

JD VANCE AT THE MUNICH SECURITY CONFERENCE: A SPEECH BY GASLIGHT

How Vance unsettled the Europeans

While Musk was ripping through the US government like a 10 tonne toddler on cocaine, Vice President JD Vance was dispatched to the Munich Security Conference last week to tell Europeans how to run their democracies. His 19 minute speech, coupled with Trumps' announcement that peace in Ukraine would be decided in a meeting between the US and Russia only, has swept the legs out from under Europe, NATO, and the post-war transatlantic consensus.

The speech itself was deeply weird, and breathtakingly hypocritical. Who was it for? It's inscrutable. It wasn't the people in the room, Vance even joked that the room would hate it. Much of it, like talk of abortion clinic perimeters, Christians burning Qurans, and weird inaccurate anecdotes about prayers didn't make sense for a Defense crowd. The talk couldn't have been for the base back home; they'll never see it, and wouldn't get the references if they did.

Could the Europeans be the audience? Unlikely. It misunderstood European coalition politics to the point of embarrassment. I doubt it was for his boss, who isn't particularly interested in European details, and anyway is busy destroying the state back home with Elon Musk and Elon's emotional support human. Perhaps it was for the Heritage-Leonard Leo-Peter Thiel crowd, but then it doesn't accomplish much more than meeting up with them and complaining about the unmanliness

of Europeans over scotch.

Vance opened with talking about an Afghan man who had driven his car into a market and killed two people recently in Munich. He segued smoothly from a convincing show of human sympathy to unconvincing and suddenly icky attempt to link migration and violence. Mass violence in Europe is an issue, but it isn't anywhere close to how prevalent it is in America. And the common factor of mass violence events isn't migration status, it's men.

For me, as an American who has made the EU my home, the most disturbing aspect was the pure hit by hit gaslighting Vance delivered to his audience. Based on the faces of the mostly silent crowd, they were disturbed too. He took what could have been a strong list of America's political flaws, and scolded the Europeans for them. It was manipulative and shameless, but at least it was also transparently manipulative. No one in the room was buying it.



Not particularly into this nonsense.

Vance's speech was a scold, talking about a number of fairly niche European issues that wouldn't read to the regime's American supporters back home. But he also spoke as if Germany, and indeed all of Europe, was failing to meet some obligation to the US Constitution. He seemed unable to distinguish between the legal systems of the many nations of Europe, and our Constitution. He criticized the German firewall policy to keep Nazi-adjacent parties out of the German government. But he seemed to mistake it for some formal legal mechanism,

rather than just rejecting associating with someone during negotiations. Coming from the American winner-take-all system, he didn't seem to understand the many methods of how governments are formed and fall in Europe.

It was like the geopolitical version of Americans traveling abroad who are shocked to find that local laws do apply to them, and that you can't pay in dollars.

Perhaps the most embarrassing moment in the speech was one of his most fervent, about the Romanian election. He was outraged that the Romanian supreme court ordered a re-run of an election because of credible allegations of Russian interference. But, of course, this was a constitutional choice made by the empowered body in Romania, which importantly here, is not subject to the US Constitution.

Vance doesn't have a lower division polysci major's understanding of European political realities. About Romania's troubles, he said "But if your democracy can be destroyed with a few hundred thousand dollars of digital advertising from a foreign country, then it wasn't very strong to begin with." Here I have to give a long, deep sigh. *That is correct, Mr. Vance.*

Part of the project of the European Union is to help politically weakened former eastern bloc European democracies strengthen their institutions with the goal of becoming robust democracies, *one day*. After decades of Soviet oppression and exploitation, institutions are weak and corruption is endemic in many of these countries. They are not strong democracies right now, and *we all know that over here*. It's part of the grand conversation of the European Union. Even the former Soviet block countries' institutions generally countenance that fact. That's why you might want to have a method of re-running an election in an unstable situation.

Honestly though, the US could take a hint or two from some of these "not strong to begin with"

democracies. Having a mechanism to re-run the 2000 election would have done this country a good turn and saved a lot of trouble, however the re-run went.

It's hard to overemphasize how much Vance didn't understand, or even care to understand, the nations he was speaking to and about. He misunderstood perimeter laws in the UK, coalitions in Germany, speech law everywhere, and what the European Union exists for.

