

# THE FUTURE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: THE US OBJECTIVES IN EUROPE AND THE EU'S ROADMAP

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### THE FUTURE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS: THE US OBJECTIVES IN EUROPE AND THE EU'S ROADMAP

The transatlantic alliance, formed towards the end of World War II and continuing to this day, maintains its ties through both military engagements (NATO) and vibrant economic relations. However, this alliance is currently being shaken by different challenges. The balance in transatlantic relations is going through a difficult period due to the differences in the priorities of the parties. Transatlantic relations, which have generally been conducted on the principle of cooperation in the international system, seem to have shifted to a more dominant US relationship due to the Trump administration's policies, which differ from the past and put Europe in a difficult position. The strict application of the "America First" doctrine in political and economic terms during Donald Trump's second term in the US appears to be the source of the inequality in relations. In the current situation, European states are moving away from absolute harmony with the US in the international system and are experiencing various conflicts of interest. Issues such as mutual security commitment and shared values are no longer considered sufficient by the US. Therefore, Europe is faced with the necessity of maintaining its strategic autonomy within the framework of an interest-driven relationship.

One of the reflections of this transformation in relations is the redefinition of the US's perception of global threats and its national defense strategy. The new US National Defense Strategy (NDS), published in January 2026, overshadowed alliance relationships by emphasizing homeland defense with an isolationist approach rather than global interactions.<sup>1</sup> In this context, it can be said that the US has built a doctrinal foundation for the shift in its foreign policy direction. However, it can be argued that the reality on the ground contradicts the approach in the document. Although the US points to prioritizing the 'homeland,' it does not abandon its military engagements with different countries. Furthermore, the decision to conduct a military operation against Iran with the support of Israel on February 28, 2026, reflects this contradiction. Therefore, in a sense, US foreign policy in Donald Trump's second administration has returned to the principles of the Jackson School. This diplomacy, which can adopt an interventionist or isolationist stance depending on the situation, has a dynamic that can oscillate between two poles within itself. The direction of this oscillation is directly related to the question of how vital US interests are.

If the US foreign policy is to be examined specifically in the context of its policy towards Europe, it can be argued that the US's indication that it no longer intends to be the primary guarantor of the European continent's defense, and its desire to increase tariffs on Europe, gives meaning

to the EU's discourse of "strategic autonomy."<sup>2</sup> However, while Europe is trying to develop its defense industry and equip its own armies, it is also struggling with the political and economic pressure from the US, as well as its dominance over digital data.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. War Department (2026). *2026 National Defense Strategy*.

<sup>2</sup> Kremidas-Courtney C. (2026, 26 January). *America's new Defence Strategy and Europe's moment of truth*. European Policy Centre

<sup>3</sup> Riekeles G., Ryan J. (2025, 18 November). *The EU has let US tech giants run riot. Diluting our data law will only entrench their power*. European Policy Centre.

This analysis will examine the current state of transatlantic relations. First, it will explore the US's political, technological, and economic objectives in Europe, and Europe's counter-movements of resistance and adaptation. Second, it will address Türkiye's importance to the EU within this equation. Finally, the third and last section will assess the future of the European Union's strategic autonomy.

### Political, Technological and Economic Tension Points Between the US and Europe

Since Donald Trump's second term, various lines of tension have emerged between the US and Europe. These manifest as current points of diplomatic friction, encompassing political, economic, and technological dimensions.

When examining priorities in the political dimension, one can begin by addressing the critical points in the National Defense Strategy, released in January 2026. This document frames border security and absolute control of the Western Hemisphere as the main military priorities. The identification of Greenland, the Panama Canal, and the Gulf of Mexico as "key terrains" requiring direct control is a declaration to the world that the focus is on continental security. In this respect, it is necessary to draw attention to its similarity to the isolationist approach of the Monroe Doctrine. However, in contrast, within NATO, of which the US is a founding member, the US allocates significant resources to maintain its presence – especially in Eastern European countries – in addition to the 5% defense budget share

it demands from European states.<sup>4</sup> As a more recent example, the war launched against Iran also reveals that the US has not yet abandoned its international interventionist identity.

To elaborate on the US's interventionist foreign policy specifically in the context of Europe, the relationship established with Europe through NATO has transformed into a unilateral imposition of will. As seen in the Greenland Crisis that emerged in early 2025, the new US vision is not only isolationist but also contains aggressions that could threaten the territorial integrity of its European allies.

