



Policy Paper

PREDICTING THE UNPREDICTABLE: MAKING SENSE OF TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS FOR 2025 POST TRANSATLANTIC POLICY FORUM 2024

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About the Transatlantic Policy Forum

Transatlantic Policy Forum (TAPF) is a closed-door summit for decision-makers and opinion-formers co-organised by EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy with partners. TAPF has been held in Prague every Autumn since 2018 under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.



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Introduction

The result from the 2024 Presidential elections has, once again, shook the foundations of the Transatlantic relationship – but to what degree, remains the question. The transatlantic relationship will enter 2025 against a backdrop of significant geopolitical tension, testing the strength of the post-Cold War international order and its core values of democracy and the rule of law in the wake of critical elections around the world.

The election of President-elect Trump signals the re-entry of an 'America First' foreign policy, set to redefine future transatlantic relations. Meanwhile, the fate of the ongoing Russian war against Ukraine hangs in the air as concerns over the durability of U.S. and EU support against Russia's ongoing war of aggression is called into question. This geopolitical complexity is further heightened by continued crises in the European neighborhood, including the escalating Israel-Hamas conflict and Chinese interference posing risks to Taiwanese political stability and regional peace.

Recognizing these formidable challenges, together, a diverse range of transatlantic experts convened on November 14-15, 2024, for the seventh Transatlantic Policy Forum (TAPF). The event was organized by the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy in partnership with the Atlantic Council, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and supported by the International Visegrad Fund and the U.S. Embassy in Prague.

The forum tackled a wide range of topics, starting with the state of global democracy in the wake of a 'super year' pivotal election and the rising influence of AI-fueled misinformation and disinformation campaigns. Discussions examined NATO's and the EU's enlargement policies, particularly Ukraine's membership ambitions and their potential impact on EU integration and security. This tied seamlessly into deeper conversations about cooperative efforts for Ukraine's reconstruction, showcasing shared strategies and resources.

Discussions then turned its focus to collective security in an increasingly multipolar world, addressing transatlantic approaches to challenges from major powers like Russia and China, alongside regional issues in the Middle East and Taiwan and emphasized the need for Europe to step up significantly in its own defense and military resources. Sessions also delved into global trade practices and explored the future of transatlantic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing economic resilience and strategies for de-risking.

This policy paper compiles the key insights and deliberations from the Forum, which adhered to the Chatham House Rule to protect participant confidentiality. Based on the engaging discussions, this paper offers a comprehensive set of takeaways, including actionable recommendations and a strategic “To-Do list” for the transatlantic alliance in the coming years.

Democracy's stress test: election integrity

As this "super election" year concludes, 2025 promises to bring with it key elections that will significantly influence the Transatlantic relationship. Before looking ahead, the opening session at TAPF examined the outcomes and challenges tied to election integrity, emphasizing the critical need for robust and trusted electoral institutions.

The discussion highlighted the fresh results of the U.S. Presidential election, showing a "landslide" victory for Trump. The discussion focused on some key issues – how to protect election integrity, including physical security measures to safeguard poll workers, prevent voter intimidation, and mitigate risks of post-election violence. Thankfully, we saw a relative peaceful election, securing Trump a win in the seven swing states, achieving 312 electoral votes compared to Harris's 226, alongside a popular vote majority.¹ While it appears he will also control both the Senate and the House, experts emphasized the distinct nature of this victory. Unlike 2016, which revealed clear evidence of election meddling, or 2020, when claims of a stolen election sought to delegitimize President Biden's victory, the 2024 results indicate that Americans embraced Trump's platform. Democratic allies must now prepare for a potentially unpredictable and challenging four years ahead.

