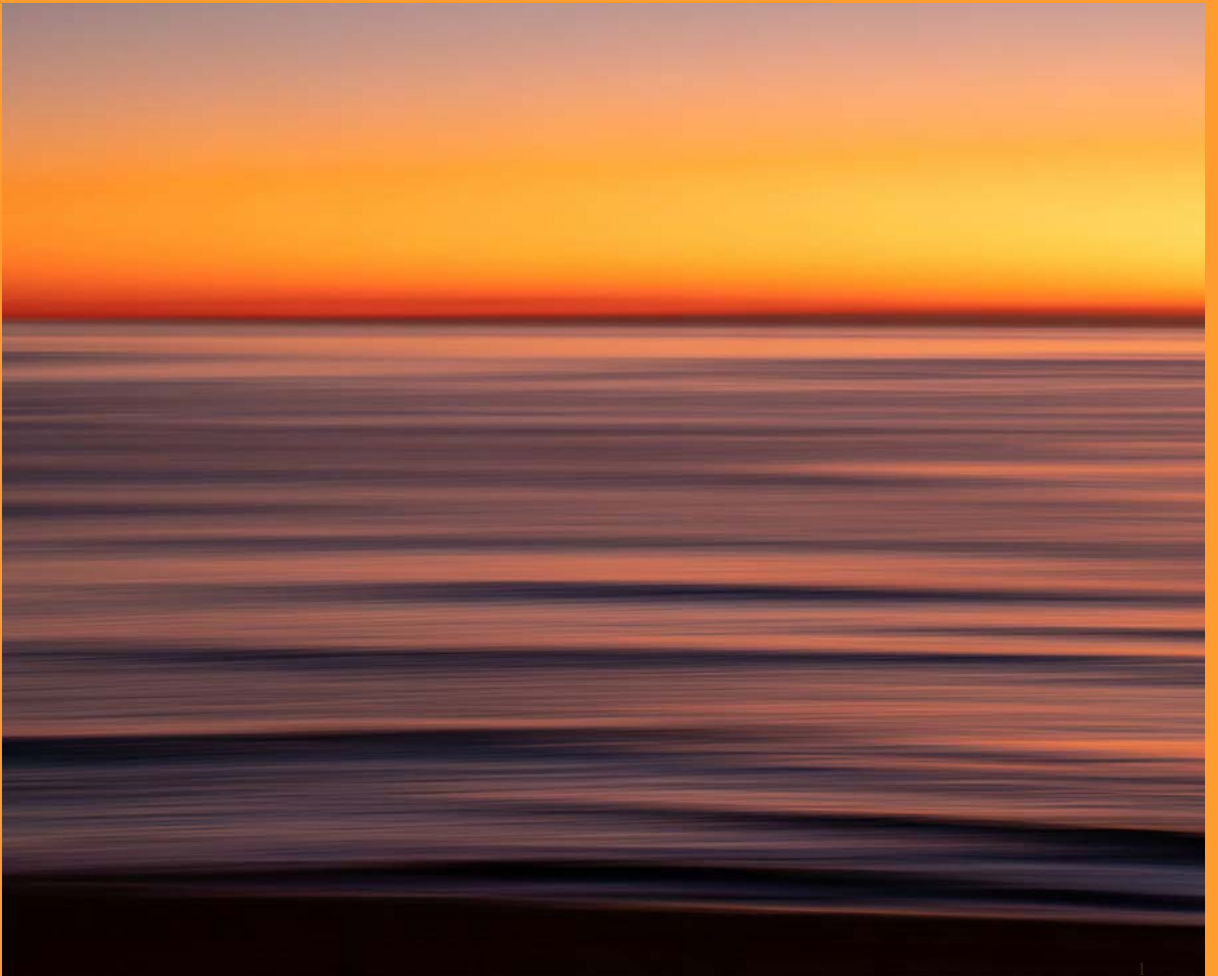
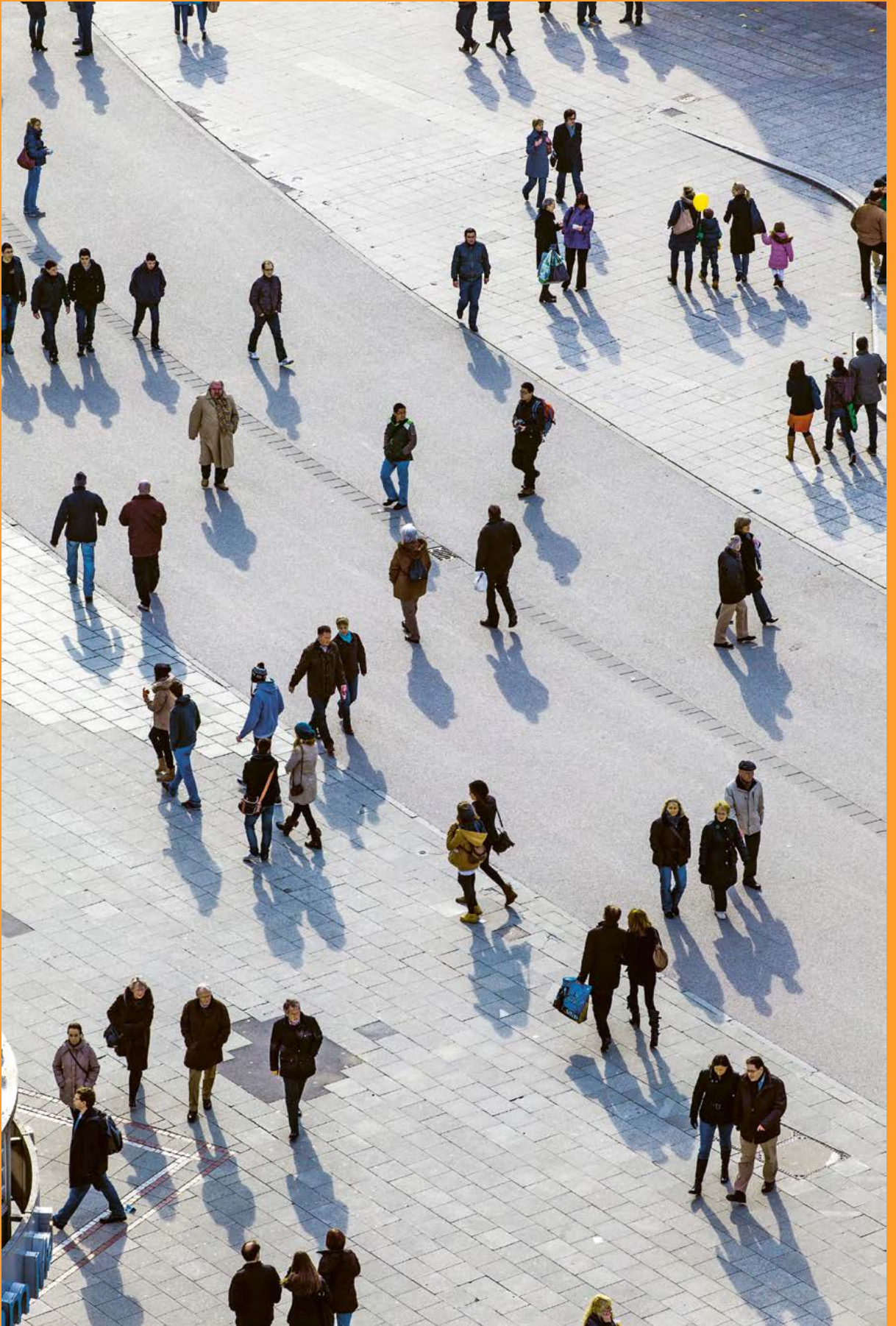


Strengthening Partner Europe!

BKHS
MAGAZINE

05





DEAR READERS,

TEXT: MATTHEW DELMASTRO,
MAGNUS KOCH, DAN KRAUSE AND
ELISABETH WINTER

European integration began as a peace project after two devastating world wars. What began with cooperation in coal and steel eventually led to further economic, political and social integration. Over time European states grew ever closer together. Following the Cold War, the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 created the formal European Union we know today, reinforcing the single market, setting the path toward economic and monetary union and introducing a common European foreign and security policy. The EU also opened itself up to new members, most significantly in the mid-2000s when it granted membership to states across Central and Eastern Europe. In the post-Cold War period, the “Western model” of democracy and a market economy appeared triumphant; some even proclaimed the “end of history”.

Today, we know better. The terrorist attacks of 11 September, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the 2008 financial crisis, the surge in right-wing populism and the rise of powerful authoritarian states all put pressure on the promise of an open, rules-based order. More recently, Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Israel’s unremitting war in Gaza and the US retreat under Trump from its traditional global role have brought that order to a breaking point. Indeed, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine – a core security priority for Europeans – and the neutral positions taken by many countries in the Global South have laid bare the erosion of the old order without yet revealing the birth of a new one.

Europeans are confronting the stark reality that their security and prosperity can no longer be taken for granted, that the

former can no longer be outsourced to the United States and the latter can no longer be based on cheap, reliable energy imports and a completely free and open global trading system. Europe is now facing a world of power politics where dependencies are ruthlessly exploited and international rules are challenged or openly violated. The EU’s key strength remains its economic weight, but without political unity and greater defence capabilities, it does not translate into real global influence.

The current moment demands reforms and renewal inside the Union – all towards the goal of increasing Europe’s strategic autonomy and capacity to act: from investing more heavily in defence and advanced technologies and strengthening the single market to enforcing smart digital regulations and transforming decision-making structures to enable more unified action. It must pursue these investments in its own capabilities while not losing sight of what keeps Europe’s societies together. The EU must preserve and promote social justice as well as involve citizens in this larger process of renewal, a process that may even serve to reinforce new forms of European identity based on solidarity and common purpose.

But ambitious internal reforms remain only part of the answer. Most of Europe’s pressing challenges – from climate change and digitalisation to migration flows and violent conflicts on its borders – are transnational in nature. These issues cannot be solved by the EU on its own, much less by any single member state. The cross-border crises of recent years have made one thing abundantly clear: Europe needs partners.

Strong partnerships are not optional. They are essential preconditions for Europe’s ability to act effectively on the world stage. Amidst intensifying great power competition, multilateral cooperation is the only way for most countries in the world to safeguard their interests. The EU is no different. Multilateral organisations such as the UN remain indispensable, but so do flexible coalitions, regional alliances and bilateral relations. With like-minded partners,

STRENGTHENING PARTNER EUROPE!

Europe can effectively and credibly stand up for the values of democracy, human rights and fair markets. With emerging powers, it must develop pragmatic forms of cooperation. With societies across the globe, it must promote the idea that international politics need not be a zero-sum game. Partnership is Europe's path to strength and relevance in a contested world.

The Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung (BKHS) supports this project to strengthen Europe both at home and abroad with partners. Under the motto "Strengthening Partner Europe!", we are exploring ways the EU can increase its ability to act globally by becoming a more capable, credible and attractive partner. The fifth edition of the BKHS Magazine has collected expertise from across our foundation as well brought together an array of other perspectives from think tanks and academia. The contributions analyse Europe's internal capacities and external relations, highlight opportunities for cooperation and propose concrete steps for strengthening Europe's global role and partnerships. The result is not a uniform picture, but a rich debate via a variety of formats: an earnest invitation to reflect on Europe's future role in the world.

We wish you a pleasant and engaging read!

→ Matthew Delmastro is a research assistant at the BKHS and editor of the BKHS Magazine.

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“If we Europeans want to be up to the task of meeting the external challenges we are facing, then the cohesion and ability to act of the EU are necessary conditions. Both are jeopardised when nationalist tendencies gain the upper hand.”

During his term in office and beyond, former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt championed a united Europe capable of acting on the international stage. He believed that lasting peace and Europe’s future could only be built upon strong cooperation among European states. Today, however, the EU faces major challenges, both foreign and domestic, that are threatening its ability to act as a sovereign and effective actor in the international arena. This year, Helmut steps aside to give the stage to member states’ permanent representatives to the EU. We asked them: **“How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?”**

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STRENGTHENING PARTNER EUROPE!

SALVAGING GLOBAL ORDER IN THE POST-AMERICAN ERA



The second Trump administration is actively precipitating the dissolution of the post-war international order. As alliances dissolve and disorder spreads, strategies of bloc formation and multi-alignment are becoming obsolete. To prevent a descent into a predatory world of imperial politics, the “Rest of the West” and the Global South must join forces to preserve the basic principles of international law and global order.

TEXT: NATHALIE TOCCI

Before the re-election of Donald Trump, many believed that the world was headed towards growing tension, if not outright conflict, between the Global West and the Global East. The most tangible manifestation of this dynamic was Russia's invasion of Ukraine, after which followed Western support for Kyiv and less overt but equally significant Chinese economic and technological support for Moscow. North Korean troops fighting alongside Russia and deepened military cooperation between Tehran and Moscow only added further fuel to the fire. While most dismissed the idea of an alliance in the making, it was taken seriously enough that the acronym “CRINK” (standing for China, Russia, Iran and North Korea) began circulating in public debate to indicate the axis of countries at the forefront of the confrontation with the Global West. Many depicted this confrontation not merely in geopolitical, but in normative terms as well. It was a struggle

of democracy against autocracy, so the argument went, part of the larger narrative pushed by the Biden administration in particular.

A heated debate ensued over what has become known as “the Global South”, a term that refers to a wide diversity of countries varying in size, geography, level of development and political system and orientation. The Global South came to be viewed as the new terrain of competition between the Global West and East. The BRICS grouping of countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) gathered steam and enlarged its membership in 2024 and 2025, blowing wind into the sails of the Global East. At the same time, Global South countries became regular guests at G7 summits, setting off debates about possible G7+ formats. Yet, countries in this heterogeneous grouping balked at the idea of having to choose between East and West. Those strong and powerful enough to hedge their bets, like

India and various Gulf countries, played in both camps at their convenience, seeking to extract maximum gain from all sides. Smaller and weaker countries attempted to extricate themselves from the dilemma, concentrating instead on their domestic and regional agendas. The overall resistance to this binary choice echoed the spirit of the non-aligned movement during the Cold War.

Two competing views

Since Trump's re-election, however, this dynamic has been turned on its head. The apparent convergence between the US under President Trump and Russia under President Putin on the war in Ukraine, on the one hand, and the US's greater readiness to strike trade deals with China than with long-time partners like the EU, on the other, is catalysing two opposing views amongst policymakers and analysts about the emerging world (dis) order and how to navigate it.

One view is that Washington's about-face on Ukraine and willingness to strike deals with China vindicates the strategy of multi-alignment adopted by middle powers in the Global South. It explains why, for instance, the first negotiations between Russia and Ukraine took place in Saudi Arabia and in Turkey rather than in "aligned" countries in Europe or East Asia. Riyadh and Ankara resisted being forced into taking a side, winning themselves the role of honest brokers. Overall, this view suggests countries in the so-called "Power South" can best secure their national interests by hedging, pursuing strategic autonomy, rejecting permanent alliances and engaging in transactional cooperation.

I believe the opposite is true. In fact, the shift in US foreign policy under Trump invalidates multi-alignment as a strategy. A country can only be multi-aligned in a world in which multiple alignments and orders still exist. But recent events suggest that alignments may soon be a thing of the past, and that rather than multiple — perhaps even competing — orders, we may be left with mere disorder instead.

The Trump administration appears to genuinely believe that the post-war international order built and led by the US since

1945 does not serve American interests. The US not only no longer wants to be the hegemon of that order, but it is intent on smashing it and the alignments that came with it. Oddly, the US is transforming into a revisionist player in the international system. It is even more revisionist than China in some respects, which at least implicitly acknowledges that it has benefited from the post-war multilateral order. Rather than a liberal international order resting on American power, what Washington seems attracted to now looks more like empire — the pursuit of territorial expansion and predatory relations with former allies and partners, unshackled by international rules, norms and institutions. The Trump administration seems content with the idea that other major powers are also allowed to have their own spheres of influence, so long as the US remains first among imperial equals.