Trump, characterizing Greenland as essential to US national security, has suggested buying the island from Denmark or annexing it by force. After the Danish and Greenlandic governments stated that the island was not for sale and that its sovereignty was non-negotiable, the US resorted to blackmail. Trump told Denmark and seven other European countries that if they did not support the transfer of Greenland to the US, tariffs on their imports would be increased.<sup>5</sup> Europe, however, rejected the US territorial claims and opted for solidarity. European countries, along with Denmark, have undertaken actions to increase Greenland's military presence under the name "Operation Arctic Endurance". Considering that this escalating crisis is occurring between NATO allies, and that Article 5 of NATO could become meaningless, potentially leading to the dissolution of the alliance, the US has – for now – abandoned the path of coercive diplomacy regarding Greenland.

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<sup>4</sup> NATO (2025, 25 June). *2025 The Hague Summit*.

<sup>5</sup> Curtis J., Fella S. (2026, 23 January). *President Trump and Greenland: Frequently asked questions*. UK Parliament.

In light of the unpredictable diplomacy of the US, it is also necessary to address the issue of nuclear autonomy, as Europe no longer relies on the US nuclear umbrella. Recent developments, such as French President Macron's statement on March 2, 2026, that France will increase its nuclear arsenal, and the signing of a nuclear deterrence agreement with German Chancellor Merz, are examples of Europe's attempts to create its own nuclear umbrella.<sup>6</sup> This move towards nuclear power is a factor that could pave the way for Europe to achieve relative independence from both the US and the current threat, Russia.

Examining the US policy regarding the Russia-Ukraine war will also be useful for understanding the current state of transatlantic relations. It seems appropriate to divide the US policy on the war into pre- and post-Donald Trump eras. Before Trump's return to power, the US under the Joe Biden administration pursued policies in diplomatic cooperation with Europe from 2022, when Ukraine was invaded. The Joe Biden administration repeatedly confirmed its alignment with Ukraine by advocating for sanctions against Russia, a common stance, and the protection of Ukraine's sovereignty. However, from 2025, when Trump returned to power, the US left the responsibility for military and financial aid

to Ukraine to Europe.<sup>7</sup> The priorities of the United States are shifting; while emphasizing Ukraine's sovereignty, the US now appears to be aiming to bring the parties to the negotiating table with a "peace at all costs" approach. This policy shift can be observed in the Trump administration's assertive stance towards Ukraine. Trump's statements forcing Ukraine into negotiations, such as claiming that "Russia has the upper hand in this war"<sup>8</sup> and that "the responsibility lies with Zelenskyy,"<sup>9</sup> as well as demanding territorial concessions from Ukraine,<sup>10</sup> reveal a pragmatic shift in the US position regarding the war in Ukraine, moving it against Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> In addition, the US is providing military support to Eastern European countries both to control the course of the war and to project an image as an alternative power to the EU. The military buildup in Poland by NATO,<sup>12</sup> the increased NATO presence in Slovakia,<sup>13</sup> and the positioning of Hungary against Ukraine reveal this objective.<sup>14 15 16</sup> In short, the war in Ukraine is being used as a pretext to effectively bring Eastern Europe under US hegemony.

At this point, it is necessary to thoroughly examine the US objective. The US aims to revitalize economic relations and shift its focus to the Asia-Pacific region while preserving the current status quo as much

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<sup>6</sup> France 24 (2026, 2 March). *'To be free, we have to be feared,' Macron says in keynote nuclear speech.*

<sup>7</sup> Trebesch C., Nishikawa T. (2026, February). *Europe Steps Up: Ukraine Support After Four Years of War.* Kiel Institut.

<sup>8</sup> Parker M. (2025, 9 December). *Trump Says Russia in Stronger Position on Ukraine, Chides Europe.* Bloomberg.

