

TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS IN TIMES OF TRUMP II: WHAT THE EU SHOULD DO

JAN WOUTERS*

Abstract

This contribution analyses the deterioration of EU–US relations under President Trump’s second term, contrasting today’s tensions with the cooperative spirit envisioned in the 2003 European Security Strategy and briefly revived under the Biden Administration. The article argues that Trump’s confrontational and transactional approach has undermined trust, unity, and multilateral cooperation. In response, three urgent priorities for the European Union are suggested: (1) deepen economic integration and enhance competitiveness through innovation; (2) achieve strategic autonomy, particularly in defence and foreign policy; and (3) restore and defend the multilateral rules-based international order. Despite current strains, the EU should sustain people-to-people and institutional ties with the United States, preserving shared democratic values and preparing for a future renewal of the transatlantic partnership.

At its summit in Brussels of 12 and 13 December 2003, towards the end of a rather tumultuous year for transatlantic relations, the European Council approved the first ever European Security Strategy of the European Union (EU or Union).¹ This strategic document, which still offers a good read today, ends with the following noteworthy statement about the partnership between the EU and the United States of America (US):

‘The transatlantic relationship is irreplaceable. Acting together, the European Union and the United States can be a formidable force for good in the world. Our aim should be an effective and balanced partnership with the USA. This is an additional reason for the EU to build up further its capabilities and increase its coherence.’²

* Jean Monnet Chair *ad personam* and Professor of International Law and International Organizations at KU Leuven.

* Professor of International Law and International Organizations at KU Leuven.

1. Council of the European Union, *European Security Strategy. A Secure Europe in a Better World* (European Communities 2009) <www.consilium.europa.eu/media/30823/qc7809568enc.pdf> (all websites last visited 16 December 2025).

2. *ibid.*, 42.

Today, 22 years later, and a year into the second Trump presidency, these words sound slightly surreal, if not utopian. ‘Acting together’? ‘An effective and balanced partnership’? ‘A formidable force for good in the world’?

What has gone wrong in the transatlantic partnership and how can it be fixed? The present contribution can only scratch the surface of this twin question. One could maybe start by saying that relations between Europe and the US have never been simple.³ There have been hiccups and tensions during most of the decades since World War II on a great variety of issues, from security and trade⁴ to antitrust⁵ and human rights.⁶ Especially since the end of the Cold War, there have been various agreements, formats, and resets as US administrations succeeded each other.⁷ As mentioned, the

3. For a unique longitudinal analysis, see Mary Nolan, *The Transatlantic Century: Europe and the United States, 1890–2010* (CUP 2012).

4. See, in the context of NATO, the tensions in the 1970s and 1980s described by Michele Testone, ‘Introduction’ in Michele Testone (ed), *NATO and Transatlantic Relations in the 21st Century* (Routledge 2021) 1 at 6; Lawrence Freedman (ed), *The Troubled Alliance. Atlantic Relations in the 1980s* (Heinemann 1983). On tensions in the transatlantic security relationship see Wyn Rees, *The US-EU Security Relationship: The Tensions between a European and a Global Agenda* (Palgrave Macmillan 2011); on tensions in trade, see John H Jackson, ‘United States-EEC Trade Relations: Constitutional Problems of Economic Interdependence’ (1979) 16 (3) CML Rev 453, doi: 10.54648/COLA1979035; in the areas of food and agriculture, see Tim Josling and Stefan Tangermann, *Transatlantic Food and Agricultural Trade Policy: 50 Years of Conflict and Convergence* (Edward Elgar 2015). See more broadly for recent tensions, Daniel Schade, ‘A Strained Partnership? A Typology of Tensions in the EU-US Transatlantic Relationship’ in Mechthild Roos and Daniel Schade (eds), *The EU under Strain? Current Crises Shaping European Union Politics* (De Gruyter 2024) 191.

5. For an overview of the many decades of clashes and attempts at cooperation, see Eleanor M Fox, ‘Competition: Linking the World’ in George A Bermann, Matthias Herdegen and Peter L Lindseth (eds), *Transatlantic Regulatory Cooperation: Legal Problems and Political Prospects* (OUP 2001) 243.