But Also, Rank Hypocrisy

He pounded out the words "If you're running in fear of your own voters, there is nothing America can do for you," this, from a country that purges its own voter rolls along ethnic and political lines regularly. Politically motivated voter purges are uncommon in the EU, whereas they are an expected piece of electioneering in America. We even have to tell people to check and recheck they haven't been caught up in partisan voter purges every election. That's so uncommon in Europe as to be a sign of political crisis, rather than business as usual.

Vance bellowed out at the crowd that "Thin mandates produce unstable results..." without the slightest sign of self-awareness. I have to agree with him in principle, but coalitions and alternatives to FPTP voting means that unclear and close results are rarer in Europe than America. He also conveniently omitted that his ticket won by 1.5% of the vote, but everyone in that room knew it.

One of the points he seemed very confident of was that "...there's no more urgent issue than mass migration." Migration is a complex issue in Europe, but most urgent? No, the data simply doesn't support that. In fact Europeans largely agree on the need for migration, but the details are devilish. Many of us in Europe put inflation, inequality, and even climate change

above migration. EU wide, the relevance of migration has been dropping steadily since the crisis a decade ago. Migration is there, but it doesn't approach the rolling crises of consumer prices, inequality, and energy costs the truly plague Europe.

Americans don't really worry about energy and resources the same way Europe does. Most of America's inflation problems are more or less self-inflicted, but Europe has to rely on trade with the rest of the world to meet many of its existential needs. If Vance only talked to the AfD, Le Pen, and maybe Orban, he can definitely construct an ersatz man-child Europe, terrified of brown families crossing the Mediterranean looking for a better life. But that's not all of Europe, and not even most of it these days.

But being an American talking about mass violence events in Europe is a tricky proposition. Being from a country where the most common cause of death in child is a bullet, Vance's sentiment of "tak(ing) our shared civilization in a new direction" misses that a lot of Europeans don't consider America very civilized, largely because of peculiar cultural norms like gun violence.

At one point, out of nowhere, Vance said "If American democracy can survive 10 years of Greta Thunburg scolding, you guys can survive a few months of Elon Musk." I have no clue what this means. I think it was meant to be a laugh line. Maybe it just sounded good in his head.

Vance mainly spoke of an America that doesn't exist. There is no broad consensus in America, no easy confidence about a bright future. The nation is checked out, divided, and struggling to survive. He wouldn't dare try to give a 'Morning in America' speech any further west than Munich. He couldn't even do it in Munich. No one was buying what he was selling.

The Europeans saw Vance as meddling, interfering in the ways that he was accusing them of doing, because he doesn't understand European decorum

around speech. Decorum is taken seriously in a way that American's don't understand, and a serious person is expected to watch their words in a way that Trump's people don't get, or care to get.

Vance often seems like the smart grownup in an administration of weirdos and troglodytes, but he's not. He just cleans up ok. Give him some runway, and he shows he's just as regressive and weird as the rest of the bunch. Vance is just another one of the idiot wrecking crew tearing their way through America, and now the world.

The Response

The consequences of this political clown show were immediate.

The one-two punch of Vance in Munich and Trump cutting everyone but Putin out of negotiating the Ukraine war has shocked Europe, possibly into action. Macron has hosted a meeting of leaders in Paris, including the largest states in the EU and the UK's Keir Starmer, who is something of a self-appointed American whisperer.

It doesn't mean the EU is springing into action. Springing is not a thing the EU does, but meetings are. It does point to the EU waking up to how dangerous the Americans really are right now, and also how delusional. Settling the Ukraine war without Ukraine at the table is insane, and both Zelensky and European leaders have pointed that out. If the Ukrainians don't stop fighting, and they won't, the war doesn't end. It just turns into Russia's Vietnam, or Algeria, or Afghanistan, again. And Ukraine becomes a field of bones and blood and hate.

There's talk in Europe of peace keepers in Ukraine. Not serious talk, and peacekeepers are a terrible idea, but at least they've started throwing spaghetti at the wall.

NATO head Mark Rutte is out pounding the

pavement with leaders and press about the need to get military spending in Europe up to 5% of Everyone's GDP. It's a transparent call to be able to cut the Americans out and take on threats like Russia and Iran on their own. But it's also a hard lift, at a time when economics and climate change are pressing Europe. The countries most at risk – Poland, Finland, and the Baltics, are already ramping up to resist Russian invasion. This isn't paranoia, Russian political elites have promised to come get them after Ukraine for years.

The US, and its power to bind things together geopolitically is gone, possibly for good. But the old European terrors, mainly Russia and in-fighting, persist.