Event
“Transatlantic Relations at Times of Strategic Confrontation with Her Excellency Catherine Colonna”

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FEATURING
Catherine Colonna
Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, France

CSIS EXPERTS
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Transcript By
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Max Bergmann: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. It is fantastic to see such a large crowd here in Washington on a Friday, particularly in our era now of hybrid work. I think it's a sign of the importance of our visitor today and of the conversation that we will soon have.

I am Max Bergmann. I am the director of the Europe Program here at CSIS as well as the Stuart Center.

We are delighted to have you to all join us, either in person or watching online. We are honored to host Her Excellency Catherine Colonna, the minister of Europe and Foreign Affairs of France along with Ambassador Philippe Étienne and esteemed members of the impressive team of France's Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs. Thank you all for being with us today.

I will turn to Minister Colonna in a moment, but let me just say a few words about her background. She is no stranger to the United States. A career diplomat, her first posting was to the French Embassy here in Washington in the 1980s. The minister has held numerous high-ranking positions throughout her career including as a spokesperson for the Presidency of the Republic. She has been ambassador to Italy and San Marino, and ambassador to the United Kingdom. We may get into Brexit and the U.K., but would be curious for your thoughts on that. And this May she became minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, Minister Colonna is an officer of the Legion of Honor, officer of the Order of Merit, and Commandeur of the Order of Arts and Letters, and she was elevated to the prestigious rank of Ambassador of France in November of 2020. But that's actually not all. I learned yesterday that she was also previously vice president of the Cannes Film Festival, so she has quite, quite the resumé.

So it is our tremendous privilege to have the opportunity to host her today on her first visit as minister to the United States. And it has been quite a year in Franco-American relations. Last fall the partnership hit its lowest point since the Iraq War over AUKUS. Ambassador Étienne was the first French ambassador recalled from the United States since 1793, so he's not the first ambassador to be recalled – the second – but still it has been quite a long time.

However, in the past year, the relationship has been rebuilt. Presidents Biden and Macron were able to right the ship and set Franco-American relations back on a productive course, and this is because, in my view, the relationship is simple too important to let drift. France is our oldest ally and one of our closest diplomatic, military, and economic partners. Strong Franco-American cooperation has been vital in forging a robust response to
Russia – to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February of this year. And President Biden’s recent invitation to President Macron to attend the first White House state dinner of his presidency, I think, attests to the importance of the relationship, and that state dinner is due to take place in early December.

And CSIS takes pride in being one of the leading think tanks in the world investigating questions relating to international security, foreign policy, and geopolitics, and so we are honored to host Minister Colonna during her visit to the United States and, as minister, to provide a forum for her first big address on transatlantic relations.

And so your remarks I think come at a pivotal time. While the relationship from AUKUS has recovered, there is so much untapped potential in the Franco-American relationship that sometimes I tend to think that we as countries are a bit too similar. The U.S. and France are both democratic republics, we’re born of revolution and with grand ambitions for ourselves, and for our countries, and place in the world. And sometimes, to be frank, we can really annoy the heck out of each other. (Laughs.) We each always think we are right and that we know what’s best. But we can really let that hold us back. And I hope with the minister’s visit and with President Macron’s visit that we are witnessing a new dawn in the relationship between France and the United States.

And so, with that, let me welcome Minister Catherine Colonna to the podium. And let me remind everyone to silence their phones. And then after her remarks we’ll have a question-and-answer session that I will lead. Minister, please, welcome to the stage. (Applause.)

Minister Catherine Colonna:

Merci beaucoup. Thank you. Thank you so much.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends, good morning, everyone. It’s good to be back in Washington after some time, and good to see some people I’ve known for some time as well. It’s a pleasure to be with you today.

I served my career, as you just heard, in Washington as a young – a very young diplomat, so of course much has changed since then. I am 40 years older. My French accent is getting stronger and stronger, and the gastronomic scene in D.C. has changed for the better I’ve been told, but I’d like to experience it myself.

Yet today, as back then, we are challenged to address a strategic confrontation as recently and particularly experienced with Russian missiles indiscriminately raining down on Ukraine cities along with Iranian drones.
We are once again being challenged by an imperial power whose aggression puts Europe and global security at risk.

A time of crisis is a time to tighten ranks among allies one more time, one more time. This is especially true for France and the United States, which are strong and oldest allies. Now is the time to reaffirm the meaning of our alliance and the principles on which it is based. I am therefore deeply grateful to the Center for Strategic and International Studies for providing this unique opportunity to discuss the state of transatlantic relationships.

