

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR EXTERNAL POLICIES  
POLICY DEPARTMENT



# The 2016 elections in the United States:

## Effects on the EU-US relationship

AFET



## IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

# The 2016 elections in the United States: Effects on the EU-US relationship

### ABSTRACT

Despite (or because of) Donald Trump's various campaign statements, it is hard to predict confidently what path his administration will take in a wide range of foreign-policy areas. It is however possible to identify key issues and challenges in EU-US relations during his presidency. This briefing provides an overview of issues where US policy may change sharply during the next four years and what this may mean for the EU. Less interventionism, less commitment to NATO and a retreat from trade liberalization could be central to Trump's presidency. Transatlantic relations would be affected by US actions such as rapprochement with Russia and a softer line on the Ukraine conflict, alignment with Assad and Putin in Syria, extreme counterterrorism measures, abandoning the Iran nuclear deal, and unconditional support for Israel. Confrontation with China over trade and regional security, and reversal of environmental policies will also have repercussions for the EU. In order to mitigate all these risks, the EU must at least entrench existing cooperation with the US before trying to enhance it. It can do so by reaffirming European unity and solving threats to its integration, by becoming a better security "producer" and by "thickening" interparliamentary exchanges.

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## 1 Introduction

Based on Donald Trump's personality and statements, it is easy to imagine during his presidency a worst-case scenario for the EU in which relations plummet, the transatlantic security alliance is threatened and economic relations worsen. These outcomes are not unthinkable, but less extreme ones are likelier. Imagining the worst is easy because there has never been in modern US history a president elected with less qualifications and experience for the office, nor with such a controversial personality. He has also repeated that he wants to be unpredictable. However, this mix of personality and absence of record means that one cannot be certain how many of his promises Trump would try to implement or how hard. He could opt for different policies when confronted by the realities of governing or under the influence of the Republican Party establishment. It is perhaps uniquely difficult to predict what his presidency will entail. Nonetheless, the fundamentals of EU-US relations are clear, key issues in the transatlantic debate in the next four years are predictable (barring the unforeseen), and enough is known about Trump to map out where the main challenges for the EU will be during his presidency.

## 2 The political configuration after the elections

From January 2017 the Republican Party will control all branches of the US government, giving Donald Trump and party leaders almost complete freedom to pursue their agendas (which are not identical). The party will dominate the policy debate for at least the next two years. As well as the presidency, it has a narrow majority in the Senate and a larger one in the House of Representatives. Republicans could strengthen their hold on the Senate in 2018. They also hold the majority of state governorships and legislatures, with national consequences through control of congressional districting that reinforces their dominance in the House of Representatives. Trump and the Republican Senate could entrench a strong conservative majority on the Supreme Court for decades: he will appoint a conservative to the vacant seat, and could name more given that the age of two liberal justices and the one centrist. Following Hillary Clinton's defeat and its failure to win the Senate, the Democratic Party faces tension between its left and centrist wings. It could mount a Senate rear-guard action, sometime in collaboration with Republican dissenters, but it will not shape policy in the next four years.

The determinants will be how much Trump tries to implement his populist ideas and whether he is supported by Republican legislators and policy-makers (the majority of whom do not share many of them), or whether they pull him to a standard conservative agenda. Vice-President Mike Pence will be powerful as a bridge between president and party, and given that Trump has expressed a vision of his role as that of a delegating Chairman of the Board (Johnson and Restuccia, 2016). The most important dynamic is likely to be the balance of influence between the nationalist-populists who supported Trump and the Republican conservative establishment. So far, he has nominated more of the latter to cabinet and other senior positions; figures from Congress, Wall Street and the private sector, previous Republican administrations and the military. And despite Trump's outsider rhetoric, the transition has been dominated by Washington lobbyists and conservative think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation. This will influence in policy in many areas in a strong conservative direction (e.g. with regard to low taxes, deregulation and free trade) which could clash with some of Trump's populist positions (Kopan and Prokop, 2016).

