive. And all of this must be done outside of a U.S.-led framework. This means that a small group of key countries—like the UK, France, Germany, and perhaps Italy—will have to decide together to start rearming, preferably buying European weapons instead of American ones. Only then will they have a significant force capable of deterring threats in Central Europe.

But if they don't do this, they may find that the U.S. is no longer there. They seem to grasp that a revolution is taking place regarding the U.S. presence, but they fail to draw the necessary conclusions. Instead, they cling to the past. They hope to convince the Americans to let them sit at the table, to persuade them to support European military efforts.

Starmer is going to Washington to plead with Mr. Trump: If we send forces to Ukraine, will you back us? Of course, Trump won't.

So, they keep clinging to the past. And my fear is—knowing them—that they have learned nothing, unfortunately.

Anatol Lieven

Do you think there is a chance, over time, of working together to genuinely build up Europe's defense industries? Of course, the key to that is integration. But that also requires sacrifices—some countries would have to stop producing certain things. Do you think that is politically possible?

Pierre Lellouche

Well, recent years have been very negative. If you look at joint programs between France and the UK, there is very, very little left—nothing except the missile sector, where we have built some pretty good missiles together.

We had a project for a shared aircraft carrier, but that was abandoned. With the Germans, ever since Transall and Alpha Jet, there has been no joint aircraft project. We have been discussing a joint tank project since 1958, since Michel Debré and Franz Josef Strauss. And of course, that is still not happening.

It takes a perfect alignment of leaders in key countries—leaders who understand the urgency—to force those decisions through the military and invest in the necessary industries. Because defense industries don't build weapons unless they have orders. You need orders to buy machines, to train workers, and to rebuild an industry that has almost vanished.

The arms industry in Europe has been moving at an incredibly slow pace. There were years when we were producing only two fighter planes per year, simply because we were not exporting the Rafale. We built just two per year due to a lack of funding.

Anatol Lieven

And the problem is—well, I'm not so sure about France—but in Britain, our wider industry has collapsed to such an extent that it's very difficult to maintain even a halfway decent military industry. Without a strong industrial sector, you don't have the necessary skills to support it.

We're trying to run a naval shipbuilding program with basically no commercial shipbuilding industry at all. And as a result, frankly, our ships keep breaking down. At any given time, most of them are under repair.

Pierre Lellouche

And then you don't have the sailors either.

Anatol Lieven

That too.

Pierre Lellouche

You can't even use the aircraft carrier because there aren't enough sailors.

So yes, this whole system has to be rebuilt. I mean, Europe has been through worse. If you look back at post-war Europe and post-war France, in the middle of colonial wars and all the chaos of the 1950s, we still managed to recover and become successful nations again.

But that requires public opinion, mobilization, and strong leadership. And my concern is that we have extremely poor leadership, while public opinion has been distracted by many other issues.

People haven't talked about nation and patriotism in Europe for years. That's why JD Vance's speech was so shocking—because suddenly, he was talking about family, work, and nation—concepts that, in Europe, have been labeled as far-right.

Unfortunately, many of these fundamental values have been caricatured as fascist or extremist, which is absolutely absurd. But yes, the patriotic idea has been in decline, and with it, the bonds within our societies.

That said, this moment in history is also an opportunity—societies can be awakened again. But it takes leadership.

Anatol Lieven

Of course, one factor that helped galvanize the creation of the European Community—and obviously NATO as well—was the presence of Soviet armies in the very heart of Europe, in the middle of Germany, just 50 miles from the French border.

They are much farther away now.

Tell me, we have a question: Do you think that after the Ukraine war, as many have claimed, there is a serious risk that Russia will go further—attacking Poland, the Baltic states, and NATO directly? Or is this, in your view, a mere chimera?

Pierre Lellouche

It's amusing because many of the same people who argue that Russia will soon be in the Baltics, in Poland, and then in Berlin or Paris are also the ones saying we must support Ukraine to the end of the war because it is under threat.

The reality on the battlefield is that the Russian army has spent three years capturing only a very small part of Ukraine—an area that was already largely populated by Russians.

They are struggling against a much smaller adversary. Ukraine has lost around 20 million people since independence and is now down to about 30 million, facing a country of 145 million. Given such a demographic advantage, plus vast oil revenues, Russia should have been able to push much deeper into Ukraine.