Which – on the continent, in Asia, in the Middle East, or in Africa, we are indeed currently experiencing a time of deep turmoil on enormous, unprecedented scale, should I say. Over the past eight months, Europe has been at the crossroads of renewed geopolitical tensions. On February the 24th, Russia unleashed its illegal, unprovoked, unjustified, and brutal military aggression against Ukraine. It ushered a new era of war on the continent the likes of which Europe has not seen since World War II.

Russia’s war violates the sovereignty of Ukraine – this is a fact. It puts the security and stability of Europe and the European continent at risk – that is also a fact. But the stakes go far beyond Ukraine and Europe. President Putin’s war threatens food and energy security globally. It undermines the fundamental principles of the multilateral order, which France and the United States are committed to uphold as permanent members of the U.N. Security Council: sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-aggression, pacific settlement of disputes.

If Russia’s actions go unanswered, wars of conquest might become the new normal in international relations. Anywhere in the world, those who are tempted to pursue territorial expansions through aggression, invasion and mass crimes could feel encouraged. We cannot afford that. As President Macron underscored at the General Assembly a few weeks ago in New York, we must push back against a brutal, and I quote, “return to the age of imperialism and colonies.” End of quote.

Beyond Ukraine, crises have multiplied across the globe. The terrorist threat still looms in the Levant and in the Sahel region. Iran’s nuclear ambitions and aggressive regional behavior fuel growing instability in the Middle East and threaten the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

Russia is using the Wagner Group to increase its influence in Africa as in the Central African Republic or in Mali, exploiting resources and carrying out massive human rights violations. State and non-state actors spread disinformation and use cyber as their new weapon. Strategic competition
also increased and became even harsher in the Indo-Pacific with China growing in assertiveness and even sometimes aggressiveness as recently experienced in the Strait of Taiwan.

For decades, every U.S. administration – Democrat and Republican alike – has asked Europe to take more responsibility on the world stage; specifically when it came to its own security and to shoulder a larger part of the burden. This has often been encapsuled into one figure: the 2 percent NATO target.

We Europeans are ready, able, and willing to meet our responsibilities. Over the past few years and especially in the context of the war in Ukraine, the European Union has strived to more and even more become a reliable partner for the U.S.

Having faced several existential crises over the last decade, Europe could have collapsed – some might have hoped for it. It didn’t, and instead, it made significant headway on the economic front while dealing with the financial crisis in 2008. It overcame Brexit, which many interpreted then as the beginning of European disunion. It showcased unprecedented solidarity and efficiency during the COVID-19 pandemic. It demonstrated an impressive unity, responsiveness, and determination while confronting Russia’s military aggression of Ukraine.

On that fateful early morning of February 24th, President Putin did not only make a strategic mistake regarding Ukraine and the people of Ukraine – with resistance and courage I witnessed during my three visits as minister to Kyiv. He also made a strategic miscalculation regarding Europe. Russia expected to be able to shy away from the challenge. It expected weakness and division. The exact contrary happened, taking aback all who would have bet against the EU. We did stand united. And we stand undeterred, and we stand strong in facing Russia’s imperialism.

We’ve acted swiftly and decisively. Within 48 hours after Russian forces began invading Ukraine, the European Union – under you may recall the French presidency of the Council of the Union – adopted massive sanctions which we have continuously strengthened since then. The 27 member states have already adopted eight rounds of massive sanctions. Just this Monday – last Monday – three, four days ago, with my fellow EU colleagues and Dmytro Kuleba, who spoke to us by VTC from his bunker in Kyiv because he was under shelling. While Iranian drones were sowing death and destructions, we started to work on a ninth sanction package, and we decided to sanction Iranian individuals and entities responsible for the drone transfers to Russia. These sanctions were adopted in record time. It was Monday; they have entered into force today.
In close coordination with the United States and our other G-7 partners, these sanctions are targeting those responsible for the invasion and for the horrendous crimes carried out in Ukraine. They are working. They are crippling the Kremlin’s war effort by suffocating entire strategic sectors of the Russian economy such as the car industry, aerospace, and of course, defense industries.

Access to critical technologies, and goods like semi-conductors, for example, has been dramatically reduced if not entirely cut off, and this is only the beginning. We stand by our Ukrainian partners, and we will support them as long as it takes.