6. See, *inter alia*, in light of the ‘war on terror’ declared by President GW Bush after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, Erik André Andersen and Eva Maria Lassen (eds), *Europe and the Americas: Transatlantic Approaches to Human Rights* (Brill 2015); Cyrille Fijnaut, Jan Wouters and Frederik Naert (eds), *Legal Instruments in the Fight against International Terrorism: A Transatlantic Dialogue* (Nijhoff Publishers 2004).

7. One can mention the Transatlantic Declaration of 1990, the New Transatlantic Agenda and Action Plan of 1995, the mutual recognition agreements of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the economic partnership agreements after 2008 and the negotiations for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) during the Obama presidencies: see, *inter alia*, Marise Cremona, ‘Guest Editorial: Negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)’ (2015) 52(2) CML Rev 351, doi: 10.54648/COLA2015026; Matthias Herdegen, ‘Legal Challenges for Transatlantic Economic Integration’ (2008) 45(6) CML Rev 1581, doi: 10.54648/COLA2008114; Michael Smith, ‘The European Union and the United States: Competition, Convergence and Crisis in a Strategic Relationship’ in Laura C Ferreira-Pereira and Michael Smith (eds), *The European Union’s Strategic Partnerships. Global Diplomacy in a Contested World* (Palgrave Macmillan 2021) 97; Daniel Hamilton, ‘The Transatlantic Strategic Reset’ (2014) *Strategie und Sicherheit* 91, doi: 10.7767/sus-2014-0110.

European Security Strategy was adopted at the end of 2003, which had been a true *annus horribilis* for transatlantic relations.⁸ That year the US, supported by the United Kingdom (UK) and a number of other European countries, carried out a military invasion of Iraq without a mandate from the United Nations (UN) Security Council. France and Germany heavily criticized this unilateral action and in many European cities there were very large demonstrations against the invasion.⁹ The EU itself was totally divided between what the then US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld called ‘old Europe’ (France, Germany and a few others) and ‘new Europe’ (especially the countries of Eastern Europe), which were supportive of the Iraq operation.¹⁰ It was a veritable diplomatic *tour de force* by Javier Solana, the then EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, to bring back European unity with a carefully drafted European Security Strategy.¹¹

This European unity always was, and still is, a fragile thing in foreign affairs and in particular in transatlantic matters. It remains a considerable endeavour to bring 27 countries with different histories, ideological traditions and sensitivities – some of them littered with anti-Americanism – onto the same page concerning EU-US relations.¹² One would think that the fact that 23 EU Member States are also now members of NATO – Finland joined in 2023 and Sweden in 2024 – would help in achieving transatlantic unity. And it does. But there is also, of course, the American side, where so much has always depended on the incumbent inhabitant of the White House. Luckily, support for European integration and US-EU relations has been part of an – albeit uneven – bipartisan consensus in Washington DC for most of the post-World War II period. It can even be said that without strong American inputs and nudging, there may not have been a ‘Schuman

8. A 2003 poll by the German Marshall Fund had found that 81% of German and 82% of French respondents disapproved of the way that US President Bush was handling international affairs: Mary Elise Sarotte, ‘Transatlantic Tension and Threat Perception’ (2005) 58(4) *Naval War College Review* 25.

9. For a closer analysis, see Stefaan Walgrave and Dieter Rucht (eds), *The World Says No to War: Demonstrations against the War on Iraq* (University of Minnesota Press 2010).

10. See Petra Roter and Zlatko Šabič, ‘“New” and “Old Europe” in the Context of the Iraq War and Its Implications for European Security’ (2004) 5(3) *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 517, doi: 10.1080/15705850408438901.

11. See on the process leading up to the European Security Strategy Pol Morillas, *Strategy-Making in the EU. From Foreign and Security Policy to External Action* (Springer 2019) 109–132.

12. See, eg, after the 2003 divides, Algirdas Degutis, ‘The Transatlantic Rift: Ideological Roots and Implications for Central and Eastern Europe’ (2006) 4(1) *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 9, doi: 10.47459/lasr.2006.4.1.