From the European perspective, the recent Slovak elections were highlighted, where the democratic election of Slovak nationalist-left candidate Peter Pellegrini as president further reinforced the influence of pro-Russian Prime Minister Robert Fico over the country. Fico, now serving his fourth term since last October, has steered Slovakia's foreign policy towards a more pro-Russian stance and introduced reforms to criminal law and media regulations, sparking concerns

¹ James FitzGerald, "Just How Big Was Donald Trump's Election Victory?," *BBC*, November 23, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn5w9w160xdo>.

about the erosion of the rule of law in Slovakia.² This shift toward pro-Russian leadership, coupled with tactics that challenge and undermine election integrity, has raised alarms as similar trends appear to be gaining traction in Europe and Central Eastern Europe and most recently in Romania's elections in November.

The discussion shifted towards the 2024 European Parliamentary elections which faced fewer challenges to election integrity, thanks to robust initiatives led by the EU, for example its Digital Services Act³ and EU Code of Practice on Disinformation⁴, among other mandates. It was highlighted that coordinated efforts by civil society and digital platforms played a key role in raising awareness about issues such as fake information, deepfakes, and the misuse of AI. The discussion emphasized the responsibility of technology companies in addressing these challenges and underscored the importance of adopting a whole-of-society approach to effectively combat misinformation and its impact on democracy. However, far-right forces in the EU showed signs of consolidation. While far-right parties lost support in countries like Finland, Sweden, and Hungary compared to 2019, their gains in Central and Eastern European countries such as Czechia, Estonia, and Poland were also limited in 2024. A comparison of the 2019 and 2024 election results reveals that the most substantial growth for far-right parties had already occurred in 2019.⁵

² Radovan Stoklasa and Jan Lopatka, "Pellegrini Wins Slovak Presidential Election in Boost for Pro-Russian PM Fico," Reuters, April 7, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/government-backed-pellegrini-takes-lead-slovak-presidential-election-2024-04-06/>.

³ European Commission, "The EU's Digital Services Act," European Commission, 2023, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act_en.

⁴ European Commission, "EU Code of Practice on Disinformation | European Commission," [commission.europa.eu](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/protecting-democracy/strengthened-eu-code-practice-disinformation_en), n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/protecting-democracy/strengthened-eu-code-practice-disinformation_en.

⁵ Max Becker, "Divided but Dangerous: The Fragmented Far-Right's Push for Power in the EU after the 2024 Elections," *Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik (SWP)*, October 1, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.18449/2024C44/>.

With continued shift in the political spectrum, democracies will need to learn from this super year of elections, especially with upcoming elections next year in Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Bolivia, Canada, Chile, Germany, Japan, Poland, and the Philippines, among others. Election integrity remains under threat from forces seeking to weaken democracy by eroding public trust. Democratic institutions are increasingly targeted by organized and sophisticated actors.

To safeguard election integrity, governments, civil society, and technology stakeholders must prioritize strategies that build civic resilience against misinformation, polarization, and cyber threats. Local governments should play a leading role, leveraging their deep understanding of community dynamics to foster trust and engagement. Politicians must avoid divisive rhetoric that risks polarizing communities and undermining democratic processes.

A Fellowship in Need: Rebuilding and Securing Ukraine

At this moment, the reconstruction of Ukraine remains a critical priority for the U.S., the EU, and countries like Czechia, all of whom have taken distinct approaches to aiding Ukraine. Key areas of support include humanitarian aid, military assistance, and long-term civilian reconstruction.

1000 days have now passed since the start of Russia’s war in Ukraine. Discussions began with the sobering reminder that true reconstruction can’t start until destruction has fully stopped. The United Nations currently estimates that “as of 31 December 2023 the total cost of reconstruction and recovery in Ukraine

is \$486 billion over the next decade, up from \$411 billion estimated one year ago⁶ and continues to rise.

