

Brussels Forum

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A Conversation: Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski; The Hon. Dr. Ursula von der Leyen

Dr. Karen Donfried: One of the co-chairs of this year's Brussels Forum, the brilliant Dr. Brzezinski, when asked about what advice he had for Transatlantic policymakers said, "Think strategically, reflect historically," think strategically, reflect historically. Simple and clear words but profound. Our next speaker, whom I am so honored to welcome, clearly shares this perspective, Ursula von der Leyen, Germany's Minister of Defense, is also Germany's first female defense minister. She was born here in Brussels, as her father worked at the European Commission. So it's a wonderful German and European story, and we certainly could not be more delighted than to be welcoming her back to Brussels for GMF's 10th Brussels Forum. Please join me in welcoming her.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Thank you very much the Dr. Donfried, ladies and gentlemen. Revolution or evolution? Well, what do we see when we look at the current security situation? Ukraine, Russia, ISIS, the phenomenon of hybrid warfare. You all know the catch words, I think in perhaps 100 years when someone is looking back to this meeting here, he might say this was a sustained evolution as regard security, but I think contemporary witnesses feel as if they are in the middle of a revolution since 2014. I would like to focus on

four short points concerning evolution or revolution. The first one, of course, is hybrid warfare. Is it a new phenomenon or is it as old as the hills, as the IISS in London believes it to be? Covert operation, propaganda, economic pressure, subversion, may be that old, but the intensity, the orchestration, and the way in which hybrid strategies are applied to-date is new. And if you look at Russia and the Ukraine, apart from the serious breach of international law, there is a highly professional disinformation campaign finding its way deep into western media. And if you look at ISIS the propaganda is also finding its way deep into our western societies. We are the targets, we, the Western societies, societies that are based on freedom. Freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the rule of law, democracy, and therefore we have to find answers for ourselves, preferably in advance, in order to generate resilience. And this leads me to our second point. We need to strengthen partnerships. If we look at the European Union, NATO or the USCE, we have everything we need. Diplomacy, we have economic strength, a free press, an intense public debate and dialogue, we have military strength, a deterrence. If we look at NATO, we are doing our homework. With the Whales Summit, the alliance has made decisions, we are now working on the implementation, as you all know the bad words. It's a spearhead, logistic bases, the so called NfIU's, N-F-I-U's, the high readiness headquarters (inaudible). And if we look at the European Union, if there's one thing President Putin did not expect, it is

the fact that the European Union is capable to act in unity. This was something he did not expect, and I'm proud, of course we have 28 very heterogeneous member states. But when it's getting serious we know what we stand up for. With the strong sanctions against Russia, the European Union holds a very strong economic tool in its hands. And here is economic power leading power to security matters. But I'm convinced, we have to go further. Europe will only stay politically relevant in future, if we are able to complement our economic power and our political influence with a truly coherent security and defense policy. I think the Treaty of Lisbon has a great deal of potential we just have to use it. And I want to underline that the times have passed in which there was a different difference between European and NATO thinking. The strengthening of the European defense capabilities strengthened both NATO and the European Union. And this leads me to my third point, the European Army, that has been discussed over the last couple of weeks. Well, John Klundeuger(phonetic), has cited an important long term goal, I think we have to set ourselves goals, even if it's still a very long way to go and we are at the beginning of this long way. But if we do not have goals we just take the European Union for granted, we criticize its bureaucracy, and there's a high, high risk to fall back to nationalism. I think we need goals because you just have to remember, the European Union has managed to realize the single market, the freedom of movement, the joint control of border, think of Schengen. A common