Whether or not the US-led liberal international order promoted or hindered US interests is beside the point, as is whether the pursuit of American empire will become a reality or remain a mere aspiration. To the extent that Trump believes the former order did not advance US interests, that order — which was already under threat externally — is unlikely to survive its own creator's death blow. The end of that order will also mean the end of alignments altogether, beginning with the most closely-knit alignments in the Global West.

The need for new partnerships

This raises the question of how other countries should react. In particular, where does this leave the "Rest of the West" as well as the "Global Rest"? The Rest of the West is scrambling to regroup, rearm and reduce its dependencies in sensitive areas. The challenge is massive — materially, but above all psychologically. Europe is on the frontlines of this challenge — squeezed by the Russian threat, the American betrayal and the danger from within posed by far-right forces backed, unsurprisingly, both by Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump. But Canada, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Mexico and others aren't likely to fare much better. At the same time,

“A country can only be multi-aligned in a world in which multiple alignments and orders still exist. But recent events suggest that alignments may soon be a thing of the past.”

Trump is having a unifying effect on the Rest of the West, as is shown by the participation of Canada, Japan and South Korea in the “coalition of the willing” preparing to secure any eventual peace deal in Ukraine. There is no doubt that, if they collectively get their act together, the Rest of the West – still comprising some of the world’s wealthiest nations – would remain a formidable force.

However, it would be a major mistake for them to act alone. Rather, they should seek to join forces with countries in the Global South – both the poor and the powerful – who also consider a world of empires, where “might makes right” is the prevailing law, as a serious threat to their interests. The norms of a future world order these countries could aspire to and agree on may not be as “thick” and intrusive as those of the liberal international order. But they should at least adhere to the core principles of the Charter of the United Nations: non-aggression, the prohibition of territorial expansion or border changes by force and respect for sovereignty. In this respect, Europe’s normative ambiguity with regard to recent Israeli actions, including its attack on Iran – in which Europeans cited Israel’s right to self-defence, although it attacked a sovereign country in violation of the UN Charter and the Geneva Convention – and its devastating war in Gaza, has represented a major setback to its goal of restoring its credibility in the eyes of the Global South.

Crafting a common agenda

The Rest of the West’s common agenda with the Global Rest should start with a recommitment to the fundamentals of international law. But it shouldn’t stop there – it

should go on to explore what parts of the multilateral order can be saved or rebuilt. The EU’s proposal to Pacific countries of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) to work together to salvage the international trading system is precisely the right approach to take.

The Global Rest, particularly countries in the Global South, are absolutely right when they criticise the West for double standards and hypocrisy, as well as for having committed or been complicit in large-scale violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. But the current scale of human suffering we are witnessing as the current international order unravels – from Gaza and Ukraine to Lebanon and Sudan – will only be amplified should it be undone entirely. Development, among other areas, will suffer too. Protectionism will only hinder global growth, while public debt burdens will become ever more unsustainable for many low- and middle-income countries.

Yes, the old order is broken – perhaps beyond repair – but this is no reason to give up on order altogether. It is up to the Rest of the West to join with the Global Rest to salvage what is worth keeping and rebuild a new order together.

→ Nathalie Tocci is director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, professor at the School of Transnational Governance (European University Institute) and chair of the International Advisory Board of the BKHS.

Europe's strategic reckoning: rearmament, path dependency or geopolitical recalibration

TEXT: FAITH MABERA

As the war in Ukraine grinds on and uncertainty looms over the future of transatlantic ties, Europe is at a critical juncture in an increasingly polarised geopolitical landscape. The choices are stark – continue to enact its dramatic reorientation towards increased defence spending and militarisation, follow the familiar path of historical drift guided by the transatlanticism of the post-1945 liberal order, or finally take calls for strategic autonomy seriously and chart its own path independent from US hegemony.



From peace project to war economy

The war in Ukraine, along with perceived shifts in US foreign policy, have laid bare the contradictions and tensions inherent in the idea of the “political West” and the glaring strategic imperative for Europe to adapt to rapidly evolving geopolitical realities on its home turf and further afield (Sakwa, 2024). This has prompted the gradual morphing of the EU from a “peace project to a war project”, justified ostensibly by the threat of Russian aggression and concerns about the erosion of Europe’s technological and industrial production capacities (Varoufakis, 2025). Economic vulnerabilities, growth stagnation, and innovation and productivity deficits in key sectors such as artificial intelligence, electric vehicles and clean technologies – where China and the US are dominant – have further motivated this strategic reorientation.

EU leaders have presented the surge in defence spending as a means of enhancing the EU’s geopolitical standing, mainly by bolstering Europe’s defence–technological and industrial base (EU Commission, 2025); thereby reinforcing deeply ingrained notions of military strength as the bedrock of geopolitical power. Rearmament has also been proposed as a kind of “military Keynesianism”, envisaged as a stimulus for economic growth and enhanced competitiveness (Varoufakis, 2025). This is encapsulated by the recently approved 800–billion–euro defence package, ReArm Europe Plan/Readiness 2030, which proposes an increase in member state defence spending of up to 1.5 per cent of GDP. This comes in addition to a new supranational borrowing programme, Security Action for Europe (SAFE), which provides up to 150 billion euros in loans to member states for defence–related expenditures (Clapp et al., 2025).

The shadow of transatlantic hegemony

However, beneath these pivotal shifts in fiscal and defence policy, fundamental challenges persist in Europe’s internal landscape, including a fragmented political terrain, the erosion of centrist coalitions and the resurgence of populism and far–right ideologies – all of which impede the EU’s capacity

to act as a unified, autonomous global power. Furthermore, the EU’s consensus–based decision–making model hampers coherence and rapid collective action. This political configuration has meant that Europe has largely pursued a reactive foreign policy, responding to events set in motion by big capital and major powers, rather than pro–actively shaping outcomes.

Despite repeated calls for strategic autonomy, seemingly in defence of “the European way of life” and “European values” (Wolf, 2025), Europe’s independence of thought, particularly in foreign and security policy, is constrained by US dominance. This takes the form of an “institutionalised hegemony” in which generations of EU leaders have been professionally shaped and ideologically tethered to the US through an ecosystem that includes think tanks, universities and elite knowledge networks like the Fulbright Program and Atlantik–Brücke (Bonilla, 2025). These networks serve as “idea refineries” and “talent pipelines” in the elevation and positioning of a European elite cohort that is beholden to the Euro–Atlanticist worldview and conditioned to uphold US primacy and a Western–led hegemonic world order.

Erosion of normative power

As Europe grapples with existential questions about its security, global positioning and geopolitical relevance, its values and moral standing have come under scrutiny against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and crises elsewhere in Gaza, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan. The perceived double standards, evident in the disparity in the valuation of human lives in Ukraine and Gaza, and the inconsistent application of international norms have severely eroded Europe’s credibility across the Global South.

Parallel to its rearmament drive, the EU’s evolving priorities have also translated into funding shifts under the framework of the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument – Global Europe (NDICI–GE), the EU’s jumbo external action financing instrument. According to one analysis, recent trends

“Looking ahead, the fundamental question is whether Europe can adapt to a geopolitical and security landscape that is markedly different from the one it faced at the inception of European integration.”

point towards significant reductions in allocations for the peace, security and governance sectors in the 2025–2027 period compared to 2021–2024 (Watson & Rotmann, 2025). While funding for green growth and transitions as well as sustainable growth and jobs increased by 7.2 and 1.8 per cent respectively for the 2025–2027 period, funding for peace, security and governance is set to decrease by 6 per cent. The overt prioritisation of the 300-billion-euro initiatives as part of the EU’s Global Gateway infrastructure strategy over other programmes not only diminishes the EU’s aspirational role as a pivotal peace and security actor but could also jeopardise its security interests in its own neighbourhood.

Reclaiming sovereignty and rebuilding credibility

Looking ahead, the fundamental question is whether Europe can adapt to a geopolitical and security landscape that is markedly different from the one it faced at the inception of European integration. The origins and evolution of the EU as a monetary union are rooted in economic integration and functional institutionalisation as pillars of peace and prosperity. Present-day realities and the emergence of a post-Western international order — characterised by plurality, diversity

and shifts in the distribution of power — demand that Europe reclaims its sovereignty by charting a path less reliant on the US economy and military support.

Such a decoupling strategy would entail a rebalancing of Europe’s internal economy, a clear-eyed assessment of its competitive advantages and structural vulnerabilities, and a pragmatic recalibration of its operational playbook in the international arena (Thotharis & Elsoukarry, 2025). This includes, crucially, a rebuilding of its credibility and a purposeful reorientation of its relations with members of the Global South in Africa, Asia and Latin America, on terms of mutual respect and consistent application of values.

Anything less, and Europe risks irrelevance and continued subservience to US geopolitical projection at the cost of economic decline, deindustrialisation, societal malaise and a severe knock to its global standing.

→ Faith Mabera is a post-doctoral fellow in the area of international relations and security at the University of the Witwatersrand.

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How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?



"The EU's strength and ability to act, including globally and especially in its neighbourhood, depends on the unity, solidarity and strategic partnership of its Member States. The EU's support to stability, reforms and EU membership paths of the enlargement countries can also contribute to a more peaceful, prosperous and cohesive EU and to its role as a confident and values-driven global partner."

Irena Andrassy is the Permanent Representative of Croatia to the European Union.

Five Questions

ANSWERED BY
NECLA KELEK



Necla Kelek is a sociologist, author and women's rights activist. She has been a member of the Management Board of the women's rights organisation Terre des Femmes since 2014 and is the chairwoman of the association Säkularer Islam-Hamburg. She is also a member of the International Advisory Board of the BKHS.

1. What does "Strengthening Partner Europe!" mean to you in the field of migration policy?

"Strengthening Europe" in the area of migration policy means enhancing the European capacity to act as a whole in order to improve the management of migration and the protection of refugees, particularly women and children. This means that no member state should bear the main burden alone. A fair distribution system must be implemented, especially for incoming asylum seekers in border states such as Italy or Greece.

2. How can Europe improve its unity and ability to act in migration policy?

Uniform criteria and procedures to examine asylum applications fairly, quickly, and in accordance with the rule of law. Binding rules to ensure that asylum seekers do not have to move to multiple countries. Not only refugees from war, many people are also seeking to come to Europe to be able to live a dignified life. For this, Europe needs to create legal and safe pathways for labor migration.

3. How can Europe partner with other countries to ensure the decent and humane treatment of all migrants and refugees?

Europe can play a central and important role in setting global standards for the protection of migrants and refugees through solidarity, consistent respect for human rights, and an active, partnership-based foreign policy. For example, by acting together against smuggler gangs. Smuggler gangs do not save refugees; for them it is a business, and they need to be better policed.

4. How does Europe's increasingly restrictive migration policy fit with core European values?

It does not fit together, but the experiences since 2015 show that the enormous weight and constantly increasing number of people seeking protection rests on a few shoulders and the integration into schools and labor markets is not succeeding. Particularly for women, and politics tries to distinguish between those in need of protection and irregular migration, solely in order to be able to do better integration work. This is unfortunate!

5. How can Europe promote more solidarity among member states in the accommodation of migrants and refugees?

More solidarity requires political compromises, but also clear rules and mutual support. The EU can only uphold its values if it organizes migration collectively and fairly. Voluntaryness alone is not enough - institutionalized solidarity is needed!

How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?

"Member States best serve joint EU interests by acting loyally, both at the national level by timely and correctly implementing commonly agreed EU policies, and vis-à-vis partners from 3rd countries by sticking to common lines and defending the EU's position. Though the path to a consensus may sometimes be bumpy, it is the most efficient way to ensure ownership over our policies and to steer our joint future."



Vladimír Bártl is the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the European Union.

The G7 at 50: reviving the spirit of partnership from Rambouillet



Born out of crisis in 1975, the inception and subsequent achievements of the G7 have shown that nations can place shared stability above narrow national interests. Its continuing value lies in dialogue and trust across borders. Today, the EU must help renew this spirit of partnership – and ensure it extends beyond the West.

TEXT: MAGNUS KOCH

Global problems can only be solved across national borders. A milestone on the path to internationally coordinated economic and energy policy was the first G7 meeting in Rambouillet, France, in November 1975. What was originally conceived as an informal gathering of six heads of state – from Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States – laid the foundation for a forum that still exists today: the Group of 7, or G7 (after Canada's entry in 1976).

At Rambouillet, the six leaders responded to mounting global instability by choosing dialogue and coordination over isolationism and the pursuit of narrow self-interest. The economic and political circumstances were dramatic: the end of the Bretton Woods system, the oil crisis and the unfamiliar combination of stagnation and inflation together created a sense of profound disorientation among Western leaders and societies (Böhm, 2014). At the same time, political trust in Western leadership was faltering in the wake of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. In this context, German Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing turned to informal face-to-face dialogue among Western leaders to prevent further fragmentation.

The Rambouillet communiqué that concluded the first meeting may appear cautious, but it articulated strikingly forward-looking resolutions. Despite the differing interests of the participating states, they managed to reach consensus on internationally coordinated measures to combat inflation and economic stagnation. The communiqué expressed a firm commitment to free global trade – rejecting growing protectionist tendencies – as well as a coordinated strategy to address the ongoing oil crisis: reducing dependence on oil and fostering the development of alternative energy sources.

Leaders demonstrated a willingness to subordinate their immediate national interests to a larger cooperative project to safeguard global stability, maintain open markets and root policy in democratic foundations. This act of partnership among nations prevented what could have become a deeper global economic crisis. Rambouillet thus marked not only the birth of the G7, but it also powerfully demonstrated that international problems demand international solutions.

The G7 establishes itself as an international forum

In the following years, the G7 evolved into the central platform for plurilateral cooperation among industrialised democracies in the Global North. Canada joined immediately in 1976, and from 1977 the European Community (EC, which later became the EU) also took a seat at the table. As intended by Schmidt, the inclusion of the EC strengthened Europe's political weight vis-à-vis the United States and highlighted the EC's role as a stabilising anchor during the Cold War (von Karczewski, 2008).

In subsequent decades, the G7 proved its usefulness in successive crises: from the debt crisis of the 1980s to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the global financial meltdown of 2008; although the latter also required additional expanded cooperation via the new G20 format. As an informal club of nations, the added value of the G7 meetings lay less in legally binding commitments than in their capacity to generate trust among leaders, build lasting partnerships and allow for quick coordination of strategy. What began at Rambouillet as an experiment in informal exchange at the highest level matured into an essential forum for coordinating economic and foreign policies; or, in short, into cooperative cross-border crisis management.

A forum under pressure

Fifty years later, the international landscape has shifted fundamentally. The G7 no longer holds the majority of global economic power. Rising powers such as China, Brazil and India have become central actors, and for many in the Global South the G7 remains a “Western club” pursuing its own narrow interests. This perception has spurred the growth of alternative groupings such as BRICS or the G20 and highlights the limits of a format restricted to the industrialised democracies of the Global North.

But the G7 can still play a central role today: in an era of renewed geopolitical confrontation, the need for candid dialogue and trust among leaders is greater than ever. Climate change, financial instability and security crises demand not less but more cross-border cooperation. The G7 has demonstrated that an open and trusting atmosphere is essential for finding common answers across national borders. The cooperative spirit of Rambouillet – setting aside narrow interests to serve a broader cooperative good – remains as urgent today as in 1975.

Europe's responsibility today

The EU has a crucial role to play in keeping this spirit alive. The changing structure of G7 membership over the years and the EC's very entry in 1977 demonstrate that the G7 can adapt and expand. The EU, as a political project rooted in compromise across borders, embodies the cooperative logic that Schmidt and Giscard pursued at Rambouillet. Moreover, thanks to continuous economic and political integration, the EU has become more united over time and has thus strengthened its position within the G7 (G7 Germany, 2021).

