

# Audio file

[Episode1.mp3](#)

## Transcript

Speaker 1

Europe. I would not want to miss this. Rich in history and culture.

Speaker 2

Absolutely beautiful.

Speaker 1

For centuries, this continent has played a central role on the world stage. Look at that. But this is Europe's most perilous moment since the Second World War.

Speaker 3

This is the bunker.

Speaker 1

It faces an aggressive Russia. An ambitious China. It's quite shocking to hear you say that it is much closer right now to Beijing than it is to Washington. And Europe's most powerful ally can no longer be fully relied on.

Speaker 2

I said, if you're not going to pay your bills, we're not going to defend you.

Speaker 1

I'm Katia Adler, and after years of living and working in Italy, France, Spain and Germany, I've got to know them really well. Who said that Germans don't have an excellent sense of humor? So how are these four countries with mainland Europe's biggest economies responding to this turbulent new world? There are a lot of police vans behind us. What strengthens them? Oh, wow. It looks like a shark. And what weakens them? In this episode, I'll begin my journey in Italy. This is not a face of Italy that its government wants people to see. Before continuing on to Germany, this country is having a bit of an identity crisis. Italy. It's a country really close to my heart. It feels so good to be back in Italy. It makes me happy. My mum's best friend is Italian, and over the years I have spent a lot of time living, working and visiting here. I'm in Siena, in the

middle of the country. Its stunning architecture and rich history draw millions of tourists every year. And there's one age-old tradition that pulls in the crowds more than any other.

Speaker 2

Paleo time in Siena, and they're off, and so will half the jockeys be soon. It's the first horse home that wins.

Speaker 1

For more than 300 years, twice every year, the city's central square has been turned into a racetrack. The different neighbourhoods of the city compete fiercely against each other in a \*\*\*\*\* horse race called the Palio.

Speaker 2

The porcupine is one. His district supporters go wildly joined.

Speaker 1

This is where the Palio, the horse race, takes place. And now's the best time to come here, actually. I have seen the Palio many times. It is so packed for the 90 seconds the race lasts, you cannot see a thing. And that's why this time is not the actual race I've come to see. It's the build-up when the passion for the Palio can really be understood. Since medieval times, Siena has been divided into 17 minuscule neighborhoods called contrade. It's these areas, sometimes made-up of just a few streets, that compete against each other during the paleo. Rivalries are so fierce that teams keep their horses closely guarded in the days leading up to the race. So this is dragon territory. But I've been allowed a sneak peek at the horse from the dragon contrada. Laura Bonelli is one of the leaders here. And there's been a guard with the horse. And that's as far as I'm allowed to go, so as not to spook the horse. It's almost impossible to overstate how seriously each contrada takes this event, and how much a contrada matters to its members. The contrada is much more than the palio. Can you explain to us what it means in your life? Each contrada has its own colors with which they deeply identify. In the days leading up to the race, the horses leave their stables for various rituals chaperoned by members of the contrada. Here comes the horse. There he goes. So the contrada will all follow behind. Sometimes, different contrade and their horses come face to face. Ten contrade are competing, and each one is just bringing their horse out for show. I'm singing the song of their contrada, so that these guys over here, and they are singing against another contrada over here. There are police here because later tonight it can come to fisticuffs. Each contrada is so desperate to win the palio that some even call on higher powers for help. So this is a very sombre moment. We're going to have a blessing of the horse. The palio is colourful and intense. But it also reveals so much about this country. And that is the real reason I'm here. So much about the Palio

is about ritual and tradition. It is peculiar to Sienna, but the divisions that you have here, the strong bonds between very small groups, that tells you a lot about Italy and Italians that you need to know if you really want to understand this country. On the evening before the race, I've been invited to the highlight of the preparations. A grand feast. in celebration of the dragon contrada. Wow, this is quite something.

Speaker 2

And you know what?

Speaker 1

It's really rare for outsiders to be let in. The whole contrada is here, around 900 people. And across this city, other contrada will be having similar celebrations. ... In some ways, it's even more than family, stepping in where the Italian state doesn't. There's often been a sense here that the authorities are absent, not looking out for the welfare of their citizens. So Italians have learned to build their own local networks of support. Can you imagine life without your contrada? Well, that was quite something, wasn't it? And that's the reason I wanted to come here to Siena, not just because that is spectacular, but because it is a vibrant illustration of what Italy is all about. This is not a strong united country. It's actually made-up of self-contained units of trust, just like the Contrade. I'm leaving Siena now and heading south to Calabria. Calabria is the toe of Italy's boot and the only region in Italy I've never visited before. It feels a long way from Siena and the wealthier north. It reminds me of how Italy was when I was a little kid. It's just delicious. Even by many Italian standards, Calabria is off the beaten track. So much so that even my sat nav can't help me with directions. It's great they're going to lead us the way. It's too complicated. Grazie, Signore. Ciao, ciao. We're being shown the way by this fantastic vehicle. Listen to that motor. It's too good. This is what I love. I love, I love, I love. I love that I get lost and then these guys just go, oh, I'll show you the way. Brilliant. You're a hero. Thank you. Ciao. Ciao, ciao. That is the best tourist guide I have ever had. Fantastic. Calabria's coastline is stunning, but it has far fewer tourists than most other regions in Italy. I'm not going to stay right for very long. I have always wanted to come to Calabria.

Speaker 2

The thing is, most Italians haven't been to Calabria either, and you'd think with beaches like this, it would be stacked with visitors. Oh my God.

Speaker 1

Okay. There are good reasons why fewer tourists come here. It's less accessible, for one, but also, for generations, this part of Italy has been dominated by the mafia. You see a lot of poverty in Italy's south. You always have done, a lot of neglect. And historically, that has opened the door to mafia clans to come in here and form states

within the state. They offer protection or justice, maybe a bank loan for a new home. but always at a really high price. Italy has four major mafia clans. The one that's active in Calabria is the Ndrangheta. It's one of the most powerful criminal organisations in the world. And its control over local politics and business has made Calabria hugely corrupt. Before coming here, I was told very clearly by locals there were certain areas I shouldn't go and definitely should not film. I've come to a courthouse where there's a mafia trial involving the Andrangheta. In 2016, Maria Quindamo was murdered. A man is on trial, accused of disposing of her body. Antonio Cozza is the lawyer acting for Maria's family. So how did it go in there?

Speaker 2

The process is very delicate. It's a process. But it's absolutament. It's the mafia, it's the mafia, it's the problem, it's the problem. The mafia has a reputation for violent retribution against those who speak out.

Speaker 1

But Maria's brother, Vincenzo, wants to tell me about his sister and what the mafia are alleged to have done. He's asked to meet me at the farm she ran with her husband and where she disappeared. It feels strange for me doing interviews like this because I know I'm going to be poking at somebody's wounds. But Vincenzo said he wants to speak. The more we talk about the mafia, he says, the easier it is to beat them. Ciao Vincenzo. Ciao. Ciao.

Speaker 2

What are you doing? This is Maria, your sister. There she is. She's so gorgeous.

Speaker 1

She looks so happy. Maria had three children with her husband, Nando. They ran his farm together, but they separated. And soon after, Nando took his own life. His family has been linked to the Mafia, and after his death, the Mafia allegedly wanted revenge, as well as the farm. Maria wouldn't give it up. And on the 6th of May 2016, a farm worker called Vincenzo to tell him his sister had been attacked.

Speaker 2

Do you remember what was going through your head? You found her car with blood on it.

Speaker 1

You didn't find her body?

Speaker 2

Oh, my God.

Speaker 1

The idea of destroying a body and feeding it to the pigs, it just.

Speaker 3

Sounds to me unimaginable.

Speaker 1

It's now 10 years since Maria disappeared, and so far, no one has been convicted of her murder. The trial continues. I still can't quite believe that there are chunks of Italy that still live in the world of the Godfather films, and Calabrio is fighting back. But in the meantime, the mafia has infiltrated politics in Italy and absolutely the economy. And yet this is a G7 nation, a big power in the EU and in NATO. It's an astonishing weakness in a major European country, and ultimately, it leaves many Italians feeling vulnerable, like the authorities just can't look after them. My next stop is Venice. For many, this is the most beautiful city in the world. I love the... crumbling grandeur of Venice, and especially that in all the faded glory, you have your knickers hanging out on a line. Like so many of Italy's great cities, Venice used to be a powerful city-state, at one point an empire in its own right. It only became part of Italy in the 1860s. It's days like today. I feel like the luckiest person alive to be doing my job. But I'm not here just to see the sights. I'm here to see how Italy's unique character shapes its outlook and its role on the European stage. Grazie. Murano is a little corner of Venice that's famous worldwide for its glassware.

Speaker 2

Ciao, ciao. Luciano Gambaro runs one of the more than 60 glassblowing workshops here.

Speaker 1

But glassblowing is an energy-hungry industry.

Speaker 2

It's like a hot wind hitting you in the face.

Speaker 1

The furnaces need to stay on 24-7, and that means they use a lot of gas. Much of that used to come from Russia, because it was cheap. But when Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, sanctions against Moscow cut off that Russian gas. Energy prices spiralled, along with Luciano's bills.

Speaker 2

14 times more expensive.

Speaker 1

My God.

Speaker 2

So in the end.

Speaker 1

What's more important, where the gas comes from, or the fact that you get gas that you can afford? After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, everyone in Europe was worried about the steep rise in energy prices. But Italians' reaction to the war stood out. They sympathized with Ukraine, but many questioned Italy's involvement in the conflict. They just didn't trust their government to protect them from knock-on effects. Soon after the invasion, Italy was the only EU country where a majority of the population opposed sending weapons to help Ukraine. But facts on the ground in Europe have been changing fast. Conflict with Russia now feels a lot closer. NATO says Russia could invade one of its member states in the near future. And Italy, amongst others, is being pushed to prepare. I'm in Tuscany to join an Italian special forces unit, the elite Folgore paratroopers, on a NATO exercise. Captain Gennaro Angrisano is keeping me out of trouble.

Speaker 3

How many people are taking part in this exercise?

Speaker 1

Soldiers from seven different countries, including the UK, are taking part in this exercise.

Speaker 3

Okay, you could be quiet.