<sup>9</sup> The Guardian (2026, 6 March). *Ukraine war briefing: Trump urges Zelenskyy to 'get a deal done' with Russia.*

<sup>10</sup> Slattery G., Balmforth T., Mason J. (2025, 20 October). *Trump urged Ukraine's Zelenskyy to make concessions to Russia in tense meeting, sources say.* Reuters

<sup>11</sup> Independent Institute (2026, 27 February). *How U.S. Unpredictability Is Forcing Long-Overdue Autonomy.*

<sup>12</sup> Army Recognition Group (2025, 27 August). *Polish Military Becomes NATO's Third Largest Force*

<sup>13</sup> NATO (2026, 28 January). *NATO's presence in Slovakia.*

<sup>14</sup> Spike J., Megerian C. (2025, 6 November). *At White House meeting, Hungary's Orbán to seek Trump's blessing to keep buying Russian oil.* Associated Press News

<sup>15</sup> Fornusek M. (2025, 11 December). *Europe's drive to bolster Ukraine faces two obstacles — Trump and Orban.* Kyiv Independent

<sup>16</sup> Associated Press News (2025, 21 November). *Hungary's Orbán says Trump's plan to end Ukraine war could deter Europeans from their war intentions.*

as possible.<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> This would allow sanctions against Russia to be lifted; Russia, as a player returning to the global economic dynamics, would be able to eliminate the uncertainty it caused in the markets. However, it should be anticipated that the normalization process envisioned for Russia will be under US control. This is because, particularly in the energy sector, the US has filled the void left by the significant deprivation of Russian gas in Europe through LNG supply.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, it can be predicted that the US will not make sharp concessions on its economic interests. In conclusion, the end of the Russia-Ukraine war will give the US a more intensive opportunity to develop a "grand strategy," allowing it to allocate time and resources to competition with China. On the other hand, it should be noted that while all these strategic calculations regarding the end of the war are being attempted through negotiations in the US-Russia-Ukraine triangle, the European Union (EU) remains outside the table; the Union is conducting diplomacy within a limited political sphere of influence.<sup>20</sup>

The US policy of isolating Europe can also be examined from a technological perspective. In this age of artificial intelligence, the US is seeking absolute global dominance based on capital intensity in terms of technological power. The "AI Action Plan" announced by Trump for 2025 reflects US's attempt to establish

dominance. This plan aims to allow the free development of artificial intelligence technologies by easing all restrictions nationwide in the US; thus, as an extension of national security, it aims to bring AI models to the global market. This plan encompasses the export of all AI models, hardware, and software to the world.<sup>21</sup> This will allow the US to establish its own dominance in the artificial intelligence infrastructure of importing countries. This is precisely where the issue of technological independence becomes apparent.<sup>22</sup> Aware of the US dominance in the technology sector, Europe is attempting to control the freedom of operation of US-based technology giants by imposing restrictive regulations on the continent (Digital Markets Act – DMA, Digital Services Act – DSA, EU Artificial Intelligence Act – AI Act). The \$140 million transparency fine imposed on platform X is one example of this.<sup>23</sup> As a result of these restrictions, the cost for US companies to comply with EU laws has risen to around \$97 billion annually.<sup>24</sup> Europe is not only pursuing a policy of restriction, but has also begun investing in infrastructure to respond to the US's artificial intelligence capabilities. The increasing scale of investments in EuroHPC, a technology companies alliance founded by the EU, demonstrates Europe's serious focus on its own strategic autonomy. With budgets allocated to initiatives such as telecommunications infrastructure

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<sup>17</sup> The Economist (2026, 17 February). *How big is the prize of reopening Russia?*

<sup>18</sup> Stares P. B. (2026, 24 February). *Preparing for the Day After in Europe*. Council of Foreign Relations.

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat (2025, December). *EU imports of energy products - latest developments*.

<sup>20</sup> Hall B., Seddon M., Foy H., Mackinnon A. (2026, 15 March). *Ukraine peace talks fizzle out as Trump's focus shifts to Iran*. Financial Times.

<sup>21</sup> Krasodonski A. (2025, 14 August). *Trump's AI Action Plan seeks customers, not partners*. Chatham House.

<sup>22</sup> Sidley (2025, 30 July). *The Trump Administration's 2025 AI Action Plan – Winning the Race: America's AI Action Plan – and Related Executive Orders*.

<sup>23</sup> Roelofs M. W. (2025, 5 December). *Elon Musk's X Hit With \$140 Million Fine In Europe For 'Deceptive' Practices*. Forbes.