Declaration’ and the first dynamics of the European economic integration process in the 1950s.¹³

The contrast today is all the more extreme because during the Biden Administration transatlantic cooperation was at an all-time high. It suffices to read the opening sentences of the long EU-US Joint Statement of 20 October 2023:

‘The United States and the European Union and its Member States, representing nearly 800 million citizens, united by our values and bound together by the most dynamic economic relationship on earth, reaffirm our commitment to a transatlantic partnership that delivers for all our people. ... Together, we are working to secure peace, stability, and prosperity regionally and across the world ... We are deepening our cooperation to reflect the pressing challenges and opportunities of our time – strengthening our economic security; advancing reliable, sustainable, affordable, and secure energy transitions in our economies and globally; reinforcing multilateralism and international cooperation; and harnessing digital technologies to work for, not against, our shared values of democracy and respect for human rights and the rule of law. We are more united than ever.’¹⁴

Here too, when re-reading this quotation today, it comes across as unreal, almost as if it were cooked up by some naïve idealists – maybe even by some ivory tower academics? So quickly have things changed in the past year.

Let us face it: the first year of the Trump II Administration has been a roller coaster for the whole world, including for EU-US relations. The cooperative attitude of the US towards the Union has been replaced by threats, fear mongering, muscle flexing, coercion and transactionalism. During his first term, Donald Trump had called the EU ‘a foe’.¹⁵ In 2025,

13. See, *inter alia*, Francesca Fauri and Giuliana Laschi, ‘The American Fertilization Process and Europe’s Integration Pattern in the 1950s: A Comparative Analysis of Outlooks’ in Yann Echinard and others (eds), *L’Union européenne et les États-Unis: processus, politiques, projets/The European Union and the United States: Processes, Policies and Projects* (Larcier 2013) 67; Enrico Ciappi, ‘A Reappraisal of the Origins of European Integration: From Wartime Planning to the Schuman Plan’ (2023) 58(4) *Journal of Contemporary History* 676, doi: 10.1177/00220094231200453; David M. McCourt, ‘Hegemonic Field Effects in World Politics: the United States and the Schuman Plan of 1950’ (2021) 6(3) *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, doi: 10.1093/jogss/ogaa035; Joseph M. Siracusa and Hang Thi Thuy Nguyen, *Richard M. Nixon and European Integration: A Reappraisal* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018) 9–50.

14. See <www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/10/20/us-eu-summit-joint-statement/>.

15. ‘Donald Trump: European Union is a Foe on Trade’ *BBC* (15 July 2018) <www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-44837311>.

he has declared that ‘the European Union was formed in order to screw the United States’¹⁶ and that the EU ‘is in many ways nastier than China’.¹⁷ Marc De Vos has written a sharp op-ed in the *Financial Times* with the title ‘Europe’s summer of humiliation’. He convincingly argues that

‘to placate Donald Trump’s instincts, Europe has had to bow down and pay up, no fewer than three times. First for Nato, pledging hundreds of billions to additional defence and security spending. Then for Ukraine, committing to paying the US for weapons Ukraine needs. And this week [that is, the last week of July] for trade, allowing the US to unilaterally multiply tariffs even as Europe promises more than \$1.3tn in purchases of American energy and weaponry, and in investments on US soil.’¹⁸

That is how far we had come in just half a year. The story evolves on a daily basis. Reference can be made, for instance, to the meeting in the White House on Monday 18 August 2025 of President Trump with Ukrainian President Zelensky and not fewer than seven European leaders (the Presidents of France and Finland, the German Chancellor, the Prime Ministers of Italy and the UK, the President of the Commission – the President of the European Council was not invited¹⁹ – and NATO’s Secretary-General) who had uprooted their agendas after a disastrous bilateral meeting of the American and Russian Presidents on Friday, 15 August. Despite their presence, no clear outcomes were reached and, most of all, no strong American commitments were made.²⁰

What will the future bring? Most likely a continuation of the roller coaster, with interludes of increasing tensions, yet other half-improvised negotiations, new flattery and ‘thumbs up’ photos. In other words, the next

16. ‘Trump Says the EU was Formed to “Screw” the United States’ *France24* (26 February 2025) <www.france24.com/en/europe/20250226-trump-says-eu-formed-to-screw-united-states-tariffs>.

17. ‘Trump: The EU is “Nastier than China”’ (*Politico*, 12 May 2025) <www.politico.eu/article/trump-eu-nastier-than-china/>.