Speaker 1

I've not usually described the disciplines, but I'll try. The Italian paratroopers are landing in the forest. And we need to find them. The exercise lasts for three weeks. The paratroopers have to gather information about the other soldiers operating in the area. I can see them. This unit is made-up of paratroopers from Italy and Japan, a NATO partner country. It's seen as crucial to get NATO allies used to working together. In case you have to do it for real. Right, we've got to switch to infrared now so that we are not responsible for this unit being discovered, right? Okay. Our lights could give away the unit's location, but with infrared, we can film in total darkness. In order to keep scouting

without being spotted by other units, the team are staying put by day and moving by night. So, we're having to move speedily now. The Paris have to get to their next objective. They've only got a certain amount of nighttime hours with which they can move. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, NATO's been conducting more and bigger training exercises in order to prepare to defend itself against a Russian attack. But now Europe faces another huge challenge. posed by what's supposed to be its greatest ally, the US. These kind of exercises, they are increasing in their frequency, but also their importance. Basically, for decades, NATO has been bankrolled by the United States, which has secured peace in Europe, essentially. But with Donald Trump, all of that has changed. He said he's demanded that European countries pay more and do a lot more for their own defence. If they don't, he's threatened to walk away from NATO altogether. While these paratroopers continue to their objective, NATO's future seems a lot less certain. After decades of having its security subsidised by the US, Europe now feels it can no longer fully rely on what's supposed to be its most powerful ally. What you might be surprised to know is that suspicion of the US is deep-rooted in parts of Italian society. I've come to a town called Vadese and I'm heading to a party. I can hear the murmuring, the bustle. Sounds like the party started. That's so good. This is a Festa del Lunita, a festival of unity. These events happen across the country and they used to be fundraisers for Italy's Communist Party, which was once the biggest and most influential in Western Europe. Nowadays, it's more about cheap food and a lot of fun.

Speaker 2

That was really fun. That was really fun.

Speaker 1

Although hardline communism is no longer mainstream in Italy at all, its legacy here means many Italians view Russia and the US very differently to how they're seen in the UK. Are you from this part of Italy?

Speaker 2

I was born and bred here, yeah.

Speaker 1

Is it right that Italy, along with other European countries, sends weapons to Ukraine?

Speaker 2

I think that's definitely wrong. I mean, you want to make peace, and you keep selling weapons. They should stop doing that.

Speaker 1

You want Italy to stop?

Speaker 2

Yeah, I would want them to stop, yes. Immediately. What do you think of NATO?

Speaker 1

What do you think about Italy's decision with other European countries to spend a lot more on defence?

Speaker 2

What about Russia? Can you see having relations with Russia again?

Speaker 1

At the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, only just over 50% of Italians blamed Moscow for it. In stark contrast to most of Western Europe, there's a lot of understanding in Italy for the Russian perspective. That doesn't normally translate into direct support for Vladimir Putin, with one very notable exception. Italy's longest-serving modern-day prime minister, Silvio Berlusconi, had a soft spot for so-called strongman politicians, and he was famously friendly with Russia's president. Even after leaving office, Berlusconi visited Putin in what had been Ukrainian Crimea, after Russia grabbed it in 2014. So, I followed Berlusconi right from the start when he first became Prime Minister, back in the mid-90s. And essentially, he was a showy, wealthy businessman who said, I made a huge success of myself, I'll now make a success of our country. He was strongly anti-immigration, pro what he called Christian values, and he was the first Italian Prime Minister to jump into bed with the post-fascist far-right since the Second World War. And that opened the door in Europe to making those kind of parties more acceptable to voters. Attitudes once labeled far-right, like being anti-immigration, are now more widespread across Europe. So what it means to be far-right is being re-examined. There are huge differences between Europe's now very popular nationalist parties. Germany's AfD has been classified by German intelligence as extremist. While in Italy, Prime Minister Giorgio Meloni leads a government that's managed to woo both the EU and Donald Trump. The goal for me is to make the West great again. One big reason for Meloni's success in Italy is public concern about immigration. I traveled to Italy's northeast, to a small town on the border with Slovenia. I think it's fair to say this country is one of a lot of fast drivers, and it always tickles me when I look at the traffic lights. The red is red. It's bigger than the other colors, so it tells you to stop. Mon Falcone has grown around one of Europe's biggest shipyards. Fast cruise liners are built here, mainly by migrant workers who've come here legally to fill jobs Italians no longer want. Almost one in three people here come from abroad. Okay, I'm gonna have to pretend I understand cricket. A lot of these players work at the shipyard. Sunny Bouyan has lived and worked here legally for two decades. Hi, Sunny.

Speaker 3

Hello, nice to meet you. Would you like to try?

Speaker 1

I'll have a go. I'll always have a go. This team are the Monfalcone Tigers, but they have to train Outside Montfalcone.

Speaker 3

The situation is very ridiculous in Montfalcone because cricket is banned the village where we live.

Speaker 1

Cricket is banned in Montfalcone.

Speaker 3

Yes.

Speaker 1

In 2023, the local authorities made playing cricket in Montfalcone punishable by a fine. So, Sunny, do you feel that the banning of cricket in Monfalcone is a form of discrimination, racial discrimination?

Speaker 3

I think so.

Speaker 1

But you've been there 20 years, so why is it now recently?

Speaker 3

Because, when the right wings come to administrate this city, the situation is day by day getting worse.

Speaker 1

The authorities argue that cricket needed to be banned, because it's dangerous. And it's not just cricket that's being clamped down on. There's no official mosque in Monfalakone, and the local government has effectively stopped people from praying in the two Islamic centers in town because of planning regulations, they say. So where do you pray?

Speaker 3

Everyone praying in their home, some going to a neighborhood city, and some going to Slovenia to pray sometimes.

Speaker 1

Over the border.

Speaker 3

Over the border to pray.

Speaker 1

Wow.

Speaker 3

If 9,000 people don't have one place to pray, can you imagine the impact, social impact? Because they're banned every places.

Speaker 1

It's a right to be able to pray.

Speaker 3

Yeah. So it's very upsetting and very frustrating for us.

Speaker 1

I'm leaving here with really mixed feelings. Banning cricket is clearly extreme. But migration is one of the toughest issues that I cover in my job. It is on the minds of voters right across the continent. And in my career, I've never seen so many anti-immigration or so-called hard-right or far-right parties so popular here in Europe. But does that mean that all their voters are racists or extremists? Clearly not. Many of those voting for parties that are tough on migration say the political mainstream shut down the debate for years, rather than listening to and managing their concerns. The final stop on my Italian journey is the tiny island of Lampedusa. Just 70 miles from the coast of North Africa, this is one of Europe's front lines of illegal migration, where asylum seekers and other migrants try to enter without official permission. But for many Italians, it's a tourist destination. So I've got myself a holiday hire car. So the last time I drove one of these, I was 18, just the other day. Hello. Just a few thousand people live on Lampedusa, but during the summer months, its population goes up more than fivefold, with largely Italian holiday makers flocking here. I am loving driving this car now. She and I have become great friends. There aren't many places that straddle 2 opposite worlds like this island. As well as the glamorous yachts here, nowhere else in Italy sees more small boat arrivals. This is part of what Europe calls its soft underbelly. So it's open, it's vulnerable to people smugglers bringing over boatloads of migrants. And over

the years, I've reported on 10s of thousands. Italy has had hundreds of thousands of people arriving on its coastline, often to desperate and chaotic scenes. The boats come from North Africa. And sure enough, some are arriving right now. So we've been told it's about 60 migrants that have arrived. You can see them coming onto their pier now. I can never get over this huge contrast. Those who risk their lives to come to Europe on the one side, and then right over there, Europeans in their bikinis frolicking by the beach. Such different fates just so close by. There have been times in the last few years when more migrants have arrived in one week than there are locals on the island. It's prompted the mayor here to describe Lampedusa as being in crisis. Locals aren't happy at all with the attention it brings from the media. Lampedusa's biggest source of income is tourism. and boatloads of migrants are bad for business. This is not a face of Italy that either its tourist industry or its government want people to see. In fact, Giorgio Meloni's government was elected on the promise of stopping these small boats. It's A pledge we've heard from leaders across Europe. Enza, Hi.

Speaker 2

Hi. Bonjour.

Speaker 1

I'm meeting fisherman Enzo Belleci. What a lovely boat. Grazie. The Italian government says they're resolving the problem of illegal immigration. Right along the coastline are migrant boats that have been washed ashore. You see like those like square holes in the boat? What was that?

Speaker 2

Rectangle.

Speaker 1

Yeah.

Speaker 2

Okay. Oh my God.

Speaker 1

But despite all these boats along the coastline, Meloni's government has had real success in reducing numbers. Small boat arrivals to Italy are down almost 60% in the last couple of years, thanks partly to deals with North African countries to stop the boats from leaving. For any boats that do get close, the government has imposed restrictions on where they can be rescued and by whom. As far as Enzo's concerned, this more hardline policy has a human cost.

Speaker 2

Yeah, they made it illegal, not...

Speaker 1

But that's been really difficult, 'cause you were stuck, not just with the humanitarian situation, but also you were in a legal bind, because at the time, you could have been fined for helping the people. Did you feel alone?

Speaker 2

Solo, solo. No.

Speaker 1

But it isn't always possible to save people. And Enzo has seen firsthand the horrors that can unfold when migrants are left without rescue.

Speaker 2

I've agreed that the people that are left without rescue... ... and that's why I'm here. It's upset to you.

Speaker 1

Enzo is on the front line of illegal migration. For him, this isn't about policy or even what's best for Italy. It's about people. The tension surrounding migration, it doesn't end here on the southern coastline, it seeps into countries. And it makes problems between European countries. In these times of deep international tensions, when European countries say they need to work better together, migration remains one of the biggest issues that drives a wedge between them. My next stop is Germany. This is the economic and political powerhouse of Europe. The economy here is almost twice the size of Italy's. In fact, it's the third biggest in the entire world, after global titans America and China. And traditionally, it's been driven by its exports. If there's one thing that screams Germans are good at making things, it's got to be cars. Mercedes, BMW, Porsche, Audi, they're seen as reliable, desirable and really high quality. And where better to see Germany's world-class cars in action than the Nurburgring, home of German racing. It is busy. petrolhead's paradise. This was once Germany's Formula One circuit. It's nicknamed the Green Hell, and it's one of the riskiest, toughest race tracks ever built. Luckily, I've got one of the track's best drivers to take the wheel.

Speaker 2

Hello.

Speaker 1

I'm Katia.

Speaker 2

Hi, Katia. Nice to meet you.

Speaker 1

What are we driving today?

Speaker 2

It's a German car, right? It's a... proper sports car. It's very powerful.

Speaker 1

Are German cars the best?

Speaker 2

I think so, yes. I really like how they drive.

Speaker 1

What about the passenger? How am I going to feel?

Speaker 2

Most of the passengers enjoy it. Some not that much, but we have special bags in your door.

Speaker 1

Thanks. The car is called the Beast of the Green Hell. It's one of the fastest supercars in the world. Okay.

Speaker 2

Jump in.

Speaker 1

Can I just share, at this point, I don't even like roller coaster vibes, but, you know, maybe I should have thought about that.

Speaker 2

You're ready.

Speaker 1

Um, I'm ready. If you're ready... I.

Speaker 2

Am. Okay. Better not three. Little John, wait. This is my favorite part here. Look at this. This is the famous cow's head.

Speaker 1

Driving over 150 miles an hour, we're really putting German engineering through its paces. Oh, my gosh. I could get a taste for that. Thank you very, very much.

Speaker 2

Thank you.