The constitution gives the president a very free hand in foreign policy, which has also become highly centralized in the White House, though there is also for observers a tendency to over-personalize foreign policy. Policy details will depend on how much influence establishment Republicans exert throughout government. Many of them who opposed Trump will end up in the administration since his circle of advisers and political entourage do not contain enough people with relevant experience for all the positions to be filled. Beyond that, even the most determined president cannot shape the whole of foreign policy alone or through a few aides, and neither can one assume Trump will devote more effort to it than to domestic issues. Thus staffing the bureaucracy and implementing policy will rely on establishment

Republicans. Even if they do not turn Trump away from his goals that go against Republican orthodoxy, they are likely to influence the details and pace of their implementation. So far, Trump's choices for senior foreign-policy posts show balance between those sharing his more confrontational positions (Gen. Michael Flynn for National Security Advisor) and those favouring traditional Republican stances (Gen. James Mattis as Defense Secretary, Gen. John Kelly as Homeland Security Secretary). It is too early to judge how Rex Tillerson, his chosen Secretary of State, fits exactly in this balance.

### 3 EU-US relations and current issues on the agenda

EU-US relations have been generally good in most policy areas under President Barack Obama. He repaired much of the damage from the George W. Bush presidency, reaffirmed the US security commitment to Europe after the Ukraine crisis, was more multilateral and less interventionist (thought the latter led to some European complaints), and focused on issues the EU cares about. In many ways he was a 'European' president (Chivvis and Puglierin, 2016). Not all has been perfect as shown by the dispute over the NSA scandal. Despite strong relations with the EU and individual members, Obama did not make Europe his priority region.

The EU and US cooperate very closely on common foreign and security policy goals. With regard to NATO, though, Obama pushed for more burden-sharing, reducing the capabilities gap and higher EU defence spending. There has been unity on sanctions against Russia, as well as broad diplomatic unity over Ukraine. The 2014 European Reassurance Initiative – with US troop rotations and pre-positioning of military equipment – signalled renewed support to the EU in face of tensions on its eastern flank. The US and EU cooperate closely in the Middle East, including for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (alongside the UN and Russia in the Middle East Quartet), despite differences with some EU members over their stance on recognizing a Palestinian state and taking actions against Israel over settlements in the West Bank. They also share a strong interest in preventing or reducing instability in North Africa, in particular with Libya in an uncertain state, but some in the EU criticize the US for cutting its involvement after the fall of Gaddafi. The refugee situation resulting from the war in Syria is a shared concern that sees considerable diplomatic and military cooperation, though some in the EU criticize the US for not doing more to stop the conflict. The US has led a coalition against ISIS, including airstrikes backed by EU members, and they work together in the fight against Al-Qaeda.

Collaboration in counter-terrorism has been a persistent aspect of relations since 9/11. Strong intelligence cooperation has been central to this, but tensions have arisen regarding how data is securely stored and used between the EU and US, with the European Court of Justice overturning the Safe Harbour Privacy Principles in 2015. The US-EU Privacy Shield agreed upon in 2016 to replace it includes obligations for how companies and the US government deal with EU citizens' data, as well as establishing a mechanism for redress (European Commission, 2016 (a)). In 2016 the two sides also signed an Umbrella Agreement on personal data exchanged by law-enforcement bodies (European Commission, 2016 (b)).

The EU and US have highly integrated economies and the world's largest trade-and-investment relationship, with combined activity accounting for about half of world GDP. This sets the tone for the global economy and trade liberalization, setting standards and regulations (Mix, 2015). Transatlantic foreign direct investment is the strongest driver, supporting millions of jobs in the US and EU (The White House, 2014 (a)). The 2012 Statement on Shared Principles for International Investment reaffirmed their commitment to a fair and open investment climate (European Commission, 2012). Despite obstacles in negotiations, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), negotiated since 2013, embodies shared values in rule of law and open markets (European External Action Service). The US supported the EU during the eurozone crisis by providing funds to the International Monetary Fund and with the US Federal Reserve extending currency swaps to central banks (Federal Reserve System). Taxation is also an issue of growing contention between the EU and US, as the 2016 Apple ruling against state aid shows and

with similar situations arising involving other US multinationals (European Commission, 2016 (c)). Given the importance of the digital sphere in transatlantic economic activity, the two sides share a growing interest securing critical cyber infrastructure against criminal and third-party disruption. R&D flows are also critical to their economic interaction.