Since the beginning of the war, Europe has mobilized over 22 billion euros in economic, humanitarian, microeconomic, diplomatic, and of course military assistance, without even mentioning the 17 billion euros paid by the EU budget to support 10 million refugees – 10 million Ukrainian refugees welcomed by our EU countries. We’ve pledged more than three million – three billion – forgive me, three billion euros under the European Peace Facility to bolster the capacities of the Ukrainian armed forces.

EU supports adds up to the significant bilateral efforts made by every single of the European member states, be it in the field of weapons, non-lethal equipment, intelligence, or training. The EU also launched – this Monday – a military assistance mission which will allow us to train up to 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers, including 2,000 in France, on European soil. And we are also helping Ukraine with economic and financial assistance; nine billion euros so far have been pledged of which two-thirds have already been disbursed, part of it this week – an additional two million (euros) has been disbursed.

So we’re doing our part, and our hand is steady. Europe accepts to bear the cost of this war while working with the United States to limit its economic impact because we must convince our citizens that we – the EU and the U.S. – we’re doing our utmost to tackle this issue, including for our countries.

These decisive steps are a response to the dire circumstances, but they are also the testament of larger trends. First, European defense is taking shape. In one short semester, the European Union managed to boldly go where it had not dared venture before. At the Versailles summit in March, EU leaders adopted an ambitious agenda aimed at fleshing out the European sovereignty, both on economic and on security issues. This means achieving energy independence from Russia by reducing oil and gas imports. This means mobilizing our industrial policy to better secure our supply chains and strategic components, and reducing our excessive dependence to other
external suppliers such as China. This means pursuing a new agenda of common defense investments in Europe and a common approach to the threats we are facing under the strategic compass of the EU.

So let me say a few words about the relationship between the EU and NATO. There is a classic and common misconception that an autonomous European defense would undermine NATO. It is not new; I’ve been in this country before. Allow me to say that nothing could be further from the truth – nothing. I stated clearly in the NATO summit in Madrid last June, but we’ve stated before in other NATO summits, and I stated in the EU summit in Versailles in March, this autonomous European defense is not only compatible to but complementary to NATO.

NATO is and will continue to be the cornerstone of our collective defense. A stronger NATO is good for Europe, just as a stronger Europe is good for NATO. As you know, France is significantly contributing to the reinforcement of NATO’s posture in Eastern Europe right now – we’re doing it. We are a framework nation in Romania with a deployment that is soon to reach the brigade level. We are present in Estonia – I’ll be there on Monday – and we take part in efforts and missions in the Baltic States. While strengthening the contribution to NATO’s military posture, France has pushed for an ambitious common security and defense policy for the EU during its presidency of the EU Council through the first half of this year.

A second trend is also taking shape. We’re building a political community that goes beyond the European Union. On May the 9th this year, President Macron expressed the ambition to gather the whole continent under one roof, so to speak. Six months later, on October the 9th, the European political community held its first meeting in Prague under the Czech presidency. Forty-four European heads of state or government attended this first meeting, including the U.K., which is interesting. Beyond display of unity, the European policy community serves a strategic purpose: strengthening our common resilience through concrete alliances, concrete cooperation projects in the area of, for example, critical infrastructure protection, the fight against cyber crime, energy supplies, and mobility, among others.

Third and last, the EU now acts and thinks globally. In Africa, France and the EU are determined to push forward a renewed partnership with a massive increase of our development aid. France’s aid to Africa, for example, has doubled in volume between 2017 and 2022 – doubled in volume. Our development assistance will reach its highest level ever this year with 14.8 billion (euros).

And I would like to say a few words about another area where we have to act in common – the Indo-Pacific – and what a great part of our strategic, economic, demographic, and environmental future is clearly being defined.
During my official visit to India last month, I expressed our goal clearly, as a resident nation in both the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, France is committed to upholding the liberty of sovereignty in the region. To put it clearly, there can be no choice if there is only one offer – the Chinese one with so many strings attached.

France adopted its strategy for the Indo-Pacific some time ago, in 2018, and France was instrumental in the adoption of an EU strategy for the Indo-Pacific that is new in 2021. Our ambition – I just mentioned it – is to propose an alternative model of cooperation to the region, promoting multilateralism, upholding the rule of law, supporting an open and fair environment for trade, supporting connectivity and green transition.

We must now deliver in concrete results. With its Global Gateway initiative in particular, the EU is offering infrastructure projects in key areas such as health, transport, and the Internet. In the defense and security realm, Europeans are also individually – member states – and collectively – EU – increasing their operational presence and develop the partnerships with like-minded countries from the west of the Indian Ocean to the Pacific.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is no denying that the transatlantic relationship has experienced its ups and downs. We all know that. But the truth is the alliance between France and the U.S. is unquestionable. It is unquestionable because of our common history, because of the extraordinary connection that exists between our peoples, our values, and our strategic interests.