Speaker 1

That was absolutely brilliant. Thank you. Stay safe. Germany is the leading car manufacturer in Europe. It produces over a third of the EU's cars. course, they're not all race cars. VW, VW, VW up ahead. This is Wolfsburg, but you may as well call it Volkswagensville, because the whole town has grown up around the plant here. This is the headquarters of the Volkswagen Group. The factory's been here since the 1930s, and it's one of the biggest manufacturing plants in the world. The factory is absolutely ginormous. It started all the way back there. It's still going. It's like a city within a city, and it's not completely unusual to have 3 generations of one family working in there. Volkswagen is the world's second-biggest car company, and it's become a symbol of Germany's economic success. Oh, wow. Just stacks and stacks and stacks of cars in two glass buildings next to each other. Incredible. And I'm not a car person, but that is quite impressive. Volkswagen is still a family-run business with a reputation for looking after its workers. Hello. Hi, do you speak English? Yeah, I do. Oh, excellent. Thank you. Can I please get Volkswagen part 199398 500A? I will lock that up real quick. Give me a moment, please. Thank you. OK, so this part is said to be the Volkswagen part that is sold most in the whole world. I mean, just last year alone, 8 million of them. Oh, brilliant. Thank you so much. I do. And there you see it. does have a part number, but it is the Volkswagen Currywurst. And who said that Germans don't have an excellent sense of humor? The plant makes around 23,000 sausages a day to feed the VW workforce, and they in turn make up to 3,500 cars a day. All of it run on state-of-the-art German efficiency. This is great. Wow. So if I look... Right above me is just this huge tower of cars all around. These 400 cars are waiting for collection by their new owners. But only around 20% of the cars made here in Germany are sold here. Most are exported. All of this shiny success, Germany's economic success, It's all been built on three specific things. So cheap gas from Russia to feed energy-hungry German industry, including the car industry that the economy relies on. Also manufacturing and sales to China and sales to the United States. But guess what? None of that is working anymore. After Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Germany largely stopped buying cheap Russian energy. And China's booming domestic car industry and President Trump's tariffs have reduced crucial markets for German cars. In the last two years, the unthinkable has happened. The legendary German economy has been shrinking. Volkswagen means the people's car. And being an exporting powerhouse and having a

recipe for a booming economy, that has long been part of the German identity. But now that it's not working so well anymore, I think you can say that this country is having a bit of an identity crisis. Unfortunately for Germany, when times were good, the government didn't invest enough in its infrastructure, its rail network, its telecommunications, even its famous autobahns. Roadworks, roadworks, more roadworks, and massive traffic jams. There's been an awful lot of that as I've driven through Germany. The road network here was once the envy of Europe, but the cracks are clear to see. Literally. In 2024, a bridge in Dresden collapsed into the river below. And it's not the only one falling apart. Some are being demolished because they're unsafe. According to the Federal Transport Ministry, around 5,000 bridges in Germany are in urgent need of repair. Oh, wow. That is huge. The German government has now embarked on a massive programme to replace bridges like this one. But somehow it's kind of magnificent and impressive at the same time. But there are so many bridges in need of repair that government plans to rebuild them are deemed unachievable, and that impacts people's lives. So while German politicians for years focused on big industries selling abroad, what they didn't do was take care of things here at home. Mobile coverage in Germany is really ropey. People still use faxes here. I know that's hard to believe. And then you've got all of these crumbling bridges and roads as well. And over time, that's how Germans began to see their country as broken. The stagnating economy is far from Germany's only problem. As Europe's political powerhouse and a major supporter of Ukraine in its war with Russia, some here worry that Germany itself could soon be under attack.

Speaker 3

Hello.

Speaker 1

Oh.

Speaker 3

Hi.

Speaker 1

I'm Katia.

Speaker 3

Hi, Christian. Hi.

Speaker 1

And who's this? Hello, Felix. Hello, Felix. This is Christian Klaus and his family. I'm meeting them on the site of their future home.

Speaker 3

Fantastic. That is, it's so beautiful.

Speaker 1

One of the most striking features of this house lies deep underground.

Speaker 3

Okay.

Speaker 1

All right, okay.

Speaker 3

A little bit of light. A little bit of light.

Speaker 1

Where are we going?

Speaker 3

Wait, I have light.

Speaker 1

This is the bunker. Christian is building a nuclear bomb shelter under his house.

Speaker 3

This is the house when they have 150 centimetres. OK, the decker off the boarding off as we will be filming this. This is the.

Speaker 1

Wow, that's massive. This is really.

Speaker 3

Yeah. This is on the technical. This by the explosion, she's only clapping automatics. That's even kind of gas. So it is around 100% safe. Here we have enough bed outbound. The insurance is closed, and we should have a panorama of sea.

Speaker 1

The bunker can accommodate Christian and his family for up to three months. He says it's an important insurance policy, given Germany's deteriorating relations with Russia. Germany doesn't have a border with Russia. So, I mean, in the UK, we don't think about having to build bunkers against Russia. You're not close to the front. So why are you thinking about?

Speaker 3

Protecting yourself from Russia? .....

Speaker 1

Building a bunker in your family home feels really extreme. But unlike France and the UK, Germany doesn't have nuclear weapons of its own as a deterrent, and Germans feel very exposed. The government here has been looking at old Cold War bunkers to see which of them could still be used. And it's going to set aside funds for a new nationwide building program for bunkers. German intelligence warns that Russia could launch an attack against a NATO member state as early as 2029. And next time... Wow! ...I'll see a completely different side to Germany... It's the biggest single turnaround I've seen in this country in all my years reporting on it. ...before continuing my journey to Spain to see how old wounds still cause divisions. I don't feel Spanish at all. At all? No, I don't think I belong to Spain.

Speaker 2

How the death of a young woman exposed to hidden criminal underworld trafficked in Belfast on BBC iPlayer. While on sounds, the devastating sound effects caused by prescription drugs. Listen to Shadow World now.

## Audio file

[Episode2.mp3](#)

## Transcript

Speaker 1

Europe. I would not want to miss this. Rich in history and culture.

Speaker 2

Absolutely beautiful.

Speaker 1

For centuries, this continent has played a central role on the world stage. Look at that. But this is Europe's most perilous moment since the Second World War. This is the bunker. It faces an aggressive Russia. An ambitious China... It's quite shocking to hear

you say that it is much closer right now to Beijing than it is to Washington. And Europe's most powerful ally can no longer be fully relied on.

Speaker 3

I said, if you're not gonna pay your bills, we're not going to defend you.

Speaker 1

I'm Katia Adler. And after years of living and working in Italy, France, Spain and Germany, I've got to know them really well. Who said that Germans don't have an excellent sense of humour? So how are these four countries with mainland Europe's biggest economies responding to this turbulent new world? There are a lot of police vans behind us. What strengthens them? Oh, wow. It looks like a shark. And what weakens them? In this episode, I'll continue my travels through Germany to see how a surprising descendant of this country has changed everything. Ancestral home of the troubles. Then I'm off to Spain. A country still coming to terms with its painful past. I'm starting this part of my German journey in a quiet corner of the country, in the Bavarian Alps, in the far south. Of all the countries that I'm visiting on this journey, I think Germany is the most misunderstood. Go off into France, Italy, Spain on holiday, but look at this. It's spectacular. And there's only one way to really see this landscape. So I'm a bit nervous, but I'm quite thrilled at the same time, actually. I can't believe I'm doing this. Hi, I'm Katia. What am I doing? Hello, I'm... Yes, I'm quite happy to be up here. I'm just a bit nervous about jumping off there. I've known these mountains since I was young, but I have never done this.

Speaker 3

You have to run.

Speaker 2

If I tell you to run.

Speaker 1

I have to run. OK.

Speaker 3

Kadia, ready?

Speaker 1

Go forwards, go forwards, go forwards.

Speaker 2

And run. Run, run, run.

Speaker 1

Oh.

Speaker 2

Oh my gosh.

Speaker 4

Wow.

Speaker 1

Oh my lord. My brain is kind of, it's like, oh wow, this is amazing. And then it's like, oh my god, I'm so high. Absolutely beautiful. Look at that, you know, people think of Germany and they think of the Autobahn. and they think of factories. Here we are, not an ultra bum, not a factory insight. And I cannot get the smile off my face. Look what we have down there. What a castle. This castle looks so much like something out of a fairy tale that apparently it caught the eye of Walt Disney. It's said to be the inspiration for Sleeping Beauty's castle, and it became part of Disney's logo as well. That is impossibly romantic.

Speaker 4

I mean, no wonder Disney fell in love with this castle. I think that tells you a lot about Germany. There is a lot of.

Speaker 1

Unashamed romance in this country.

Speaker 4

Okay, we're going to land now. Prepare yourselves. Okay.

Speaker 1

Perfect. We're getting closer. It was pretty amazing. It was... I didn't expect I was going to love it as much as I did. And I would also say that I've spent a lot of time in my career trying to persuade people how interesting and beautiful Germany is, but I've never gone to those lands before. For outsiders, Germany is often associated with high-tech engineering, or its Nazi past. But there's another, less well-known side to this country, which is just as important to its identity. I've stopped off in Fussen, a medieval town just a couple of miles from the castle. Gorgeous, isn't it? This is classic Bavaria. Look at the pharmacy. These painted buildings are also, you see them a lot. Whenever I travel to Germany for work, if I have 5 minutes free, I'll always look for an old town. And I love it. You find quaint town centres like this across Germany. They are dripping with nostalgia. Thank you. I grew up in the UK, but parts of my family are from Germany, and I love its

culture and traditions. Not good for the figure, but, you know, it's very good for the soul. And actually, coffee and cake, it's like a religion in Germany. Mm. This is another part of the German character that isn't so well known. There's a word in German, the *Mutlichkeit*. It sort of means comfy coziness. It's very hard to translate into English. And it's just very German, sit and have your cup of coffee. It's not glamorous like in France. It's not dramatic like in Italy. It's kind of quiet comfort. That inclination towards quiet comfort tells you a lot about Germany. Long haunted by the horrors of their country's Nazi past, modern Germans have shied away from taking the lead politically or militarily in Europe. The leaders they choose can come across as a little bland compared to Italy's or France's. Angela Merkel, one of Germany's longest-serving prime ministers, was nicknamed *Mutti*, meaning mummy. But now Germany is being forced to step out of the shadows. Like much of Europe, it's facing a new and different kind of threat. Hybrid warfare.

Speaker 5

Munich Airport has halted all flights after unidentified drones were spotted in the area.

Speaker 1

Airports in Denmark, Norway and Poland have all recently suspended flights due to drones. Moscow denies any involvement.

Speaker 6

But these incidents have raised fears that Moscow is testing Europe's defences.

Speaker 1

From drones shutting down airports, to packages planned to explode on planes, to underwater cables being cut. Hybrid attacks on Germany blamed on Russia have increased significantly in the last couple of years. Senka.

Speaker 7

Yep.

Speaker 1

Hello.

Speaker 7

Hi, Katya.

Speaker 1

Hi. You look busy.

Speaker 7

Please join me at the table.

Speaker 1

Pleased to meet you. Nice to meet you. Sunke Mararins is a colonel in the German Air Force and a specialist in hybrid warfare. He advises military and political leaders on the attacks that Europe's facing. But instead of using a PowerPoint presentation to illustrate the threats, he's made a board game.