At this moment, the reconstruction of Ukraine remains a critical priority for the U.S., the EU, and countries like Czechia, all of whom have taken distinct approaches to aiding Ukraine. Key areas of support include humanitarian aid, military assistance, and long-term civilian reconstruction. Czechia, for instance, has demonstrated significant commitment, providing over 2.2 million rounds of ammunition and playing a vital role in reconstructing cities like Charkov. Czechia has also contributed one-third of energy resources in Charkov and delivered essential supplies such as water, healthcare, and energy.⁷ Beyond the conflict, Czechia has supported Ukrainian refugees by integrating over 380,000 individuals, 80% of whom hold working permits, bolstering the local economy.⁸

The Forum highlighted the EU's financial support for Ukraine, estimated at EUR 84 billion⁹, primarily aimed at reconstruction aligned with future EU accession. This aid is tied to the Ukraine Plan, outlining reforms in governance, rule of law, anti-corruption, digital transformation, environmental sustainability, and human

⁶ World Bank. "Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment Released." *World Bank Group*, 15 Feb. 2024, www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2024/02/15/updated-ukraine-recovery-and-reconstruction-needs-assessment-released.

⁷ Ministry of Defense and Armed Forces, "The Minister of Defence Informed about Declassified Details of Military Aid to Ukraine | Ministry of Defence & Armed Forces of the Czech Republic," *Mo.gov.cz*, February 23, 2023, <https://www.mo.gov.cz/en/ministry-of-defence/newsroom/news/the-minister-of-defence-informed-about-declassified-details-of-military-aid-to-ukraine-245604/>.

⁸ UNHCR, "Czechia Fact Sheet," May 2024, <https://www.unhcr.org/cz/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2024/05/Czechia-Fact-sheet-May-2024-final-v2.pdf>.

⁹ Akhvlediani, Tinatin. *EXPLAINING UKRAINE'S RECOVERY and RECONSTRUCTION: WHAT, HOW and WHEN?* Centre for European Policy Studies, May 2024. https://cdn.ceps.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Explainer-2024-05_Ukraine-reconstruction-1.pdf

capital development.¹⁰ These reforms aim to modernize Ukraine's economy and advance its path toward EU membership. It was noted that the EU, as a unified body, will continue to support Ukraine's reconstruction efforts, recognizing the critical interconnections between a strong, resilient Ukraine and the stability, security, and prosperity of the wider European region.

Similarly, the U.S. has sustained its financial and logistical support for Ukraine, focusing on energy needs, bolstering businesses, and coordinating with policy leaders. Ensuring effective communication and cooperation among all stakeholders remains vital for both immediate and long-term aid efforts. However, as President-elect Trump gears up for office, he has already mentioned his intention to end the war 'in a day' has yet to see an action plan. It was mentioned that Trump could approach Ukraine in various ways – withdraw support and place more responsibility on Europe, make deal with Putin that may have detrimental and territorial losses for Ukraine, or go 'all in' and provide Ukraine the critical support they need to not only win but to rebuild after the war.

Looking ahead, questions arise about the future of post-war Ukraine, particularly how Ukrainians will return home and address challenges such as mental health recovery and rebuilding the economy.

The conclusion underscored the urgent need for allies to achieve both immediate victory and enduring peace for Ukraine, highlighting that if the US reduces its support, the EU must be prepared to take a more leading role. **In the short term, a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, industry, and civil society is essential to rebuilding Ukraine's critical infrastructure, including**

¹⁰ European Commission. "Commission Endorses Ukraine Plan, Paving the Way for Regular Payments under the Ukraine Facility - European Commission." *Neighbourhood-Enlargement.ec.europa.eu*, 15 June 2024, neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-endorses-ukraine-plan-paving-way-regular-payments-under-ukraine-facility-2024-04-15_en

energy, water systems, and transport. Close collaboration with international partners, remains necessary to mobilize significant financial investments, ensuring Ukraine's economic stability and long-term development.

Trials and Triumphs with Trump? – Questions on Transatlantic Security and NATO, EU Enlargement

Although the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine became a wake-up call for many European countries in terms of investing in own security, for some, these events were not surprising, especially for those in the Kremlin's shadow. While Europe still relies heavily on the security provided by the U.S. military, unfortunately for Ukraine, European countries would not be able to replace the American contribution to its military support in the short term¹¹. The long-term process of strengthening our own defense and industrial capabilities has only just begun.