Having carefully looked into the new national security strategy the Biden administration just released last week, and as France is currently going through a similar process as well, I am struck by the convergence of our assessments. Just as the U.S., we consider that we are moved to an era of increasing geopolitical competition between powers eager to reshape the world order. Just as the U.S., we recognize the urgency of modernizing our military to cope with this new strategic environment, but also to use diplomacy, and to address global challenges that call for more international cooperation. Cooperation is also needed. And just like the U.S., we see a pressing need to support value-based partnerships and to reinforce multilateralism in order to protect our common goods.

Almost 60 years ago to the day – on October the 22nd, 1962 – General de Gaulle hosted Dean Acheson, who came to present evidence on Soviet launch ramps in Cuba. De Gaulle famously told him that he did not need to see the photographs and that the United States could count on the full solidarity of their French ally while facing the Soviet threat.
So France may be a troublesome ally sometimes, as it always speaks its mind, but it is an ally that is able and willing, with a full-spectrum, combat-proven military and a strategic culture which has always led us to shoulder our responsibilities. This is what I wanted to tell you today: France is your ally and your friend. So is Europe.

Our alliance must be based on solidarity, transparency, and respect of the given word, predictability, and trust. But we can go and must go further by building upon the impetus given by Presidents Biden and Macron in Rome in October last year – you just remember that. We need each other, and we need to be able to trust each other. These lead me to say that it is in this regard a very positive signal that President Macron has been invited to pay a state visit to the United States of America that I understand will be the first state visit hosted by President Biden since he took office, and of course this is a real honor for my country.

France is determined to further deeper cooperation in strategic fields such as space, energy, and digital technologies, and regulation together with the United States. We will strive to do so bilaterally, but also by supporting the Trade and Technology Council.

So we are partners. We are partners, but we may also find ourselves competitors in certain areas. That is quite normal. And in this case, we need to find a way to regulate our competition. This is the best way to maintain the strategic interests we share in the long run.

In this regard, I believe it is important that colleagues and friends in Washington are aware of some questions and concern we can have. Some of the ideas, for example, adopted in the Inflation Reduction Act could, from our point of view, impact the level playing field between the U.S. and the European actors, creating a risk of divergence between our economic interests. We must not allow that to happen.

A final word on Ukraine. We are committed to maintain the unity and solidarity that have prevailed between allies since the outbreak of the war. The democratic values we share on both sides of the Atlantic are under siege. Are still hiked of – of propaganda, disinformation, and outright lies targeting us have multiplied, and my country knows it, as you know.

These material attacks have gone to try to achieve one goal: undermining us and what we stand for with so-called alternative models, which are, in fact, anti-democratic and authoritarian in nature and often supported by revisionist powers. And we're also committed to preventing a rift with the Global South – the so-called Global South – which the Kremlin propaganda is all too eager to encourage.
In this regard, our joint diplomatic efforts are paying off. Russia stands alone on the world stage, only supported by countries like North Korea and Syria alike, as we’ve made plain with the last vote of the U.N. General Assembly very recently.

We must build upon this new partnership to tackle the global challenges facing us all. Climate change, global health, food supply, biodiversity are not only common goods, they’re also new frontier – new frontiers for global security, stability, and prosperity. They are the new frontiers for our humanity where we share all common interests.

So we need inclusivity to demonstrate that the multilateral system is the most efficient tool to settle disputes, produce unbiased binding rules, and provide stability and development to all. That means we need also to be clear-headed about the way our partners in the south sometimes perceive us – if you allow me to end on this note.

So there’s no doubt we face significant challenges, but I’m convinced that our partnership is more crucial than ever and will only become more and more crucial in the years to come.

Thank you for your attention, and I’m now ready to take a few questions. Thank you so much. (Applause).

Mr. Bergmann: Well, Minister, thank you so much. I mean, there is much to discuss, and you’ve put out much on the plate.

Maybe I’ll just start with probing you a little bit about Franco-American relations and the state visit. You had mentioned in your remarks that France hopes to see greater cooperation on space, energy, digital, and the trade and tech council.

What are – beyond that, beyond those, sort of, specific areas, is there – what do you hope to get out of the state visit? Do you hope to establish, sort of, a new partnership, a new relationship with the United States – or new and improved relationship?