18. Marc De Vos, ‘Europe’s Summer of Humiliation’ *Financial Times* (31 July 2025) <www.ft.com/content/698517e6-9955-4ae9-9a9f-b91202157571>.

19. ‘Trump Excluded António Costa from the Meeting for Peace Negotiations in Ukraine’ *ECO News* (27 August 2025) <econews.pt/2025/08/27/trump-excluded-antonio-costa-from-the-meeting-for-peace-negotiations-in-ukraine/>: ‘The US President only wanted one representative from the European Union (EU) and decided to give the place to the leader of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, despite the protocol dictating that, in this type of situation, both the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Council should have been present.’

20. ‘White House Meeting Ends With Few Signs of Progress on Ukraine’ *New York Times* (18 August 2025) <www.nytimes.com/live/2025/08/18/us/trump-zelensky-ukraine-putin>.

three years will be very ‘Trumpian’. And who knows who and what comes next at the helm of the US?

The question is what the EU can and should do about it. In my view, it has three urgent missions that it owes to current and future generations, both in Europe and worldwide.

The first fundamental objective must be for the Union to integrate its economies faster and more deeply than ever before, prioritizing competitiveness and technological innovation.²¹ Even before the Trump II Administration took office, the EU institutions had received two extensive reports, the Letta Report ‘Much More than a Market’ of April 2024,²² and the Draghi Report, ‘The Future of European Competitiveness’ of September 2024,²³ which brought that message home. It was Mario Draghi who, reacting to the first indications that President Trump could impose high tariffs on products from the EU, observed that the obstacles EU Member States impose against each other do much more economic harm than the US could with tariffs.²⁴ However, the implementation of these policy proposals has been excruciatingly slow.²⁵

The second priority should be for Europe to attain strategic autonomy²⁶ and independence from the US, both politically and militarily.²⁷ That will require enormous investments in defence and security and is a process that will take not only many billions of euros, but also many years to achieve. However, it is worth it, and not just for the EU itself: in the end, such autonomy will serve not just European security interests against any possible aggressor, but also the capacity of the EU to be not just a regional but

21. See also the contribution of Daniel Sarmiento to this issue.

22. Enrico Letta, ‘Much More than a Market. Speed, Security, Solidarity. Empowering the Single Market to Deliver a Sustainable Future and Prosperity for all EU Citizens’ (April 2024) <www.consilium.europa.eu/media/ny3j24sm/much-more-than-a-market-report-by-enrico-letta.pdf>.

23. Mario Draghi, *The Future of European Competitiveness, Part A. A Competitiveness Strategy for Europe, Part B. In-depth Analysis and Recommendations* (9 September 2024) <commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-competitiveness/draghi-report_en#paragraph_47059>.

24. Mario Draghi, ‘Forget the US — Europe Has Successfully Put Tariffs on Itself’ *Financial Times* (14 February 2025) <www.ft.com/content/13a830ce-071a-477f-864c-e499ce9e6065>; J Ma, ‘Europe is Already Sabotaging its Own Economy Far More than U.S. Tariffs Could, Former ECB President Says’ *Fortune* (16 February 2025) <fortune.com/2025/02/16/europe-economy-trade-barriers-regulation-mario-draghi-us-tariffs-trump/>.

25. In September 2025 the European Policy Innovation Council reported that out of the Draghi Report’s 383 recommendations, only 11.2% had been delivered: European Policy Innovation Council, *Draghi Observatory and Implementation Index. September 2025 Audit* <www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/03/Draghi-Observatory-Audit-Memo68.pdf>.

26. On the EU’s aspirations to attain strategic autonomy, see, *inter alia*, C Beaucillon, ‘Strategic Autonomy: A New Identity for the EU as a Global Actor’ (2023) 8(2) EP 417.

27. See also the contribution of Carolyn Moser to this issue.

also a global provider of security, beyond the European theatre. Needless to say, this process requires a complete shift in geopolitical thinking and the mindset of European elites and their populations. Importantly, this process should go hand in hand with – and should definitely not be divorced from – the first priority, which is strong investments in innovation and technology, including in the military field.