US actions on a wide range of global issues have major consequences for the EU, and their close collaboration is often key to progress. Obama took important actions to combat climate change, such as the Clean Power Plan to limit carbon emissions from US power plants. The Paris Agreement to make countries accountable for greenhouse-gas emissions while shifting investment towards clean energy was in part the result of strong EU-US cooperation. The US has also long been a supporter of European energy independence (The White House, 2014 (b)). The two work closely together in nuclear non-proliferation, which was instrumental in achieving the Iran nuclear deal (The White House, n. d.). They account for over three-quarters of global aid, are jointly the largest promoters of development and shared values, and work together on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. A Development Dialogue was re-launched in 2009 (Gaus and Hoxtell, 2013).

## 4 Future US foreign policy and EU-US relations

Donald Trump emphasized key international goals during the campaign, but he also contradicted himself and is not interested in details. He gave one major speech each on foreign policy (National Interest) and defence (The Hill). Predicting his foreign policy relies on interpreting his beliefs as much as on guessing how his goals might be fleshed out. One should expect a less interventionist US tempted by “soft” isolationism, but one that is also unilateralist, nationalist and confrontational when it acts. Trump has displayed three core principles: opposition to alliances, opposition to free trade and affinity with authoritarian leaders (Wright, 2016). He sees multilateral institutions and agreements as costly and restraining the US’s ability to act in its interest. He criticizes the international security role the US has taken since 1945, and is critical of globalization. While US actions might be less predictable due to his personality and lack of detailed positions, his core beliefs will underpin them, regardless of the exact ones he takes or the influence of the Republican Party.

What Trump has promised for his first 100 days shows his priorities (Trump, n.d.). They include renegotiating (or else leave) the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), labelling China a currency manipulator, identifying “foreign trading abuses”, lifting restrictions on exploiting domestic energy sources, cancelling payments to UN climate-change programmes, suspending immigration from “terror-prone” regions and using “extreme vetting”, new screening procedures for immigrants, a law to end offshoring by US companies, and increasing defence spending. It will be difficult to achieve most of these things in the short-term, not least because this will depend on Congress and might face judicial hurdles, but even starting on them could have repercussions for the EU. In particular this will apply to what Trump announced as “day one” priorities: withdrawing from TPP, cancelling restrictions on energy production including in shale and coal, and investigating abuses of visa programmes. He has separately promised to start immediately renegotiating NAFTA.

One important factor that could lead to quick changes under Trump is Obama’s use of executive orders to implement his regulatory agenda across many fields – such as healthcare, the financial sector, environment and energy, consumer protection and civil rights – as a consequence of systematic opposition by the Republican Congress since 2011 (Appelbaum and Shear, 2016). Executive orders allow presidents to work around legislative gridlock but leave their policy legacy vulnerable to swift reversal at a stroke of a pen from their successors. There is no doubt that Trump will carry out his promise to overturn many orders and regulations he sees as anti-business or against the national interest.

## 4.1 Foreign and security policy

Donald Trump's calls for allies to increase defence spending and compensate the US for the cost of security guarantees will be an immediate challenge for the EU. He will push hard on this beyond usual US calls for more burden-sharing. Having called NATO obsolete and unfit to fight terrorism, he could push for its transformation if he thinks the EU is not responding to his agenda. For example, he might end the European Reassurance Initiative. All this raises concerns for the solidity of the European security architecture, but could be balanced by raises in US defence spending, which might undercut the case for pulling back from NATO commitments.