currency, the euro. When I was born here in Brussels none of it was there, none of it. And therefore, I'm convinced that a European Army or a European Defense Union can be created as a logical consequence of European integration. I know that critics routinely object that a European Defense Union would threaten Transatlantic Corporation. I think the opposite is the case, our transatlantic partners rightly want us to do more on our own security. We need a strong European pillar within NATO. And therefore my fourth point, the practical consequences, for example, for the (inaudible). We have already taken steps into that direction. We have for example, the Franco-German brigade, which is now deployed in Mali. We have a permanent, permanent assignment of the Dutch airborne brigade to a German division. We have begun a close cooperation with Poland, my Polish colleague and me, we intend to place combat units under each other's command shortly. And please imagine ladies and gentlemen, 70 years after World War II, imagine a German combat unit under polish command and a polish combat unit under German command. I think this is a sign of deep trust among two neighbors who for centuries were separated by a gulf of enmity, and who are today united as friends. If it is true, to sum up, if it is true that Europe will only remain relevant if it progresses in the field of security and defense. If it is true that the United States expect a significant contribution to peace and stability from us. If it is true that in spite of all differences we have, Europe has more in common in the field of

security policy than not, then it is time to take the right steps now. And let me finish with a citation of Robert Schuman, the former French Foreign Minister, who said in 1950, “World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it,” and because it’s so beautiful in French and German too (speaking French and German). I’m convince the European army makes Europe stronger not weaker and it makes the transatlantic alliance stronger not weaker. Thank you so much.

Dr. Karen Donfried: Thank you so much Ms. von der Leyen it was wonderful to hear that rousing defense of further European integration particularly at this time of challenge, and I think, all of us, if the goal is to increase cooperation in Europe, increase transatlantic partnership that is a very good thing, and I’m going to invite you back to the stage and asked that you be joined by Dr. Brzezinski and I’m going to had the floor over to Steven Erlanger, of the New York Times.

Steven Erlanger: Thank you. Karen, is this live? (Inaudible). Someone take the left. (Inaudible) We have about half an hour, I mean time is quite short. So I’m going to get right to it, and I hope to leave a bit of time at the end for a few questions from the floor. The first thing in a way, Madam Minister, I’d like to ask you, we were at the Munich’s Security Conference together, and a year ago President Gauck gave a speech that seem to imply that Germans were going to put

more action behind their words and take a stronger leadership role even in defense. And you gave a speech fairly soon after that along the same lines. And one had the impression that you were told to hush a bit, that you were told you were leaning forward a little too far, and I was going to ask you, because this year in Munich you came up with this phrase about leading from the middle, and for most people leading from the middle doesn't mean anything, I mean, you can push, you can shove, in the middle you sit between opposing forces rather than leading. So the first thing I was going to ask you is, is this an advance on German strategic thinking, what does it mean exactly?

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well, first of all in German the word leadership, *Führung*, has a very ambivalent tone.

Steven Erlanger: I have a (German word) in my pocket.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well, but out of our history, our dark history, it has a very ambivalent tone. And therefore Germany for a very long time shied away from the word “leadership” in German. But if you look at the economic and political weight our country has, we have right now the debate which is necessary — whether this leads to more responsibility to take over leadership — but what kind of leadership? A typical European leadership, the leading from the center, which means not just running ahead all by ourselves, ignoring what others want to do; not leading from behind by pushing everybody

ahead of us; but having the task to lead, but also to take all our partners and friends within Europe with us. With strong partnerships and just, this is very typical European; and I think because of our history, we know that we are responsible to take over leadership when it comes down to defend human rights, when it comes down to defend democracies, defended freedom. Because we know what happens if it's not there. But on the other hand, never, ever, all by ourselves, but always take the others along. That is typical (inaudible) — .

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well, I mean, wasn't it an odd position, then, don't you think?, for — maybe it's because the French were weak and the Americans didn't care, and the British are in the middle of an election campaign — but to see Madam Merkel negotiating pretty much directly with Putin, was this kind of Germany you imagined? I mean, particularly since she's taken military force off the table?

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well first of all, as far as I remember, Francois Hollande, the French President, and the German Chancellor were in Kyiv and then in Moscow and then in Minsk. And there was always a very close communication within the heads of state and governments in Europe. And of course the chancellor was in Washington before going on her journey with Hollande. So this is typical, not all by ourselves but with others, and we have decided in Europe, you know, I think the Russian-Ukraine conflict is also a conflict

about what kind of instruments do we use to solve conflicts? And Russia decided to take the instruments of a hybrid warfare, and the question was whether Europe was going to answer with warfare instruments; but we decided to answer with economic instruments where you need a long breath, but they are hurting Russia, Russia's (inaudible) there.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Where they are in combination with oil prices. Now...