With Trump coming back to power, it's safe to say that this course won't be reversed at least for the next 4 years¹². Some will argue for the need of strengthening the European core of NATO, others will call for reconsidering European strategic autonomy. Many will fear the U.S. abandoning us in the greatest hour of need, caused by foreign aggression against NATO Allies. The biggest dilemma regarding the transatlantic security is the future of war in Ukraine. Trump played a "peace dove" card during the presidential campaign,

¹¹ *Europe has a long way to go to replace US aid - large gap between commitments and allocations*, Kiel Institute, 16 Feb 2024, <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/publications/news/europe-has-a-long-way-to-go-to-replace-us-aid-large-gap-between-commitments-and-allocations/>

¹² *Joshua Posaner and Barbara Moens, Trump is 'right': Rutte says NATO members need to spend more on arms*, Politico, 7 Nov 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-is-right-mark-rutte-says-nato-members-spend-more-gdp-2-percent-european-political-community-summit/>

pushing for a rapid end of conflicts in Europe and Middle East¹³. Looking at the election promises, he will certainly want to fulfill this one, to focus more on internal challenges.

If European countries really believe that the future of Ukraine is existential to their own security and Russia will still (or perhaps even more than before) pose a threat to NATO, they shouldn't be surprised to hear "do more" from the upcoming U.S. administration. There's little hope that the

The future of the transatlantic security does not solely reflect the political will of the U.S. It is very much about the actions that the European countries will take in the coming months and years as well.

U.S. will actually reinforce Ukraine¹⁴. On the Republican side, this is no longer seen as being in the clear interest of the U.S. In many cases, they don't see the connection between the situation in Ukraine to Taiwan, which very often is being used as a bigger picture argument. For those who will be implementing American foreign policy in the coming years, the argument that China is learning lessons from approach toward Russia¹⁵ is simply unconvincing—at least not enough to change their own attitudes toward Ukraine.

Also hanging over our heads is the question of the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific in American foreign policy. The infamous "pivot to Asia" in various forms and content has already occupied the heads of 3 different U.S. presidents and will soon enter another term¹⁶. In a sense, it is constantly taking place, and it

¹³ Robert C. O'Brien, *The Return of Peace Through Strength*, Foreign Affairs, 18 Jun 2024, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/return-peace-strength-trump-obrien>

¹⁴ Mick Ryan, Trump may surprise us on the Ukraine war, Lowy Institute, Aug 2024, <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/2024-us-presidential-election/donald-trump/article/trump-and-ukraine/>

¹⁵ Agathe Demarais, *Hard, fast, and where it hurts: Lessons from Ukraine-related sanctions for a Taiwan conflict scenario*, ECFR, 19 Sep 2024, <https://ecfr.eu/publication/hard-fast-and-where-it-hurts-lessons-from-ukraine-related-sanctions-for-a-taiwan-conflict-scenario/>

¹⁶ Mercy A. Kuo, *The 'Lost Decade' of the US Pivot to Asia. Insights from Richard Fontaine*, The Diplomat, 18 Mar 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/the-lost-decade-of-the-us-pivot-to-asia/>

is also visible in the actions of European allies, or NATO itself, which remains involved in discussions regarding the regional security. However, as was emphasized during the conference, it is possible that by talking about the U.S. abandoning Europe for the Indo-Pacific, we are presenting to ourselves a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The future of the transatlantic security does not solely reflect the political will of the U.S. **It is very much about the actions that the European countries will take in the coming months and years as well. Europe needs a more serious approach on investment in own militaries and defense industry capabilities. There is a bigger role to play for the EU, in terms of industrial strategy, as well as mechanisms of military aid and investing in ammunition supplies, for example. Bold decisions by European leaders may be necessary, both in terms of the level of NATO spending (up to 3% of GDP) and in setting the level of support for Ukraine within the EU (0,25% GDP). Depending on how the situation develops, it may also be necessary to make significant bilateral commitments to security of Ukraine, including the military deployment.**

