

Invisible Europe: divided at the tables that matter, hostage to electoral calculations

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Faced with the most serious conflict on its own soil since the Second World War, **the European Union continues to display structural political and defense weakness**. Rather than a unified geopolitical actor, Brussels now appears to be **an arena of lowest-common-denominator compromises, held hostage by the electoral interests** of individual Member States and uncertain of its role in the new global order.

The paradox of the "single voice" and national self-interest

Europe's inability to articulate a cohesive position is clearly evident in its diplomatic handling of the Ukrainian crisis. While the situation would require swift decision-making and unity of purpose, **European governments have produced an unwieldy negotiating format: no fewer than five national representatives alongside the heads of EU institutions**. A

"crowd" at the negotiating table that reflects mutual distrust among national capitals and has even ended up excluding the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Kaja Kallas.
Making the situation even more paradoxical was a reversal of traditional roles: **the proposal to entrust Europe’s voice to a single representative came from Rome, often labeled "sovereigntist"**, yet it met resistance from those who, like **Emmanuel Macron’s France, proclaim themselves champions of integration.** The reality is that, beyond the EU bureaucracy, governments act solely in pursuit of domestic approval, unable to sacrifice even a fraction of national visibility on the altar of a common interest now drained of meaning.

Dependence on Washington and the defense industry issue

This political fragmentation is inevitably reflected in the military sphere, where Europe struggles to translate financial efforts into genuine strategic autonomy. Although Donald Trump’s administration has acknowledged the progress made over the past eighteen months by European allies in assuming greater responsibility for their conventional defense, the relationship remains deeply asymmetric.
Washington, through the words of Under Secretary Elbridge Colby, **praises increased military spending but imposes a political and economic veto on any "*Buy European*" policy**.
The American message is explicit: the U.S. military umbrella (albeit reduced) remains inextricably tied to opening European markets to U.S. defense companies, discouraging the development of an independent industrial base on the Old Continent.Emblematic is the case of countries such as Germany and Poland, which have chosen to manufacture U.S. weapons under license, or the NATO "Purl" mechanism, through which Europeans finance the purchase of U.S. weapons systems (such as Patriot interceptors) for delivery to Kyiv.

The missed opportunity of enlargement

While European capitals scramble to carve out a place at the table of the "big three" – the United States, Russia and China – often reacting to the initiatives of others, they neglect the most powerful geopolitical tool at their disposal: **Ukraine's accession process to the European Union.**
With a NATO in which the automatic nature of Article 5 appears less ironclad under the Trump presidency, Kyiv's integration into the EU – and the resulting extension of the mutual-defense

clause provided for under Article 42.7 of the European Treaties – would represent leverage entirely in Brussels' hands. Yet here, too, sectoral concerns**, agricultural resistance and the inability to explain to public opinion that the continent's security depends on Kyiv's resilience** prevail. Until Europe overcomes short-term electoral calculations and its fear of making decisions independently, it will remain condemned to be shaped by history rather than write it.