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Let me finish that one thing. Because we think the solution will be at the negotiation table and will not be on the killing fields.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well then let me turn to Dr. Brzezinski because you wrote, I think in 1997 in your book, about the grand chessboard. I mean, this famous phrase which I've written down about Russia with Ukraine as an empire, and Russia without Ukraine is more of a European country. So given that Eastern Ukraine is pretty much occupied by Russian-supported forces, would you call Russia a semi-empire? Or — ?

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: I think Russia right now is an aspiring empire. That is to say, in the eyes of some, it wishes it could be. And more than that, perhaps, but it isn't yet because of internal weaknesses, and economic problems, not to mention others. But I think, looking at the issues that we're facing today, more directly, we really need to strike a balance between a policy in which we

offer Russia genuine accommodation, and at the same time convince Russia that crossing certain lines is prohibitively expensive for Russia itself.

We're trying to do that in a very difficult setting because we're a multi-nation alliance in which everyone has, more or less, a say. But at the same time we have to face the fact that there is the risk that the Russians might calculate, or rather, miscalculate, that they can seek more than is tolerable. And that would produce unpredictable consequences. This is why I favor both deterrence, including reliance of force if necessary; and accommodation. For example, reassurance to the Russians that it is not our intent or objective to make Ukraine a member of NATO, but rather something like Finland.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Just to rule it out. Now do you see the Minsk Agreement, which obviously Poroshenko also needed breathing space, but, I mean, do you see it as the beginning of a solution for the Ukraine to at least freeze the issue for now? Or do you see it as Arseniy Yatsenyuk sees it? As simply a pretext for Putin to have a more accommodating relationship and to get sanctions lifted?

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: Well, I think it all depends on whether, first of all, it is respected. I think that's the critical dimension. Now if it is respected, it can be a point of departure for some accommodation in which there is quid pro quo, not all issues are resolved, Crimea cannot be resolved conclusively now, so the status quo, the new status quo, for a while, will certainly endure and perhaps more than

that. But it is essential that Russia does not pursue a policy of undermining the possibility of Ukraine being transformed, with Western help, into a genuine, responsible democracy. And it's rather easy, through a series of short military confrontations, to impose such high economic costs on Ukraine that its efforts to reform itself flounder.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Yes, that's right. Now can I just ask you, Madam Minister, I mean, there is a lot of talk now in NATO, certainly, about the possibility that Putin will move nuclear weapons into Crimea. And I'm curious how you would regard that. If he's annexed it, it would — anyway, I mean, it's a live topic and I'm curious what you think about it. And then, Dr. Brzezinski, what you might think about it.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: It has to be observed how he is acting very closely. And I think we should not speculate too much ahead of things that happen or do not happen. And I want to put a little bit of emphasis on one point which hasn't been touched right now, but NATO changed a lot during the last year. We had, at the Summit in Wales, the effects of the Summit of Wales today are that we have a NATO that is way more flexible, agile, responsive. The spearhead is ready in two — two to —

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Is being sharpened or being forged.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well, it's ready to two to five days, which is different from where we came from where 30 to 180 days. The nephews in the Baltic States and Poland, in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania are very important for those countries as reassurance. And of course the (inaudible), which all shows that we are very serious about making clear that the Article V, we are serious about it. And that we will react.