Today, the EU should strengthen the G7 in three ways. First, by reinforcing it as a space for open and trust-based dialogue among its members. Second, by advocating for a more inclusive conversation with non-member states, especially in the Global South. The G7's legitimacy in the 21st century depends on its capacity to open itself beyond the West and to build broader alliances. Third, essential to all these efforts is to proceed pragmatically while not losing sight of the values enshrined in the EU treaties and international agreements.

Renewing the spirit of partnership from Rambouillet

Why remember Rambouillet 50 years later? Because it showed that states can rise above short-term national interests to act for global stability on a democratic basis. This lesson remains indispensable. Today, however, such internationally coordinated policy would need to extend beyond the leading industrial nations of "the West".

The complexity of today's crises makes broad alliances more urgent than ever. Building on the agenda of Schmidt and Giscard, the EU should carry this idea of partnership into the future. The EU should take the lead in ensuring that the G7 remains not an exclusive Western club, but a platform of values, dialogue and cooperation open to partners worldwide. Only in this way can the spirit of partnership of 1975 continue to shape the global order of the future.

→ Magnus Koch is head of Exhibitions and History at the BKHS.

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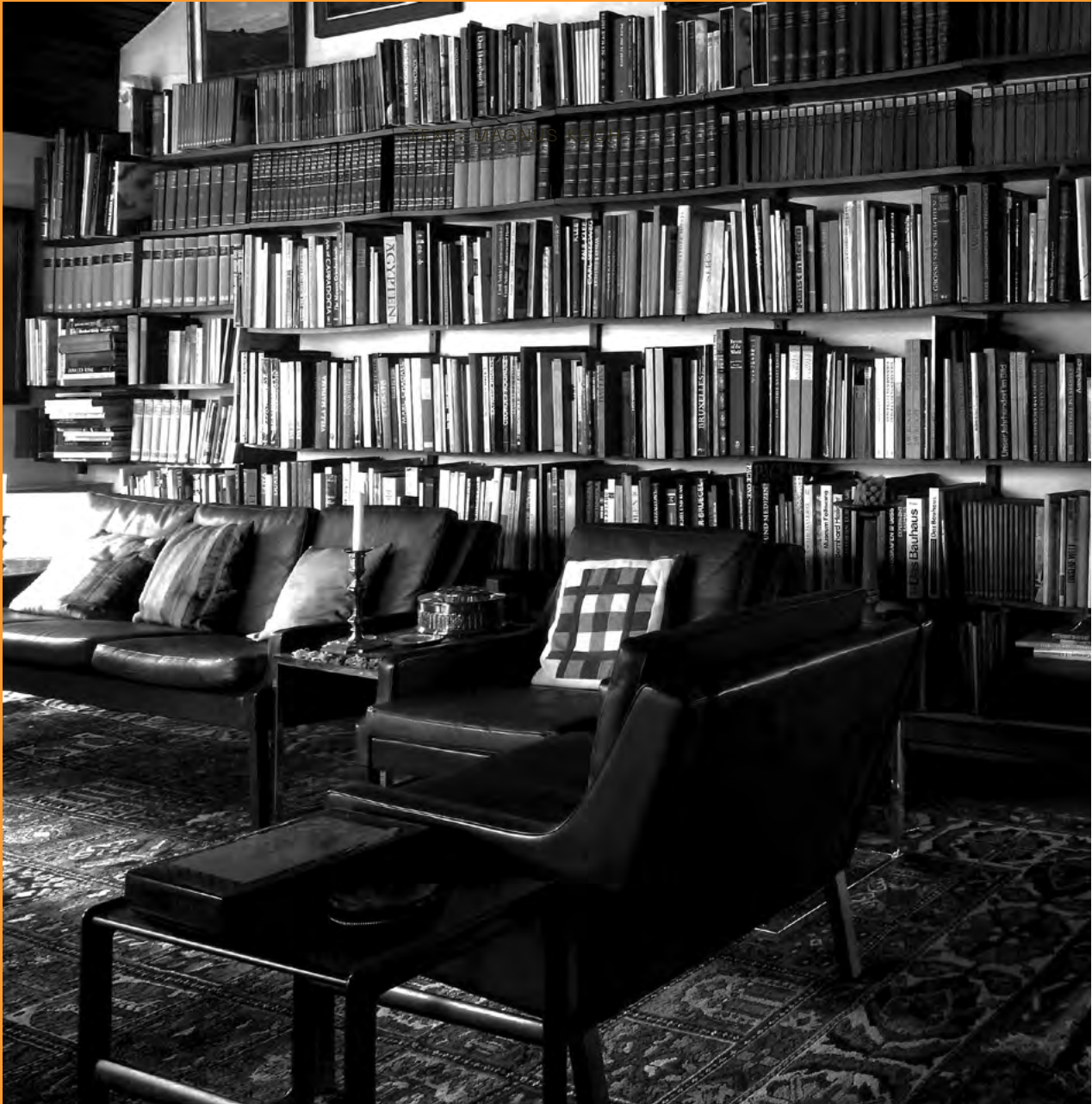
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STRENGTHENING PARTNER EUROPE!

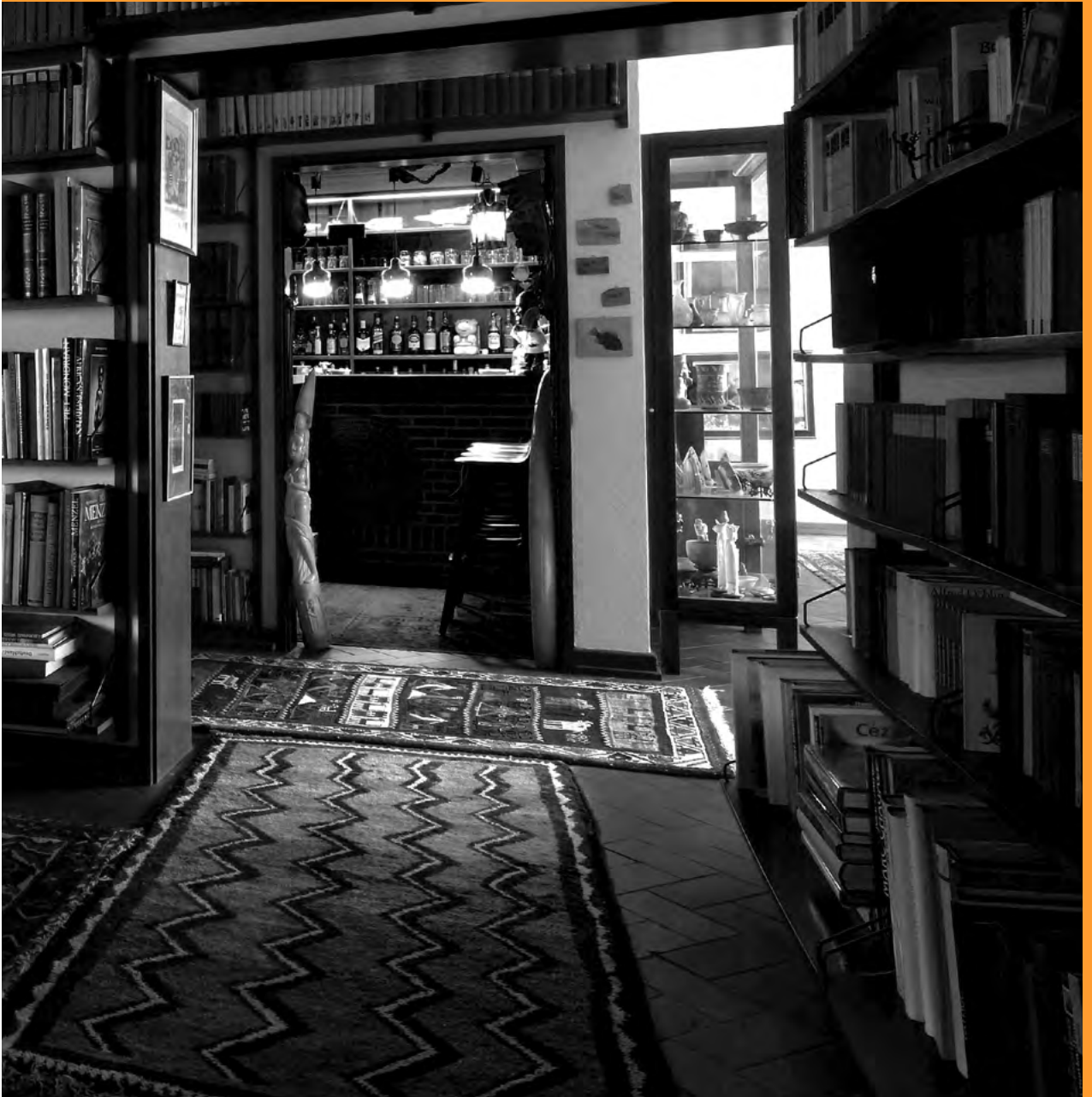
MEMENTOS



MULTILA

IN OBJECTS

OF



TERALISM

STRENGTHENING PARTNER EUROPE!



As globalisation was picking up steam in the 1970s, with interstate and inter-societal relations becoming ever more complex, Helmut Schmidt came to view international cooperation as self-evident and unavoidable. The traces of Schmidt's lifelong commitment to multilateralism span from his student years in the second half of the 1940s up until his death in 2015. In the home and archives of Loki and Helmut Schmidt, several hundred objects have been preserved that bear witness to his passionate commitment to European unity, his belief in international crisis management across national borders and his ardent curiosity about and willingness to learn from cultures and peoples beyond Europe's borders.

What follows is a series of objects housed in the Schmidts' former residence, the Helmut Schmidt-Archiv and the permanent BKHS exhibition "Schmidt! Living Democracy". Each object bears testament to Helmut Schmidt's lifelong commitment to global cooperation and strengthening European unity and agency.



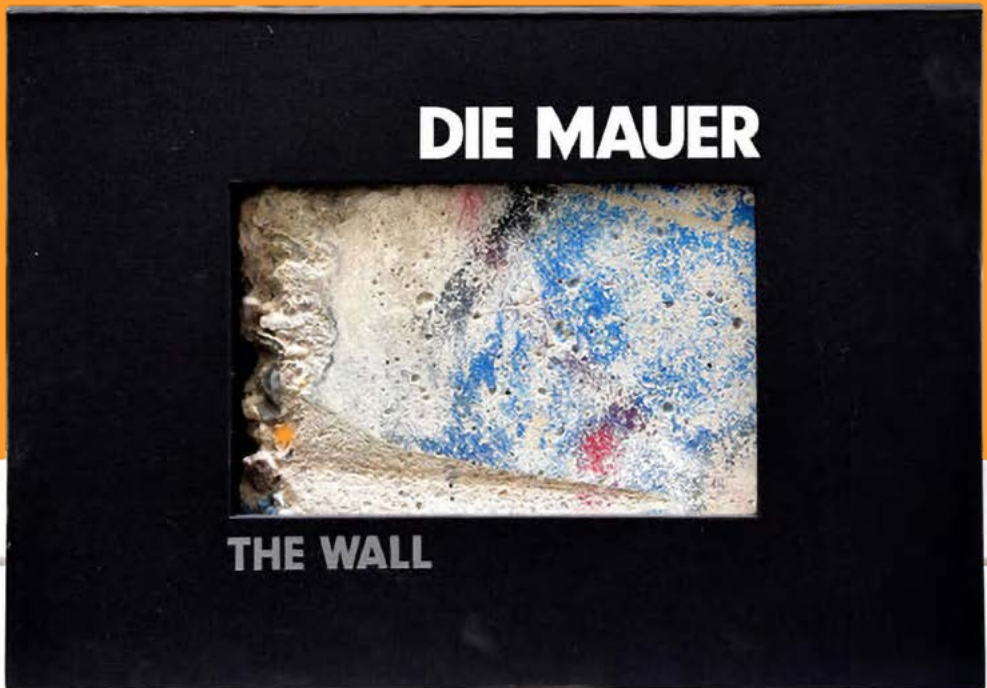
PRECURSOR TO THE ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION

After the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system in 1971, French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and Chancellor Helmut Schmidt pushed for a European monetary system designed to safeguard currency stability. When it was introduced in 1979, the ECU stood for "European Currency Unit" – at the same time, it was the name of an old form of silver coin in France (*écu*). Helmut Schmidt kept six of these *écu* coins from the 17th and 18th centuries in a glass display case behind his desk at home. They were a gift from his former finance minister and close companion Hans Matthöfer. The ECU was an important step towards the Euro, the common European currency we know today. The Euro is not only the legal tender of one of the largest internal markets in the world but also symbolises the power of jointly coordinated economic and monetary policy across borders.

OVERCOMING A DOUBLE DIVISION

During the Cold War, Helmut Schmidt was convinced that West and East Germany could only be reunited as a state and nation within the framework of a united Europe – a goal he steadfastly pursued throughout his career. The Berlin Wall remains a symbol of a double division: of Germany and of Europe. A five-kilogram fragment of grey concrete with traces of graffiti rests on a shelf in the lobby of the Helmut Schmidt-Archiv in

Hamburg-Langenhorn. It was a gift from the editorial board of the *Bild* newspaper to Helmut Schmidt on the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Wall on 9 November 1989.



STRENGTHENING PARTNER EUROPE!



BOTANICAL POLITICS

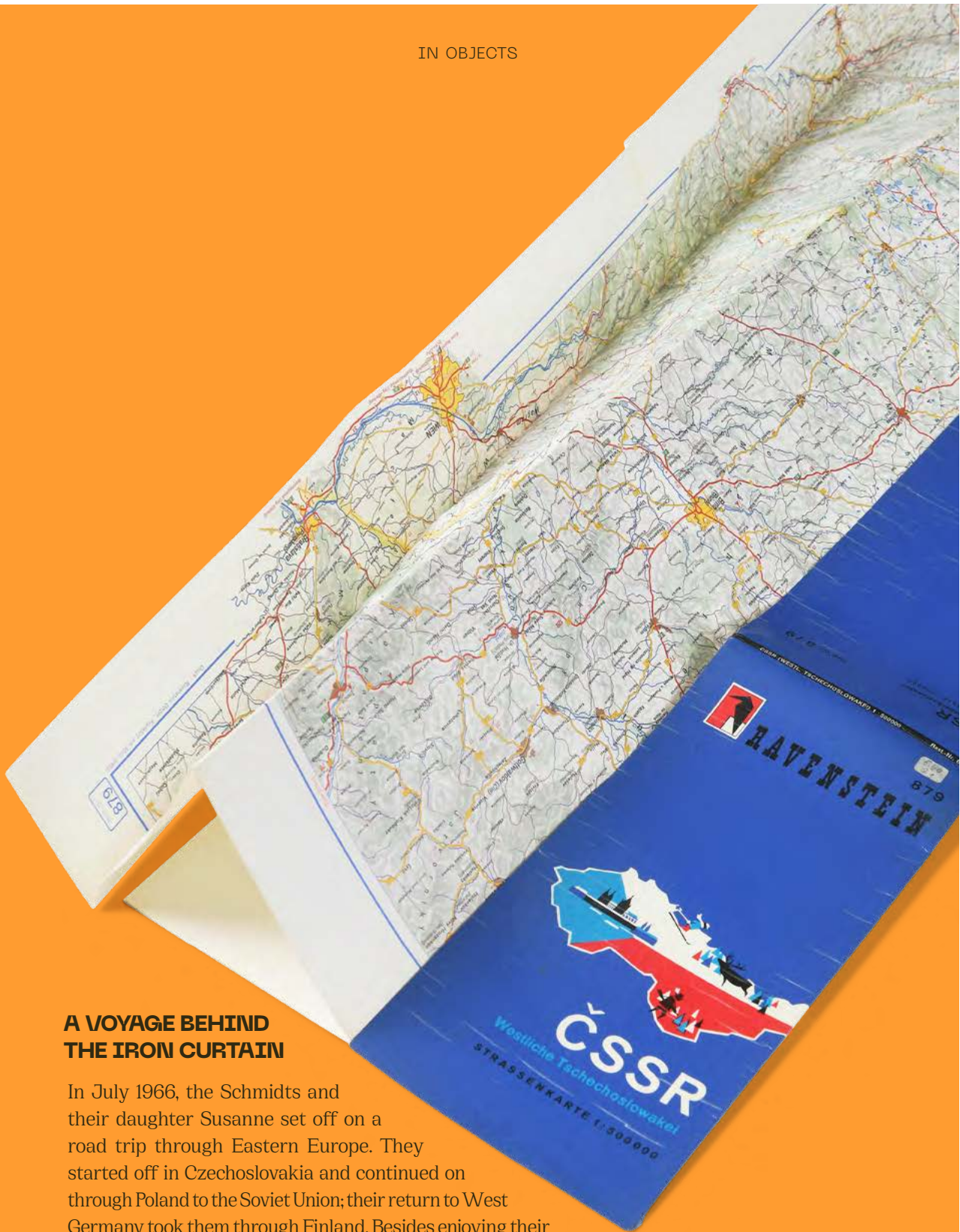
Helmut Schmidt's wife Hannelore ("Loki") shared her husband's propensity to think and live beyond the confines of West Germany. There are still three large camellia shrubs growing today in the family garden in Hamburg-Langenhorn, testifying to Loki's passion for nature and botany worldwide. The evergreen shrub has a long and cosmopolitan history: Portuguese seafarers brought it from Asia to Europe as early as the 16th century. In 1978, on one of her many state visits as the Chancellor's wife, Loki Schmidt brought back seeds of the species *Camellia japonica* and *Camellia sasanqua* from Japan to West Germany. In the years that followed, her travels as a naturalist took her to countries across the globe.