<sup>24</sup> Computer & Communications Industry Association (2025, 28 July). *New Study Finds EU Digital Regulations Cost U.S. Companies up to \$97.6 Billion Annually*.

construction, the creation of independent cloud systems, and an AI factory, Europe is trying to close the capacity gap with the US.<sup>25</sup> One recent “echo” of this effort can be seen in the warning Google issued to the EU.<sup>26</sup> Google's top legal officer, Kent Walker, argued that the EU's efforts towards technological independence were diminishing its own competitiveness, urging Europe not to break away from US technology companies. Technological competition, a vital fault line between the two sides, appears likely to continue due to Europe's protectionist reflexes.

Finally, there appears to be a tariff war between the US and Europe on an economic level. Specifically, during the 2024-2025 period, the US, relying on the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), imposed extensive tariffs worldwide – including on Europe. To control this situation, Europe aimed to escape high tariffs by signing the Turnberry Agreement with the US in August 2025. Under the agreement, the US committed to fixing tariffs on European goods at a maximum of 15%. In return, the European Union agreed to eliminate tariffs on US products, purchase \$750 billion worth of LNG from the US, and invest \$600 billion in the US market.<sup>27</sup> However, the US has once again put trade relations on a precarious footing by discussing implementing an additional tariff exceeding the 15% limit in February 2026. The EU's options for responding to this move include keeping the European market closed to the US, imposing retaliatory tariffs, and restricting investment.<sup>28</sup> However, before the EU

could act, a significant obstacle emerged from within the US. In February 2026, the US Supreme Court ruled that the President did not have the authority to impose additional tariffs based on the IIEPA Act, and that taxation authority belonged solely to Congress, thus deeming these tariffs unconstitutional. At this point, the US Supreme Court's blocking of Trump's tariff decision also postponed the possibility of renewed tension in relations with the EU. This decision, by keeping transatlantic relations at a somewhat less contentious level economically for now, eases Europe's position.

### What Does Türkiye Represent For the EU?

These US-originated challenges in transatlantic relations threaten to weaken the EU's defense capabilities. This situation motivates the EU to further diversify its international collaborations, leading it closer to Türkiye. In this context, the strategic importance of Türkiye, a bordering country of the EU, stands out in a multifaceted way, capable of transforming Türkiye-EU relations. As the EU's eastern gateway, Türkiye is simultaneously working to repair regional instability in the Middle East while maintaining European stability. Türkiye holds a crucial position in minimizing the impact on Europe from the migration movements resulting from regional conflicts in the Middle East. Furthermore, Türkiye plays a vital role for the EU by offering opportunities to diversify its energy basket. Having minimized its gas and oil imports from Russia due to the

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<sup>25</sup> HPCWire (2026, 6 March). *European Commission Announces €75M EURO-3C Project to Build Federated Telco-Edge-Cloud Infrastructure.*

<sup>26</sup> Moens B. (2026, 13 February). *Google warns EU against 'erecting walls' in tech sovereignty push.* Financial Times.

<sup>27</sup> European Commission (2025, 21 August) *Joint Statement on a United States-European Union framework on an agreement on reciprocal, fair and balanced trade*

<sup>28</sup> García Bercero I. (2026, 23 February). *An EU strategy in the wake of the United States Supreme Court tariffs ruling.* Bruegel.

conflict in Ukraine, Europe has gained the opportunity to benefit from alternative energy routes offered by Türkiye (TANAP, BOTAŞ-Bulgargaz, and BOTAŞ-OVM Petrom). In addition, although Türkiye has maintained a neutral stance respecting international law in the Russia-Ukraine war, its diplomacy-focused approach in the region and its strong military capabilities ensure that it remains a long-term strategic partner for the EU.