Min. Colonna: Oh, I got the mic, so I don’t need to be looking for one.

Mr. Bergmann: No, no.

Min. Colonna: Thank you for that key question. President Macron will come to Washington this coming December – first and second of December – and the goal is to strengthen our relationship not only to show the vitality of our relationship –
it is there, and we demonstrate it every single day here and elsewhere – but to go even further, for two key reasons.

First, we must deliver concrete results now within the framework of the joint communique they adopted a year ago after the August, I would say, episode – to be very diplomatic – that had be affecting the trust between our two nations, the reliability of our relations.

They did put everything on the table. They had a decision taken very quickly because there was just one month after the August decision to, I’d say, do better, and they achieved a roadmap. We have working groups working, and I stand to translate these working groups into decisions – whether that is regarding trade, energy, other issues, and of course, human exchanges. And there can be so many other areas – space, cooperation in the nuclear field, civilian, I mean, and elsewhere. So that’s one of the things that we would like to see – that this visit can achieve one year after, one step further.

But in addition to that and maybe even more fundamentally, I’d say that considering what happened in the world for the last 12 months, it is important to give a signal that we are all together – and not only France and the U.S. – we all together countries who believe in the international rules-based order, countries who believe in democratic principle, people who believe in universal values, and the rule of law – that we’re determined to tackle these challenges together, whether it is on the European continent in Ukraine, or elsewhere.

I mean, there are so many global challenges now that it is time to show that we’re determined to go further. We absolutely do realize what’s happening. I think nobody’s naïve in the world, none of us, none of our leaders either, and we would like to make one step further in not only that unity between us, but the messaging we’re giving to the rest of the world.

Again, you know, we have long-standing relations with ups and downs, as I mentioned it, but the rest of the world is watching us, even more than before.

Mr. Bergmann: I want to ask you a bit about European strategic autonomy or European sovereignty. This has been a major theme of Macron’s presidency starting in 2017, and there’s been some wariness on the part of the United States, or different parts of Washington, that essentially European autonomy means drifting away from the United States.

I think you gave a really strong rationale of why that’s not the case – how this would be complementary to the United States. I am curious how the Biden administration is receiving that message. And you know, there’s been lots of progress on the trade and tech council, but it doesn’t look like there’s as much progress on the U.S.-EU security dialogue.
So I’m curious, how does the Biden administration in hearing that message, that Europeans’ strategic autonomy is ultimately in the U.S. interests, because it will mean a stronger Europe?

Min. Colonna: Well, I think it is not something that’s difficult to address between the two presidents because they share the same views, that indeed it is complementary and indeed it is most needed to have a strong NATO. And we are, I believe, a reliable and strong partner of NATO, a good ally. And to have a better equipped Europe, whether it is in literal terms – I mentioned the, you know, leveling up, if I may say, of our defense effort, France being steadily one of the good nations in this respect – but others are picking up, flying up.

So whether it is on the military side or on what we call our strategic autonomy going, beyond the defense aspect, we must regain the capability to produce some crucial goods. We’ve seen that during the pandemic. We’re all, you know, looking after PPE or some medicine that we could not or did not produce in Europe anymore or in the U.S. anymore.

So, it’s going I think beyond the defense and security issue. So I think they are aligned on this, and if there is still a question mark about the complementary nature of these two leaders of what we are, it is a total misconception of what we are. That’s why we’re fighting so much to explain.

I mean, come on, look at the world – look at the world as it is. Who are the good partners? Who share the same values or the same interests to defend? Europe and the United States.

Mr. Bergmann: I think the strong EU response as you mentioned on sanctions and providing lethal assistance is an example of that. I want to turn to the war in Ukraine and Russia.

Putin it seems has doubled down mobilizing much of his country – now firing missiles and kamikaze drones at the Ukrainian public. Could you maybe assess what do you think the situation is right now in the Kremlin? What is their decision making like?

You had mentioned that he miscalculated over Europe’s resolve. Do you think right now this is another miscalculation that Putin is doubling down on the war? How do you see his political situation?

Min. Colonna: I think he made several miscalculations, clearly. On the military front, the idea was probably to take over Kyiv quickly. It didn't happen.
A second miscalculation is on the international scene. It requires some efforts, and some explanation is needed and will be given. And we must be very vigilant and active in explaining that what is at stake, by the way, is not only Ukraine or security on the continent, but what is at stake is, as I tried to explain, the world order, the pillars of the international community are being shaken, and nobody can afford that, whether in Europe or elsewhere.