An appropriate level of transatlantic security, with a strong emphasis on increasing investment on the European side, is essentially the basic foundation for discussions on the future enlargement of both NATO and the European Union. The biggest question regarding NATO is the future of Ukraine membership¹⁷ – what specific conditions in its security situation would need to be fulfilled for Allies to issue an invitation? And in what time frame could this happen? Wouldn't this be part of a deal to stop Russia's military actions? In the process of enlargement, NATO has reached an extremely important, yet difficult moment – perhaps the most difficult in the entire history of the Alliance. **Finding answers to questions**

¹⁷ Robert Pszczel, *How to win the war and join NATO? The key role of Ukraine's partnership with the Alliance*, Center for Eastern Studies, 28 Jun 2024, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2024-06-28/how-to-win-war-and-join-nato-key-role-ukraines-partnership>

on future Ukraine membership their implementation will not only shape Ukraine's future – it will also be crucial for the importance of NATO from the perspective of third countries.

Meanwhile on the EU side, the Western Balkan countries remain somewhat on the sidelines of the discussion, following the standard political and administrative path. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia are in center of attention because of the fast track on which they were put in response to their initiative motivated by Russia's imperial policy¹⁸. This is also motivated by the fear that the Kremlin will try to influence these processes by manipulating social and political moods in those countries. We can already see this in the actions of the Georgian government, which has taken a bipolar approach to the European integration process from 2022, despite noting progress on the EU integration path. However, Prime Minister Kobakhidze's recent declaration to suspend the accession process until 2028 this time is clearly one-way approach, reflecting the anti-Western agenda of the most ruling party members, including Kobakhidze himself. The effect is distancing Georgia from integration with Europe and its inclusion in the EU, probably as long as the government in Georgia does not legally change. In turn, Ukraine and Moldova, despite the initially accelerated path, will have years of work, modernization and integration ahead of them before they actually become Union members of the EU¹⁹. **It is crucial that the EU and European allies support the European integration process of these two countries, support their actions and share their own experiences of the reforms necessary to implement on the EU path. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the positive attitude of societies towards the Union and consciously and substantively**

¹⁸ Tony Barber, *Ukraine, the Balkans and the future of EU enlargement*, Financial Times, 23 Nov 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/5f7f2df4-641a-4a93-9599-a223a191f6c7>

¹⁹ Wouter Zweers, *The Eastern Trio's Path to the EU: Fast-Track or Slow Lane?*, Clingendael Spectator, 27 Feb 2024, <https://spectator.clingendael.org/en/publication/eastern-trios-path-eu-fast-track-or-slow-lane>

inform them about the benefits of joining the EU, combined with combating Russian disinformation in this area.

Can the Indo-Pacific rise Above China's Shadow?

The growing economic, security and political influence of China continues to present a significant challenge to the US and EU. The general sentiment at the Forum was that it is high time for the democratic community to recognize China not only as an economic competitor but as a potential security threat.

Experts reminded the forum that China's use of economic coercion should not be a surprise. Referring to the 2013 release of "Document 9" by the Chinese Communist Party, labelling investment banking as a threat to its regime, underscores the ideological divide between China and democratic nations.²⁰ In response, Europe and the US must pursue alternative partnerships in Asia, including a more comprehensive and strategic Indo-Pacific approach.

For leaders like former President Trump, who sees China as a military threat, the economic implications are equally concerning. These dynamics highlight the urgent need for democracies to craft cohesive strategies to address the multifaceted challenges posed by China, both as a military and economic power. Trump's earlier Indo-Pacific strategy, the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" framework, emphasized collective security, fostering economic prosperity, and upholding good governance and shared democratic principles.²¹ However, during his previous administration, trade disputes and protectionist policies complicated

²⁰ Jessica Batke, "Document 9, 10 Years Later," ChinaFile, March 6, 2023, <https://www.chinafile.com/reporting-opinion/notes-chinafile/document-9-10-years-later>.