In this context, it is important to mention the SAFE program. The insecurity arising from the war in Ukraine, the uncertainty about whether the US will provide support, and the inadequate defense industry have all accelerated the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy in continental security.<sup>29</sup> The SAFE program, aimed at improving the defense capabilities of European countries, with a total funding of \$150 billion, could offer Türkiye the opportunity to become a player integrated into the EU's security. This project, which could attract Turkish companies like ASELSAN, ROKETSAN, and Baykar to collaborate, could make Türkiye one of the actors helping the EU establish its strategic autonomy in the coming days.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the industrial integration to be realized through the "Industrial Accelerator Act" (IAA) agreed upon with Türkiye is another indication that EU-Türkiye relations promise a positive future. With this policy, the EU is strengthening its economic autonomy by reducing its dependence on competitors such as the US and China. At the same time, it is strengthening partnership relations by including Türkiye in the production chain (it

is important for Turkish companies to gain strength in market competition by prioritizing high-cost production under this law). This rapprochement may also lead to discussions on issues such as the updating of the Customs Union and visa liberalization, which have been awaited for a long time between Türkiye and the EU.<sup>31</sup>  
<sup>32</sup>

In short, the level of tension in transatlantic relations also affects Türkiye's strategic importance to Europe. In the current situation, Türkiye has ceased to be an option for Europe and has become a necessity. As a result, Türkiye-EU relations are a partnership that is open to deepening and continuously developing.

### EU's Roadmap

It can be said that Europe is amid an existential crisis in the face of the unpredictable policies of the Trump administration. It is predicted that transatlantic relations in the coming years will not be based on shared values and norms. The most likely scenario is that relations with the US will now be based on fear, threats, and self-interest. Therefore, it is vital for Europe to autonomize its own defense infrastructure, establish new and deep strategic partnerships, strengthen its economy, and protect the sovereignty of its technological data against American companies. Otherwise, the transformation of the European continent into a "backyard" metaphor for the US is a likely scenario. In light of this, the EU's search for alternative relationships and its

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<sup>29</sup> Tidey A. (2025, 21 December). *Everything you need to know about SAFE, the EU's €150bn defence instrument*. Euronews.

<sup>30</sup> Mohyidin R. (2026, 2 January). *Indispensable Yet Unacknowledged: Türkiye and the Future of Europe's Defence Order*. TRT World Research Centre

<sup>31</sup> European Commission (2026, 6 February). *Joint Statement by Turkish Foreign Minister H.E. Hakan Fidan and EU Commissioner for Enlargement H.E. Marta Kos following their Meeting in Ankara*.

<sup>32</sup> Daily Sabah (2026, 9 March). *After 'Made in Europe' inclusion, Türkiye sets its eye on customs union*.

rapprochement with Türkiye to reduce its dependence on the US is critically important in terms of its strategic autonomy vision. At this point, while the future of transatlantic relations remains uncertain, Türkiye-EU relations appear to promise a positive transformation for the goals of both sides.

It is important to avoid the misconception that the EU is in a deadlock solely due to external pressures. Decision-making in the EU Commission on issues such as security and foreign policy is based on the principle of "unanimity." This approach paralyzes the decision-making mechanism in the face of the EU's impasses. As a multi-member organization, the EU must reconsider prioritizing the interests of most of its members, rather than the interests of all its members, to maintain its power in the international system. This would allow the Union to respond more quickly to crises and preserve its regional and global influence. While the war in Ukraine may not make the unanimity principle a priority today, there are indications that it needs to change, even in the statements of EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen herself. Von der Leyen commented that EU institutions are "failing to keep pace with the speed of change in the environment" regarding their decision-making processes.<sup>33</sup> Another assessment on this issue can be seen in the statements of Andrius Kubilius, the EU Commissioner for Defence and Space. Kubilius stated that the formation of a "European Security Council," where the EU could make defence and security decisions without consensus, could be on the agenda.<sup>34</sup> For

this reason, Europe may put the issue of "decision-making" on its agenda after the war ends. Nevertheless, considering that member states may use their veto power to change the current system, what the practical solution will be seen in the coming period. The EU will either continue with the current system hoping to avoid another dispute; or it will find a way to persuade member states to accept this change; or, as a radical solution, it will end its existence and pave the way for the creation of another union.

In short, for the EU to establish its strategic autonomy, it is crucial that it demonstrates the ability to respond to the US and the will to forge new alliances. However, perhaps the first step towards establishing this autonomy is to question whether every member of the union shares this goal.

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<sup>33</sup> Gutschker V. T. (2026, 9 March). *Von der Leyen rechnet mit EU-Außenpolitik ab*. Faz.

<sup>34</sup> Rasquinho Valente S. (2026, 17 March). *AB Komisyonu Üyesi Kubilius'a göre, "Avrupa Güvenlik Konseyi" yeniden gündeme gelebilir*. Anadolu Agency.

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