THE CULINARY SIDE OF RAMBOUILLET

In 1975, Helmut Schmidt and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing convened a global economic summit to coordinate national policies to combat inflation, reduce high unemployment and respond to the 1973 oil crisis. It was clear to them that only joint efforts and international cooperation could stabilise the global economy. The first meeting of what would later become the Group of 7 (G7) took place 50 years ago, from 15 to 17 November 1975, in Rambouillet, France. The menu card bearing the signatures of the six heads of state and government in attendance – Gerald Ford (USA), Aldo Moro (Italy), Miki Takeo (Japan), Harold Wilson (United Kingdom), along with Schmidt and Giscard – is preserved in the Helmut Schmidt-Archiv. Europe, in the form of the European Community (and later the EU), joined the table in 1977 and has exerted its influence within the forum ever since.





A VOYAGE BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN

In July 1966, the Schmidts and their daughter Susanne set off on a road trip through Eastern Europe. They started off in Czechoslovakia and continued on through Poland to the Soviet Union; their return to West Germany took them through Finland. Besides enjoying their time as tourists, Helmut Schmidt – at that time a member of the Bundestag – also held many meetings with politicians and journalists, which he carefully documented after his return. But beyond these professional encounters, Schmidt was very much interested in coming into contact with ordinary people – in shops, pubs or on the street. In the following years, Schmidt was able to use the insights and contacts garnered during his travels to establish himself as a foreign policy expert. This paper map from the Ravenstein Verlag is a memento of the Schmidts' – for the time highly unusual – journey to countries behind the “Iron Curtain” and remains in their home in Langenhorn.

A FRANCO-GERMAN GAME

Among the 21 chess sets owned by the Schmidt couple, this one is probably the heaviest. Together, the board and pieces – made of the finest Sèvres porcelain – weigh 18 kilograms. As one of the countless objects in their home in the Hamburg district of Langenhorn, it symbolises the cosmopolitan outlook of its owners as well as the close partnership between Helmut Schmidt and President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. The latter gifted it to his friend Helmut in 1978 for his 60th birthday – the engraving reads: “Valéry Giscard d'Estaing à Helmut Schmidt pour son anniversaire le 23 décembre 1978”.



→ Magnus Koch is head of Exhibitions and History at the BKHS.

→ Franziska Zollweg is head of the Correspondence Project at the BKHS.



← YOU CAN LEARN MORE ABOUT THE SCHMIDTS' RESIDENCE IN LANGENHORN AND THE HELMUT SCHMIDT-ARCHIV – AS WELL AS THE VARIOUS OBJECTS THEY HOUSE – ON THE WEBSITE OF THE HELMUT AND LOKI SCHMIDT-STIFTUNG.



← SOME REPLICAS OF THE OBJECTS ARE FOUND IN THE PERMANENT EXHIBITION „SCHMIDT! LIVING DEMOCRACY“. FOLLOW THIS LINK FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE EXHIBITION OR TO TAKE A VIRTUAL TOUR!

STRENGTHENING PARTNER EUROPE!

Strength through
justice:



Europe's path
to long-term
competitiveness

A strong “partner Europe” must be both economically competitive and socially just. In a world shaped by systemic rivalries, economic strength alone is not enough. Only if the EU combines prosperity with fairness can it enhance its capability to act on the global stage. Only through inclusive partnerships can the EU build credibility and resilience.

TEXT: LEA HOLST AND ELISABETH WINTER

Europe’s promise of shared prosperity rests on the balance between economic competitiveness and social welfare – a balance coming increasingly under pressure. Rising protectionism and systemic rivalries are reshaping the international economic order and exposing the vulnerabilities of the European economy. In response, the EU is revamping its geoeconomic strategy to safeguard its competitiveness and capacity to act.

Yet, a purely economic view of competitiveness will not ensure Europe’s long-term prosperity. It risks deepening inequalities, eroding trust in institutions and feeding populist agendas. Political and economic stability depend just as much on a resilient social fabric at home as on inclusive partnerships abroad that extend fair opportunities to all citizens, regions and partners.

Resilience matters for competitiveness

Competitiveness extends beyond the performance of individual firms. When viewed through the lens of geoeconomics, competitiveness – defined by the World Economic Forum (Schwab, 2019) as “the set of institutions, policies and factors that determine the level of productivity of a country” – is made up of both economic and national security components. Economic integration and global supply chains create dependencies that can become vulnerabilities, and thus the origins and producers of goods and knowledge become as important as the economic gains enabled by trade.

In a geoeconomic sense, a nation’s competitiveness is inherently tied to its level of resilience, defined by the EU as “the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges

but also to undergo transitions in a sustainable, fair and democratic manner" (European Commission, 2020). Europe's resilience – bolstered by strong social and ecological standards – is what enables it to navigate fast-paced changes in the global trade system and protect its economy from external shocks. Thus, resilience and the social justice it implies is a fundamental precondition for competitiveness and lasting strength.

Social justice as a collective responsibility

Social justice is a collective good and, at its core, it is about ensuring that the benefits and burdens of economic life are fairly distributed in ways broadly accepted across society. Liberal theorist John Rawls argued that just structures guarantee basic freedoms and allow inequalities only insofar as they provide a collective benefit (Rawls, 1971). In an extension of Rawls's theory, Becker and Hauser highlight four key dimensions of social justice: equal opportunity, fair rewards for contributions, needs-based equity and intergenerational justice (Becker & Hauser, 2009). According to them, when supplemented with the cross-cutting requirements of gender equality and the inclusion of marginalised groups and less-developed regions, these dimensions constitute a comprehensive vision of justice. This vision, however, can only be achieved through collective action and, in the case of Europe, it depends on EU political institutions to set and enforce rules that both make social justice possible and uphold the EU's competitiveness.

Mutual reinforcement of competitiveness and justice

Economic growth and competitiveness, on the one hand, and social welfare and justice, on the other, are closely intertwined in today's interdependent world. Social justice cannot be achieved without economic strength: a resilient economy is necessary to finance social infrastructure and preserve political autonomy. The EU Single Market, for example, is a core economic asset that underpins both the European welfare state model as well as Europe's independence from external powers and pressures.

At the same time, social justice is an essential component of long-term competitiveness. A workforce protected by social security and fair labour laws, as well as supported through professional development opportunities is more likely to remain productive over time. This is especially the case during periods of structural change, such as industrial relocation or digital transformation, which often generate short-term disruptions. Without an effective social safety net, these shifts can lead to labour market gaps, skill shortages and long-term obstacles to economic growth and productivity.

In other words, economic competitiveness and social justice exist in a reciprocal relationship: each reinforces and sustains the other, and they form the backbone of a resilient European economic model. Evidence from the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement shows that positive social outcomes coincide with economic growth, even amid geoeconomic competition (Trade Impact BV, IEEP & CE, 2025). Thus, it is in Europe's long-term strategic interest to embed social justice into its economic policies to both strengthen economic growth and enhance Europe's credibility as a principled global actor.

Competitiveness alone won't carry Europe

Only if Europe retains its economic weight can it defend its interests in a shifting global order and act as a values-based power distinct from both the US and China. Yet credibility cannot be bought with GDP alone. Economic weight may secure a seat at the table, but it does not guarantee influence. Markets may open doors, but values keep them open. Values, at home, are also the glue of open and inclusive societies. If the EU wants to credibly promote high standards for labour rights, environmental protection or digital ethics abroad, it must adhere to them domestically as well. Double standards undermine Europe's normative power, weaken its negotiating position and risk internal fragmentation.

The "Brussels effect", once synonymous with the EU's regulatory leadership, risks dilution if it is not backed up by unified action and policy coherence. The EU's new Economic

“In other words, economic competitiveness and social justice exist in a reciprocal relationship: each reinforces and sustains the other, and they form the backbone of a resilient European economic model.”



Security Strategy reflects this reality: its three pillars – promoting competitiveness, protecting against unfair or coercive practices and partnering with like-minded states – directly link market strength to political agency. However, it must complement its focus on competitiveness with a renewed commitment to social justice, only then will Europe be able to retain its capacity to act.

Building inclusive partnerships for a stronger Europe

Europe's position in the global order also depends on the alliances it forges. Many middle powers and countries of the Global South face similar dilemmas – adapting to economic transformation, maintaining social cohesion and achieving strategic autonomy – making them natural partners for the EU, especially when it comes to the larger goal of reshaping and preserving a rules-based order.

The EU must chart a pragmatic yet principled course, building values-based partnerships while joining coalitions shaped by economic and security interests. Europe's credibility, both with international partners and between EU member states, requires more than declarations. It must enforce labour standards, assess the social impacts of trade agreements and use economic interdependencies to promote fair outcomes. And to increase its legitimacy at home and abroad, the EU must honour its commitments and include a diversity of voices in the policy-making process.

Ultimately, Europe's prosperity and resilience depend on both economic competitiveness and social justice. To pursue them through equitable partnerships is not only a moral imperative but a strategic necessity. If other countries are to co-develop and take ownership of the evolving global economic order, the EU must build inclusive coalitions—not just of the willing, but of the affected.

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→ Elisabeth Winter is deputy managing director and programme director for Global Markets and Social Justice at the BKHS.

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IN THEIR PROJECT ON "INCLUSIVE GEOECONOMICS", ELISABETH AND LEA RESEARCH HOW THE EU CAN IMPLEMENT GEOECONOMIC PRACTICES THAT PROMOTE A RESILIENT AND COMPETITIVE WHILE ALSO FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE GLOBAL ECONOMY. LEARN MORE HERE →



How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?



"We need to strengthen the EU as the bedrock of our freedom, prosperity and security. It is key to base our joint action on our common values and interests.

Together we are aiming to improve EU competitiveness and the sustainability of the European way of life.

We should work for a strong Common Foreign and Security Policy."

Thomas Ossowski is the Permanent Representative of Germany to the European Union.

In a world increasingly shaped by power and geopolitics, the EU faces a major challenge: assert itself or gradually fade in importance and relevance. To avoid marginalisation, the EU must increase its strategic autonomy, expand its own military strength and forge new partnerships. Only then will Europe be able to help actively shape the international order of the 21st century.

THE THREE PILLARS OF EU SECURITY:

AUTONOMY POWER PARTNERSHIPS

TEXT: DAN KRAUSE

The EU's second turning point

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine marked a historic rupture for Europe. Today, the EU faces a second turning point: a historic shift in the global role of the US. This shift had already become apparent during the first Trump administration, and it is now unfolding in full – it is comprised of threats against allies, sympathy for autocrats, the questioning of NATO's collective solidarity,

coercive trade policy, the authoritarian restructuring of American democracy and a retreat from the liberal international order, including the rejection of the very concept of the "democratic West". Combined with the EU's lack of agency in foreign, security and defence policy, this has resulted in the major powers giving little consideration for or flat-out ignoring Europe in key questions of security, such as the war in Ukraine

or the Middle East conflict (Draghi, 2025). International politics is increasingly being shaped by economic and military hard power and by three revisionist great powers: China, Russia and the US. Each is undermining, to varying degrees, international norms, borders and institutions, thereby destabilising both regional and global orders in the process.

Marginalisation or self-assertion

If Europe is to exert global influence and shape both the European and the international order of the 21st century, if it is to assert itself in international politics, defend its interests and values, and avoid marginalisation, the EU must become a sovereign actor in foreign and security policy. The capacity for an independent and autonomous foreign and security policy is not the only – but a central – prerequisite for sovereignty. As the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East have once again demonstrated, economic and diplomatic power depend on credible military capabilities. European leaders and policymakers, therefore, must finally exercise

independence and autonomy of thought by conceptualising security and defence in line with Europe's own priorities and interests. However, autonomy does not eliminate the need for partnerships and alliances; in fact, these remain essential for Europe to achieve its strategic goals and enhance its effectiveness and capacity to act.

Core interests and values

The EU's priorities in foreign and security policy include safeguarding its fundamental interests: its security, independence and integrity (Art. 21(2) of the Treaty of the European Union). Specifically, the Union is committed to assuming a global role, preserving a rules-based international order and promoting effective multilateralism. EU external action is also bound to democracy, human rights, international law and the Charter of the United Nations (Art. 21(1) TEU). When building long-term partnerships, therefore, the EU must consider normative compatibility and shared values, in addition to mutual benefit and the Union's own interests. Given the complexity of current dynamics in international politics – as well as Europe's own history of double standards, its current democratic shortcomings (e.g., populism, unfair financial and economic structures) and the legacy of colonialism – the EU should seek new partnerships in a self-reflective, pragmatic and interest-driven manner.

This does not mean Europe should abandon or downplay its values. However, no actor – and certainly not the former colonial powers of Europe, which represent less than six percent of the world's population – will succeed in imposing its values through pressure or moralising. Today, there are 195 states worldwide, the overwhelming majority of which are not great powers. Revisionism, imperialism and the violent enforcement of national territorial claims are rejected by most of the world's population.



“Without stability at home, Europe cannot command respect abroad.”

By contrast, a rules-based multilateral order founded on the UN Charter is likely to enjoy broad support if it were to be made more inclusive, fairer and more representative than the current order.

Europe must be more courageous

Today’s challenges and crises are inherently transnational, and regional instability almost always produces global effects. Accordingly, the EU’s two most recent security policy documents – the Strategic Compass (Council of the European Union, 2022)

and the White Paper for European Defence (European Commission, 2025) – correctly assign a central role to Europe’s partnerships. The Strategic Compass highlights partnerships as one of the four key pillars for strengthening Europe’s strategic role by 2030. However, to be more successful in its partnership policy and in addressing global challenges, the EU should adopt a bolder, more sovereign and more pragmatic approach to cooperation – one that is guided by strategic (not narrow) interests. This should include upfront, non-reciprocal investments

in global public goods, multilateral organisations, regional stability, climate and energy partnerships, and development, as well as the removal of its own protectionist trade barriers.

The White Paper on Defence emphasises that international security challenges must be addressed multilaterally and with partners (European Commission, 2025). Enhanced cooperation with reliable partners that already have close ties to the EU through trade, energy, technology and industry is considered essential for innovation, capability development and the resilience of the defence industry. In addition to Europe’s traditional partners and NATO members, the white paper attaches considerable importance to the Indo-Pacific region. Ukraine is given its own separate chapter, underscoring both its centrality for European security and



the progress already made in EU–Ukrainian cooperation in security and defence, including its integration into EU armaments programmes such as SAFE (Security Action for Europe). The Commission rightly advocates for a flexible geometry of cooperation, which includes the involvement of partners in defence projects, armaments initiatives and information–sharing practices.