A third priority is saving and revitalizing the multilateral rules-based order. International organizations, from the UN to the World Trade Organization and the World Health Organization,²⁸ are currently under enormous pressure. While it is too early to speak of a ‘League of Nations’ scenario – the example of the first world organization formed between the two world wars, which gradually faded away until it was irrelevant by the beginning of the Second World War – we are not far removed from it anymore. The UN does not manage to maintain peace and security due to strong geopolitical tensions within the Security Council. Even the supply of humanitarian aid to civilian populations in conflict zones has become politicized. Moreover, the development operations of the UN’s programmes, funds and special agencies – from the World Food Programme to the International Labour Organization – have been severely hit by financial cutbacks (including the dismantling of USAID), but also suffer from internal competition and bureaucracy. By now, achieving the objectives laid down in the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 has *de facto* become impossible, not just because of the effects of Covid-19 but also in light of increasing international tensions and the rising number of armed conflicts and their devastating human and environmental costs. All of this has led many countries to cut back their development budgets in favour of stronger military investments. No entity is better placed than the EU, itself a successful product of multilateral cooperation with strong commitments to international law and the principles of the UN Charter in its founding Treaties, to support efforts at putting the UN system and the WTO back on track,²⁹ and at rejuvenating and re-energizing these organizations for the decades to come. The Union will need all the international partners it can rally behind this cause. The alternative might be either a League of Nations

28. See Elaine Ruth Fletcher, ‘WHO Budget Crisis Bigger than Previously Thought – \$2.5 Billion Gap for 2025–2027’ *Health Policy Watch* (2 April 2025) <healthpolicy-watch.news/who-budget-crisis-bigger-than-previously-thought-2-5-billion-gap-for-2025-2027/>.

29. See, *inter alia*, Jan Wouters, ‘The European Union and Global Economic Governance Institutions: Keeping the Flame Alive in Turbulent Times’ in Christine Kaddous and Frank Hoffmeister (eds), *EU Diplomacy in Multilateral Fora* (Hart Publishing 2025) 123; Jan Wouters and V Hegde, ‘Reform of Global Trade Governance: The Role of the European Union’ (2022) 44 *J Eur Int* 715, doi: 10.1080/07036337.2022.2073446.

scenario, or a scenario in which these institutions are gradually taken over by powers like China.³⁰

In the same vein, no organization than the EU, with its broad and deep powers and excellent civil service expertise, is better placed to help consolidate and further develop international law regimes, both in important new areas such as cyber,³¹ artificial intelligence,³² the fight against plastics,³³ and pandemics,³⁴ as well as in existing fields such as the law of the sea³⁵ and of

30. See, *inter alia*, Mercedes Ruehl, Henry Foy and Laura Dubois, 'Trump Left a Power Vacuum at the UN. China Saw an Opportunity' *SWI* (23 July 2025) <www.swissinfo.ch/eng/international-geneva/trump-left-a-power-vacuum-at-the-un-china-saw-an-opportunity/89722765>; Tamsin Lee-Smith and Jelena Cosic, 'At the UN, China is Deploying a Growing Army of Puppet Organizations to Monitor and Intimidate Human Rights Activists' *International Consortium of Investigative Journalists* (28 April 2025) <www.icij.org/investigations/china-targets/united-nations-ngo-gongo-intimidate-human-rights/>.

31. See, eg, European External Action Service, 'UN Member States Agree to Establish a Global Mechanism to Advance Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace' (EEAS, 17 July 2025), <www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/un-member-states-agree-establish-global-mechanism-advance-responsible-state-behaviour-cyberspace_en?s=63>, reporting that UN Member States had agreed by consensus to establish a global mechanism to advance responsible State behaviour in cyberspace, building on the 2020 proposal by the EU and its Member States for a UN cyber Programme of Action.

32. The EU contributed to the UN's September 2024 Global Digital Compact, see notably 'European Union Contribution to the Global Digital Compact' (March 2023) <www.un.org/digital-emerging-technologies/sites/www.un.org.techenvoy/files/GDC-submission_European-Union.pdf>. See also EEAS, 'Statement on Behalf of the European Union and its Member States by H.E. Ambassador Hedda Samson, Deputy Head European Union Delegation to the United Nations, at the Informal Consultations on Artificial Intelligence' (EEAS, 17 January 2025) <www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-new-york/eu-statement-%E2%80%93-un-general-assembly-informal-consultations-artificial-intelligence_en>.