But the Ukrainians have resisted. And the Russian army, frankly, is not very good and not very confident. They are struggling to conduct modern warfare. They have learned a lot, of course, but they are far from successful.

So the idea that Russia would quickly invade NATO territory after this—I certainly don't buy it.

Plus, Putin's intent—and I know this because I spoke to him directly just before Maidan II—was never to enter NATO territory. Russia wanted to ensure that Ukraine remained outside the West. They kept insisting on Ukraine's neutrality.

Remember the Bucharest summit in 2008, when Sarkozy was president and Angela Merkel was chancellor? George W. Bush arrived with his idea of bringing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO before the end of his term—to finalize NATO expansion.

We, along with the Germans, told the Americans: Don't do this. This will lead to war. Putin had publicly warned them a year earlier in Munich: Don't do this.

And yet, it resulted in a disastrous communiqué stating that Ukraine could not join NATO yet but had a "vocation" to do so—the worst possible combination. The Russians were convinced Ukraine would join, while in the meantime, Ukraine was left unprotected.

Three months later, war broke out in Georgia because Saakashvili foolishly provoked the Russian army in Ossetia. The Russians advanced all the way to Tbilisi, and Sarkozy had to intervene to stop them. But the warning went unheeded.

Russia kept demanding the neutralization of Ukraine. And we could have had it—this is what I argued in vain at the time.

We could have had a situation similar to Austria or Finland: a neutral Ukraine, trading with both sides, acting as a bridge between them, maintaining its borders, and avoiding war.

Instead of considering this option, we ignored it. And right up until the last moment, we continued to ignore it.

In fact, in December 2021, Russia came forward again with two treaty proposals—one guaranteeing Ukraine’s neutrality, the other focused on disarmament and a new security architecture. And now, you will hear this new architecture being discussed again, this time as part of negotiations between Trump and Putin.

Sooner than we think, this new architecture will become part of the picture.

Anatol Lieven

Yes, I mean, like you, I was often in Austria and Finland during the last decade of the Cold War, and I never understood why Finlandization was seen as such a terrible thing.

Finland was a very happy country. Absolutely nobody doubted that it was spiritually and economically part of the West—it just had to remain neutral.

Pierre Lellouche

We could have had that. And of course, Putin is far from winning this war.

What he has achieved, however, is turning Ukraine into a real nation—one that is now deeply anti-Russian. That is a tragedy if you consider the thousand-year history shared by these two countries. But that’s another story.

At the same time, Putin has suffered major losses. He has inadvertently led to NATO’s expansion to the Baltic Sea, Sweden, and Finland. And perhaps even more concerning for him, he has turned Russia into a de facto client state of China—an outcome that, for him and many Russians, is a long-term existential threat.

That’s why I believe the global deal that Trump is exploring—his vision of a grand bargain with Russia—may actually appeal to the Russians. They need to create some distance from China.

And if you look at it from Washington’s perspective, after all, Kissinger and Brzezinski were obsessed with preventing an alliance between Russia and China.

Yet, Biden has done exactly the opposite by engaging in this proxy war in Ukraine.

That's what I describe in my book².

We have ended up strengthening the Chinese-Russian alliance, now joined by two equally toxic allies—North Korea and Iran. In my book, I call them the Fourth Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

Now, if you look at it from Trump's perspective, the idea of making a deal with Putin to break this alliance and turn Russia into a global economic partner in the tech and energy industries is not so far-fetched.

And, of course, the Russians are immediately drawn to it. In Riyadh, they made it clear: We're open. We're going to generate \$300 billion just in oil deals with American companies.

So once again, we look like fools. We stopped buying Russian gas, only to replace it with American gas—at four times the price. We abandoned tens of billions of euros in investments in Russia.

For France, the cost has been enormous. France was the largest employer of Russian citizens in Russia. We lost all of that. And now, the Americans are back, ready to take over the business.

So, who looks like the fool now? Or, as you say in English, the *cuckoo*?

Anatol Lieven

Yes, exactly. And of course, Russia has a vested interest here because as long as it remains dependent on China, Beijing can dictate the prices.

Pierre Lellouche

Exactly.

Anatol Lieven

I mean, that's where Europe does have a bargaining card with Russia. But only, of course, if it's prepared to use it and, you know, offer the resumption of...