And they did not progress in that result. They've been isolated from the beginning, and they are still isolated with just a handful of countries, not exactly the type of countries we are partners with.

And it was probably the miscalculation by – as consequence of these two mistakes being driven to – on the internal Russian front – called for a partial mobilization. You've seen the results have not been exactly welcome by the Russian population.

We have hundreds of thousands of people who have left the country as a consequence of that, and it is a question mark of – for all of us of what is exactly the state of – you know, the decision-making process in the Kremlin, but it is quite clear that it is an isolated power as well.

So it leads to some – we would call it – fuite en avant – you say doubling down. Doubling down is a little bit higher – (inaudible). So – fuite en avant – is you know going on the same train but further and further.

That's why we have to be ready to calmly, but steadily and strongly, be there – be there to support Ukraine, be there to support the international world order, and be there to defend our values. And be there together being careful not to offer the Kremlin an invitation to divide us.

And I'm a bit worried – I touched this issue a moment ago in my introduction remarks. The alignment of the policy, which is what we are doing right now, must be supported by the alignment of our economic contribution to that new scene, and that's why the energy question is key for our future, I believe.

Mr. Bergmann: I want to ask you, you know, a leader miscalculating is one thing. A leader miscalculating that possesses nuclear weapons is another.

There’s been a lot of concern about Russia’s potential use of a tactical nuclear weapon on the battlefield. How concerned about that are you, and if Russia were to use a tactical nuclear weapon, what would France – what would France’s response be in that situation?

Min. Colonna: I’d say, wisely, two things. First, never answer ever a hypothetical question, especially this one.
Second, when we talk about nuclear weapons, I think it is necessary to be not only cautious, but to limit the words we’re using. So I just say that we call on Russia to act as a responsible power, as it has to do considering the status of being a nuclear power.

Mr. Bergmann: That was a very wise answer, I think. (Laughter.) Let me prod a little bit about France’s provision of military assistance to Ukraine.

I think, on the one hand, France and the European Union and European countries have provided significant military assistance and many countries for the first time providing lethal assistance abroad, including the EU. Yet, it also feels insufficient, given that Ukraine is fighting a major global military power effectively on its own.

Looking out at the prospect of this war six months from now or three months from now, how is – do you see France increasing its level of assistance? Do you think Europe will be able to provide increased assistance? What do you say to those that are critical that Europe hasn’t provided nearly the amount of assistance that the United States has provided?

Min. Colonna: Well, I’d say, quickly, two things. We are doing our part, and we’re doing it efficiently. I gave the figures. I can give a few details.

But regarding France, as you might remember, we’ve made the choice not to give every detail public before it’s relevant, but we deliver everything we’ve promised to deliver. This is one good point for France.

And we don’t want to make everything public beforehand because it’s not useful information, I believe – not to help Ukraine if we were to do so. But only know we do our part, and we decided to reinforce. And we reinforce our help since the very beginning.

We do it in close partnership with Ukraine. We try to answer with our capacities to Ukrainian demands and needs. So we’ve already, as you note, delivered artillery, and we continue to do so. We will do more. We’ve delivered missiles. We’ve delivered Light Armored Vehicles. We delivered ammunitions. We delivered lots of things.

And I’ve been to Kyiv three times, and I met President Zelensky and other – and my colleagues – and other ministers. Every time I went there, I can tell you President Zelensky really appreciates what we’re doing and the efficiency of what we deliver, and what we deliver is what they asked for. So we’ve done that, and we will reinforce that, and so will the EU with a new a
new mission – especially of training – and so gaining time in that capacity to use whatever material we deliver.

Mr. Bergmann: Just quickly on the EU, on the European Peace Facility, I saw that it’s recently been increased by another 500 million euros to 3 billion (euros), but that fund is now running out of – running short of funds – or it’s used up half of the amount of money that it’s been allocated to last until 2027.

Does France support increasing the European Peace Facility – or finding some other vehicle to essentially provide more assistance to Ukraine through the EU?

Min. Colonna: If needed, we will – we will do it. I say “if needed” because it is not fully pledged already. It’s roughly 5 billion (euros).

So we’ve increased Monday by another half billion (euros), reaching 3 billion (euros) now. There’s still some room for maneuver, if I may say, even though this peace facility – as an ironic title for delivering literal arms, but this is the tools we have – it is an integral financial instrument, by the way, not an EU budget-funded fund. And if necessary, we will have to do more. We mentioned it today. We’ve been discussing about that another time Monday. We will – we will do it if needed.