What is lacking in both documents are measures to transform EU decision–making structures, either within or initially outside the EU treaties, in an open and inclusive manner. In the area of foreign and security policy, such measures should include the establishment of a European Security Council and a Defence Union – both of which would serve to ensure a coherent foreign policy, a common defence policy, collective procurement and civil–military command structures capable of collective defence and international crisis management. These new structures would act in consultation and coordination with NATO but should also be able to act independently when necessary.

Preconditions for effective partnerships

For Europe’s partnership strategy to succeed, it must first secure the preconditions of its own agency. It must transform strategic autonomy from rhetoric into reality and strengthen its capacity to act independently and credibly across various domains (e.g., military, technological and financial). Within Europe, this requires reformed political structures to enable a genuine common foreign and defence policy as well as investments in a resilient defence industry, critical technologies and shared capabilities. Equally crucial is effective action and engagement in Europe’s neighbourhood—stabilising the Western Balkans, securing its flanks and ensuring Ukraine’s survival and reconstruction. Without stability at home, Europe cannot command respect abroad.

Internationally, active diplomacy in multi–lateral forums, sustainable trade and energy policies, and clear commitments to international law and development will reinforce Europe’s credibility. On this basis, partnerships can help Europe to achieve three

important things: extend its influence in the Indo–Pacific, rebalance transatlantic ties away from dependence on the US and deepen cooperation with other world regions, the Global South in particular. At this second critical turning point, the EU is faced with a tough decision – self–marginalisation as a dependent periphery, or self–assertion as a sovereign actor able to defend its interests and values together with partners.

→ Dan Krause is programme director for Europe and International Politics at the BKHS.

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FOR RELATED READING, CHECK OUT DAN’S EARLIER ANALYSIS OF POSSIBLE FUTURE TRAJECTORIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER AND EUROPE’S ROLE IN SHAPING THEM →



Four Arctic

myths debunked:

UNDERSTANDING THE ARCTIC'S IMPORTANCE FOR EUROPE

TEXT: FIONA KRAMER

Over the last several decades, few regions on earth have inspired as much mystery, speculation and sensationalism as the Arctic. From Al Gore's prediction that the Arctic had a 75 per cent chance of being ice-free by 2013 to Putin's claim that the Northern Sea Route could rival the Suez Canal in global trade, sweeping declarations about the region have long abounded. For Europe, as well as for numerous other powers and actors, the Arctic is becoming increasingly relevant – environmentally, economically and strategically. It plays a crucial role in regulating the planet's climate by reflecting sunlight and shaping ocean and atmospheric circulation. The region also contains vast reserves of oil, gas and minerals, while being home to unique wildlife populations. Its changing ice levels, fragile ecosystems and valuable resources have made it a key focus for researchers, policymakers and explorers alike.

Yet, despite its growing significance, the Arctic remains one of the most mythologised regions in the world. Its geographic remoteness and political marginality have long encouraged romanticised or distorted images which have circulated through films, documentaries and media narratives. States and corporations have also weaponised certain myths such as the “abundant resource myth” or the “unclaimed frontier myth” to justify environmentally destructive extraction projects and nationalist territorial claims. These narratives have deep colonial roots, once used to dismiss or erase Indigenous sovereignty. Even today, simplified stories often overshadow Arctic realities. Challenging these myths requires centring Indigenous knowledge, scientific evidence and geopolitical complexity. Only then will Europe be able to become a credible Arctic actor – one capable of respecting Indigenous sovereignty, addressing the Arctic’s environmental, economic and security challenges, and taking responsible, coordinated action through European institutions and partnerships.



1. The myth of an uninhabited, unclaimed frontier



The idea that the Arctic is uninhabited and lacks clear jurisdiction is misleading. Indigenous peoples, including the Inuit, Sámi and Chukchi, have lived in the region for thousands of years, long before the land was claimed by and divided into nation-states. The myth of an "uninhabited, unclaimed Arctic" has often been used to justify the intrusion of colonial powers, driven by their demand for fur, whale oil and other resources. These encounters had long-lasting and devastating consequences: epidemics, cultural assimilation, forced relocations and the disruption of traditional livelihoods. Despite these impacts, Indigenous communities today continue to demonstrate resilience through land claims, self-government and cultural revitalisation.

The Arctic is currently home to four million people across eight states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and

the United States. Arctic governance combines national laws, international agreements and Indigenous self-rule. Most coastal waters fall within countries' exclusive economic zones under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), with Indigenous and regional authorities exercising substantial local control in areas such as Canada, Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and the US. Multilateral institutions like the Arctic Council facilitate cooperation, environmental protection and sustainable development. Symbolic gestures like Russia's 2007 flag-planting at the North Pole, however, continue to fuel sensational claims of conquest and perpetuate the myth of the Arctic as an uninhabited, unclaimed frontier. Yet such propagandistic acts obscure reality: the Arctic is not a vacant prize, but a region governed through established legal and political frameworks.

2. The myth of the faraway “High North”



The myth of the faraway “High North” rests on the notion that the Arctic is a distant region on the fringes of the world, with little relevance for Germany and Europe. This image, however, is deceptive. Geographically, Europe maintains close connections to the Arctic: three EU member states (Finland, Sweden and Denmark) and two members of the European Economic Area (Iceland and Norway) are Arctic states, and the region plays a central role in Europe’s scientific, economic and security priorities.

In terms of climate, the Arctic is warming at more than twice the global average. Melting sea ice raises sea levels and disrupts weather and ocean patterns, causing extreme weather events in Europe such as droughts and heavy rain. Economically, the Arctic is a coveted resource hub, not a remote barren periphery. It holds vast deposits of oil, gas and rare earths, supports vital fisheries and

offers shorter shipping routes between Asia and Europe. Geopolitically, the Arctic is a growing security concern. Russia has been rebuilding its military capacities and has started launching hybrid attacks against critical undersea infrastructure. At the same time, the neo-imperial ambitions of the United States – manifested, not least, in threats to take Greenland by force – are undermining confidence in international law and straining NATO unity. Its geographical proximity, economic opportunities and growing militarisation all demonstrate why Europe must treat the Arctic as a strategic priority. While the EU has traditionally prioritised soft issues like peaceful cooperation and climate action, today’s geopolitical shifts demand greater focus on Russian activity, critical infrastructure and defence cooperation beyond NATO.

3.

The myth of Arctic exceptionalism



The myth of Arctic exceptionalism portrays the region as a unique zone of peace insulated from global tensions. In this narrative, the Arctic is imagined as an apolitical space defined by functional cooperation, regional governance and peaceful coexistence. This vision dates back to Mikhail Gorbachev's 1987 Murmansk speech, in which he advocated for circumpolar cooperation, demilitarisation and the establishment of a joint research council. Gorbachev's vision inspired the founding of the Arctic Council in 1996, which for much of the post-Cold War era promoted scientific collaboration, Indigenous leadership and environmental research.

However, the notion of exceptionalism has always had its limits. The mandate of the Arctic Council deliberately excludes military and security issues, revealing the boundaries of diplomatic collaboration. Since the 2000s, Moscow has leveraged the myth of Arctic exceptionalism to mask its

military buildup while maintaining cooperation with other Arctic states. The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, however, marked a turning point, prompting restrictions on Russia's participation in circumpolar cooperative frameworks. With rising militarisation and intensifying great power rivalries, the region can no longer be seen as geopolitically isolated and developments in the Arctic are increasingly likely to have direct security-related and political consequences for Europe. Although limited scientific collaboration continues – for instance at the AWIPEV Research Base in Ny-Ålesund pictured above – the era of Arctic exceptionalism is effectively over. Nevertheless, its underlying aspiration for cooperation remains relevant. For Brussels, this requires a balancing act between bolstering security and resilience in the short term while keeping the door open for renewed collaboration and climate research.

4. The myth of a scramble for the Arctic



Headlines often dub the Arctic a “1-trillion-dollar ocean” rich in oil, gas and minerals, suggesting a looming global scramble for its resources. Many claim that melting sea ice will make extraction easier and highly profitable. Yet this belief vastly oversimplifies reality. The Arctic remains one of the most challenging environments on Earth, with its extreme weather, shifting ice and remote locations necessitating specialised technologies, ice-capable vessels and costly infrastructure. Even during the summer months, temporary ice retreat still requires icebreakers and safety measures, while accidents such as oil spills pose severe risks due to difficult clean-up in remote icy waters. Historically, it has been cheaper to exploit resources elsewhere and the lack of a surge in Arctic investment suggests that this remains true. The belief that climate change is making the Arctic more accessible is also misleading. While multi-year sea ice will soon be gone, melting ice

exposes coastlines to stronger storms, thawing permafrost damages infrastructure and wildfires add yet additional hazards.

Moreover, this myth once again frames the Arctic as an “empty frontier”, erasing Indigenous institutions and stewardship traditions while justifying state-led interventions. It reproduces colonial logics by presenting Indigenous lands as spaces to be seized and exploited, ignoring both historical dispossession and the current climate-related threats already endangering Arctic livelihoods. Even if a scramble for the Arctic is unlikely, the persistence of this myth shows that Europe must step up as an Arctic actor to safeguard Indigenous rights and protect the environment while also accounting for changing security realities.

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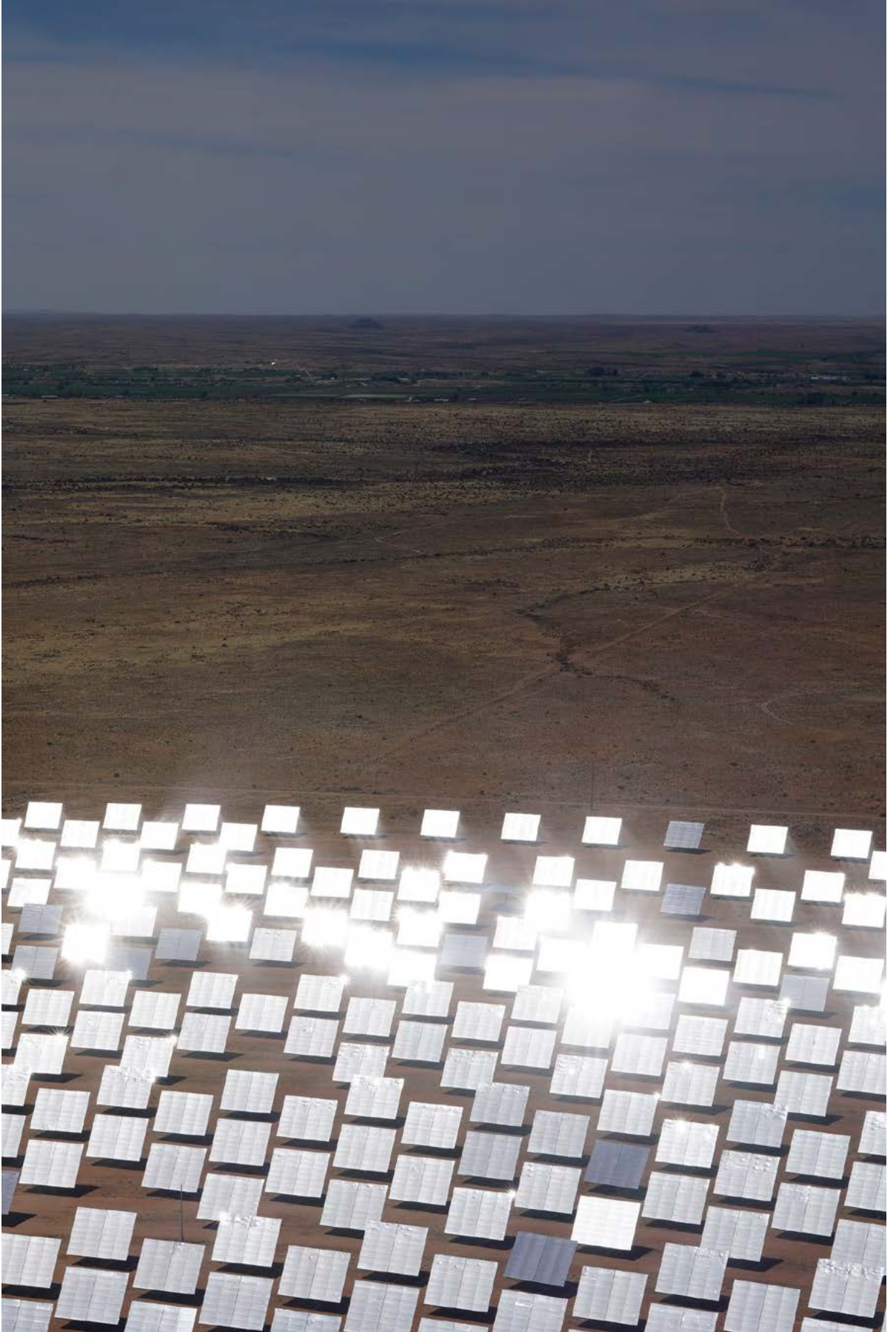
Europe faces a critical moment as rising geopolitical tensions and shifting global power dynamics challenge its credibility and influence. Building truly equitable, multi-centric partnerships with the Global South is essential for safeguarding multilateralism, promoting sustainable development and strengthening Europe's position in the global order. Beyond concrete forms of cooperation, Europe must focus on rebuilding trust with the Global South if it is to take its geopolitical awakening seriously.

Targeting collective action: Europe and the Global South

TEXT: HARSH V PANT AND SWATI PRABHU

Europe is grappling with multiple dilemmas in its pursuit of greater political and economic security. The rapidly shifting geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape is pressuring Europe to be at the same time cautious and ambitious in defining its priorities. With isolationism on the rise globally, Europe is seeking to redefine and consolidate its position in the global order. The Global South, too, faces

its own set of challenges, and it is raising significant concerns around climate action, development financing, trade and technology transformations, and reform of the multilateral order. As other countries continue to propose dependent partnership models from the outside, countries in the Global South are seeking a fair share of influence in shaping the future of global governance.



Why Europe and the Global South need each other

Due to the legacy of colonialism, Europe's engagement with the Global South has been more transactional than transformational in nature. Despite the EU being one of the largest providers of development aid, Europe as a whole has not paid adequate attention to the concerns of the Global South. While it has been complacently enjoying its comfort zone of economic and political clout, European unity has fallen through the cracks. Europe's recent geopolitical awakening has instead revealed economic fragmentation, weak political leadership, lacking European integration, policy incoherence and the dominance of parochial interests.

As the transatlantic relationship and NATO face critical questions about their future amid the ongoing US–China tariff and trade wars, Europe is being visibly isolated. The turmoil heaving inside and outside Europe necessitates tactical and innovative forms of partnership with the Global South. Although the Global South has consistently featured in the EU's foreign, development and trade policies for several decades, Europe's participation and engagement have remained quite underwhelming and laden with neo-colonialist tendencies. Critics have repeatedly highlighted how Eurocentrism has undermined its partnerships by marginalising developing countries and relegating them to the status of mere markets for investments and raw materials, rather than partners on an equal footing. As a normative actor, Europe touts the values of multilateralism, the rule of law and democracy, yet there is a mismatch between its stated policies and their implementation abroad. Europe's problems stem from its shifting priorities, differing ambitions among its member states and some inevitable hypocrisies in its attempt to be an avid champion of multilateralism.

Simply put, Europe needs the Global South's agency in multilateral decision-making to bring about a long-lasting and sustainable form of multilateralism. The Global South needs Europe, too – to lend credence to its concerns about rising geoeconomic

and geopolitical uncertainties, the external imposition of universal standards and sustainability regulations for core sectors, and the gradual establishment of economic diplomacy as the new lynchpin of global development strategy.