Pulling back from NATO could increase the UK's leverage over Brexit negotiations as it will become a more important security partner to the EU owing to its military capacities. However, the UK prioritizes NATO for its security engagement and military cooperation, and could be conflicted between its traditional US orientation and an administration that downplays NATO. Therefore Trump's NATO policies might lead to a change in UK attitudes to EU defence integration. On Brexit, which Trump has spoken positively about, he will not do much to help the UK get a good deal and does not make a softer Brexit more probable. The US will want a trade deal with a post-Brexit UK but that need not be as an alternative to, or to the detriment of, progress on TTIP.

Intelligence and counterterrorism cooperation with the EU will not change in the short term, regardless of Trump's criticism of the fight against violent extremism. In the longer term, though, his many statements supporting harsh measures and methods like waterboarding that the EU would consider torture, as well as his administration's likely approach to surveillance and privacy, and some of his senior staff choices, indicate this could lead to renewed transatlantic tension. In this regard, the data-protection provisions under the Umbrella Agreement could become the object of friction if the Trump administration prioritizes the fight against terrorism "by all means" to a degree that overrides any other considerations in law-enforcement norms or goes against the letter and spirit of the agreement.

Trump could seek unconditional rapprochement with Russia – a shift with serious consequences for EU foreign and security policy. Fears of leaving Russia a free hand in Eastern Europe may be exaggerated, but he will end talk of NATO expansion and take a softer line over Russian aggression in Ukraine, and especially the illegal annexation of Crimea. The US line on sanctions will ease, even if they are not abandoned entirely or immediately. Trump will also seek more counterterrorism cooperation with Russia, and might try to bring it back into the G8 format. The role of Congress, especially Republican members hawkish towards Russia, will be crucial, e.g. in entrenching the sanctions in law rather than executive orders (Grandoni, 2016) or blocking the appointment of nominees deemed too pro-Russia, especially in light of revelations about Russian interference in the presidential election. Secretary of State-designate Tillerson could face a tough confirmation process. However, if Russia undertakes further provocations in Eastern Europe, this could drive Trump to a tougher stance. With regard to Ukraine, support for the Kyiv government could be seen as too costly, and interest in the Minsk II process could wane to improve relations with Russia. The US could also cut down its commitments to Georgia and other post-Soviet states. On the other hand, Trump has criticized Obama for not helping Ukraine, and many Republicans in Congress are strong Ukraine supporters, so assistance levels may hold.

Trump promised to renegotiate the Iran nuclear deal and police it more aggressively. He is likely to try for this, but if this appears to be failing he could try to scrap it. In principle he could do so easily in tandem with the Republican Congress. The party is even more opposed to the deal and it may draw him to a harder position, pressuring him to act on his promise (Pecquet, 2016). The US could impose new sanctions unilaterally and, if this prompts Iran to restart its nuclear programme, the prospect of military action cannot be ruled out. This would pose a dilemma for the EU as one of the deal's architects, and might bring it closer to Russia due to common objections to US unilateral actions. In a worst-case scenario, strikes against Iran



could risk a regional conflict or instability that increases oil prices, thus hurting EU economies. Another scenario would be that the deal unravels slowly among growing US-Iranian tit-for-tat measures (Cammack, 2016). More broadly, the Trump administration should see a clear return to a policy of containing Iran in the region as opposed to Obama's attempt to encourage a regional balance of power with Iran as one pillar.

Trump's approach to the Middle East combines contradictory wishes to reduce US intervention and to fight ISIS and terrorist groups more aggressively, what one observer calls "belligerent minimalism" (Lynch, 2016). In Syria, Trump is likely to leave Russia and the regime a free hand in their military campaign, and support for anti-Assad rebels is very likely to stop. If the US aligns more closely with the Assad-Russian actions, this would pose a serious challenge for relations with the EU because of the backlash over humanitarian consequences and worsening refugee flows. Under his bellicose rhetoric, though, Trump's positions on Syria were not radically different from Obama's policy over committing troops, targeted air strikes and imposing no-fly zones.

Trump will also not challenge Middle Eastern autocrats, especially if they suppress Islamists. He blamed Obama for not standing by US allies in the Arab Spring and thus creating security threats in the region. US relations with Egypt under the Sisi regime in particular could grow closer. Trump has showed no interest in promoting democracy and human rights in the region (or elsewhere). This could lead to less US support for Tunisia's transition, in which the EU has a strong interest.