Speaker 7

It comes from the military war gaming. Every time I see an article, I create a gaming card so that my players really learn this is happening, not just making stuff up. Well, this was an event in the Baltic Sea, and someone fired from a ship onto a German helicopter. Other thing, this happens in the UK. The nuclear power plant of Sellafield was hacked. You see someone going, have a real critical infrastructure. Mines are floating. This is something what happened in the Black Sea, affecting now shipping, the same like we have seen with the drones around airfields. You have to clear the area. You can't go on with that.

Speaker 1

The front line of Russia's war may be in Ukraine, but all of Europe is under attack now.

Speaker 7

We are in a hybrid war with Russia. It's happening every day, all around us.

Speaker 1

How much has Germany been affected by it?

Speaker 7

Germany is affected almost every day.

Speaker 1

Every day.

Speaker 7

Every day. Something's happening somewhere. Here on this map, you really can see what happened over the last three years. But these are high-level events. We have seen much more on a lower scale. But here you see attacks against governmental organization, you see attacks against industry, you see attacks against critical infrastructures, you see something like a water company which was attacked.

Speaker 1

So I can see the United Kingdom. I can see Poland, Lithuania, different countries that have had these high-level attacks. But most of them are concentrated in Germany. Why?

Speaker 7

We are the second best provider for Ukraine.

Speaker 1

In terms of military...

Speaker 7

In terms of military support, in terms of humanitarian aid.

Speaker 1

None of these attacks feel significant enough to provoke all-out war. And that's the point. They allow Russia to cause fear and division. They weaken Europeans' confidence in their governments and cause rifts between allies with very little risk of retaliation.

Speaker 7

If Russia would be able to crack the German public opinion, that the German public opinion would say to the politicians, please don't use our money for Ukraine any longer, this would be a victory for Russia in Ukraine. And this is really the challenge we see in the 21st century.

Speaker 1

It's not always easy to say with 100% certainty, with each individual incident, Russia's behind that, or China. But it is clear that the number of hybrid attacks in Europe is on the rise, and that when it comes to big countries like Germany or NATO as a whole, While they may have discussed what to do if tanks roll over borders, when it comes to hybrid warfare, there is no joined-up plan. And it's hard to make a plan when NATO's most powerful member appears increasingly disinterested in German and European security. I'm just arriving at Ramstein Air Base. It's the headquarters for US air forces in Europe and Africa, and of NATO Allied Air Command. It's a pretty significant place, and I'm not supposed to film going in through the gates, so it's cameras down. Hello. Oh, hi. Nice to see Asia.

Speaker 2

Yes, nice to meet you.

Speaker 1

I'm Katia. Pleased to meet you. And I'm looking forward to having a tour.

Speaker 2

Yeah, absolutely. I'd love to take you around.

Speaker 1

Fantastic. OK. Master Sergeant Asia Hinson has been stationed at Ramstein for two years.

Speaker 2

So Ramstein is a very unique base just because of how much the base actually does. Here is kind of like a medical complex. The dental clinic is huge. It's a dental squadron. It's not just a clinic.

Speaker 1

Dentist squadron.

Speaker 2

Yes. That's a...

Speaker 1

Yeah. Well, you do have a lot of things to look after.

Speaker 2

Yes. We also have a dog grooming facility here as well.

Speaker 1

Ramstein is the largest American air base in Europe, part of a local cluster of U.S. military bases, which are home to 55,000 Americans.

Speaker 2

Actually, this is the largest American community outside of the United States.

Speaker 1

Full stop. Not just military.

Speaker 2

Not just military.

Speaker 1

The base was built after the Second World War, when Germany was split in two. The Soviet Union treated East Germany as a satellite state. The Americans built Ramstein Military Base in West Germany and invested heavily in Western Europe as a buffer against the spread of communism from the East. And as Germany was forbidden for a while from having its own military because of its Nazi past, the US provided its defense, plus a security guarantee that all of Europe has benefited from. Meanwhile, these American troops benefit from experiencing life in Europe.

Speaker 2

It's kind of like a huge mall. It has multiple stores. Yes, so they definitely adhere to all the American traditions.

Speaker 1

Yeah, so it's like going to a mall back home.

Speaker 2

Yes, absolutely. You get popcorn, hot dogs, nachos with nacho cheese and all that great stuff.

Speaker 1

You've got Taco Bells, Starbucks, okay.

Speaker 2

People typically flock to Popeyes and Panda Express. So where are we going to get our lunch? I like Panda Express.

Speaker 1

Okay.

Speaker 2

I'd like to take the teriyaki chicken.

Speaker 1

So you're paying with US dollars?

Speaker 2

Yes.

Speaker 1

That does feel odd, actually, to.

Speaker 2

See dollars in Europe. Yeah. Thank you.

Speaker 4

Thank you. Thanks, Asia.

Speaker 2

You're welcome.

Speaker 1

I mean, the base is so huge, and this place is so huge. Could you just sort of... Spend your time in Germany, in here. not really venture outside into Germany.

Speaker 2

Yeah, I think you would be missing out, but absolutely. You could live on the base and not go anywhere.

Speaker 1

These troops seem really settled here. But while Russia remains Europe's most pressing security concern, Washington has new priorities. Donald Trump has made it clear. Europe must be more self-reliant when it comes to defense. He isn't the first US president to say it, but he's certainly the most direct. I said, if you're not going to pay your bills, we're not going to defend you. The threat has worked. Feeling suddenly vulnerable, Germany is massively increasing its defense spending, roughly tripling its budget over a 10-year period, with more promised if needed. Germany's new drive when it comes to defense is The biggest single turnaround I've seen in this country in all my years reporting on it. The German government now says it wants to build the biggest army in the whole of the European Union. It's a massive change. But so is the attitude of Germany's European neighbours. They used to fear the idea of a mighty German military because of its history. Now, they're begging for it. It's hardly a secret that Donald Trump has an uncomfortable relationship with Europe, shall we say. But Germans feel particularly got at. Even if you look at when Donald Trump was a property magnate in New York, he's said to have talked often about wanting to get rid of German cars on the streets of Manhattan. Yet, as it happens, his grandparents were from Germany, from its prosperous wine country. I'm just down the road from the American Air Base. Ancestral home of the Trump's. Wow, look at that church. And vineyards and pretty houses and no golf course inside. Trump's first moved here over 400 years ago, and there are still some who live in the area. Oh, look. Becker High Trump. Trump Bakery. I am going to go in there. The former owner of this bakery was a distant relative of the American president. They don't want to talk. There's been a lot of grief. Just being associated with the name Trump has caused a lot of problems, it seems. For the family, Trump is not popular in Germany. You don't even need to go on the streets. You can see that very

clearly in opinion polls. Apart from the bakery, there are few other signs of this area's most famous descendant. Hello. But the mayor of Karlstadt, Thomas Javorek, is taking me to see the grave of Donald Trump's grandad. yes. Is there a lot of interest in the Trump race?

Speaker 3

No.

Speaker 1

Okay. Trump's grandfather, Friedrich Trump, grew up in Karnstadt in the 1870s.

Speaker 3

It was Friedrich Trump who... went to the United States just for income reasons. From there, he then went to the gold rush, and he bought land in New York, and that's actually the fundament for the... Trump Empire. Yeah.

Speaker 1

Friedrich's wife, Elisabeth, Donald Trump's grandmother, was also from Karlstadt.

Speaker 3

They got married, and that's one of the wedding pictures.

Speaker 1

Who do you think looks most like Donald Trump?

Speaker 3

I think none of them.

Speaker 1

No, I think I can see a bit in Elizabeth. Maybe I'm imagining it.

Speaker 3

Perhaps for the hair.

Speaker 1

I do find it. Intriguing that. Donald Trump's ancestry on his mum's side goes to Scotland. That seems to play in the UK's favour, you know, when it comes to personal relations with Donald Trump. But so far, this link to Germany hasn't helped. I mean, your former Chancellor Angela Merkel, she even writes about it in her autobiography that he Donald Trump seemed to be out for Germany, you know, not in a friendly way.

Speaker 3

It's what it is.

Speaker 1

Do you hope to tempt him here now? He's slapping tariffs on German cars and Germany's building its military, so maybe he's more favourably disposed. Will you invite him?

Speaker 3

I think we cannot afford the security taxes to run this invitation.

Speaker 1

It's a good thought, though. It's an interesting thought. Donald Trump used to say his grandfather was Swedish, not German. Now he seems proud of his heritage. But two-thirds of Germans, according to polls, look at the U.S. as one of the biggest threats to world peace, more than China, and just behind Putin's Russia. My next stop is Berlin, Germany's capital city. And before German reunification in 1990, East Berlin was the capital of communist East Germany, a country more or less controlled by the Soviet Union, which in turn played a huge role in defeating the Nazis. I'm visiting Trip Tower Park, a memorial to the Soviet soldiers who died here in 1945. You can see the statue to the hero Soviet soldier with a crushed swastika at his feet. I've never been here before, and the enormity of it all really hits you. There's no way that the Allies would have won the war against the Nazis without Soviet help and sacrifice. All in all, 25 million Soviet civilians and soldiers died in World War II. 25 million. Guilt about the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis still shapes Germany in all sorts of ways, including its relationship with Russia. Professor? Or can I say Jens?

Speaker 8

Yeah, I'm \*\*\*\* Jens. Okay.

Speaker 1

Hello, I'm Katia. Pleased to meet you. Professor Jens Wendland's father was a senior figure in the Nazi occupation of the Soviet Union.

Speaker 8

One moment. This is my life here father, and this is Himmler. My life here father, Hans-Alrof Prutzmann, S.S. Obergopenfuhrer, Persian Deutsche, Persian, and Todd von 300,000 Menschen.

Speaker 1

Jens says he's sickened by the Nazis' mass murder of Soviet citizens. He's devoted much of his career to building bridges with Russia, teaching media studies in Moscow.

Speaker 8

In Moscow, it's all right, and it's all right. Even when it comes to.

Speaker 1

The war in Ukraine, Jens is very open to Russia's perspective. You speak so warmly about Russia and about your time in Russia, about working in Russia. Do you see Russia, though, as an aggressor these days. You know, it marched into Ukraine, a sovereign country. Do you accept that?

Speaker 8

Yeah, Putin was an aggressor. That's why so our is why communism on the fear. Deutschen ham for diesel cooperation between was the fear de Bindung. Ruslans and Europa. So we need to get on. So we need to get on. Since the end of the Cold War, Germany has worked really.