Trust, tactics and trade-offs

Europe's global connectivity agenda offers a wealth of opportunities to build attractive partnerships grounded in mutual interests and concrete engagement. The EU's Global Gateway infrastructure initiative represents a sense of realism dawning on Europe and an awareness that it must respond to emerging geopolitical realities. However, despite the initiative's focus on building sustainable relationships and linkages across domains, it has still come under fire from the Global South. Critics have described it as a mere rebranding strategy of the EU that repackages existing instruments without adding new financial flows and is slow to spur collective action and deliver tangible results on the ground.

Faced with increasing economic threats and geopolitical disruptions to global value chains, Europe must strengthen its industrial competitiveness, pursue smart diversification in underdeveloped sectors and build just partnerships for inclusive growth with the Global South. Developing countries – especially through the BRICS, G20 and IBSA Dialogue formats – are actively forging their own political and economic agendas in the post-pandemic world. India's 2023 G20 presidency highlighted "development, inclusive growth and sustainable prosperity" as core objectives of the multilateral order.

Europe can team up with countries like India in critical areas such as health, skills training and climate to deliver joint and innovative developmental solutions that can attract the attention of the Global South, particularly vulnerable countries in Africa and the Indo-Pacific. They can, for example, work to deliver low-cost solutions in unconventional sectors with limited business incentives, focusing on climate adaptation and resilience, the energy transition, knowledge collaboration and technical training.

“As a normative actor, Europe touts the values of multilateralism, the rule of law and democracy, yet there is a mismatch between its stated policies and their implementation abroad.”

Simultaneously, bolstering connectivity from physical to digital would help to enhance preparedness and resilience within societies, leverage investments in cyber technology and enable people-centred, outcome-based impact. Progress in these areas – in addition to ensuring openness and fairness in partnerships – are some of the key ingredients for strengthening the relationship between Europe and the Global South.

The reform of international institutions and global governance is also high on the Global South’s agenda, as it can enable their strategic assertiveness and increase their bargaining power in negotiations with great powers. China’s increasing role in global geopolitics is unsettling both Europe and some members of the Global South, and they share the goal of reducing dependence on Beijing. This provides a window of opportunity for Europe to tailor its partnerships to countries like Brazil, India, Indonesia and South Africa to preserve and protect the importance of multilateralism. It is pivotal that attempts are made to address the issues of debt burdens and unsustainable models of partnerships. One of the primary ways Europe has identified to secure its interests is through supply chain diversification, and this insight should drive its search for alternative models of partnerships with the Global South. In this domain, trust building, supply chain management and economic diversification all become critical priorities.

Finally, trade agreements remain a key means to opening new avenues for cooperation and promoting economic growth and resilience. India has recently been on a free trade agreement (FTA) signing spree, the last of which it signed with the United Kingdom in May 2025. Brussels should take serious note of the lacklustre progress in its FTA negotiations with India and push for a conclusive and mutually beneficial agreement. In addition, the EU should overcome its protectionist regulatory mechanisms and consider accelerating its economic engagement with a wide variety of Global South actors. And it is crucial that Europe considers increasing outbound investments in digital technologies, human capital, the energy transition and capital market development.

Moving forward, Europe must not only establish cooperative frameworks on trade and technology, but also focus on regaining trust. It is time for Europe to take its geopolitical awakening seriously. This demands the establishment of proactive, robust, enduring and truly multi-centric partnerships with the Global South grounded in mutual respect and shared ambition.

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ECONOMIC SECURITY
IN TECH:
ENSURING LONG-TERM
COMPETITIVENESS
THROUGH REGULATION AND
PARTNERSHIPS

To promote Europe's economic security in tech, the EU must resist deregulatory pressures and unfair partnerships in the name of competitiveness. Accelerating the implementation of smart, enforceable tech rules and establishing diversified, mutually beneficial partnerships should make up Europe's true competitive advantage on the global tech market.

TEXT: DOROTHÉE FALKENBERG

The EU depends on foreign countries – China and the US in particular – for over 80 per cent of its digital infrastructure and technologies (European Commission, 2023a). This level of reliance leaves the Union vulnerable to cyberattacks, infrastructure sabotage, foreign interference and disinformation in the current context of increasing geopolitical tensions. In a global tech sector dominated by highly innovative but loosely regulated big US tech companies and the rapid growth of state-subsidised Chinese technology, the EU must balance its tech policy between promoting innovation and safeguarding security.

In its Economic Security Strategy (European Commission, 2023b), the EU identified cybersecurity vulnerabilities, technological leakage and strategic dependencies as core threats to the European economy. To address these, the EU seeks to *promote* competitiveness, *protect* economic security and *partner* with countries worldwide. While these goals sound like a promising means to ensure the EU's tech sovereignty, there is currently an imbalance between them in favour of economic competitiveness. This paper argues that protecting technological assets through robust, forward-looking regulation and cultivating diversified, mutually beneficial partnerships should be treated as equally important goals that do not contradict Europe's competitiveness.

Resisting the regulatory race to the bottom

In recent years, the EU has introduced several legislative acts to keep pace with technological developments and to address its strategic dependencies on third countries. Recent legislation has addressed, for example, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, data protection and digital services and markets. These regulatory initiatives are central to the EU's economic security agenda and aim to cultivate fair and open digital markets, increase algorithmic transparency, enhance Europe's global competitiveness and give citizens greater control over the sharing of their personal data. They have also increased the EU's global influence through the so-called "Brussels effect", whereby third countries adopt EU standards to maintain market access (Bradford, 2020).

However, critics argue that excessive EU regulation is hindering innovation and weakening competitiveness. Mounting deregulatory pressures from industry backlash and geopolitical tensions led to the European Commission's "omnibus" packages, which aim to simplify regulations and cut red tape. While there is certainly scope for targeted simplification measures (e.g. easing reporting burdens or tidying overlaps between legislation), the omnibus packages must not become an excuse to dismantle hard-won protections. Previous simplification initiatives in the area of sustainability, for example, led to the erosion of legal frameworks through de facto deregulation (cf. Vandeloise & Van Wynsberghe, 2025). If the upcoming tech-focused omnibus package (expected by late 2025) follows this trend, it may compromise the protection of EU citizens in the name of competitiveness.

To prevent this, it is particularly important to avoid regulatory blind spots in the areas of cyber security and artificial intelligence. With cyber threats rising sharply, cutting incident reporting to the point that it limits authorities' visibility is a risk Europe cannot afford. Similarly, the EU should avoid watering down the AI Act's constitutional safeguards that protect public spaces and the everyday dignity of Europeans. In particular, it is essential that it upholds the bans on certain sensitive uses of AI, such as mass facial recognition in public spaces and biometric categorisation by sensitive traits (e.g., ethnicity or political beliefs), as well as preserves the obligation to conduct Fundamental Rights Impact Assessments (Article 27).

Even beyond this principle – that security and the protection of citizens should not be compromised in the name of competitiveness – there is also no empirical evidence that regulation is the main obstacle to innovation. In fact, surveys indicate that European firms view talent shortages, energy prices and economic uncertainty as greater challenges (European Investment Bank, 2024). Moreover, a coalition of investors representing 6.6 trillion euros in assets has even publicly criticised the omnibus initiative for creating regulatory uncertainty (IIGCC, PRI & Eurosif, 2025). If applied strategically, digital rules give the EU leverage to steer companies – whether domestic or foreign – towards democratic norms and fundamental rights while still maintaining Europe's competitiveness.

Diversified, mutually beneficial partnerships

China and the US dominate the global tech sector. At the same time, the EU is heavily dependent on and experiencing increasing geopolitical tensions with both superpowers. Therefore, diversified partnerships as described in the European Economic Security Strategy are crucial for Europe's tech sovereignty. Examples are provided by its digital partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Canada and Singapore or cooperation platforms like the "Trade and Technology Councils" that the EU launched with India and the US. The EU has also pursued digital infrastructure investment initiatives in the Global South via the Global Gateway, framed as a values-based alternative to Chinese and US initiatives. While these large-scale infrastructure programmes can have practical value – such as increasing trust-based cooperation with like-minded partners, enhancing regulatory coordination and improving market presence – their actual impact on supply chain diversification is limited and, in some cases, even risks reinforcing dependencies both for the EU and countries of the Global South.

“With cyber threats rising sharply, cutting incident reporting to the point that it limits authorities’ visibility is a risk Europe cannot afford.”



To safeguard its economic security in the tech sector, the EU must stop treating its dependence on China and the US as unavoidable pillars of competitiveness by simply aligning with US tech standards and tolerating reliance on Chinese manufacturing to preserve short-term economic stability. Instead, the EU should build genuine, mutually beneficial partnerships based on local ownership and shared prosperity, without reinforcing dependency structures with the Global South. Premature concessions in the EU's carefully crafted tech regulatory framework, along with the perpetuation of unequal partnerships, should not be the price Europe pays for short-term economic gains. In the long term, the two forgotten P's – *protect* and *partner* – can become Europe's real competitive advantage.

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How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?



"The recipe for a faster and more effective EU has several key ingredients. First is the political will, unity and solidarity among Member States. Second, the strengthening of a shared European identity, based on common values, to be defended and projected globally. Third, to ensure a level playing field, we must continue our work towards upward socioeconomic convergence. Lastly, it is crucial that the EU speaks with one voice globally."

Lelde Līce-Līcīte is the Permanent Representative of Latvia to the European Union.

ALL HANDS ON DECK! NOW IS A GOOD TIME TO DISCUSS EUROPEAN IDENTITY

TEXT: ALISA RIETH AND MERLE STRUNK

In today's new environment of great power politics and shifting alliances, Europe is seeking new partnerships - not only for economic cooperation, but also for democratic alliances in the face of rising authoritarianism. Yet potential partners inevitably ask: which Europe are they dealing with? For Europe to answer this question, it must first look within itself.



“An EU rooted in the lived experiences and aspirations of its citizens has yet to emerge. Unmet promises only widen this gap, and they leave the European project vulnerable and difficult to identify with.”



From Amsterdam to Zagreb – can you name all the capitals of Europe? If you went to school in Europe, you probably had to memorise them at some point. Did it ignite your “European spark”? Probably not. What about travelling freely within the Schengen Area? It’s one of the great achievements of European integration. Yet many enjoy its benefits without fully recognising – let alone appreciating – its historical significance. For most people, it simply feels like the norm, just as many Europeans take their “Europeanness” for granted. They rarely reflect on it, perhaps because it is tied to the uncomfortable question of what it actually means to be European. But this question is becoming increasingly urgent as Europe navigates a world of competing superpowers.

The end of the post-war master narratives?

There have been numerous academic debates about the meaning and relevance of identity in international relations, especially in the context of the rise of the EU as an intergovernmental body with unique supranational features and institutions. Aspects of identity include a defined territory and a collective body of people with shared history, memory and culture; and who also share a common set of norms, values and symbols.

The EU clearly fulfils these identity criteria. The 27 member states define its territory and people and a shared history of wars, peace and prosperity shapes its collective memory. Fundamental values such as freedom and human rights provide a common normative framework, while the EU has also worked to establish a set of symbols and cultural signifiers, such as a common flag, motto and anthem. And the Treaty of Maastricht introduced formal European citizenship for the first time, complementing national citizenships. Seen in this light, European identity appears almost as a natural overlay to national identities.

Europe’s identity has also been shaped by various political and societal narratives that have provided it further meaning and cohesion. The European idea experienced a remarkable upswing after the devastation of the Second World War: at the institutional

level, the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community marked an initial milestone in European integration and economic cooperation. At the same time, transnational youth groups emerged in the 1950s who quite literally tore down border crossing signs between countries across Europe and instead put up signs that read “*You are staying in Europe*”. Europe became both a pragmatic project of economic cooperation and a forward-looking vision of shared values and a common future.

The core narratives from this period – Europe as a peace project and a guarantor of prosperity – still exist to describe the EU, but they are losing resonance. Counter-narratives influenced by nationalism and euroscepticism are gaining traction, fuelling familiar myths like “*The EU is a bureaucratic monster*”. In addition, there is growing criticism among experts that the idea of Europe continues to be largely shaped by political and social elites. Even recent pro-European grassroots movements have mainly appealed to the well-educated upper classes – those who benefit most from a cosmopolitan Europe. An EU rooted in the lived experiences and aspirations of its citizens has yet to emerge. Unmet promises only widen this gap, and they leave the European project vulnerable and difficult to identify with.

Setting a new course in the storm

Europe appears to be at a crossroads once again. Several years of the polycrisis have begun to leave their mark and public debate often depicts a Union beset by internal divisions, a lack of political will and slow responses to global crises. Yet, the EU has weathered these storms so far and proven resilient despite internal and external pressures. As in the past, today’s crises could spark renewed momentum for further integration and reforms strengthening Europe’s ability to act.

Today’s challenges, from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and growing geopolitical rivalry to widening inequalities and the decline of trust in democracy, offer clear opportunities to renew some of the earlier master narratives on peace and prosperity in Europe.

But they also demand new approaches as global dynamics have an increasing impact on the everyday lives of Europeans. Years of uncertainty have left people yearning not only for guidance and belonging, but also for practical problem-solving. But this is where mere citizenship on paper isn't enough to make people believe and engage in collective efforts to weather crises and develop common solutions. People need to be involved in the process, not merely directed from above.

The idea of a Europe *for* the people and *by* the people can point the way towards a framework for a renewed identity narrative by which Europe should want to be measured – both at home and abroad. But the question remains: what could be the core, the driving force behind such a narrative?

From passengers to crew members

In 1950, the Dutch artist Reyn Dirksen won a competition for an artwork illustrating the achievements of the Marshall Plan. His design depicts Europe as a ship on a windy sea. The hull is formed by the word "Europe" itself, while the sails – bearing the flags of individual European states – drive the vessel forward with energy and purpose. To be sure, the Europe of 1950 was a different place. Yet the image still symbolises the same thing: a shared departure. A refusal to accept the status quo. An ongoing, collective journey. That is why the image still resonates today. Perhaps Europe is sailing towards a common horizon. But that is only part of its identity. It also lies in navigating shifting winds together. One thing is clear: steering a great ship takes more than a captain – it requires the whole crew. And in rough seas like today, every passenger becomes essential.

With this image in mind, perhaps we can begin to glimpse the contours of a future European narrative that has the power to propel this ship forward and keep all hands on deck: a Europe of social justice, enabling its people to live good, self-determined and peaceful lives in a democracy that protects itself while still engaging with the world. This vision builds on old narratives but updates them for current challenges, this time with the aim of ensuring that all Europeans benefit from the Union's achievements. Europe has brought peace and prosperity – but not equally and not for everyone. That must change.

If the EU manages to credibly convey this promise to its citizens, it has the potential to awaken greater passion and engagement for Europe. That would be a double gain. As Europe navigates the troubled waters of world politics in search of new alliances, other countries will notice when it changes course. They will see that a strong, solidarity-based Europe with a clear vision supported by all its citizens can forge partnerships on equal terms. And with a ship like that, perhaps new partners would gladly join to form a fleet.

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TOGETHER WITH THE INSTITUTE FOR PEACE RESEARCH AND SECURITY POLICY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, ALISA AND MERLE DEVELOPED "UNLOCK EUROPE – THE ESCAPE GAME ON PEACE AND SECURITY IN EUROPE". LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT HERE →



How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?

"Member States can only better represent the EU's common interest in creating and preserving an area of peace and prosperity while respecting the fundamental values of democracy, freedom, rule of law and human rights, and only if they can create the conditions for their respective civil societies to fully identify with the European project and thus consider the strengthening of the EU's ability to act as a vital national interest."



Pedro Costa Pereira is the Permanent Representative of Portugal to the European Union.

The EU and its member states should step up their role in advancing the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda in Europe and across the world. The YPS agenda is not merely a “nice-to-have”, but a vital means to enhancing Europe’s capacity to address international and domestic threats to peace and security.