33. See Qi Xu, Mingyang Zhang and Shuli Han, 'Reflections on the European Union's Participation in Negotiations of the Global Plastic Pollution Instrument under International Environmental Law' (2024) 11 *Frontiers in Marine Science*, doi: 10.3389/fmars.2024.1388975.

34. See Emanuela Bozzini and Daniela Sicurelli, 'Oops! ... EU Did It Again! The EU's Preference for Global Treaties *vis-a-vis* the Reality of WHO Politics' (2023) 59(2) *The International Spectator* 112, doi: 10.1080/03932729.2023.2263350.

35. See, eg, the role played by the EU and its Member States in reaching the BBNJ Agreement in 2023 and in following up for the implementation of the Agreement, *inter alia* by (i) co-leading a 'High Ambition Coalition' of 52 countries (<oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/ocean/international-ocean-governance/bbnj-high-ambition-coalition_en>), (ii) going for early ratification together with six Member States (<oceans-and-fisheries.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-leads-global-efforts-protect-high-seas-biodiversity-landmark-treaty-ratification-2025-05-28_en>), (iii) pledging EUR 40 million through its Global Ocean Programme to support the ratification and implementation of the Agreement, especially in developing countries (*ibid*), and (iv) proposing internal EU legislation: European Commission, Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction, 24 April 2025, COM(2025) 173 final.

outer space.³⁶ In certain areas where the EU itself has fewer competences and expertise, it may be needed to scale up the capacity of Council bodies such as the Council Working Party on Public International Law, COJUR,³⁷ or sub-groups of it, to contribute, with all the Member States, to important developments, such as in international criminal law,³⁸ and in rapidly ageing fields such as the laws of war³⁹ and international disarmament and arms control law.⁴⁰ An important part of the challenge is not just to keep EU Member States united in their commitment to international treaties in this field,⁴¹ but also to temper the Union's recent tendency towards unilateral regulations affecting international affairs.⁴²

36. Here the European Commission has chosen the 'unilateral' track by proposing, on 25 June 2025, the 'EU Space Act' in order to strengthen safety, resilience and sustainability in outer space, with one of the objectives being to help in 'reducing the environmental footprint of space activities' and to allow 'addressing in future potential new commitments of the Union under international conventions concluded in the area': European Commission, Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the safety, resilience and sustainability of space activities in the Union, 25 June 2025, COM(2025) 335 final.

37. On COJUR, see Frank Hoffmeister, 'Public International Law Working Group (Comité Juridique (COJUR))', *Max Planck Encyclopedias of International Law* (2019).

38. There is an International Criminal Court subgroup (COJUR – ICC) to COJUR. On 6 February 2025, the President of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Judge Tomoko Akane, during her visit to the EU institutions in Brussels, briefed COJUR-ICC on the concrete threats that the Court faces, notably the Executive Order of President Trump with punitive measures against the ICC, and called for EU action, including through its Blocking Statute: <www.icc-cpi.int/news/icc-presidency-meets-eu-officials-and-addresses-cojur-icc>.

39. See, eg, the inventory of areas that require urgent renewal in international humanitarian law regimes with Michael P Scharf, '2025 White Paper on the Need to Strengthen International Humanitarian Law to Address the Challenges of 21st Century Warfare' (Case Western Reserve University School of Law, Scholarly Commons 2025) <scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/faculty_publications/2325>.

40. See on the need for adaptations in these regimes Stuart Casey-Maslen, *Arms Control and Disarmament Law* (OUP 2021) 172–177.

41. Two recent challenges in this respect are: (i) the withdrawal by five Member States (Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) from the Anti-Personnel Mines Convention (the so-called 'Ottawa Convention') and, at least by one Member State (Lithuania), from the Cluster Munitions Convention: see, eg, Filipa Schmitz Guinote, 'Why Europe's Withdrawal from Humanitarian Disarmament Treaties Could be a Win for Russia' (European Council on Foreign Relations, 8 April 2025) <ecfr.eu/article/why-europes-withdrawal-from-humanitarian-disarmament-treaties-could-be-a-win-for-russia/>; (ii) Hungary's withdrawal from the Rome Statute on the International Criminal Court, announced in April 2025: see Peter van Elsuwege, 'How Hungary's Withdrawal from the International Criminal Court Affects the Credibility of the European Union' (*Verfassungsblog*, 9 April 2025) <verfassungsblog.de/how-hungarys-withdrawal-from-the-international-criminal-court-affects-the-credibility-of-the-european-union/>.