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: Well first of all, there's nothing to prevent the Russians from placing nuclear weapons in Crimea, if they so wish. And there is no effective legal prohibition either. So I'm inclined to the view that they probably will. What worries me more than that, because actually whether they're in Crimea or not, is not really militarily decisive. What worries me more is the fact that over the last several weeks, Putin and his regime have deliberately flaunted the nuclear threat in direct and indirect ways at the West — over-flights, actual references to nuclear weapons. That has not happened for decades, and that's dangerous.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Now, and they have their transponders off, too, which doesn't help very, very much. So, as you said, deterrence is the key issue, if we're not drawing the line in — on Ukraine because it's not part of NATO. Part of deterrence is confidence, I mean — and the big question is whether the Balts, as we've often wondered, are defensible; and whether NATO's doing enough to make the line clear. For instance, there's a lot of debate about prepositioning heavy

armor along the Russian border, it's very difficult to do it, there's a lot of complications and argument about it. Is this something that you favor? Is that a message Putin would understand? How do you make deterrence better and more important than, I mean — obviously what you've said is there are a few headquarters and it's about a hundred people, I think.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Oh no!

Mr. Steven Erlanger: No, no, it is. I mean, it's about a hundred people in each of the Baltic countries, tops.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: No, no, no. Don't underestimate the Readiness Action Plan which is a coherent large implementation of different instruments to be absolutely ready and organized to defend this part of Europe, too. It also has other meanings. But that's the reason why there was a lot of change in NATO over the last year; and what we're doing now is implementing it concrete and actively in those different countries I was just naming, and I would not underestimate this instrument. It is the necessary response to what we've seen at the borders and the way Russian were provoking now and then, we are giving a consolidated and clear message and response to that.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Dr. Brzezinski, do you think this message is sufficient? Or does it need to be enhanced?

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: I think probably some enhancement would make sense. The main point I want to make is that there has to be a balance struck between deterrence and accommodation. We have signaled a willingness to accommodate. I'm not sure that, at this stage, we have succeeded in convincing the Russians that we are prepared to deter the kind of steps they are adopting in order to intimidate or undermine Ukraine. And we have to cope with both of these issues. But accommodation is equally important. Because in my view, the only outcome possible for Ukraine is one in which both sides walk away and can justify to their respective constituencies the settlement that was made and not one backs off and the other one prevails.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I mean, do you think the general Minsk formula of some kind of political decentralization and federalization of Eastern Ukraine works? Or is — the way I read the agreement, it's really Russia that will decide whether it's sufficient in order to close the border?

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: Well, there's no doubt that this is a rather unusual arrangement in which one country dictates to another, that the other country has to be decentralized. Whereas it itself has a variety of nations and religions under it and doesn't propose a similar regime for itself. But I know that's unrealistic. I think the real test is, what can Ukraine digest while at the same time developing steadily and making constructive use of Western aid? I am afraid that the aid will

be used mostly as a Band-Aid because of periodic crises. So we have to strive to reach an arrangement with the Russians that is really comprehensive and binding. And that's difficult, and it probably cannot be done unless the Russians become convinced that the costs of using force — the costs of using force, are prohibitively high and not worth the stake.

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: And that's the point I want to make. The costs of using force have not only to be military losses. What Europe is doing at the moment, being together with the Americans, is imposing economic costs on Russia; and they are hurting. And the costs are extremely high for the Russian economy at the moment being, and will be over years. So this is what I said at the beginning, I think we have a debate also about how to solve conflicts and what kind of costs are we imposing on each other? Are they losses of lives, or losses of the ruble, or Euros or dollars?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well this is a fair point. But of course, though it has caused economic pain, it hasn't stopped Mr. Putin from doing pretty much what he's wanted. So — .

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Not in the short term.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: — so if the point of sanctions is to deter, it hasn't quite worked yet, though, again, with Minsk he might be willing, it seems, to have

a slightly frozen border for a time, at least, to see whether Europe will roll over sanctions or whether they'll get worse or not.

Speaking of costs, Madam Minister, I couldn't, not ask you this, in NATO, in Wales, the headline goal was 2 percent of GDP. Even Britain is falling below two percent of GDP. There's only one Baltic country, I believe, Estonia, that's above 2 percent. So the question is, Germany, which is rich, as we know, and big and responsible and, as you say, wants to have a role in collective defense without too much fighting, you're spending 1.2 percent of GDP on defense. Now you're spending more on equipment. But shouldn't you be spending more? And isn't there a way for you to spend more that could reassure your own population?