Untapped potential: youth as partners for peace and security

TEXT: KIRSTEN HARTMANN

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agenda. In 2015, following the advocacy of young peacebuilders and their partners, the UN Security Council officially recognised the important and positive role of young people in peace and security efforts for the first time. It encouraged member state action along five pillars: participation, protection, prevention, partnership, and disengagement and reintegration. However, despite important progress, widespread implementation of the agenda remains lacking. For the EU and its member states, the YPS agenda offers untapped potential to strengthen Europe’s position as a global partner and its ability to tackle global and domestic peace and security challenges. Meaningfully involving young people in addressing those challenges is not a favour granted to them, but critical to building sustainable peace for the whole society.

Championing YPS in times of crisis

“YPS champions” are needed to advance the implementation of the agenda, and Europe is well-placed to take up this role. Driving significant progress on YPS would strengthen Europe’s position in the field of peace and security and its global credibility as an effective multilateral actor. Youth across Europe are pushing to implement the agenda, including in organisations, networks and YPS coalitions. In 2021, Finland became the first country to adopt a YPS National Action Plan (NAP) – a document that outlines a country’s strategy for implementing the YPS agenda – and is developing a second one, while Italy is about to launch its first NAP. Also, in 2021, the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development, Folke Bernadotte Academy, seconded the first YPS adviser to a UN peace operation. These actions represent important experiences to share with other (European) states.

The EU officially committed itself to implementing the YPS agenda in 2017. EU bodies and institutions have adopted conclusions and policy frameworks that incorporate the agenda (Rohrhirsch, 2022), such as the Youth Action Plan in EU external action (2022-2027) and the updated Civilian CSDP Compact (2023). The YPS agenda should be strengthened as a cross-cutting issue in the EU’s domestic and foreign policy, for instance in the next EU Youth Strategy. EU member states should also coordinate their YPS actions, for example through a “Group of Friends”, engage with the EU YPS coalition and push the agenda forward in EU institutions.

Driving implementation of the YPS agenda forward is crucial given the current challenges facing multilateralism. The UN is experiencing its worst financial crisis in decades, and its legitimacy and efficiency are being increasingly put into question. However, today’s transnational crises need global solutions – these must be co-developed with young people. Across the world, youth continue to experience not only physical violence, but also other structural forms of violence stemming from political, economic and social exclusion.



This “violence of exclusion” can feed a cycle of mistrust between governments, young people and the multilateral system (Simpson, 2018). But we cannot afford to waste the potential of the largest-ever global youth population in addressing today’s multiple crises. Young people are changemakers and key stakeholders in peace, security and development. Meaningfully including them as co-leaders and partners – not just as beneficiaries – further offers the chance to restore their political trust and develop more just and effective multilateral solutions.

Promoting peace and partnerships: YPS in external action

Europe should leverage the YPS agenda to strengthen its own ability to prevent and resolve conflicts and promote sustainable peace worldwide. This serves the EU’s strategic interest and member states’ foreign policy objectives and security interests. Peace processes involving additional actors, such as civil society, alongside the main conflict parties contribute to more sustainable peace outcomes (Nilsson, 2012), and in many conflict-affected countries, youth constitute the majority of the population. It is thus key to support youth-inclusive and youth-led peace efforts. In a context of growing global militarisation (Liang et al., 2025), the EU and its member states must increase rather than decrease non-military peace and security assistance.

YPS can also be an effective means of strengthening Europe’s international partnerships, particularly with countries of the so-called “Global South”. Credible and mutually beneficial partnerships with countries from around the world are ever more important in the changing world order. For countries with large youth populations, YPS is especially important in their bilateral and regional partnerships. When it comes to regional and national YPS implementation, Europe can learn a lot from potential partners – in particular from African countries, which are taking the lead on the YPS agenda. The African Union, for example, has a continental framework for YPS with a 10-year implementation plan (2020–2029), and the majority of existing NAPs on YPS have been adopted by African countries.

Leading by example: YPS across Europe

The EU and its member states need to step up YPS implementation across Europe. Focusing solely on YPS implementation abroad would undermine Europe’s credibility as a partner, as it rests on the mistaken assumption that the YPS agenda is only applicable to contexts directly affected by armed conflict and it neglects Europe’s own security challenges. Since Russia’s war against Ukraine, war has returned to the European continent, making peace and security relevant topics for European youth. Additionally, European youth continue to face many forms of physical and structural violence, including marginalisation and exclusion from political processes. Europe is witnessing growing mistrust in political systems, societal polarisation (both on- and offline) and right-wing extremism, all of which pose serious threats to democracy, peace and security. Core YPS concepts such as meaningful participation, partnerships and physical and psychological protection offer promising approaches that can also be applied to these domestic challenges. For the YPS agenda to realise its full potential in the next ten years to come, the EU and its member states must consider it as critical to strengthening Europe’s global role and addressing global and domestic challenges in a way that benefits the whole society.

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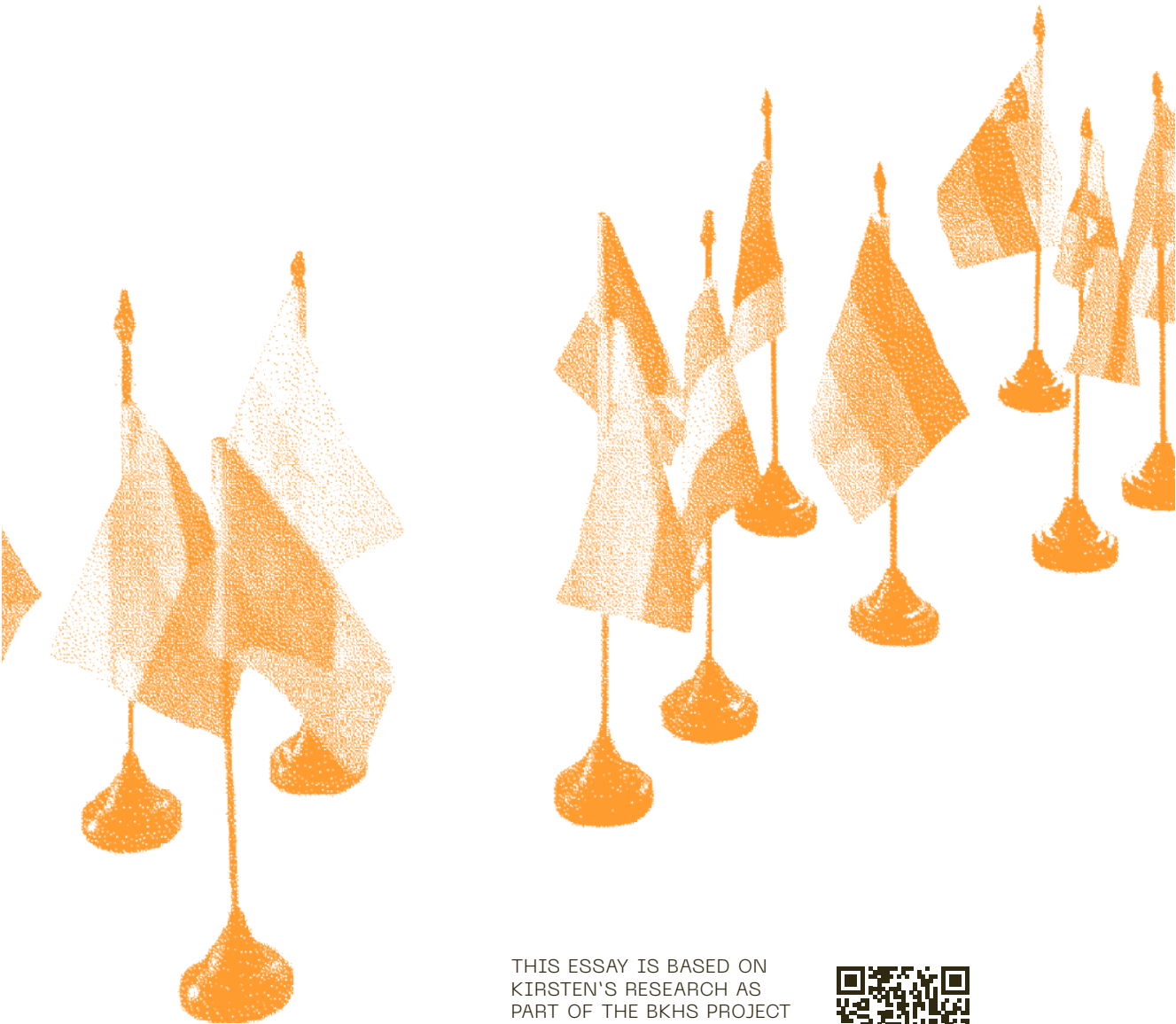
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THIS ESSAY IS BASED ON
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„GEN P(EACEBUILDER) –
IMPLEMENTING THE YOUTH,
PEACE AND SECURITY
AGENDA“. LEARN MORE HERE →



In 2050, Europe stands as the world's most resilient democracy – a sovereign information society where empathy, truth and civic participation have replaced clickbait and manipulation. This transformation began with bold reforms like the Digital Sovereignty Pact, public-interest platforms and universal media literacy. The result is a public sphere as essential as clean water, one that is protected, transparent and deeply democratic.

EUROPE 2050: THE RISE OF A RESILIENT, SOVEREIGN INFORMATIONAL POWER

TEXT: ALEXANDER SÄNGERLAUB

It is the year 2050, and Europe has become the world's most resilient democracy — a shining example of how a diverse continent can come together to build a truly sovereign informational society.

Gone are the days when European public spheres were dominated by clickbait storms, Silicon Valley algorithms and disinformation campaigns designed to divide. Today, citizens gather every morning in digital town squares — the "Agora Europa" — where debates are respectful, fact-based and constructive. Empathy and collective problem-solving, rather than viral outrage, set the tone.

How did Europe get here? It all began with a courageous political shift in the 2020s and 2030s. Recognising that democracy cannot function without a resilient information ecosystem, Europe launched the Digital Sovereignty Pact 2035. This pact established a roadmap for reclaiming digital autonomy and strengthening democratic foundations across all member states.

The first major milestone was the creation of the European Digital Commons, a publicly funded, non-profit and interoperable platform where citizens can participate in democratic debates without outside manipulation or hidden commercial interests. Imagine a digital public service broadcaster, but designed for the 21st century: algorithmic transparency by default, data sovereignty for every user and respectful moderation that prioritises dialogue over division.

Europe's democratic resilience was further strengthened by efforts at radical transparency in political communication. Micro-targeted ads and dark money campaigns are relics of the past. Today, every political message is clearly labelled, easily traceable and subject to strict fairness audits. Participatory citizen councils have become a core pillar of European governance, giving every generation — from teenage climate activists to retired teachers — a real voice in shaping policies.



Journalism, once on the brink of collapse under economic pressures and waning trust, is thriving again. Cooperative newsroom models, community-supported investigative teams and robust public co-financing ensure that journalists can focus on what they do best: holding power to account, explaining complexity and inspiring collective solutions. Constructive journalism is no longer a niche — it is the heartbeat of Europe's information ecosystem.

Online platforms, once dominated by a handful of tech oligarchs, have been transformed into transparent and interoperable spaces. By enforcing strong interoperability standards and algorithmic oversight, Europe has dismantled monopolistic structures and created a thriving ecosystem of citizen-centred digital services. People can now choose the algorithms that govern their feeds, and civic councils ensure these technologies align with democratic values rather than profit maximization. In 2026, an important milestone to reach this point was the introduction of a hotly debated but necessary Europe-wide digital tax to finance media literacy programs, quality journalism and platform oversight.

The most impressive achievement, however, lies in society itself. Media and information literacy have become universal skills, taught at all ages from kindergarten to lifelong learning centres. Citizens are empowered to question sources, recognise manipulation and actively participate in shaping their own informational environments. Disinformation campaigns still appear, but they fizzle out quickly, unable to penetrate the resilient collective immune system of an informed public.

Europe's informational sovereignty is not about isolation — it is about strong, self-confident partnerships. With this new-found strength, Europe supports neighbouring regions in developing their own resilient information infrastructures and cooperates with democratic allies around the world to safeguard digital rights and freedoms. There is a lot to learn from democratic partners all over the world: how to build your own successful platforms and implement modern

digital policy from South Korea or Taiwan, how to create successful media literacy programmes from Finland, or how to protect minors on social media from Australia.

By 2050, the European public sphere has become as vital as clean water or renewable energy — a common good that is fiercely protected and continuously nurtured. The continent's transformation is the result of a holistic "public sphere policy" approach, integrating infrastructure, security, education, culture and media policies into a shared democratic mission.

Looking back, it becomes clear: this was never just a technical or regulatory journey. It was a cultural renaissance — a shift in collective mindset towards prioritising truth, participation and the common good. But this process was hard work. It meant shifting the European idea from an elite project to a citizen project. The introduction of European Citizens' Councils and a common European passport were important steps in this direction.

Europe no longer chases the "golden trophy of attention" awarded by platform algorithms. Instead, it writes its own story, centred on human dignity, critical thinking and democratic vitality.

As every superhero knows: with great power comes great responsibility. In 2050, Europe's superpower is its resilient, democratic and sovereign informational society. And it is up to us — today's architects of the future — to make this utopia a reality.

→ Alex Sangerlaub is the "Minister of the Future" and founder of the Berlin-based think & do tank futur eins.

LEARN MORE ABOUT
THE THINK & DO TANK
FUTUR EINS AND ITS
UTOPIA OF AN INFORMED
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How can member states better represent the common interests of the EU and strengthen its ability to act?



"We joined the EU to achieve more together for the common good. Yet, the tendency to prioritize narrow national interests too often hampers our ability to act decisively. The EU's added value must remain our guiding objective—transcending national lines in pursuit of collective progress. Building mutual trust, deepening dialogue, and upholding our shared values are essential if we are to foster more transparent, inclusive, and effective decision-making."

Statement from the Permanent Representation of Slovenia to the European Union.

"Strengthening Partner Europe" across borders

ROUTES RECOMMENDED BY BKHS STAFF

This year, at a time when the freedom of movement within the Schengen Area is coming increasingly under pressure, as European governments are making it harder rather than easier to cross national borders, we are taking a strong stand in support of European integration and the freedoms it guarantees. To showcase the connectedness and diversity of our European continent, BKHS staff have compiled a list of recommendations for routes criss-crossing Europe, whether by foot, bike, train or even by ferry. They not only offer great tips for planning your next vacation but illustrate how travels like these can enable human connections across borders and contribute to European unity - strengthening Europe in routes, step by step, person by person.



Via Regia from Görlitz to Vacha

LENGTH: 470 km

TYPE OF ROUTE: Hiking route

BORDERS CROSSED: Former inner-German border

Highlights: The pilgrimage route follows the historic trading route Via Regia, first mentioned in 1252. Many historic sights await you along the way, like the Wartburg Castle in Eisenach or the impressive Domkirche in Erfurt. In Vacha one can experience German history up close. The former inner-German border ran through the city, even passing right through a house, the Haus Hoffeld.

Spots to take a break: Pilgrim hostels, monasteries, community and family accommodations

Required fitness level (1-10): 6 (multi-day hikes are demanding, but here you can adjust the section lengths to your liking)

Self-actualisation potential: High

Recommended by: Lea Holst, research assistant at the BKHS

The E5 European long-distance path

from Oberstdorf to Merano

LENGTH: About 115 km

TYPE OF ROUTE: Hiking route

BORDERS CROSSED: The route takes you from Germany through Austria to Italy.

Highlights: The lovely *Kaiserjochhaus* hut und delicious *Kaiserschmarrn* - and of course the beautiful landscape!

Spots to take a break:

Cosy mountain huts and hotels

Required fitness level (1-10):

Not for beginners

Self-actualisation

potential: Preferably not in continuous rain! And the journey is the reward. :-)

Recommended by: Kirsten

Hartmann, project officer at the BKHS



Camino del Norte, Spain

LENGTH: About 850 km

TYPE OF ROUTE: I walked. But one can walk, bike, ride, even take a kayak along the lines of the coast.