Speaker 1

Hard to build close business ties with Russia, and the invasion of Ukraine came as a huge shock. That was really interesting. What a contrast to the UK, where when it comes to Ukraine, Russia is definitely seen as the aggressor. Jens was explaining it all very much from Russia's point of view. Jens is far from alone in wanting to normalize relations with Moscow. The AFD party, which regularly leads opinion polls in Germany, wants to end sanctions on Russia and start buying cheap Russian energy again. The shadow of Germany's Nazi past hangs over everything in this country in one way or another, including attitudes to immigration. I've come to Mannheim, a city in the rich, industrialized west of the country. We hear Turkish everywhere here. We've got Kebab shop, there's another one down there, and another one. Jewelry shop, the kind that you see all over the place in Amman and Jordan. There's another one, two, three of them down this street, and delicious cakes. I feel like I'm back in the Middle East. Germany's economic rise from the ashes of World War II was supported by lots of foreign workers. Germany's large immigrant population goes back to the 1950s, '60s, and early '70s, when it was looking for workers to come and feed the booming economy in West Germany. And they came from all over the Mediterranean, and a lot from Turkey. Germany called them gastarbeiter. That means guest workers. The implication was, you come here and work, and then you go home. But a lot of people stayed. Today, a quarter of Germany's population is either an immigrant or the child of an immigrant. Here in Mannheim, it's almost half. Hello. Hello. Hi. Niza Ocal runs a wedding dress shop together with her mum.

Speaker 4

Yeah.

Speaker 2

For.

Speaker 1

Decades, immigrants into Germany, along with their families, were broadly accepted and seen as a necessary part of a growing economy. But in 2015, that changed radically.

Speaker 7

This year has seen an unprecedented number of migrants arriving in Europe. Most have come from Syria. Eleven million Syrians have been left homeless, and many have fled abroad. No bus, no train.

Speaker 4

We are very tired.

Speaker 1

As over a million Syrian refugees and other migrants arrived in Europe, many EU countries shut their borders. And Chancellor Angela Merkel did an extraordinary thing. She welcomed them.

Speaker 7

Germany expects to take in 800,000 asylum seekers in 2015, far more than any other country.

Speaker 1

But Merkel's decision has had profound consequences.

Speaker 6

Trail of devastation after a car ploughed in to protesters.

Speaker 1

Three people have died in a knife attack in southern Germany. About an hour or so, this news broke that a car had driven into a crowd at a Christmas market, possibly 60 to 80 people being injured. A string of attacks over the last few years, carried out by asylum seekers and immigrants, has fueled concerns that immigration is out of control. Many German Christmas markets now have barriers to make people feel safer. There was an attack here in Mannheim's Central Square, too, when an Afghan man stabbed and killed a policeman. All these attacks have made Germans feel incredible. incredibly insecure. It's pushed up support for the far right, because a lot of people feel that migration is totally out of control now. The attacks are fueling support for views that are tough on

migration. And breaking taboos that have existed in Germany since the end of the Second World War. As a result of changing attitudes, the AfD has become the first hard-right nationalist party to be voted into the German parliament since World War II. It's Germany's biggest opposition party by far. And it's very well known and liked for its hard-line policies on immigration. One leading AfD politician was even found guilty of using Nazi slogans and downplaying the Holocaust. Support for the AfD is particularly noticeable in Germany's East. This is a map of the election results from the last general election here in Germany. Look at that. The blue is AfD. And you can see a clear split between the country, east and west. I mean, and that is the dividing line between West Germany and what was former communist East Germany. If this isn't a picture of a country still deeply divided, I don't know what is. I've come to a city in East Germany called Schwerin. Oh, look at that. Now that is... wow! there is a tendency to think of East Germany as an ugly, poverty-stricken, former communist version of the West. But, oh, my God, does it have some beautiful secrets. Look at that. I mean, a fairy tale castle on a lake. It's gorgeous. Oh, this is stunning. The reason I'm here is to get a better idea of why the AfD is gaining ground in places like this. I am on my way to meet a couple of young podcasters, supporters of the AfD, and I'm going to arrive just before they start recording, so we're going to have to be very quick, quick, quick. punctuality, that's what Germans believe in, and I think I've just failed the test. As the AfD has gained popularity, Berlin's position towards it has hardened. In 2025, the German authorities officially classified the party as extremist, describing their policies as anti-democratic. There's even been talk banning the AfD outright. The local government here is also investigating the man I'm about to meet for extremism. A claim he contests.

Speaker 5

Hello.

Speaker 1

Hi. I am so sorry. I'm not too late.

Speaker 5

It's fine. It's fine. No worries.

Speaker 1

Yeah.

Speaker 5

Boris. Hello.

Speaker 1

Nice to meet you, Boris.

Speaker 5

That's Matias.

Speaker 1

I'm Matias. Boris von Margenstern is a journalist who vlogs on YouTube about immigration and culture wars. I'm just going to sit and observe, so please just carry on as you would.

Speaker 5

Okay, then we'll start. You can get inside.

Speaker 1

Inner sanctum.

Speaker 5

Yeah.

Speaker 1

Excellent. Where shall I put myself?

Speaker 5

You can come through here.

Speaker 1

Okay.

Speaker 5

And then...

Speaker 1

Today, Boris is joined by regular guest Matthias Schroeder. So you're going to tell your listeners that we're here today?

Speaker 5

They already know, yeah.

Speaker 1

They know already.

Speaker 5

I had to tell them this time it's not my fault that we're late. Usually it is, but now I have someone to blame it on.

Speaker 3

OK.

Speaker 1

There are now dozens of AFD supporters like Boris and Matthias. Using social media far more skillfully than traditional parties and helping to bring the AFD's agenda to huge numbers of young voters. Boris and Matthias have invited me to meet some of their friends. Why is it, do you think, that so many Germans are moving towards the AFD? . . . . .

Speaker 5

. . . . . for example. That's the immigration. I'll stop them. Is that the problem with an explicit benend? Extremist in the form and of. I just wondered, how can young people.

Speaker 1

Long for a homeland or a good old days that they've never that they've never really experienced? Is it? Is it real the dream that the AFD.

Speaker 3

Is selling even.

Speaker 1

The AFD has millions of supporters, like Boris and his friends, who feel alienated from traditional establishment politics. For them, classifying the AFD as extremist is just a ploy to weaken.

Speaker 3

Support for the party. The AFD is the AFD. in Einemland.

Speaker 1

Are you suggesting that it's the German establishment trying to shut the AFD down?

Speaker 3

Yeah.

Speaker 1

Rather than actually having bona fide arguments why the AFD should be shut down. That's what you're saying? So it's against democracy?

Speaker 3

Yeah. Definitely.

Speaker 1

You don't have to agree with them, but... The AFD is huge in Germany, and it's growing, and it feels victimised by the German establishment. And the danger of the German establishment trying to shut the AFD up, or even shut it down altogether, is that increasing numbers of its supporters will lose faith in traditional politics here altogether and become more open to arguments that the freedom of speech or the voice of the people are being muzzled. It's time for me to leave Germany. This is a country in flux at home and under pressure from its European neighbours to step up on the world stage. Right now, Germany is uneasy in its own skin. It's unsure of who or what to be. It's just at the moment that this continent is at its weakest since the Second World War. And as Europe's biggest economy, it is time for Germany to stand up and to take far more of a leadership role, one that it's been afraid to take since World War II. Next, I'm heading to Spain. all the countries I'm visiting, this is the one that Brits are most familiar with. We make more than 15 million trips here a year, enjoying white sandy beaches and stunning coastal villages. But although we may think of Spain as being united by paella, sangria, flamenco, living here, it can feel less like one nation and more an assembly of 17 often very different regions. with distinct identities. I'm starting in the region of Catalonia, in a small town called Vilafranca, not far from Barcelona. I've come here on a day when the town celebrates one of its most colorful and craziest traditions. We've got one crew. We're playing. There's something over there. These guys playing something completely different. I say, you know, this is what I love about Spain. This mix of, you know, festivities, but absolutely chaotic. People of all ages all coming together. I love it. But today is about far more than the music. If you look at that lady's shirt at the back, the yellow and red stripes, that is the Catalan flag. These aren't very proud Catalans. Today, the town is celebrating its Catalan identity with an age-old tradition, building giant towers made of people. If you have a look at the people on the bottom here, everyone is kind of moving forward to give support for the base structure. The lightest scramble to the top.

Speaker 2

Oh, the little ones are coming now, like small children with their helmets on.

Speaker 4

Wow, it can happen. You can see they're shaking, but thankfully everyone's okay.

Speaker 2

They're okay.

Speaker 1

It's not unusual for a collapse to lead to a hospital visit, but that's not enough to put them off.

Speaker 4

Oh my God.

Speaker 2

They did it, they did it. 10, 12 hours a week of practice.

Speaker 5

It lasts a couple of seconds.

Speaker 4

But it is really impressive.

Speaker 1

To find out why they do something so dangerous, I'm catching up with one of the climbers, Maria Kamel, whose young children take part as well. So I have to say, first of all, congratulations.

Speaker 4

Thank you. That was amazing. What does it mean to you and to everybody here to do these castiles? What does it represent? It represents a tradition. It's a very strong symbol of the Catalan character, of the Catalan people. We are strong. We work together. We like to reach the sky.

Speaker 1

We have Catalan music playing while it happens. Lots of people wearing Catalan flags. What's your mother tongue?

Speaker 4

My mother tongue is Catalan. I always speak Catalan at home, and I learn to speak Spanish at school.

Speaker 1

So later, six or seven years old. And what about your children?

Speaker 4

My children speak Catalan at home and also in the school.

Speaker 1

They learn Spanish as a second language or a foreign language.

Speaker 4

Yes. The main lessons in Catalonia are done in Catalan. Do you feel more Spanish or Catalan? I definitely feel Catalan. I don't feel Spanish at all.

Speaker 1

At all.

Speaker 4

No, I have nothing against Spanish people or Spanish country, but I don't think I belong to Spain.

Speaker 1

I think for a lot of people, that's quite a dramatic thing to say in a way, you know. Many tourists come to Barcelona, to Catalonia, and they just think, oh, it's a region of Spain.

Speaker 4

Yes. Not for you. Not for me.

Speaker 1

Maria is far from alone amongst Catalans in not feeling Spanish. Near to Vilafranca is the largest city in Catalonia, Barcelona. I've come to Barcelona on a really special day. It's Catalan National Day. Today is about celebrating Catalan culture. But a lot of people aren't just here for a celebration. They're here because they want independence from Spain. The Catalan flag has red and yellow stripes, but on proud display today are also Catalan flags with a star, and they symbolise a call for independence. Trying to look for one flag that's not calling for independence. I can't see one.

Speaker 4

From the very, very young to the very, very old.

Speaker 1

Catalan nationalists, they do feed that to their children with mother's milk. It is felt so strongly, so deeply. Catalonia does have considerable autonomy from Spain, with its own parliament and police force, but many here feel that isn't enough.

Speaker 4

Isn't there a difference between having your language, having learning Catalan, having your traditions, and wanting to break away from Spain?

Speaker 1

So much passion on the streets today. A lot of joy, but also anger and frustration. You know, it does seem remarkable in modern-day Spain, and of course, it's not all Catalans, but there are so many people who feel hostile, almost disgusted at the idea of being called Spanish, of just being part of this country. So much of that hostility towards Spain in Catalonia and other parts of the country can be traced back to Spain's civil war of the 1930s.

Speaker 4

First of the actual pictures from Spain in revolt tells a graphic story of bloodshed and violence. The land of smiling tomorrow is grim today.