US-Turkish relations could improve as Trump supported Recep Tayyip Erdoğan after the coup attempt against him and he could seek a closer relationship based on counter-terrorism. He will also likely want to leave Turkey a free hand in its engagement in the Syrian conflict or with the Kurds. The Trump administration might not stand in the way of a request to extradite Fethullah Gülen (something for the courts to decide) and could direct law-enforcement agencies to target his activities. A strong Trump-Erdoğan relationship, coupled with Trump's lack of interest in EU matters, could also give Turkey greater leverage in its relations with the EU.

There will likely be a return to strong, uncritical US support for Israel. Trump has closely aligned himself with Benjamin Netanyahu and will be backed by the bipartisan pro-Israel consensus that Obama tried to move away from. Hardline Israeli positions will be endorsed, as shown by Trump's support for making Jerusalem the country's capital. The EU should not expect strong US interest in the peace process and a two-state solution, which will pose a challenge to its policy on the issue and to the future of the Quartet.

Trump and some of his senior staff picks favour an aggressive, confrontational approach towards what they term "radical Islamic terrorism" and see as the greatest security threat to the US (Lake, 2016). This could take the form of less discriminate military action against terrorist targets in the Middle East, harsher counterterrorism methods, strident rhetoric against all Islamists and designating groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood as terrorist organizations, and a temporary ban on Muslims entering the US or a registry of US Muslims (Lynch, 2016). In any combination, these will fuel anti-Americanism that could merge with wider anti-Western sentiment across the region, raising the terrorist risk in the EU or for European targets around the world. Trump's policies on Israel and Syria, as well as his support for autocratic regimes, would only add to this dynamic.

Last but not least, while Trump has over the years showed antagonism towards China on economic issues (see below), the US could shift to a more disruptive China policy also on security issues related to Taiwan, the South China Sea or North Korea. Here Trump could find support from parts of the Republican Party that want to confront China, having criticized Obama's policy of engaging it as an international stakeholder as too soft (Crowley, 2016). The unprecedented call between Trump and Taiwanese leader Tsai Ing-wen after the election suggests that his administration could consider overturning the established US "one China policy", which would have serious repercussions in the region, not only over the security of Taiwan but also

in dealings with North Korea over its nuclear programme and trying to address Chinese expansion in the South China Sea. Heightened tensions in Asia and worse US-Chinese relations as a result of Trump's policy shifts could have wide-ranging security and economic consequences for the EU and pose serious challenges to its relations to the US and China alike.

## 4.2 Economic and global issues

Opposition to free-trade deals was central to Trump's election and so far indications are he will try carry out his promises on TPP and NAFTA (Behsudi and Cook, 2016). He will have legal authority to carry out many of his threats (Noland et al., 2016) There is also a chance he will try to label China a currency manipulator and look into imposing tariffs on countries like China and Mexico, despite the risks to the US and global economy. Trump has not criticized trade with the EU or targeted TTIP in the same way, but given the state of the negotiations attempting to renegotiate it on more favourable terms to the US (e.g. on sustainability or labour regulations) and generally destabilizing the international trade regime could be the end of TTIP. His threat to pull out of the World Trade Organization is less likely to be pursued, but there will be no US impetus to revive a global trade liberalization effort. Even if Trump does not carry through all his threats toward China, any trade confrontation with it risks serious economic consequences for EU members, not least export-reliant Germany as the largest EU economy (Bond, 2016). With Germany as the US's most important trading partner, the Trump administration could continue the Obama administration's repeated criticism of Germany for its trade surplus and claim that without Germany's fiscal intervention a weak euro would cause currency distortions in global trade. One balancing factor on these issues will be how much pro-trade Republican congressional leaders will push back, as they have indicated they will.