BORDERS CROSSED: The autonomous regions of País Vasco, Cantabria, Asturias and Galicia.

Highlights: The Atlantic Ocean to your right and mountains to your left. Diversity in many aspects - people, languages, food, cultural and natural landscapes.

Spots to take a break: From hostels (*albergues*), *böbs* and hotels to monasteries and camping grounds.

Required fitness level (1-10):

Anyone can take part. Most importantly: stick to your own rhythm and pace and be open to adjusting your expectations.

Self-actualisation

potential: Be mindful with yourself, the people you meet on the way and the nature that surrounds you. There can be magic in every encounter.

Recommended by: Miriam van der Linden, event manager at the BKHS



Trans Dinarica

LENGTH: 5,500 km (96,500 meters of elevation gain)

TYPE OF ROUTE: Biking route

BORDERS CROSSED: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia.

Highlights: Being one of the first to bike this new route created in 2024 – the first of its kind to connect the entire Western Balkans.

Spots to take a break: Huts, guest houses and villages.

Required fitness level (1–10): 8 (per the route’s official website: “It is good if you are aware of what it means to cycle 1,000 meters of altitude in one day.”)

Self-actualisation

potential: 8 countries, many more local and specific cultures, the rugged Balkan wilderness, thousand-meter climbs, gorgeous mountain scenery – my estimate: very high!

Recommended by:

Matthew Delmastro, research assistant at the BKHS



Night train Hamburg—Stockholm—Jukkasjärvi (Polar circle)

LENGTH: 1,700 km (a 29-hr continuous journey)

TYPE OF ROUTE: Night train

BORDERS CROSSED: Germany, Denmark and Sweden

Highlights: Depending on the connection: the Öresund bridge (at night), Bullerby landscapes, the Luleå Archipelago, Stockholm, Lapland and the polar lights.

Spots to take a break:

The dining car “Krogen” between Malmö and Stockholm.

Self-actualisation

potential: Rail-movies with night owls, lots of time to lose yourself daydreaming while looking out the window, listening to podcasts.

Recommended by: Magnus Koch, head of Exhibitions and History at the BKHS



Bird migration routes in Europe

LENGTH: It varies. Some short-distance migrants from Scandinavia only fly as far as Germany. Others travel all the way to the Sahara.

TYPE OF ROUTE: On wings! For those of us who can't fly: hiking it is.

BORDERS CROSSED: States, continents, elements? A border is not an obstacle for a bird.

Highlights: The great gathering and resting places, e.g., in the German and Dutch Wadden Sea.

Spots to take a break:

The nearest bench will do, but if you can, visit a bird ringing centre and watch ornithologists from all over the world at work!

Required fitness level (1–10): Birding is for everybody. But bring your time.

Self-actualisation potential:

If a common firecrest that weighs only four to seven grams can make its journey, so can you.

Recommended by: Merle Strunk, education and knowledge transfer officer at the BKHS



The red crossbills I observed this summer in Ålesund might be seen again in winter back home in Germany.

IN ROUTES

Ferry Stockholm – Helsinki

LENGTH: Approx. 400 km

TYPE OF ROUTE: Overnight ferry (16-hr trip)

BORDERS CROSSED: Sweden and Finland

Highlights: Explore two great cities and unwind on the ferry across the Baltic. It feels like a mini-retreat – cozy cabins, a spa and sauna with ocean views, plus restaurants and bars. Starting around 40 euros, it's affordable and saves about 180 kg of CO2 on a round trip compared to flying.

Spots to take a break: Stop on the Åland Islands for kayaking, horseback riding or visiting

"Saltkråkan" filming locations – a treat for Astrid Lindgren fans.

Self-actualisation

potential: Cruise past Swedish fjords and secluded coastlines, enjoying the sunset from the deck – calm, slow travel at its best.

Recommended by: Fiona

Kramer, student assistant at the BKHS



Eibsee to Zugspitze

LENGTH: Approx. 4,467 m

TYPE OF ROUTE: Cable car and by foot

BORDERS CROSSED: Germany–Austria

Highlights: The cable car overcomes a vertical difference of 1,945 meters, the greatest of any aerial tramway in the world within a single section. On clear days you can see a panorama of 400 peaks in four countries – Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Italy.

Spots to take a break:

Summit terrace with the restaurant Panorama 2962

Required fitness level:

Easy, the cable car is accessible

Self-actualisation

potential: Freedom and connecting with nature

Recommended by:

Doris Leupold, programme officer at the BKHS

4Daagse

LENGTH: 120–200 km

TYPE OF ROUTE: Marching event

BORDERS CROSSED: Within the Netherlands, but with participants from all over the world – civilian and military – crossing borders to take part in the "Walk of the World".

Highlights: 4Daagse Feesten – a street festival with open air parties, food, art and live concerts; the varying routes through Nijmegen, Grave, along the river Maas and many Dutch towns where people cheer and hand out food and drinks, celebrating YOU.

Spots to take a break:

Resting points with medical care, - every 10km

Required fitness level

(1– 10): 8 – requires training and specific preparation, broken-in gear and knowledge of blister prevention/ treatment.

Self-actualisation

potential: Very high, a roller coaster of emotions from pain to pure joy

Recommended by: Lea Hinz,

intern at the BKHS



From values to strategic interests: credibly reframing EU foreign policy



The EU's credibility as a values-based actor is eroding – both at home and abroad. But would the world be better off if the EU stopped trying to base its foreign policy on values altogether? We argue: no, it clearly would not. However, the EU must stop treating its values as moral ornamentation and define them as strategic interests—internally and externally.

TEXT: JULIA GANTER AND LEONIE STAMM

In the latest *Emerging Middle Powers* survey, most experts from Brazil, India and South Africa were pessimistic about the development of relations between high-income and low- and middle-income countries (Körber-Stiftung, 2025). In the same survey, over 80 per cent said the West had lost credibility as a “defender of global norms”. Europe’s restrictive migration policy and its stance on Israel – often cited as examples of a selective application of international law – are key drivers of these perceptions. While this problem is not unique to the EU, it is more serious than a mere reputational issue – it is becoming a strategic liability.

This weakening of the EU's credibility comes as it is seeking to renew and diversify its partnerships while also confronting numerous external and internal challenges. Domestically, political fragmentation, a substantial loss of public trust in institutions and a clear rightward shift are currently threatening a core belief on which the EU was founded: that peace, prosperity and stability are inseparable from values such as democracy, the rule of law, multilateralism and human rights. This idea can still be found in the *Political Guidelines of the European Commission for 2024–2029*, which depicts these values as existential for the Union's future.

Yet, in today's increasingly interest-driven and geopoliticised international order, upholding this values-based identity while at the same time striving to become a serious geopolitical player seems to be a competitive disadvantage for the EU. As its migration policy illustrates, the EU is attempting to resolve this dilemma by privileging short-term interests over long-term principles, undermining both its image and strategic coherence in the process.

Pursue values, but redefine them as interests

The EU's current approach is a strategic mistake. Traditionally, interests are seen as state-centred and material – anchored in security, economic power or global influence. Values, by contrast, are treated as normative commitments to, for example, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, equality, social justice or societal resilience. Yet on closer inspection, many of these so-called “values” are in fact expressions of long-term, collective European interests. They reflect the well-being and aspirations of the many, whereas conventional interests often only serve the priorities of the few.

Europe must resist the temptation to overlay the realist playbook of global politics. Instead, it should redefine and promote its values as strategic interests, pursue them consistently and credibly, and anchor them in a logic of mutual benefit and strategic investment. This approach can help strike a balance between the overreach of treating its values as moral absolutes and an exclusive focus on short-term interests.

Negotiating strategic interests at home and abroad

One example where this could be applied is the EU's Global Gateway initiative. Rather than conveying the message that the infrastructure initiative is "respecting the highest social and environmental standards, in line with the EU's values and standards" (European Commission, 2025), the EU should seek to foster a shared understanding with partner countries of how its priorities – like green energy standards or labour protections – align with their development goals. In this way, Global Gateway would function not merely as a source of funding from which third countries can benefit if they align with "European values", but would become a platform for genuine, interest-based negotiation – built on reciprocity and equal standing rather than compliance and conditionality.

However, EU actions abroad are only credible when the same standards are applied at home. Principles like social justice and equality are key to ensuring the long-term legitimacy and resilience of democracy, especially in times of growing polarisation. European cooperation on the Continent and partnerships beyond its borders have the potential to deliver public goods – such as economic stability, climate resilience and security – that no single member state could provide alone. To counter internal fragmentation and rising nationalist sentiment, the EU must make the case that its foreign policy caters to the strategic interests of its own citizens. The promise of a rules-based, cooperative order must not feel abstract, but tangible and inclusive.

In a fractured world, the EU must resist the urge to abandon its values altogether – or to impose them too rigidly. Instead, it should pursue a principled and pragmatic foreign policy that treats values as strategic interests. The EU's credibility depends not on how loudly it declares its values, but on how consistently it practices them – and how strategically it pursues them.

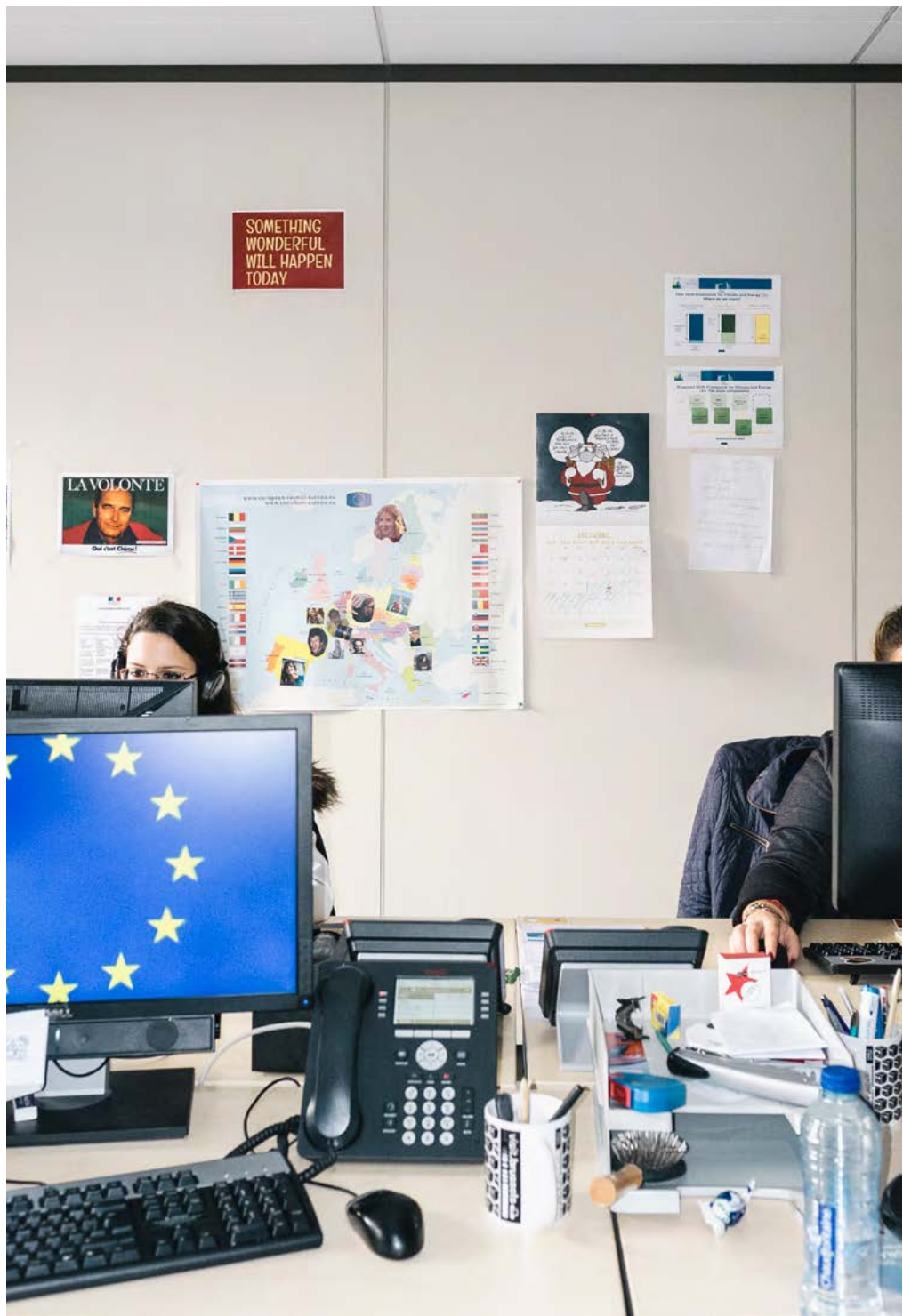
→ Julia Ganter is programme director for the Emerging Middle Powers Initiative and editor-in-chief of *The Berlin Pulse* at the Körber-Stiftung.

→ Leonie Stamm is a research fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP).

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READ MORE ABOUT THE PERSPECTIVES OF EMERGING MIDDLE POWERS LIKE BRAZIL, INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA IN A WORLD OF RENEWED GREAT POWER COMPETITION IN THE KÖRBER STIFTUNG'S EMERGING MIDDLE POWERS REPORT →



One wish for the future

TEXT: WOLFGANG SCHMIDT



Europe needs security. Our way of life, our freedoms and our democracy are seriously under threat. I hope that we Europeans have learned our lessons from the history of the 20th century. Our free Europe must be able to deter any external military aggression, and it must stand firm. For securing peace and stability, we also need partners, and our Europe must be and remain a reliable partner internationally. I wish for European politicians who will take the initiative to unite Europe in its long-term pursuit of sovereignty, enabling it to protect itself and to build partnerships around the globe. This requires courage, determination and persuasiveness. I wish that we, the free European people, realise what is at stake for us and support the urgently needed investments in our common security.

I wish for a strong Europe: politically, economically and militarily.

→ Wolfgang Schmidt heads the *Zeitzeugen* oral history project at the BKHS, interviewing people who worked with or for Helmut Schmidt.



← THE ZEITZEUGEN PROJECT AIMS TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SCHMIDT'S PERSONALITY BUT ALSO THE INDIVIDUALS WHO PREVIOUSLY REMAINED IN THE BACKGROUND. SCAN THE QR CODE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PROJECT.

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STAY UP TO DATE ABOUT
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The fifth issue of the BKHS Magazine collects ideas and recommendations for “Strengthening Partner Europe!”. It focuses on how Europe can increase its ability to act on the global stage while acknowledging this can only be achieved through greater international cooperation. Europe must expand its partnerships to stay relevant and to be able to wield influence amidst competing great powers, but also to hold together a fragile multilateralism and address intractable global challenges like climate change, increasing levels of conflict, global poverty and hunger, as well as persistent income and wealth inequality.

We collected expertise from across the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung as well as brought together an array of other perspectives from think tanks and academia. The result is a nuanced debate, and an invitation to readers to think critically - and more boldly - about Europe’s future role in the world.

The Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung (BKHS) commemorates one of the most important 20th-century German statesmen. As a future-oriented think tank, it addresses issues that also interested Schmidt. Three overarching programmes are at the heart of the foundation’s work programme: 1) European and International Politics, 2) Global Markets and Social Justice and 3) Democracy and Society.

Closely meshed with these programmes, the permanent exhibition “Schmidt! Living Democracy” in Hamburg’s city centre reflects almost half a century of German and international contemporary history. It places the achievements of its namesake in current and

historical context. In the Helmut Schmidt-Archiv in Hamburg’s Langenhorn neighbourhood, the foundation makes the private documents of Schmidt and his wife Loki available to researchers and grants the public access to the Schmidts’ former private home.

The foundation was established in 2017 by the German Bundestag as one of seven non-partisan foundations commemorating politicians. It is supported by the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media.

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