Speaker 1

After almost three years of fighting, General Francisco Franco's nationalist forces defeated Spain's republican government. Franco went on to rule Spain as a dictator for almost 40 years. He imprisoned political opponents, sent many to forced labor camps, and executed tens of thousands. In his drive to dominate Spain, he tried to centralize and control it all from Madrid. Franco violently clamped down on regional identities in areas like Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia, which all had their own languages and independence movements. Franco felt really threatened by regional pride and local nationalist sentiment, and he tried to crack down on all that hard and fast. But the thing is, if you try to repress people's passions and their sense of identity, they often just come out all that much stronger. Across Spain today, many still burn with resentment about the brutality inflicted by the Franco regime. Yet just outside Madrid, there's still a giant memorial Franco commissioned essentially to glorify himself. That is massive. Franco claimed this memorial and its 150-meter-high cross stand in honor of everyone who died during the war on both sides. But Franco's political prisoners were forced to build it. and it's become a symbol of what opponents believe is lingering sympathy for his legacy. This place always sends shivers down my spine. It's thought that more than 30,000 bodies are buried here. But the families of those who were killed opposing Franco said no one asked them if the remains of their loved ones could be brought here to a place they saw and still see as a homage to right-wing nationalism and a successful military coup, and ultimately where Franco's body was laid to rest in glory inside that basilica. After Franco's death, Instead of confronting what he'd done and trying to heal the country, Spain's political class imposed what they called a pact of forgetting that many Spaniards have not forgotten. Look, 2 banners have just been unfurled. While we've been filming, I've just seen the activists run off. 1936 and 1975, you know, that's from the start of Franco's military coup until the end of his dictatorship. That is a message saying, glory to a freed Basque country. The activists are showing the repression they were put under by Franco and his regime. Oh, look,

they're taking them, they're taking them off now. Yeah. They have the security guards making sure they disappear. These aren't images Spain wants us to see. This remains a hugely divided country between those who feel they still haven't received justice and those who saw the Franco era as one of political stability and economic growth. But a public memorial perceived to be celebrating Franco is surprising. What A contrast to the fates of two other famous European 20th century fascist dictators, Mussolini and Hitler. Franco's body was taken away from here just a few years ago, but the shadow of this place still looms large here. In the 50 years since Franco died, little has been done to help the families of his victims move on. I've come to the south of the country, to Cordoba, and I'm on my way to a cemetery that has a mass grave from the Franco era. At first glance, this cemetery looks much like any other, the final resting place for thousands of loved ones. But tucked in a corner, at the far end, lie the remains of people executed by Franco's followers. Hola, Daniel. Hi, I'm Katia Encantada. Daniel Quiroga is coordinating the exhumation of the bodies buried here. This is a mass grave. And in the city of Cordoba? Wow, in all these mass graves in the city, how many people in Spain disappeared? It's thought that across Spain There are up to 6,000 mass grave sites. Around 1/4 have been dug up. And while bodies of the Republican leftists who fought against Franco were tossed into the ground in unmarked graves, those who fought for Franco were often given proper burials.

Speaker 4

It's a.

Speaker 1

Big contrast between this part of the graveyard and an unmarked mass grave.

Speaker 4

You're very emotional.

Speaker 1

It's a real wound.

Speaker 4

That's open in Spain still.

Speaker 1

Spain is a modern Western European country, but it still has one of the highest numbers of disappeared people in the world. I'm Katia. I'm so pleased to meet you. Rafael Amor and his daughter, Maria Jose, have been waiting for decades to find the remains of Rafael's father. Rafael's father, Francisco, was a captain fighting against Franco's army,

but he was captured. He was brought to this cemetery, shot, and thrown into a mass grave.

Speaker 6

The final is the most emotion in the world. . . . . I'm so sorry, Rafael.

Speaker 1

I'm so sorry. This happened so many years ago. But there's still so much pain. Work is due to start soon to unearth the remains in this cemetery. Once they're recovered, the aim is to identify them through their DNA. to finally bring some closure. Francisco Amor Cuadrado, just one of so many Spaniards thrown away like rubbish into mass graves by Franco's fascists. This pain and division in Spain is just going to keep on being passed from generation to generation until this country confronts its ugly past and then finally puts it to rest. These old wounds divide and weaken Spain, politically as well as socially. It's continental Europe's 4th richest power, but the role Spain plays on the European stage is far off its potential. Next time, I'll come face to face with one of Spain's biggest threats. Another fire starts there, another there, another there. Before heading to a European rainforest. You do not get this in Paris. And finding out why the heart of France is hurting. Looking in my wing mirror there, are a lot of policemen behind us.

Speaker 3

The premiere of an award-winning Storyville, the extraordinary tale of the Mistress Dispella on BBC Four now, and with a new story about a category of prescription drug with unusual side effects, Shadow World Impulsive on sounds.

## Audio file

[Episode3.mp3](#)

## Transcript

Speaker 1

Europe. I would not want to miss this. Rich in history and culture.

Speaker 2

Absolutely beautiful.

Speaker 1

For centuries, this continent has played a central role on the world stage. Look at that. But this is Europe's most perilous moment since the Second World War. This is the bunker. It faces an aggressive Russia. An ambitious China. It's quite shocking to hear you say that it is much closer right now to Beijing than it is to Washington. Yeah. And Europe's most powerful ally can no longer be fully relied on.

Speaker 3

I said, if you're not gonna pay your bills, we're not going to defend you.

Speaker 1

I'm Katia Adler, and after years of living and working in Italy, France, Spain, and Germany, I've got to know them really well. Who said that Germans don't have an excellent sense of humor? So how are these four countries with mainland Europe's biggest economies responding to this turbulent new world? There are a lot of police lands behind us. What strengthens them? Oh, wow. It looks like a shark. And what weakens them? In this episode, I'll continue my journey through Spain. So it's like an army coming towards you. Before traveling onto a French rainforest, where plans for Europe's defense are taking off. There it is, ready for launch. I'm starting this part of my Spanish journey in the region of Castilla La Mancha, in Spain's hot central south. Of all the countries I'm visiting on this trip, Spain is the one that plays the smallest role internationally. Spain's economy is the fourth biggest in the EU, so you'd think that the country would have quite a lot of clout, at least on the European stage. So often, Spain is just missing in action. I mean, take Ukraine, for example. You've got France working with the UK to organize security guarantees for Kyiv, and Spain is nowhere insight. I mean, geographically, the threat from Russia feels, most Spaniards, very, very far away. Spain is the only NATO country that has resisted Donald Trump's demands that all member states increase defence spending to 5% of GDP. From Madrid's point of view, there are other national security challenges closer to home that it needs to spend its money on. So there's something I'd really like to show you. The Spanish government produces a map that it regularly updates. You can click on fires and that is the map of Spain right now. Red. Estremo, extreme. The majority of Spain is at extreme risk of fires. So this is just for public information. If you live here, you look at this because, you know, it could save your life. Almost 90% of Spaniards think the country needs to spend money on coping with climate change. I'm visiting in July 2025, during Spain's worst fire season for decades. Look at that sign. No lighting, cigarettes, definitely no campfires. Look how dry it is around here. The government is pumping billions into trying to deal with the threat. Literally taking money from its defence budget to spend on fighting climate change. I've come to join a team of firefighters to see where some of that money's going. The team is led by Isidro Gonzalez.

Speaker 2

...

Speaker 1

Today is a training exercise. They never know where the next fire will start, so every drill is crucial. The siren that we've just heard means that the water's about to be dropped.

Speaker 4

Here we go, bumpy bucket, and it'll now drop the water. Water in this area. Here it comes. Whoa.

Speaker 1

Forest fires here aren't new, but they're getting worse. In 2025, an area twice the size of Greater London burnt in Spain. So climate change is really changing your job. The training exercise has barely finished when the team are called out to a real fire. I can see a whole ton of smoke spreading out, like almost in a straight line across the trees. Right now, the fire feels a safe distance away. But the danger is how quickly it can spread. The firefighters warned us of this, that if you just have one ember that flies on the wind that you can feel all around, another fire starts there, another there, another there. This is how fast it goes. This is the reality of living in hot, dry Spain. Six helicopters are trying to contain the fire. I think that could be the group that we were filming with this morning. Meanwhile, farmers are desperately plowing the fields, trying to create fire breaks, turning over fresh soil to stop the flames from spreading. But strong winds make it hard to get the blaze under control. Look at the fire eating up the bush over there. That tree has just caught alight. It feels almost surreal. Farmers still in their tractors trying desperately to protect their land, the helicopters overhead, the fires licking all around us, this huge amount of destruction. You can hear about wildfires, breathing them, seeing them, and how fast they spread. It's quite something else. The... Yeah, the wind is starting to blow towards us, I think. We're going to get out of here for our own safety now.

Speaker 5

Yeah, we should, yeah.

Speaker 1

Firefighters fought for nearly 20 hours to bring the blaze under control. But the toll of climate change goes beyond the fires themselves. Spain is Europe's largest producer of fruit and veg. But worsening droughts are putting farmers under great pressure. Fortunately, the Spanish have a crop that thrives almost anywhere. If I say olive oil, you probably think Italy, and that really winds the Spaniards up, because they are the

biggest producers of olive oil in the world. And this region, Andalucia in the south, well, that's where the bulk of it's made. I've come to meet Ignacio Rojas, who runs a small olive farm. Nice to meet you.

Speaker 6

Nice to meet you too.

Speaker 1

And your lovely olive grove. Olive trees can grow in the harshest of conditions. They need very little water and can tolerate a scorching sun.

Speaker 6

This is for my family since one century ago.

Speaker 1

One century.

Speaker 6

Yeah, we are three generations working in the... in the farm.

Speaker 1

Yeah.

Speaker 6

And we are very proud about what we are doing.

Speaker 1

The olives are turned into oil, and the best way to sample it is straight up.

Speaker 6

This is the best juice that you can bring in the world. Salute. Mm.

Speaker 1

Oh, that is delicious. But Ignacio's farm is in trouble.

Speaker 6

This area is the worst percentage in terms of productivity. The soil is very sandy and here.

Speaker 1

I mean, it is. I mean, it's actual sand, like on a beach, right? It's like a...

Speaker 6

Yeah, it's sand.

Speaker 1

The farm is around 120 miles from the driest region in all of Europe, where the arid conditions are like those you'd find in a desert. This is the front line, where fertile land is turning into dust.

Speaker 6

So it's like an army coming towards you.

Speaker 1

Wow. These trees look healthy, but without enough water, they don't produce olives. Is the area of land you can't use anymore, getting bigger?

Speaker 6

So there's nothing you can do with this land anymore? No. So you had tomatoes, now you have dust. Yes.