² <https://amzn.to/4haDIGe>

Available on Amazon. English version available March 21st. ask to: message@pierrelellouche.fr

Pierre Lellouche

And it's all absurd. Russia isn't going to move to another planet—they will still be our neighbors.

So, sooner or later, something will have to be done to rebuild economic and human relationships. But this war has caused long-term damage.

Anatol Lieven

I just wish we could move past these appallingly ahistorical stereotypes.

I was reading a French commentator—Pierre Servan, I think—who described Russia as France's ancient enemy. Well, yes, in the 1790s and under Napoleon. But he seems to have forgotten that in both world wars, Russia was a critical ally of France.

So, this French...

Pierre Lellouche

And on top of that, Napoleon tried until the very last moment not to invade Russia because he knew it was unfeasible. But he had a problem with the British. He went in because of the British.

For centuries, Russia had strong ties with Germany, the UK, and France. Just look at history—trade relations, cultural exchanges, and so on.

Even in the Russian Empire, the government spoke French—all the way up to the 19th century.

But Mr. Servan is one of the morons who have been polluting the discourse.

You can't imagine how many articles and books have been written with the same level of ignorance—just pure propaganda. It was not a serious way of looking at things.

I wanted to share an anecdote with you. I recently met the first French Consul to Ukraine. He later became ambassador to Kyiv. The French Foreign Ministry only discovered Ukraine in 1992, after its independence.

Remember, right before that, both Mitterrand and George H.W. Bush opposed Ukraine's independence in the name of stability. But once Ukraine became independent, we had to open an embassy.

So I met the first ambassador, who wrote his memoirs. When he arrived in Kyiv with his wife, there was not a single French citizen living in Ukraine—not one.

And when I went to Maidan—the first one—as president of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly at the time, and I met Yushchenko, there were virtually no French people or journalists.

Nobody was interested in Ukraine.

Part of the problem, as I recall in my book, is that Ukraine was like a white spot in the European mind for 100 years.

Ukraine was ignored after the First World War and never became a state. Only the Kurds and the Ukrainians were left without a state. In 1918, in 1941, and after the Second World War, Ukraine disappeared. It took the revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union for it to reappear.

And then Europe suddenly realized it had a new neighbor—larger than France, with 50 million people—and nobody had a clue what to do with it. The question of how to integrate Ukraine into the broader architecture was never seriously raised, not in any capital, including Washington.

Under Biden, the only thing that interested both him and Trump about Ukraine was Hunter Biden's laptop and his dealings with Burisma in Kyiv. That was the extent of U.S. interest in the country.

Then, suddenly, Russia invaded—and overnight, we had Hitler and Churchill. And Zelensky, of course, played this extremely well. You know, "I don't need a taxi, I need weapons."

And just like that, we had mass mobilization for Ukraine—for understandable and legitimate reasons: fear, sympathy, and so on.

And then we entered into this proxy war, which has killed so many people and has now led to an impossible situation. Because when Biden leaves and Trump comes in, the deck of cards will be reshuffled, and once again, the Europeans will be left out in the cold—with nothing.

So yes, it's tragic. A tragedy for the people who have suffered the war, and now a tragedy for Europe, which must rebuild itself without the U.S., while facing a hostile Russia... And that is going to be *bloody* difficult.

Anatol Lieven

I mean, on that point, a key part of any peace agreement will likely be keeping the door open for Ukraine's EU membership—something you mentioned, along with von der Leyen's promise.

But in your view, is that realistically achievable in the foreseeable future?

Pierre Lellouche

No. Interestingly enough, the Russians accept that. They agreed to it in the 2022 negotiations, which, unfortunately, were never pursued.

But yes, the Russians accept Ukraine's entry into the EU. They keep the Donbas—the historically Russian part of the country—and leave Ukraine for the Europeans to deal with. And believe me, that's a big problem.

I know a little bit about the French farming industry. Nobody wants Ukraine in the EU. Nobody. That would be the end of Europe's agricultural policy. And the same goes for the Polish—they don't want it either.

On top of that, Ukraine has several strong industries, but the real problem is stability, the rule of law, and corruption. And as you know, corruption has continued throughout the war.

The big question is: What kind of political system will they build after the war?

I wish them good luck—I like Ukraine, I like that country, and I wish them the best. But they will have to clean up a lot of bad habits, including massive corruption.

