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The Coalition of the Willing: A “Fragile” Alliance to Support Kyiv

Ukraine: Europe and its allies are urgently seeking defense solutions.

Interview with Valentin Dauchot

Kyiv’s allies, gathered under the “Coalition of the Willing,” met on Tuesday in Paris in the presence of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and American envoys Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff. The objective: to demonstrate their “convergence” on the security guarantees to be provided to Ukraine and to outline the framework of a “multinational force” in the event of a hypothetical ceasefire with Moscow.

Officially established in London in March 2025, the Coalition of the Willing is regularly represented by the Franco-German-British trio, which is highly active alongside Volodymyr Zelensky. In reality, it consists of about thirty states, including members of the European Union (except Hungary, Slovakia, Malta, and Austria), several NATO members (Canada, Turkey, Norway, but not the United States), and third-party countries such as Australia and Japan.

All of them aim to unite their forces to varying degrees to support Ukraine politically, diplomatically, and militarily, and to help the country exert as much influence as possible in peace negotiations with Russia. Frédéric Mauro, an associate researcher at the Institute for International and Strategic Relations (IRIS) and a lawyer at the Brussels Bar specializing in defense issues, reflects on the purpose and limitations of this open alliance.

In what context was the “Coalition of the Willing” created?

It emerged at the beginning of 2025 for several reasons. The first is that Europeans understood that with Donald Trump’s rise to power, the Americans would not engage militarily in Ukraine and would not even provide arms support unless paid for in hard cash. The second reason is that the European Union has no legal competence in defense matters. It is competent in the field of the arms industry but not in defense itself, as there have always been voices opposing integrated defense. No European state has the capacity to establish, on its own, an interposition force, let alone an intervention force against Russia. Unity brings strength, so they agreed on a diplomatic solution that allows for the conception of a form of common defense (and thus provides security guarantees, Editor’s note), and, above all, buys time, as they will only intervene militarily if a ceasefire is accepted by Russia, which is entirely utopian.

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What does this alliance represent?

It is the seed, the beginning of something, the right path to follow because it is being done outside the Union’s treaties. To modify the treaties or activate clauses that would give more power to the EU, unanimity is required, and there will always be voices opposing it. Therefore, action must be taken outside the treaties, bringing together those who are willing and able to agree to form a European Union or a “Defense Eurogroup,” expanded to include allied

countries. However, where this Coalition of the Willing falls short is that, to be effective, it should be both “permanent” and “structured.” Permanence means being long-term, based on political foundations, and finding a way to decide collectively even if not all members agree. The notion of structure refers to the need to plan defense: what armament is needed immediately, and then in five, ten, or fifteen years? The coalition needs legal status, a foundation for genuine collective decision-making, but none of the heads of state or government want to relinquish the illusion of power, as their internal political forces would immediately accuse them of compromising national sovereignty.

Doesn't this defense mission fall under NATO's responsibility?

Yes, it could be carried out within NATO... provided the Americans allow it. Otherwise, there are many issues to resolve. If Europeans want to intervene alone, they must first address three questions: the issue of nuclear guarantees, the strategic catalysts (primarily intelligence and software capable of processing this intelligence quickly), and command: who leads this coalition, who decides to use force, and who directs operations? Within NATO, this issue does not arise because it is the SACEUR (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) who gives orders, but he is American and receives his orders from Washington. For thirty years, European leaders have tried to create an intergovernmental defense alongside NATO instead of moving toward a common defense, and it is clear that this approach does not work. As the Italian revolutionary Antonio Gramsci, quoted ad nauseam, said: “The old world is dying, the new world is slow to appear, and in this twilight, monsters arise.”