The Trump administration will target US companies that have delocalized production abroad (or plan to) through incentives and sanctions. With Republicans in control of the executive and Congress, the US could see the "most far-reaching overhaul" of its tax code since the 1980s, including lowering the corporate rate of income tax and a proposal for "border adjustment", which would in principle "for the first time...tax American imports while exempting exports from US tax", as a way of targeting presumed tax advantages enjoyed by EU, Chinese and other exporters (Rubin, 2016). This would carry a high chance of similar retaliatory measures by trading partners and WTO litigation, with considerable risk of damage to the transatlantic trade relationship.

Fiscal stimulus, focusing on infrastructure spending, and tax cuts are central to Trump's economic agenda. This will likely lead to higher deficits, inflation and changes in the Federal Reserve policy rate. Financial deregulation, especially revising the Dodd-Frank Act, is also to be expected. Trump's win briefly caused uncertainty in financial markets, which then soared because of speculation about the medium-term impact of his policies. This could change or even reverse if his trade stance creates economic and political backlashes. In the long run, his proposed macroeconomic and trade measures will likely cause higher deficit and debt levels. A stronger dollar and protectionist measures could lead to higher price competitiveness of EU manufacturers against US exporters. In monetary policy, two scenarios are possible. The Federal Reserve could have to raise interest rates sooner and more than expected. Capital outflows from the EU to the US would then challenge European financial stability as investors will try to realize arbitrage. As European banks are still vulnerable and low growth does not allow the ECB to tighten monetary policy, EU members could be forced to make greater fiscal commitments to safeguard financial stability and economic recovery in the eurozone. On the other hand, if US interest rates are kept low in order to protect GDP growth, risk of a financial bubble will grow that could destabilize global financial markets.

With regard to the environment and climate change, the impact of a Trump administration for the EU could be high. He has said he does not believe in global warming, in line with many Republicans in Congress, and

will likely try to withdraw from the Paris Agreement or else refuse to recognize its non-binding obligations (Meyer, 2016). The US will probably cut off its funding for UN climate-science research. Trump will very likely end the Obama administration's Clean Power Plan and pursue comprehensive energy deregulation in favour of producers. His transition team contains many climate sceptics and energy industry figures who will have government positions, including at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Obama's environmental and energy agenda has been pursued through extensive use of executive orders, given the inability to push legislation through the Republican Congress since 2011, especially empowering the EPA through regulatory instruments such as the Clean Power Plan. These are highly vulnerable to change by the new administration through reversal of executive orders, weaker rules-enforcement by the EPA under a new leadership or judicial challenges (Restuccia and Guillen, 2016). However, an onslaught on the Obama legacy could be mitigated by legal challenges, the latitude individual states have to set their policies and regulations in this sphere, and the likelihood of requiring legislative change from Congress for more fundamental change (Buzbee, 2016).

Trump may have begun backing away from his comments about countries having to provide for their defence by acquiring nuclear weapons, but a strong US push on non-proliferation is unlikely. Given his desire for the US to have maximal military capabilities, his administration might stop implementing the New START treaty or even consider leaving the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Fears of proliferation in Asia and the Middle East as a consequence of a new US approach to alliance commitments and nuclear arms would become more justified, while Russia would be encouraged to further back away from existing ones.

## 5 Conclusion and recommendations

With everything known about Donald Trump and the new US political context, it is difficult to look at EU-US relations in terms of enhancement at this point. The more realistic goal for now is to entrench current levels of cooperation in areas of importance to the EU. The EU cannot premise its actions on solid predictions as to Trump's overall strategy or approach to issues as he shows no sign of greater predictability. His behaviour during the transition suggests he will not turn soon into a standard president, nor change his view of policy issues as arenas for zero-sum bilateral deals, which ignores the interconnected nature of most of those issues that are central to EU-US relations. How quickly Trump moves along the learning curve when his preferences clash with the reality of this interconnectedness will be a crucial determinant of the stability of EU-US relations.