Anatol Lieven

Massive corruption—when it comes to the internal politics of Europe.

Vance, of course, has been portrayed as positioning the U.S. against Europe. But in reality, what he was actually doing was aligning the Trump administration with European populists.

Maybe we need to wait for the results of the German elections. This is, after all, a calculated bet on the future—one supported by evidence.

Is Europe, in fact, undergoing a kind of incremental political revolution of its own?

Pierre Lellouche

Yes, what you just said is very important. His speech really deserves to be read, because he gives many examples from different countries.

He highlights the reflex of the so-called progressive left—or center-left—which, much like in the U.S., views figures such as Hillary Clinton and Kamala Harris as representatives of an elite that looks down on the so-called lower classes, assuming they don't understand anything.

Another crucial aspect of his speech was the emphasis he placed on immigration as a central issue. And, of course, immigration is a massive issue across all of Europe.

Anatol Lieven

For a long time, elites tried to ignore it.

Pierre Lellouche

Exactly. But now, of course, it's surfacing and forcing change—including in Scandinavian countries, even within the Scandinavian left.

Everywhere, political shifts are being driven by immigration—in Austria, the Netherlands, Italy, and of course, France.

Right now, Marine Le Pen is polling above 30%, and she could win the next presidential election.

So, of course, Vance's speech resonates deeply with this political reality. And Macron understood it immediately—he framed it as the International Reactionaries, or reactionary international, versus his own progressive international.

But if the progressive international fails to address immigration and the crime situation—where people are being killed every day in Europe, in one country or another, by migrants wielding knives in the streets—then it is in serious trouble.

This is the reality.

So even if the elites don't care, the people who have to live alongside this reality care a lot. And that is gradually reshaping the political climate.

Vance described this as a kind of political revolution—one similar to what happened in the U.S., which led to that extraordinary electoral victory.

But here is someone who was supposed to be politically finished—you know, he was pursued by seven judges, people tried to destroy him—yet he survived and won with 74 million votes.

This marks a significant turning point in political history. He is reshaping the American state at an incredible speed, fundamentally altering its values. Many of the pillars constructed by progressives—the woke revolution, DEI, and all of that—are being systematically dismantled by measures he had prepared in advance.

Whether this will reach Europe is quite probable. In fact, it is already happening in several countries that have decided to take action on immigration.

But Europe faces a massive problem: we do not have Guantanamo. We have nowhere to place migrants. We cannot exert pressure. It's extremely difficult.

Right now, France and Algeria are in a standoff. Algeria refuses to take back criminal migrants who have been convicted. They ignore their commitments while continuing to send thousands of people across the Mediterranean every day.

The numbers in France are becoming staggering:

340,000 legal entries per year, largely due to family reunification—for instance, French-Algerians in France bringing their wives from Algeria.

160,000 asylum seekers annually, because asylum has effectively become a fast-track for immigration.

Plus, an unknown number of illegal migrants.

Altogether, we are talking about at least 500,000 to 600,000 people per year—people who need healthcare, housing, and possibly jobs, even though only 40% of migrants actually work.

This places enormous pressure on our economy, our schools, and our housing system. And the same applies to every European country.

Meanwhile, Africa's population is set to double in the next 20 years, reaching 2.5 billion people by 2050.

That is tomorrow morning.

Anatol Lieven

And with the increasing impacts of climate change on agriculture, of course.

Pierre Lellouche

So, Anatol, looking at all of this, the real question is: Is Russia actually the problem, or is it something else?

In Munich, Vance said that the real issue is not China or Russia—it's immigration. And you know what? I agree.

I've worked on this issue for many years, and the impact of immigration on our societies is immense. Unlike the U.S., where immigration comes from a mix of regions, ours is mostly Muslim. So we face the challenge of integrating Islam

into Western society. And believe me, that is not an easy task—if it can even be done.

Anatol Lieven

Which, of course, is completely different—or at least very different—from the challenges America is facing.

Pierre Lellouche

Of course. Much, much harder. Much harder.

Anatol Lieven

Do you see this fundamentally transforming the European Union?

I mean, are we heading back toward a Europe des patries—a much looser union, where countries take back more control over their own affairs, including border policies?

Pierre Lellouche

I'm convinced of it. And for one structural reason—which is also a historical one.