42. On this, see, eg, Sophie Bohnert, 'The Shift to Unilateralism in the European Union's Trade Policy' (2025) 62(4) CML Rev 1057, doi: 10.54648/COLA2025066; Jan Wouters, 'The EU's Efforts to Uphold the International Rules-Based Order: Mission Impossible?' (2024) 15(8) Global Policy 1, doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.13467.

But what to do about EU-US relations? Rather than succumbing to flattery and submitting to the whims of the current US President, who is threatening tariffs and visa restrictions if the EU were to enforce its regulations *vis-à-vis* US technology firms,⁴³ the EU should try to limit the damage and continue to build and deepen transatlantic understanding and cooperation in alternative ways. One cannot expect any continuation right now of the cooperation – however difficult sometimes – in the context of the Transatlantic Trade and Technology Council during the Biden years.⁴⁴ But nothing prevents European business leaders, civil society actors and universities from continuing to engage, bottom-up, with their American counterparts – if need be with a facilitating hand from the EU and Member States. The greatest danger of the current turbulent period is that Europeans and Americans are quickly becoming alienated from each other and that mutual prejudices are being given free rein, especially among the young generations. Here university professors and scholars bear a significant responsibility. Rather than turning away from the US and wallowing in their own righteousness, Europeans should do all they can to continue to cherish, cultivate and deepen the old ties and values shared with the US, so that hopefully, in line with the European Security Strategy, the two players together can one day truly become ‘a formidable force for good in the world’.

Post scriptum

At the time this contribution goes to print, the challenges for transatlantic relations have only become more acute and continue to pile up. The US’s National Security Strategy unveiled in November 2025 is highly critical of the EU and European trajectory, marking a major shift in US foreign policy and warning against Europe’s ‘civilizational erasure’ due to migration policies, low birth rates, and ‘the sovereignty-sapping incursions of the most intrusive transnational organizations’.⁴⁵ It advocates for a return

43. Eliza Gkritsi and Jacob Wendler, ‘Trump Threatens “Substantial” New Tariffs against Countries with “Discriminatory” Digital Rules’ (*Politico*, 26 August 2025) <www.politico.eu/article/us-question-report-sanction-eu-officials-dsa-donald-trump/>.

44. See, *inter alia*, C Bjola and R Csernaton, ‘Tech Diplomacy and the Digital International Order: The Case of the EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council’ (2025) 2025-08 *Global Policy* 1, doi: 10.1111/1758-5899.70041; Elaine Fahey, ‘Legal Convergence through Soft Law? The EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC)’ (2024) 29(4) *European Foreign Affairs Review* 471, doi: 10.54648/EERR2024026; Elaine Fahey, ‘The EU-US Transatlantic Trade and Technology Council: Shifting Multilateralism through Bilateralism and Institutions?’ in Ottavio Quirico and Katarzyna Kwapisz Williams (eds), *The European Union and the Evolving Architectures of International Economic Agreements* (Springer 2023) 171–181.

45. *National Security Strategy of the United States*, November 2025 <www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf> at 9.

to stronger national identities and openly praises ‘patriotic European parties’, which many European leaders view as an unacceptable attempt to meddle in internal politics. In December 2025, the US Trade Representative criticized the EU and certain Member States for their ‘continuing course of discriminatory and harassing lawsuits, taxes, fines, and directives’⁴⁶ against American service providers, and threatened countermeasures against particular European companies. In January 2026, the EU and most of its Member States (with the exception of Spain) reacted extremely cautiously to the US’s use of military force against Venezuela to capture its President, Nicolás Maduro, and bring him before an American court. Last but not least, the ever stronger language of President Trump about acquiring Greenland raises existential questions for NATO and for the EU’s solidarity with Denmark. All of these developments make the ‘three urgent missions’ for the EU identified in the present article all the more pressing.

46. Post of the US Trade Representative, 16 December 2025 <x.com/USTradeRep/status/2000990028835508258>.