Speaker 1

Once land becomes unfarmable, it can eventually become unlivable. After Greece, Spain has the highest number of displaced people due to climate change in all of Europe. Migration because of climate change, so when people pack up and leave their homes, moving to another part of the country or just leaving their country altogether, we don't really hear about that here in Europe. But in Spain, it is a big topic of conversation. You already have 90% of Spaniards crammed into the big cities here or living just in the coastal areas and leaving the increasingly vast, arid parts of their country behind them. And it is that growing climate challenge that, to a big extent, is responsible for distracting Spain and preventing it playing a much bigger role on the world stage. My next stop is more than 300 miles north. I'm going to the region of Galicia. Lovely Galicia. It's so much greener and more lush than we often think of as Spain. And whereas Northern European, so the Brits, the Dutch, the Germans, still rush to the south, to Andalusia for summer holidays. It's got so hot there with climate change, that clever Spaniards make their way here up north. In Galicia, much of life revolves around the sea. The region is Europe's biggest producer of shellfish. There you have the wonderful sea on one side, and on the other, you have all of these seafood production warehouses. And there you have it written in red. Mariscos, it means seafood. Delicious. When the tide's out, the conditions here are perfect for finding clams and cockles. There we go. I'm down the wrong leg already. Right, I've travelled the world, gone to war zones. I can definitely put these on with dignity. Hola.

Speaker 4

Hello. Hola, Marisa. Hola, Marisa.

Speaker 1

So, what tell us what you're what you're doing here.

Speaker 4

What's this implement? It's just like... Help a little bit. Tell me what to do. Are you telling me that I'm not strong enough?

Speaker 1

Weirdly satisfying.

Speaker 4

I got one. Excellent.

Speaker 3

Not completely useless.

Speaker 4

I don't think my family would do very well if this was my job, I have to say.

Speaker 1

People working here sell their shellfish at the local market. But it's getting harder and harder to make a living.

Speaker 4

Are there fewer people working in the industry now? So, over how long have the numbers dropped like that? Wow. Yeah, that's dramatic.

Speaker 1

Galicia's seafood industry may be struggling, but it's a very different story for Spain's economy as a whole. In 2024, Spain's was the fastest growing of all of Europe's major economies. In part, because its prime minister, Pedro Sanchez, has taken a radical step compared to other leaders in Europe. He's openly accepted that Spain needs a huge influx of immigrants.

Speaker 7

(Spain speaking in foreign language).

Speaker 1

I've come to Spain's capital, Madrid. So I've been told that several nights of the week, people come here to dance salsa, most of them from Latin America. And I can already hear it. Like so much of Europe, Spain is wary of migration from the Middle East and Africa.

Speaker 4

But it's opened its arms to South Americans.

Speaker 1

Spain's government has announced plans to legalise almost a million undocumented migrants over the next couple of years. The economy isn't just getting a boost from South America. Spain has taken another controversial step compared to most European neighbours, welcoming investment from China with open arms. seemingly without much question. Oh, I think this must be him now. Yes, it is.

Speaker 4

Victor.

Speaker 3

Buenos dias.

Speaker 1

Katia. Katia. Pleased to meet you. Victor Cortizo is a lawyer who helped Chinese companies looking to invest in Spain.

Speaker 3

I remember that when.

Speaker 1

I was living in Spain many, many years ago, it was like the corner shops. That's where you saw they were bought by a lot of Chinese families in Spain.

Speaker 3

Now it's business, big business. It's quite a bridge to wire.

Speaker 1

In 2025, Spain awarded Huawei a multi-million euro contract to store wiretap recordings used by its intelligence services. Spain's interior ministry said it couldn't see a security risk. It would be hard to imagine the UK, or other Western European countries doing something similar. There are a lot of European countries that said we do not want

to have the involvement of Huawei, you know, in our telecommunication system because of fears of spying.

Speaker 3

... ..

Speaker 1

In the last few years, dozens of Chinese investment projects in Spain have been announced, many involving billions of euros. Spain is hungry for more. It's already the end point of the world's longest rail route, going all the way from near Shanghai to Madrid.

Speaker 3

So this is like the drop-off point for the rest of Europe.

Speaker 1

With America less predictable, Europe is wrestling with how to view China. Strategic threat or stable business partner. Spain has made-up its mind. Spain is part of NATO, Spain is part of the European Union. If you have a look at the relationships that Spain has.

Speaker 3

How important is that relationship with China?

Speaker 1

But Spain stands out from its big European allies in provoking Donald Trump, you could say. You know, opening up markets to China when he says, Close them to China, he says it very clearly, and when he says, Spend more on defense, Spain is the only, the only NATO ally to say, No, I'm not gonna do it. Does Spain feel closer or have more?

Speaker 3

Trust, at least when it comes to business, in China or in the US under Donald Trump.

Speaker 1

It's quite shocking to hear you say that it is much closer right now to Beijing than it is to Washington.

Speaker 3

Do you think this is the future for Spain, or could this change with a different president, different geopolitics?

Speaker 1

Victor is a lawyer who can make money from Chinese businesses investing in Spain. But there's no doubt that compared to its major Western European neighbours, Spain right now is an outlier. Far less worried about Russia, far more friendly with China. These are major differences of opinion, and if they deepen, they'll present a significant threat to a sense of common purpose in Europe. My final stop in Spain is somewhere that shows what Europe's big powers can achieve if they work together. Oh, look, there are some of the military planes. Airbus, here we come. Airbus is the world's biggest manufacturer of planes. Many of us have flown on holiday in one of them, but they also build military aircraft. and do a fashionable line in hard hats. Regulations, you know. Head of air power at Airbus is Jean-Brice Dumont. Hi, I'm Katia. Very pleased to meet you and very pleased to be here.

Speaker 8

Let me show you a bit of the aircraft and tell you where we are. This building is the building of the final assembly line of the A400M. This is where you put together parts coming from all over Europe, and it's here in Spain that the aircraft is finally assembled. We've got four very powerful engines, which makes this aircraft the most powerful.

Speaker 1

The most powerful in the world.

Speaker 8

It can carry close to 40 tons of payload. 40 tons is a lot. It can be troops. It can be equipment, so that's in terms of engine power and ability to go far unrivaled in the world of today. And I'm particularly proud of what we could achieve. This one is the flagship of a European cooperation.

Speaker 1

Give us an idea of the nations that have been involved over time, because the UK's been involved as well, isn't it?

Speaker 8

With a few exceptions, all the wings of all the Airbus aircraft are designed and produced in the UK. We might appreciate that an aircraft without wings is a tube. So the role of the UK in the Airbus landscape is one of the key roles. It's one of what we name in our Airbus jargon, home country. So home countries of Airbus are France, Germany, UK, Spain.

Speaker 1

Airbus is a publicly traded company. But some of its biggest shareholders are European governments. It was started more than 50 years ago with a vision of giving Europe

commercial independence from the United States in producing aircraft. Oh, wow. I can't. It looks like a shark. It does. Doesn't it look like an open man shark? Today, with Europe feeling less able to rely on the US for its security, Airbus could play an increasingly important role in Europe's defense capabilities. How important is it in the times that we're living in that Europe works together in order to create these kind of aircraft like an Airbus?

Speaker 8

I do believe it's essential. I do believe if Europe has a set of countries, has a force for good, if Europe doesn't put, doesn't unite efforts, doesn't unite money, money to invest on big programs like this one will become obsolete, will be irrelevant. Europe has to play the role.

Speaker 1

You have defense ministers like in Germany saying Russia will be able to invade NATO proper in just a few years' time. Is it realistic? Is Europe up to the task of becoming more self-reliant soon?

Speaker 8

I think with the number of products we have, which are European products, the answer is yes. We've proven a model that works. Commonly in Airbus, we say Airbus is Europe that works, kind of implicitly admitting that there are areas in Europe that don't work so well. The message we're getting from the US is you have to contribute more. And this is definitely the call of duty that Europe has to receive and has to assume.

Speaker 1

Europe is now responding to Donald Trump's insistence that it contribute more to its own defense. And this isn't just about keeping America on side. Europe has realized that the US has new priorities, and Europeans need to be able to look after themselves. The final country I'm visiting on this journey is France. But I'm not heading to a part of the country that many of us know. Wow. That looks lush and tropical. I'm off to French Guiana, on the other side of the Atlantic. French Guiana is officially part of France. They don't see it as a colony. It's the legal equivalent of a British county. even though it's on the edge of the Amazon rainforest. I'm going to be completely honest. I didn't come to French Guiana to be in the rainforest, but most of this place is covered by it. You don't have to travel very far to see it, and why wouldn't I? I mean, it is spectacular. French Guiana became a French colony during the Napoleonic Wars. It was made a proper part of France in 1946. About 95% of this little corner of France is rainforest, much of it primeval and breathtaking. But I'm here to see something even more surprising. Europe's spaceport. I'm here to watch a rocket launch. The middle of French Guiana's rainforest is where the European Space Agency, or ESA, has its launch pad. Tony? Yeah.

I'm Katia. I'm pleased to meet you. Can I hop in with you? Yes, sure. Tony Tolka Nielsen has worked at ESA for 30 years. He's from Denmark, one of 23 European countries, including the UK, that are members of ESA. Why do you launch from here, from French Guiana? I mean, it is very far away.

Speaker 7

It's probably the best place to launch from in the world. Why? Because it's very close to equator, so when you do launches to the east, you profit from the rotation of the Earth, and you are launching into the exact plane where you want to launch many satellites. Then we also have a very benign climate here. There are no hurricanes here. And we can launch to the north and to the east, because we are launching overseas.

Speaker 1

The Guiana Space Centre is a massive site. It takes half an hour to drive from the entrance to the assembly hall, where the rockets are put together. Wow. All the launches that take place from here are to send satellites into space. How important is it that Europe is autonomous now in space?

Speaker 7

Space is fundamental for our economy. That's the first point. So we. Navigation, for example. You use navigation every day when you take your car. It's so fundamental for many things. When you do bank transactions, the signal passes via satellite to have secure via communication. Space today is fundamental for our economy. but also for our security.

Speaker 1

So when NATO says, insists, that we all have to spend a lot more on defense, people tend to think of weapons or armored vehicles. How important is space in defense?

Speaker 7

So we need, for example, secure communication, cybersecurity, and all these kind of things, and intelligence. All this is now space-based. China, it's the US, it's Russia, they all have these kind of systems, and they are even moving into having Let's call it aggressive things in space.

Speaker 1

What does that mean, aggressive.

Speaker 7

It can jam our satellites, for example, with electromagnetic signals. It can even take our satellites out of orbit. and things like that. We are answering to that by developing and

proposing new systems in addition to what we already have, because Europe needs this in the new geopolitical context.

Speaker 1

To what extent is Europe's push for autonomy in space now, down to Donald Trump, a change in the US administration, and him saying very clearly, Europe, you can't rely on us anymore totally for your security?

Speaker 7

100%. This situation, the Trump, has made everybody realize that we need to ensure our own security. Two years ago, it was a bit taboo for the European Space Agency to talk about space systems for defence. This has completely changed. It's really taking off now. We are ramping up in industry.

Speaker 1

In 2025, ESA launched 4 satellites into orbit. In 2026, that doubles to 8. And in 2027, it'll be even more. So there it is, ready for launch. We're pretty close, though. You know, it's a lot bigger than it seems from here. It's taller than the Statue of Liberty. And it's in a kind of... temporary housing that you can see, and it's been waiting there to be protected from the elements until takeoff today. The satellite being launched today will provide high-resolution radar imagery of Earth. So really slowly now, that protective building is reversing away from the rocket, so it will be free to take off. Yeah, it's time to leave now.