Mr. Bergmann: I want to ask you a little bit about the backchannel diplomacy that President Macron has been playing with President Putin that has brought a lot of criticism, I think, from Eastern European countries. There’s a lot of criticism on Twitter.

What would you say to those critics? I mean, it seems like this diplomacy is fairly well coordinated with Ukraine, with the United States. What is the nature right now of the Macron-Putin conversation?

Min. Colonna: If I may correct you slightly?

Mr. Bergmann: Please.

Min. Colonna: It is fully coordinated with our friends. It has to be. But, of course, it is.

They are not easy conversations. You can imagine that. They might be difficult sometimes, and they don’t produce all the results we would like to see. That’s clear.

But we absolutely think it is crucial to keep a channel of communication with those making the decisions in Russia, including President Putin. We know the only ones talking to President Putin, or to the Russian ministers. I even
believe that some American ministers do so when needed, including recently.

Because if we think about it, Putin is probably isolated now in his very strange region of the world and the way it could be run. So isolation – reinforcing this isolation of his would not be a good option. Whether all our messages go across, clearly not enough. But we need to use that opportunity to make him understand how we see things, what we believe he should do. We need to hear him when we – we need him to hear, I’m sorry, when we mention our analysis and our assessment of mistakes he made, and what he could do to move on in a different direction.

And sometimes it is achieving some results – like it did in the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, you know, where we could – after conversations between my president and President Zelensky, there was President Putin and then myself to my colleague Lavrov – clear the way for the Vienna agency mission in Zaporizhzhia, which happened after a long months of negotiation but it did happen, allowing presence – international presence there and possibly paving the way for a security zone around the plant, which is absolutely necessary because this is too dangerous for the world to use that as a zone of military confrontation.

So it is not as useful as one could hope for, but it is needed, critical. And it must go on, and we’re not alone.

Mr. Bergmann: I want to ask you a quick question about enlargement. Ukraine was granted candidate status to join the EU this summer, which, I think, was a very important step. I think we here in the United States see potential EU membership for Ukraine as critical to its reconstruction.

Yet, future enlargement of the European Union has sort of been stuck toward the Western Balkans. In order for the EU to enlarge and take on new members, does France believe that a new EU treaty will be needed – that a new treaty will be needed before letting new members in to reform how the EU functions?

Min. Colonna: Not quite. We believe – and we’re not the only one to believe – that a new EU treaty will be needed. We know the difficulties. And the point is not to address the enlargement.

The enlargement is a process. The rules are there. Everybody knows what they are. And nobody has an interest, even those candidate countries, to take a fast track where they would not be fully prepared when they join the EU because they will join.
You mentioned the Balkans. After the war, next to Yugoslavia, we offered – and we did offer – again, black and white, the rules are clear – that they will be welcome in the EU as not only partners, but members should they be in capacity to join us.

So we do our part. Sometimes some countries have been joining because they were able to do their part. Some are a bit late. One of the goals of what we’re doing is to help them realize that this the future, that we’re ready to welcome them, and now they’re to do their homework. And just quoting President Zelensky after the EU granted this status to Ukraine, he said that now it’s up to us to do the job, and we’ve been helping.

Mr. Bergmann: I want to ask just a question related to French foreign policy overall in Europe because it seems like you have become minister at somewhat of a challenging time, where relations with the U.K. have been difficult. There’s been tension between France and Eastern Europe.

There’s now been a change in the Italian government, which has been a strong partner of France, and also, tension with Spain over the MidCat pipeline. There’s been some criticism of France that France that looks out for – when it comes to Europe looks out for its own national interest first and really defends that very strongly, and doesn’t always stand up for European interests.

So how would you assess the kind of state of French foreign policy in Europe? Can France still lead in Europe?

Min. Colonna: Well, first of all, Brexit was more of a challenge to the French ambassador to London. To the French, as it is for Europe and foreign affairs, it is done. As you know, we took note of it. We signed new agreements, and this is it. And we must turn now to a more positive future.

It is no news that Europe is diverse, but it is a fact that we’ve been able to not only stay united, including in this crisis that could have been extremely challenging, but that we’ve progressed towards our integration. So it requires sometimes a lot of time. It requires lots of efforts. It’s not always easy, but we are progressing.

We only – you know, a few years ago, nobody would have believed that we could have a common borrowing capacity. It has happened. Only a few years ago, saying the words strategic autonomy would be a bad word – European defense strategic concept.