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Yes. We come out of a story after the reunification of falling financial lines year after year after year, declining Bundeswehr. And yes, you are right, we have a large debate now in Germany that it's obviously necessary to invest more in security and defense on the Bundeswehr, which is good because the political atmosphere and the public opinion changed completely. And yes we're going to have a rise in budget of 1.2 billion for the next year and over the last — next four years, 8 billion. It's not a matter of one year or two years, it's a matter of sustainable, long-term higher budgets in defense because we need a healthy ground on which we are standing.

So I'm with you. But to reach the two percent for Germany is also difficult because we have a very strong, very much rising GDP. So you always have the benchmark there. Just to give you an impression, next year, the German overall budget will rise 3.3 percent. The defense budget will rise 3.7 percent, which is higher than the overall budget. But still, we're far away from the two percent of the GDP because this one is going through the roof.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well let me — just before I turn to the audience, because I'd like to take a couple questions, have you ever considered — I mean, I'm not talking about sharing taxpayer money with Greece here — but couldn't Germany spend more in a NATO context to provide money for a fund for collective equipment purchasing that countries could use as NATO begins to move toward a different kind of warfare. Has that ever been considered? Some kind of NATO endowment fund that Germany could spend some of its money on to get up closer to 2 percent, that wouldn't necessarily be on the Bundeswehr, but would be for the collective NATO good.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well, what is different in Germany from most other member states of NATO is that whatever we do goes into NATO. So we have the largest share, apart from the United States, of soldiers and of equipment and of finances in NATO. This is different in other member states. So I would not

understand what a specific fund would change, because we give everything in NATO.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Well, the fund, I mean, an awful lot of small countries that can't afford to buy air transport, for instance. And then — anyway, I just raise it in the air. Okay.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: No, no, no. It's a good thought because we have a multinational helicopter institution in Germany. We build it up right now. So we are buying the helicopters. And small nations are fitting in with personnel and have the chance to equip their personnel with helicopters which are located in this multinational organization in Germany, when we buy the helicopters. Of course, this is the right idea. It's the way to go. And we have — as a framework nation, of course we have to supply the frame with a lot of equipment and infrastructure so that other smaller nations can plug in with highly specialized personnel, which we lack. So we need them to. And that's the way NATO works.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Sounds like a good beginning. I want to take a couple questions here, in the time we have. I see Charles Grant, first.

Mr. Charles Grant: Charles Grant, Centre for European Reform. I have a question about whether NATO is really a paper tiger or not. A senior NATO official recently said — this was an off-the-record event — that while the Zapad-13 exercise, which Russia carried out in Kaliningrad, showed that it could mobilize

60,000 to 80,000 troops in 72 hours. It would take NATO six months to mobilize that many troops. He said that the decision-making processes within NATO are so slow and cumbersome that, even if streamlined, after a Russian incursion into the Baltic's would take NATO 10 days to take any kind of decision on what to do. And he also said the Baltics are militarily indefensible, seen from NATO. So if that is correct, isn't Russia — doesn't Russia just see that NATO is a paper tiger and it's not actually much use in defending our security?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Do you want to take that right now?

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: Thank you very much.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: It's encouraging, you know?

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: The Russians, theoretically, could accomplish some significant tactical successes through the advantage that they have in more rapid decision making and more rapid deployment. But the Russians would have to calculate, is it going to stop right there? What would be the reaction, particularly of the United States? Because the fact is that if NATO collectively dilly-dallies, the United States nonetheless probably would be involved, and actively so. And my sense is that within the Russian military, at high levels today, there is some serious concern whether the renewal of the Russian armed forces, which is underway, is yet ready at greater situation that makes Russia ready for major warfare.

I see some analogy here between the German general staff after Anschluss, warning Hitler that if he pursues the efforts against Czechoslovakia too energetically, he will plunge the Germans into a war for which it is not yet ready but will be ready in about four years. They were correct. And I suspect that a similar situation is, in fact, existing today in terms of the ratio of power between the United States and Russia.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Madam Minister, do you want to answer?