Speaker 2

We are going to start fueling the launcher.

Speaker 1

So we have to get out of here. OK, thank you. Thanks. Time to go. With the launch imminent, all the media and engineers are moved to a safe distance. This is as close as we're allowed to go. You can just make out the rocket over there in the distance. We're just under 4 miles away.

Speaker 8

Look, there it goes.

Speaker 1

Look at that. Wow. And now the saddle. I feel that vibrating inside my chest. This is absolutely epic. I didn't think it would just feel so powerful, actually. You know, I mean, wow, I can still see it going and going. Donald Trump's insistence that Europe pay a lot more for its own defence came as a shock to much of the continent. But France has

long been wary of relying on America. Over the years, it's opted for totally independent nuclear and intelligence programs, in contrast to the UK, which is far more entangled with Washington. With this launch, France pushing for so many more launches from its territory, and also France pushing for Europe's autonomy in space in these much more dangerous times we live in. All of that is key to understanding the French mentality, because France sees itself as a leader. It wants to lead in Europe, it expects to lead, it demands to lead. As the launcher falls back to Earth, it's time for me to leave French Guiana. I'm heading to France's capital, Paris. The so-called city of love helps make France the most visited country on earth. It's home to endless iconic sites, from the Eiffel Tower to Notre Dame to Montmartre. I'm a little bit in love with Montmartre was passed, suffering artists and a bohemian lifestyle. Nowadays, well, it's a lot more about tourism and getting your caricature done. France is fiercely proud of its arts and culture. It legislates aggressively to protect them. Around 4 out of 10 songs played on French radio have to be enfancy by law. French film is shielded against Hollywood blockbusters by very generous subsidies. Basically, France pays through the nose to support its culture, its language and its people. France is a country that loves to spend. The health system here is brilliant, the welfare state so generous, and public spending is pretty much the highest in Europe. And that is brilliant. if you can pay for it. But France is struggling to do that. Its national debt is huge. In the eurozone, only Greece and Italy are more indebted. And that hampers France's lofty ambitions on the world stage and puts spending at home under pressure. So, are the French willing to give up some of their generous welfare state? I've come to a cafe in Monmouth to ask the owner, Fred Monnier, what he thinks. Do you have a minute to sit with me? So now France has a huge government debt crisis. France is seen as a problem child in Europe. You know, you're supposed to be one of the big powers in Europe next to Germany, but actually you're in big, big, big, big trouble here. But it seems to me that the people of France are not willing to give up this huge-generous welfare state. If you go to Germany, people are quite willing to do their bit for the country if things are difficult. In France, there seems to be an attitude, the state owes me. As a citizen, the state looks up, has to look up to me.

Speaker 7

Provide for everything.

Speaker 1

But how does France go forward, right? Because it's sort of reaching crunch time with a massive debt crisis and the world is changing. And your president, Macron, says, you know, Europe has to be more independent. We have to spend more on our own weapons, on defence. helping Ukraine, the money has.

Speaker 2

To come from somewhere.

Speaker 1

The French have a strong sense of national identity, but they also expect their state to look after them. But while France might have a more generous welfare state than most, it's far from alone in Europe in its budget dilemmas. There are really, really hard choices facing governments right across Europe. There's only a certain amount of money in the pot, so how do you keep the welfare state going, make good on your promises to spend more on defence, and no one wants to pay a whole load of new taxes? The thing is here in France, when you ask people to give up even a tiny little bit of their welfare, they go out and they protest. Just before I came to Paris, there were huge protests after the government suggested scrapping 2 bank holidays in order to boost the economy. A couple of weeks later, the Prime Minister was forced out, the 5th to go in less than two years. France, one of Europe's leading powers, is in trouble. While Paris may be home to the culture, glitz and glamour that France is so famous for, arguably the real soul of this country is far removed from the big city in rural France. Loving these windy roads. There's a spectacular view of that village. That's amazing. It's like a movie set or something. That says Gorge de la Sesse. I love the gorge. Let's go and have a look. I want to see how close to the gorge I can get. So I really wasn't expecting this. I don't really have the right footwear, but heels go anytime in my book. And this, well, I wouldn't want to miss this for the world. But France's stunning landscapes aren't just easy on the eye. Its farms are famous for the delicious wines and food they produce, including allegedly up to 1,600 types of cheese. So, bright and early, I'm off to meet some farmers. You can hear raised voices in this car park. You've got farmers meeting today to take part in a nationwide protest against the government.

Speaker 2

So I shall listen to what they're saying.

Speaker 1

As across much of Europe, many farmers in France feel the political establishment is deaf to countryside concerns.

Speaker 2

I'm Katia.

Speaker 1

Bonjour.

Speaker 2

Pleased to meet you. I'm very pleased to meet you.

Speaker 1

Cedric Sor is an organic grape farmer.

Speaker 2

Do you come from a family of farming? Does it go back?

Speaker 1

Is it harder for farmers to persuade young people to stay in farming?

Speaker 2

Cedric and his.

Speaker 1

Convoy of farmers are heading to local government offices to make that point. Looking in my wing there and there, are a lot of policemen behind us. They're plotting where to dump their loads, so to speak, like all the.

Speaker 2

You know, the earth, the branches and stuff that farmers have brought with them. So this comes from the vineyards, the earth from the vineyards. I've been to a lot of protests where they've chosen manure instead.

Speaker 1

It's quite well, you've got the steam rising from it.

Speaker 2

There's quite a lot of graffiti being put up there. This is pretty strong, look. We're dying. They feel that their livelihoods are dying, actually.

Speaker 1

And this is one sign there can be more stops across town.

Speaker 2

Some more dumping on the government office.

Speaker 1

One of Cedric's big concerns is that government politicians in Paris are obsessed with being green, even if that pushes up costs and stops French farmers being able to compete with cheaper produce coming from outside Europe. They've just graffiti this on the wall, , so enough regulation, you know, whether it's for the environment, all the green regulations, you know, they just, what they just say, is whether from Paris or the

EU in Brussels, they just get more and more and more paperwork, more and more constrictions on how they can run their farms.

Speaker 2

And they feel it strangles them.

Speaker 1

Suicides amongst desperate French farmers are far higher than the national average. Farmers are now being courted by the political extremes on the left and right, who say they'll do things differently. So what do you think you can change with your protest?

Speaker 2

So Emmanuel Macron, the EU talked about having a green revolution.

Speaker 1

They wanted to be well, yeah. The Green.

Speaker 2

Deal, exactly.

Speaker 1

The French government argues that the Green Deal can make farms more sustainable and resilient. But these regular protests are working. Afraid of losing the farmers' votes to the political extremes, the French government and the EU are rowing back on parts of their once trumpeted Green Revolution. The final stop on my trip around France is the country's second city, Marseille. With its location on the Med, Marseille has always been a gateway for immigrants arriving in France. It's a vibrant and cosmopolitan melting pot. It feels so different to Paris here. Paris is glamour. Marseille. Marseille has an edge to it. It's a city of graffiti, Middle East and North African restaurants and boats. But scratch the surface, and it's also a glaring example of the parallel societies you find in cities across the country. After the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of North African immigrants came to France to help build the economy. But they've often been housed far from the glamorous city centres. They've just shouted us, no cameras here. People here do not like the press, they don't trust us, and they say they're sick of being always associated with crime and violence. It can get a bit aggressive with cameras here sometimes. I've come to one of Marseille's northern suburbs, where more than 40% of people officially live in poverty. Many of these areas are plagued by drug dealing, gang violence and high murder rates. Marseille has even been called one of the most dangerous cities in Europe. Bonjour. Bonjour. Munir Montrani works in a youth centre on an estate called La Bousierine, trying to keep local kids away from drugs and crime. What is the family original immigration?

Speaker 5

It's important. It's important to look after the immigration of the people. Well, we could.

Speaker 1

Despite being born in France, Munir doesn't feel the same strong sense of national identity that I've seen so far in this country. As far as Munir is concerned, people like him are treated like second-class citizens. But he's hoping to help the next generation aspire to a better future. Today, Munir has brought some teenagers from his estate to Marseille's swanky fort to perform at a concert. It is just a concert. It won't change the world or these boys' lives, but it is a small step towards bringing Marseille's 2 parallel worlds together.

Speaker 5

Is it? No, it's not.

Speaker 4

I love this.

Speaker 2

Wow.

Speaker 1

France is one of the central pillars of Europe, and it sees itself as a leader. It's not alone in facing political, social, and economic problems right now. But as the EU's second-largest economy, when it struggles, it can have a big impact on all its neighbors. Before I end my European journey, there's one more thing I want to see on the outskirts of Marseille. Admittedly, it's ugly and grey, but it is so important. It's a terminal for storing imported LNG. It's natural gas that's been turned into a liquid to make it easier to transport. And Russia produces a lot of it. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Europe was pretty quick to slap sanctions on Russian oil and gas. Basically, it just felt really wrong to keep spending loads of money in Russia that it would then use in Ukraine for the war. Imports of Russian oil and regular natural gas into the EU were banned. But Russian liquefied natural gas is still being imported into Europe. Take a look at this website. It's pretty cool, actually. It shows you all of the ships all over the world carrying LNG. So each one of those blue triangles is a ship. And if I go in a bit closer, click on that ship, and it tells me that the ship loaded up with LNG in Yomel Peninsula, that's in Russia, there's a massive LNG filling station there, and it's delivering it, guess where? To France. So that means that three years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Europe is still buying LNG from Russia. In fact, since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the volume of Russian LNG coming

into Europe has actually risen. Energy is just so important to us. At the most fundamental level, we need it to heat our homes, to drive our cars, to power our entire economies. The problem for Europe is We're not energy independent. We have to buy it in, and that makes Europe really vulnerable. There are plans for the EU to stop importing Russian LNG, but almost four years after realising just how much of a threat Vladimir Putin poses, it is still importing it. It's an astonishing indictment of how reliant this continent is on others, even those it views as its enemies. I've come to the end of my journey. This is a continent at a crossroads. I've worked as a reporter across Europe for a really long time now. And sometimes you have to take a big step back from the dizzying cycle of daily news to truly appreciate just how much things have changed. Europe has relied for decades on the US for security and defence in a world dominated by the West. But that is over. Washington doesn't prioritize Europe anymore. It's busy on the world stage jostling with other giants like China and India and Russia. As I've seen on my travels across Europe, we all have different pressures and priorities. But this whole continent is now being forced into a fundamental rethink about how to become more self-reliant. Now, the American president has turned post-war assumptions on their head. What kind of Europe will emerge? Right now, that's unclear. But each country's history and experiences have left their mark. And understanding that will be essential to navigating our new world. and unfocused Europe risks being left behind or even trampled underfoot in this new jungle of big power politics that we now inhabit. In a new Storyville documentary, a wand abruptly torn apart, portraits of a confused father on BBC Four now, Although a murder case unfold, a decades-long quest for justice in the hunt for Arlene Fraser's killer on iPlayer.