### 5.1 Reaffirm and demonstrate European unity

The best response to the Trump presidency will be to do what the EU needs to do regardless of who is president, given its internal challenges. The best way to mitigate any negative impact on the transatlantic relationship from Trump's actions is by repairing EU unity and prosperity, reinforcing existing integration and solving its crises, especially over the euro, and becoming a stronger, united foreign and security actor at least in its eastern and southern neighbourhoods. If Trump does really abhor multilateral institutions and seeks bilateral deals with member states rather than deal with the EU, it will be imperative for Europeans not to let themselves be divided. The more united the EU is, the better it will deal with the US if Trump pursues policies that hurt fundamentals of the transatlantic relationship. Reaffirming the collective nature of its side of the relationship will not only protect the EU's leverage towards the US, but also acting as a stronger unitary actor is likely to register more with Trump and affect his views of the EU and maybe his actions. The NATO summit in Brussels planned for March 2017 and the next EU-US summit, as well as Italy's G7 and Germany's G20 presidencies in 2017, will be crucial opportunities to set the tone of the EU's engagement with the Trump administration over the next four years.

## 5.2 Be a better security “producer”

To counter Trump’s narrative of Europeans as freeloading “users” of security at the US taxpayers’ expense, the EU needs to build further and faster its ability to be a “producer” of security. It has to build on recent moves to increase defence spending and on the conversation about meaningful collective security mechanisms. Progress in the debate over the European defence union and its relationship to NATO is crucial. Preserving the transatlantic security relationship will require greater willingness by the EU to deploy military power, especially in its neighbourhood, in situations that the US will not consider of vital interest. Yet the EU must do this without reinforcing Trump’s anti-NATO inclination, which would be self-defeating as the alliance should remain the cornerstone of Europe’s security architecture. Europe has to walk a fine line between realizing the ambitions set out in the EU Global Strategy and becoming a more capable and willing US ally in military terms, and ensuring that greater strategic autonomy does not encourage US voices saying that NATO is no longer needed. And in the security sphere too, EU members must be vigilant not to get drawn into bilateral arrangements with the Trump administration and remain focused on the need for a collective security stand.

## 5.3 “Thicken” interparliamentary engagement

The US president has remarkable latitude in foreign policy, but it is often overlooked how enabling or constraining Congress can be through its constitutional prerogatives and depending on the political context. If its members (Republicans and Democrats) are important for channelling, tempering or opposing Trump’s policies, the EU should focus on engaging Congress more than it does now, including through the European Parliament (EP). While there should be no illusion as to how much influence the EP can have on members of Congress, whose personal political calculations often makes them disregard their own parties and presidents, “thicker” engagement can provide an important additional avenue for making EU concerns and priorities heard by influential actors in Washington. This applies to most if not all of the issues discussed above, and in the current context would be useful in having another EU voice in the crucial discussions about NATO, Russia and the US security commitment to Europe; TTIP and free trade globally; the Iran nuclear deal; relations with China; and climate change and the Paris Agreement.

One option is to increase the frequency of the Transatlantic Legislators’ Dialogue (TLD) meetings, but a preferable one is instead to create smaller issue-specific meetings between these. This would also increase EP outreach beyond the House Foreign Affairs and Senate Foreign Relations committees, and help bring the Senate more into the conversation. It might even be a step towards eventual pairing of congressional and EP committees (beyond special working groups) that would enable dealing in greater detail with complex technical and regulatory questions while the broader policy discussion remains at the TLD level. As well as foreign and security issues being dealt by the respective EU and US foreign affairs committees, core issues of defence, trade and the environment should also be addressed by targeting relevant committees in the House (Armed Services, Energy and Commerce, Natural Resources, and Ways and Means) and Senate (Armed Services, Energy and Natural Resources, Environment and Public Works, and International Trade). Devoting EP efforts to this approach, while still facing considerable obstacles, could reap rewards in the long term. In doing so, the EP already has at its disposal the European Parliament Liaison Office in Washington whose resources could be increased accordingly with relative ease. The EP should also lobby discreetly for Congress to establish a counterpart in Brussels. Finally, given that there has traditionally been less motivation for institutionalized interparliamentary exchanges on the US side, there should be a concerted effort by the EP to use all contacts, whether formal like the TLD, the EP delegation to the US or ad hoc, to stress to its American counterparts the value of thickening the EP-Congress relationship.

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