And you know the history of Europe. The economic market was created after a failure to talk about defense. So we’ve been able – it took some time,
but we’ve been able to reach that step where everybody knows that we have to build a more integrated Europe, a more political Europe, and a more sovereign Europe for the sake of us all, including – for instance – for the sake of those friends and partners who share our values.

Mr. Bergmann:  OK. I’m going to take one or two questions from the audience because we’ll have just a few minutes.

But my final question is – and you mentioned this about climate change. You know, for many of us in America a miracle happened this summer when the United States Senate passed the Inflation Reduction Act taking really bold, strong steps on climate, but as you note, that many of the provisions of that legislation require being made in America and don’t necessarily take into account the transatlantic dimension.

Do you see this as a potential, sort of, you know, green trade war that could emerge similar to the Airbus Boeing dispute that had roiled transatlantic relations? Or do you think this just, sort of, a solvable issue that can be worked through?

Min. Colonna:  No, no, we’re certainly not looking for any war, and certainly not on that.

It is a two-fold reality. It is very welcome that the U.S. are taking action to increase their reach of the, you know, carbon neutrality goal. We’re doing the same. So we would not complain that you’re doing.

That speed up there was needed, and it was needed. So that’s good news. Now we’ll be careful – and we’ll need to have a conversation with the U.S. administration and all our, you know, colleagues. We have to have a conversation of whether it will impact negatively not only the level playing field, which is, I would say, a trade issue, but more deeply the – what I would call the economic alignment of our two entities that is absolutely needed for, I think, our common prosperity down the road.

And b, especially in the current context of the war in Ukraine, and what it will require from all of us to sustain the effort in the long-term. We cannot afford any disruption. So we’ll be looking for some conversations like that, I’m sure.

Mr. Bergmann:  OK. We’ll take one or two questions.

Ma’am, please in the front. A microphone will be coming to you. The one rule is you must ask a question – or two rules – and also identify yourself, please, so.
Min. Colonna: Mic?

Mr. Bergmann: Yes.

Min. Colonna: Thank you.

Q: Thank you for this opportunity. Madam Foreign Minister, my question is that France is an ally with Saudi Arabia, and after the OPEC Plus decision, it said that Europe will go into recession. The United States is revisiting its relationship with Saudi Arabia. You, being an ally of the U.S., will France be revisiting its relationship with Saudi Arabia at this time?

Mr. Bergmann: OK. And I think we can take one more.

Sir, in the back there. Sorry to make you run, too. Oh, over here.

Q: Thank you. My apologies if my question overlaps. I just caught the tail end where he mentioned Saudi Arabia.

But concerning whether Russia is truly isolated or not, Saudi Arabia has just announced an interest in joining Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa in creating their own shared currency and a means of economic exchange in order to not be totally dependent upon the SWIFT system – the dollar and the euro.

Does that indicate Russia's not truly isolated? And what do you think the possibility is of the BRICS countries challenging the hegemony of the dollar and the euro?

Min. Colonna: Thank you. So very briefly regarding Saudi Arabia, I'm sure it was a disappointment for many countries, including for the United States, I'm sure, considering the engagement that President Biden demonstrated very recently, actually, with this country.

It's not good news either for the rest of the world. Because in a time of war in Ukraine and energy prices rising, having potentially these energy prices rising again will affect the world economy globally.

So yes, there is a need to talk further with Saudi Arabia, but they're not alone in the OPEC so we need to talk to other countries of the OPEC as well to see how we can bring down the prices, and that is needed because we need more, you know, visibility. And probably some of the ideas have been floated – price cap and some of it – although difficult to put in practice, even though we're progressing.
On the second question, I would say that each one of us is taking its responsibilities. We’ve adopted sanctions, and disrupted most of the, you know, Russian financial system. So did the U.S.

Some countries decided to stay, I would say, neutral in this respect, which is not being neutral, and I can refer to the good and quite long developments made by President Macron on this topic at the General U.N. Assembly – in his speech before the Assembly.

Nobody can stay neutral because this war is affecting every single country in the world. If you – alone, invasion to take place. If you could just disagree with your neighbor. It’s really the end of a system, and the beginning of trouble for everyone.

But I mention it, we need to probably address more than what we do the concern of our partners. That was my ending note.

Mr. Bergmann: Well, Madam Minister, thank you so much. That was a tour de force. Merci beaucoup.

Please join me in thanking the minister, and all the best in your meetings today in Washington and to the Franco-American relationship. Thank you. (Applause.)

Min. Colonna: Thank you.

(END)