Most people don't realize, when they repeat the usual mantra, "Europe is peace", that in fact, no—it's not Europe that has ensured peace.

It's *NATO*.

Because remember, Europe began to exist with the Conference of Messina in 1955 and the Treaty of Rome in 1957.

But these came after NATO—NATO was founded in 1949, and then in 1954, Germany was rearmed, and U.S. troops returned to Europe during the Korean War. That is what made the construction of the European Union possible.

Now, if you remove that security foundation and leave only a bloc of 28, 30, or even 40 countries...

Take Madame von der Leyen—she wants to keep expanding the EU. Why? Because that is the bureaucratic reflex in Brussels. If there's a problem, the solution is always: expand. Create new funds. That's how they believe democracy spreads—when a country is somewhat democratic, just bring it in.

Albania? Sure, why not. Even though the Balkan conflicts are far from resolved, let's bring them in.

So, in the end, what do we have? A mini United Nations sitting on no solid security foundation. And we expect this group to function properly? It won't.

The Union will not survive the demise of NATO. It will not. Mark my words: some countries will survive—if they make the right decisions on defense and join forces. But we will return to the original framework.

Remember what happened right after World War II, when the Cold War began? The first instinct in London and Paris was to build what became the Western European Union—the precursor to NATO.

The idea was to create something with France, the UK, and the Benelux countries, and then bring in Germany. That was the initial plan.

But it didn't work. We started thinking about forging a European army, and when that failed in the French parliament in the summer of 1954, we shifted to NATO. Germany was rearmed within NATO, and that made possible the creation of the European Community, and later, the European Union.

So if NATO disappears and the current order collapses, my fear is that the EU will face a massive survival crisis in this new context.

Change is coming—no doubt about that.

Anatol Lieven

Is this the end of the West as an ideological construct?

I mean, the West was never a geographical reality, but it was certainly an ideological and geopolitical one.

Is that now gradually dying—or already dead?

Pierre Lellouche

It could be.

There could be two Wests—one led by Trump, Elon Musk, and the Russians, who actually share the same values.

The same values, in fact.

Family, nation, opposition to woke culture, opposition to same-sex policies, and so on. A strict, traditionalist vision.

It could happen.

And then, on the other side, you would have a different West—the so-called progressive West in Europe.

But I don't believe the progressive West can be a viable solution in Europe—because of the immigration problem.

In the end, you may even see these two visions merge due to common challenges.

And don't forget—the Russians also have a Muslim problem.

Anatol Lieven

Very much so.

This also opens the door to abandoning what I've always found to be a very problematic idea—one that, I must admit, I've fallen into myself. I'm ashamed to say it, but it's the habit of describing the European Union as Europe.

Even with Britain leaving the EU, we haven't left Europe. We're still right there, just off the shore.

We haven't pulled anchor and drifted off somewhere to join America.

During the early years of Putin's administration, there was an interesting phrase in Russia—Russia as the Third West.

Pierre Lellouche

Yes.

Anatol Lieven

In other words, you have Europe, which is undeniably the West. You have America, which is also the West, but in many ways, quite different from Europe.

So why not Russia as a Third West?

Maybe it's an old dream.

Pierre Lellouche

It is an old dream.

You remember the Second Rome?

Yes, it's a very old dream.

Anatol Lieven

But perhaps a more relaxed attitude toward these divisions isn't the worst thing in the world.

You can have multiple Wests, after all.

I mean, when you're in Moscow, it's not the same as being in Delhi, or Beijing, or even Cape Town. But then again, being in Moscow isn't quite the same as being in Paris either.

And for that matter, being in Washington isn't quite the same as being in Paris.

Pierre Lellouche

You're absolutely right.

The thing is, the sheer power of American cultural influence has been so overwhelming that Europe has been flooded by so-called U.S. culture—something I personally have a few issues with.

Take, for instance, the decline of French restaurants and French cuisine, replaced by the junk food industry.

Did you know that France is the second-largest consumer of McDonald's in the world?

Anatol Lieven

No. Really?

Pierre Lellouche

It's awful.

We've been flooded with American TV series, American food, American fashion, music, and so on. In many ways, European culture has become a minority in Europe itself.

In cinema, in artistic creation—the American industry is such a massive juggernaut that it has an enormous impact.

Even in Russia.

So yes, this could be a moment where people start rethinking things—perhaps even seeking to create different kinds of Wests.

