

RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES: TIME TO WAKE UP ... AND GET OUT OF BED

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EDITORIAL



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In an increasingly volatile global environment, Europe finds itself at a crossroads in its relationship with the United States (US). The alliance with Washington was once viewed as a bedrock of democratic values and ideals; now there are serious questions about its future relevance, its integrity, and even its legitimacy. It is difficult for Europeans to come to terms with this new environment. Our leaders shrink from openly recognising the extent of the ongoing revolution. This is understandable because Europe's security is so dependent on the US and NATO, against a background of Russian hostility and aggressiveness. But if Europeans, in the words of Ivan Krastev, want to both wake up and ["get out of bed,"](#) they must face uncomfortable truths and awkward questions.

The waning myth of shared values

Is a close alliance still possible with a country where Carl Schmitt's authoritarian worldview is increasingly triumphant? America today appears less interested in traditional isolationism than enforcing a new form of imperial consolidation and asserting themselves through coercion. The notion of a 'transatlantic community of values' is eroding under the weight of divergent domestic policies and worldviews between the US on the one hand and Europe and Canada on the other.

While liberal democracies everywhere struggle to preserve their pluralist institutions and social safety nets, parts of the American political class, including within the US government, not only openly flirt with autocratic tendencies, but actively work with like-minded forces in Europe to undermine the European Union (EU) in its present state. A [recent report](#) by a Hungarian and a Polish think tank first presented in Washington pleads for a vision of the EU as a hollowed-out

structure: a loose confederation of nations, governed by unanimity and free opt-outs, and, echoing Trump's attacks against the judicial system, stripped of judicial oversight.

Europeans should question the American model that has attracted them for so long. Over the last 20 years, the US has outpaced Europe in terms of gross domestic product (GDP) growth. America retains a unique capacity of innovating and creating value. But there is a darker side to this picture. The accumulation of wealth does not seem to benefit the majority of the population and does not translate into shared social wellbeing. [Figures](#) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on health, for instance, paint a stark picture as far as the American model is concerned. The average life expectancy in the US is 76.4 years compared to an OECD average of 80.3 (France's average amounts to 82.4). The uninsured population in the US stands at 8.7% against 0.1% in France and other EU countries. Maternal mortality per 100,000 births is at 21.1 in the US versus 7.9 in France and infant mortality per 1000 is at 5.4 compared to 3.6. While Europe should learn from the Americans how to generate more growth, it should definitely not try to emulate the American social model, which prioritises GDP over health, social equity, and basic human dignity.

There is no reason either to accept the logic of the American administration on trade, tariffs, and economic leverage. We do not know how the "tariff war" will evolve over the coming weeks and months. For the time being, the US maintains an *erga omnes* 10% import tariff, while selectively imposing higher duties, including 25% on steel, cars, and semiconductors, and various tariffs as a coercive tool to 'rebalance' trade (20% for EU exports).

The EU has so far been overly cautious in its retaliation. One may wonder whether this is the right approach when [faced with a bully](#). The risk is that this will be seen as a tacit acceptance of the underlying Trump argumentation. We should robustly contest the latter, including the 10% tariff for all goods entering the US. The more we dither, the more the other side will be tempted to use the time to try and drive wedges between EU countries. This would have disastrous long-term effects for all Member States. We should not forget that while the US is important for Europe, a mere 2.4% increase in internal EU trade could offset a 20% drop in exports to the US, as pointed out in a recent FT comment by Isabelle Matos y Largo.

We should also envisage targeting services where the US has a big surplus. The more so since Washington has also opened another front against Europe in the field of digital regulation. Regulating Big Tech is now seen as a hostile act when done by the EU. It is just a way of preserving our ways of living.

Geopolitics: Subservience without security?

I am not sure that most Europeans understand what is going on in the field of security. The new American strategy becomes clearer as time goes on. It is built around three ideas: one, Europeans must pay for their own defence; two, the US no longer provides the same guarantees on Article 5 of the Treaty of Washington (NATO Treaty); three, the US expects Europe to continue to toe the American line on geopolitics. The US has gradually been redefining Europe's security framework, not through consensus, but by

imposition. The question to ask is whether this is partnership, or whether it is vassalage. In other words: do we accept that everything remains as is while the US side of the equation weakens or disappears?

Europe must pay for its own defence and increase its spending, even if the current mention of 5% GDP seems excessive.[1] This money should primarily be spent to build up a true European defence industry. The American lobbying against a European preference should stop, unless, of course, Europeans get reciprocal treatment and access to the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA). The idea presently circulating about setting up a NATO-linked defence bank (Defence, Security and Resilience Bank) raises questions. Promoted by former NATO officials with strong ties to American military-industrial circles, this institution would fund defence purchases across the 'free world.' Do we need yet another layer of bureaucracy? Is this not a Trojan horse for American arms manufacturers?

Concerning the security guarantee embedded in NATO, Europe's interest is that it continues while its own role in the organisation is strengthened. But in the case of a weakening of American engagement - let alone a withdrawal - Washington cannot expect Europe to remain wedded to every geopolitical move dreamt up in the US.

Ukraine: Reconstruction or exploitation?

Trump's posture toward Ukraine and Russia raises multiple concerns. So far, the main contribution of the Trump administration is

[1] It bears repeating that the joint expenditure now of the European members of NATO hovers around 450 billion euros. The Russian military budget is estimated at around 130 billion. We should start by making far better use of the money we spend on military expenditure.

the propagation of Putin's war objectives. The minerals deal concluded between Washington and Kyiv is widely seen as a positive move towards ensuring the US's continued interest in an independent Ukraine. It is not absurd to look at it from another, less positive angle. We should not accept the underlying premise that Ukraine must pay back the assistance received, even though helping Ukraine is in the core security interest of the West. The Marshall Plan after World War II was more sophisticated than that. More importantly: is this deal really compatible with Ukraine's status as a future EU Member State? Is there not a risk of turning Ukraine into an American economic protectorate in the heart of Europe? Those questions are even more relevant in view of the refusal of the American government to include any security guarantees in the deal.

In this context, questions can also be raised about the recent deal between Poland and the US on the construction of Poland's first nuclear reactor. *Prima facie* there is nothing wrong with such economic cooperation. But it is a bit troublesome that it was set into the framework of the so-called 'Three Seas' initiative, a US-backed platform linking fifteen countries from the Baltics to the Black Sea and the Adriatic Sea. Working towards European energy independence is a good thing. But we should be wary not to create new energy dependencies with a partner more interested in dominance than cooperation. It is worth knowing that Trump's son was recently touring the region to lobby for the initiative. One may also question whether it is acceptable that the leader of the American delegation at the signing ceremony, a Trump ally closely linked to oil and gas circles in the US, used the occasion to tell the audience that Europe's 2050 carbon neutrality goals were ["wrong"](#) and that EU Member States should instead purchase more US natural gas.

The urgency of strategic autonomy

Europe must finally grasp the full implications of its dependency. The alternative is grim: a future where our political sovereignty, economic interests, and social values are gradually eroded, with the active help of what used to be our closest ally and the guarantor of our security. More strategic autonomy is not a luxury, but a necessity. It does not mean that Europe should work towards severing ties with Washington; it means recalibrating them. A robust transatlantic alliance should be built on mutual respect and mutual interest, not on brutal pressure from one side and passive obedience from the other. Europe must engage with the US as an equal, not as a subordinate. To do so, it must up its game, become stronger, and more confident. Europe is slowly waking up to the challenge. Now it is time to get out of bed and get going.

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