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Yes, just at one sentence. And therefore, the tool of the economic sanctions is in a double way hurting, because you have to pay for modernization of an army. We were talking about money just a moment ago. And if an economy is going down the drain, the Russian economy, you cannot invest anymore that much in a modern army. This is a thought, too.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: And its foreign reserves are going down. Sir, sir.

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: The problem however is that the Russians may pursue an assertive policy towards Ukraine just far enough to avoid a military confrontation but produce the result of the total collapse of the Ukrainian economy, the wasting of billions of dollars that came from the West, while Russia still suffers — indeed, it does suffer from our sanctions — but remains a major power and therefore achieves a major change in the geopolitical situation in Europe.

This is why we have to be very careful. And I repeat myself here. On the one hand, make a serious effort at an accommodation with the Russians and offer them a deal that they can live with. But at the same time, make it very clear to them, as credibly as we can, that the deliberate use of force, even if only periodically, is going to produce higher costs for Russia and that we're prepared to undertake the needed actions to that effect.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Let me take another question. I see some — a hand way in the back. But I can't really — it's very hard to see. Yes. Go ahead. Do you have a microphone?

Mr. Iter Turan: Yes, Madam Secretary, you seem to be advocating two things. One, (inaudible)

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Could you identify yourself? Sorry. Just for the...

Mr. Iter Turan: I am Iter Turan from Istanbul Bilgi University.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Thank you.

Mr. Iter Turan: You seem to be advocating, on the one hand, that there is closer cooperation within Europe on security matters. On the other hand, you also advocated that NATO and Europe, or the United States and Europe work more closely together. Why is this not happening? What do you see is the major impediment?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Good question. Why don't we get an answer? Go ahead.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well, there has — if you look back at the history, the beginning of the European Union was a defense union. Then of course because of France, it stopped at that point. That was for many, many, many years, a huge gap. In between, all these things happened like the single market, the single, the euro; we had Schengen, enormous changes within other fields in Europe. And the defense union kind of was quiet and sleeping. It started again a few years ago when France came back to that idea, which shows that within Europe I always think you need to have goals you aim to. And that the moment being, when we talk again about the European Army and the European Defense Union over the last weeks, we had a lot of input now from different countries, the Commission and others, how we could proceed. In other words, you take small steps, necessary steps at the beginning. If you have the goal, all of us know where to focus on. And there we have to be consistent and work hard and go this way.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Christoph, one more, short please. Thanks.

Mr. Christoph Von Marschall: I want to ask about European Army and let the air a little bit out of this idea. It sounds very nice and of course we get a lot of positive reactions. Europe is always good. To do something together is always good. But is a European Army possible and thinkable if we have still in Germany,

there's a so-called Parliament Vorbehalt (sp?) that there can't be any action if the Bundestag hasn't agreed before. I can't really imagine that France or Poland or the Netherlands will make their use of military force dependent on the vote of the German Bundestag. Is not sending your own soldiers into combat the core of national sovereignty? So shouldn't we rather think about pooling and cooperation but not about a little bit balloonie ideas like European Army today?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Thank you, Christoph.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Thank you for being so charming. But...

Mr. Steven Erlanger: He is charming.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: He is charming, definitely, definitely. Well, you know, it has always been so in Europe, that there were some who said, "Well, the status-quo makes it impossible to go forward." I remember being a minister for labor, what a horror it seemed to be that Poland, the Polish labor market would join to the German one and we could have free movement of Polish laborers. And I was the one who told my public, don't be scared about that. That will be of positive benefit for Germany.

And what have we seen today? We're grateful and happy that we have the common labor market in Europe that has been at large. Of course we have changed a lot of the architecture. Of course we have changed law in Germany to integrate more Europe. So if you think in a little bit bigger context, of course it might be

necessary that we change German law. But this has been — that has been the story of Europe.