You're right.

The Russians, of course, face a different dilemma: they remain divided on where they truly belong.

Are they part of Asia? Are they part of Europe?

During the conflict in Ukraine, the voices of what is known as the Eurasian school in Russia have regained a lot of influence. Figures like Karaganov, for example, have argued that Russia's future lies with Asia and China.

At the same time, the Russians fully understand that they are rapidly becoming colonized by the Chinese.

If you go to Siberia, you'll see plenty of Chinese—just as you do on the West Coast of America.

So, the future is intriguing.

If U.S.-Russia relations warm under Trump and Putin, and this turns into a true partnership—economic, trade, and tech—it could create a different kind of West in both places.

And that might force the Europeans to rethink their approach toward both Russia and the U.S.

But again, my advice would be not to do this through Brussels—because Brussels would drown the whole effort.

The very DNA of Brussels is to erase national identities in favor of some abstract ideal called Europe—which is, in reality, completely hollow.

But that's what they do for a living, and they do it very effectively—constantly multiplying regulations in every sector.

Anatol Lieven

In every aspect of human life—without any democratic mandate whatsoever.

Pierre Lellouche

Of course not.

Anatol Lieven

Vance isn't wrong about that.

Pierre Lellouche

That's yet another problem.

During this war, Madame von der Leyen managed to position herself as a war leader—even though she has absolutely no legal authority in defense matters. None at all.

Now, they've come up with the so-called European Defense Minister—without funding, without troops, and, once again, without any mandate to send people to war based on decisions made by the Commission or by Brussels.

It's an abstract and highly damaging construction because it further undermines the very notion of national belonging.

Europe works if nations come together to share some competencies. That's fine.

But if you try to replace the foundations of democracy and history with a technocratic entity that is completely disconnected from reality, then you end up with a void.

And that's exactly where we are now.

America is moving in one direction because it has the mandate to do so. Russia is moving in another direction.

And we, at this moment, are doing nothing.

Except talk. That's all they do—talk.

Anatol Lieven

And of course, you cannot ask soldiers to die for a void.

There's this strange idea—particularly prevalent, I've noticed, among the German Greens—that you can somehow summon a military or even a militarist spirit out of thin air.

Of course, this comes from people who have systematically avoided military service themselves, even in times of peace.

It's a purely civilian fantasy—this idea that the military consists of pawns who can simply be moved around and sent off to risk their lives.

But that's not how soldiers think.

And that's never how they have behaved.

Pierre Lellouche

So, at the end of the day, what we're witnessing is not just a historic shift in U.S.-European-Russian relations.

All of this will likely lead to a complete overhaul—perhaps even the destruction—of the old European system, followed by the emergence of something new.

My hunch is that the EU will not survive the shockwave of this major historical turning point.

Something else will have to be reborn—probably on a much smaller scale, focused on political survival and security issues.

Then, you may see cooperation in various fields with other countries, but we'll return to the hardcore of Europe.

And that will be an interesting period.

But for now, they haven't even begun to think in those terms.

As I describe in my book, Madame von der Leyen and her administration, over the past three years, have focused solely on enlargement—more of the same.

More regulation.

When high-tech industries emerge, what do they do? Regulate.

They don't build. They don't invent. They don't invest.

They regulate. That's what they do for a living.

Anatol Lieven

It's tragic.

And at the same time, we lack both the ideas and the will to contain conflicts in the Balkans—if, God forbid, they erupt again.

Pierre Lellouche

Exactly.

Take France, for example.

They're talking about deploying forces in Ukraine, yet we can't even stop the violence in New Caledonia or Martinique, let alone restore security in the streets of France.

What are they even talking about? It's ridiculous.

When you have a weak state and nothing but talk, talk, talk, it convinces no one.

That's why Trump despises this kind of leadership.

And let's be clear—Putin despises them too.

So, we're heading into a tough period. Until a new generation of leaders emerges.

And hopefully, the right decisions are made now to start rearming—seriously. That's my hope.

Anatol Lieven

I hope so too.

But at the moment—speaking as a Brit who remains European, despite what some may think—it's a bleak picture.

Well, thank you so much.

I'm afraid we're out of time, but I truly appreciate this discussion.

It was fascinating, and it's refreshing to hear such honest and clear views on these issues.

Thank you.