And I think if at the beginning of a development, we start with the ifs, and buts, which is not possible to do, we will never, ever move forward. On the contrary, we will have a development that we will stand-still. We will have a disintegration. We will have the Euro-critic — European-critic forces getting bigger and larger and more influential.

So you need within Europe those who believe in a deeper integration of Europe. And of course the European Defense Union is one part of it which is doable. There's a lot of room in the Treaty of Lisbon still. There's a lot of room and space for movement in the German Grundgesetz and the German law. So why not use it and why not move forward?

Mr. Steven Erlanger: I also want to just press you on that a bit, because Volcker Rule was supposed to be looking into this triple-lock of Parliament. I don't know whatever happened with that. And it was very nice when you described the Polish-German Armies under each other's command. But the question is, would they be good at doing anything? That's really the question. I think it's a political — lovely political idea, but...

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: No. Excuse me, excuse me. The Franco-German brigade is in Mali at the moment (inaudible).

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Finally. Finally. After the French asked...

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Yes, but it is clear...

Mr. Steven Erlanger: ...and asked and asked and were refused and refused.

Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: And, please, may I — may I ask where the NATO response force has ever been deployed? Just to put it in this room. So we are not looking for conflicts. We have these — we have to build up our forces that, in case — and of course everybody is working for not having the case — in case it's necessary to use military forces, to send them. The NATO response force has never, ever been deployed. The Franco-German brigade is in Mali at the moment being. And therefore, I think it's the right way to move forward, to have this combination of Polish troops under German command and vice versa because it also shows that we are determined to work closer together with our European friends to be stronger in Europe.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Okay. And right there, Marta. You've both got your glasses on, I'm sorry.

Ms. Marta Dassù: For the Minister. We see —

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Marta Dassù.

Ms. Marta Dassù: — we see, and welcome, in my view, a much more active German foreign policy and security policy on the Eastern front, much less so in the Mediterranean. May I ask you, you were in a different position at that time, 2011.

You abstained your country, vis-à-vis the intervention in Libya and the U.N. Security Council. Would you consider that, now, the right decision at that time or a mistake?

The Honorable Dr. Ursula von der Leyen: Well, has it been — what the world did at that time, let's put it that way, or the west did at that time, was it successful? No. So I think we should not look back and blame each other because there were made a lot of mistakes on all sides, if I may put it that way. Let's look forward. I think the council today has been talking about Libya. I'm convinced, if we look at Tunisia and Tunis, the country where the Arab desire for freedom started, we need to do something to strengthen Tunis and Tunisia. And, of course, Europe will have to act somehow, what Libya is concerned, and we should do it in a very coherent and consistent way with our Transatlantic partners and within Europe. But the story back was not a success story.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Unfortunately, we have to wrap this up but I do want to give Dr. Brzezinski a chance to respond. Do you believe that Putin and Russia right now represents a serious global danger or simply a regional danger, or is it a country on the decline that we don't have to worry too much about? Last question.

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski: I don't think he represents a global danger deliberately, but he does represent a global danger in the sense that he's setting in

motion events and making threats that cumulatively could escalate and, in-fact, produce a global danger.

And don't forget, this is taking place in a context in which Ukraine is not the only serious problem. We are facing a serious problem in the Middle East, where, in-fact, we're trying to work with the Russians and the Iranians, and the Russians are working with us. So the potential for damage to global stability is enormous, not only in Europe, but cumulatively also in the Far East.

So he's a danger in effect, objectively, even if, subjectively, it is not his interest or intent to be dangerous. And if we are steadfast and clear, and I repeat myself again, if we create a situation in which he can help terminate this challenge in Ukraine, then I think that we'll all be ahead. And if we are not deliberately firm, and at the same time being willing to accommodate, we'll encourage him to escalate and will end up with chaos, probably intensified not only in Europe but in the Middle East.

Mr. Steven Erlanger: Thank you both very much.

Dr. Karen Donfried: Thank you both so much. I think you fulfilled Dr. Brzezinski's mandate of thinking strategically and reflecting historically, so thank you so much.