²¹ Ford, Lindsey W. "The Trump Administration and the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."" *Brookings*, May 2020, www.brookings.edu/articles/the-trump-administration-and-the-free-and-open-indo-pacific/. Accessed 18 Oct. 2024.

these objectives, straining alliances and creating tensions in the region. Recent comments calling to impose upwards of 60% tariffs²² on goods sold to the US are already causing concern - signalling the possibility of an even tougher stance on Beijing, suggesting a more confrontational approach could shape U.S. policy in the Indo-Pacific.

It was mentioned that the EU on the other hand, should continue to bolster its Indo-Pacific strategy with its Global Gateway, a “values-driven, high-standard and transparent infrastructure partnership to meet global infrastructure development needs.”²³ Its aim has been to “reinforce value chains by strengthening and diversifying trade relations, implementing existing trade agreements”²⁴ which includes finalising ongoing trade negotiations and developing cooperation in strategic sectors as previously mentioned. The EU needs to seek alternative supply chains and decoupling with China. Lithuania’s example was emphasized who received trade sanctions for their support for Taiwan, are good case studies on how to navigate and circumvent economic coercive tactics.

As China, Russia, and Iran continue to assert their influence and challenge the international order, it is imperative for democracies to demonstrate strong alignment and cooperation. In the Indo-Pacific, democratic allies are increasingly coordinating their strategies to counter these authoritarian postures and uphold shared values such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and respect for territorial sovereignty.

²² Juliana Liu, “China Is Armed and Ready for Trade War 2.0 with Donald Trump,” CNN, November 22, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/11/22/business/china-is-armed-and-ready-for-trade-war-2-0-with-donald-trump/index.html>.

²³ “Global Gateway.” *Commission.europa.eu*, 2023, commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

²⁴ *JOINT COMMUNICATION to the EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT and the COUNCIL the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*. 21 Sept. 2021.

This presents a pivotal moment for both the new U.S. administration and the EU to revamp their Indo-Pacific strategies. By aligning their approaches, they can strengthen partnerships with key regional players like Japan, South Korea, India, and Australia, while enhancing engagement with ASEAN nations. A renewed focus on collective security, resilient supply chains, economic partnerships, and sustainable development will be critical to counterbalance authoritarian influence.

Trade, Tariffs and Trump

Main focus points of the panel related to trade practices were lessons learned from the Trump's first term²⁵ and limitations of progress in economic cooperation between the U.S. and the EU during Biden's presidency. Participants reminded that the main factor behind the economic and trade policies of the U.S. will be restoring jobs and production capabilities back in the country. Such an approach will impact the process of reshoring the American industry and lower chances of the U.S. partners to be involved deeper into the supply chains. Failure to reach significant agreements between the U.S. and the EU in formats such as the Trade and Technology Council (TTC) will be an argument for the new administration to dissolve them²⁶. Others will lose their importance altogether, such as the climate dialogue. Policy towards China could potentially be the common agenda on the EU-U.S. level, but only if European countries would be ready to tighten their approach to cooperation with China.

²⁵ Keith Johnson, *Get Ready for Trump Trade Wars 2.0*, Foreign Policy, 7 May 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/07/trump-trade-policy-second-term-economy-election/>

²⁶ Frances Burwell, *In this year of elections, the US-EU Trade and Technology Council should get strategic*, Atlantic Council, 26 Mar 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/in-this-year-of-elections-the-us-eu-trade-and-technology-council-should-get-strategic/>

The specter of imposing broad tariffs by the U.S. not only on Chinese products but on imports in general was a factor shaping the discussion with a view to the

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complicated years of transatlantic economic cooperation. The tariff war itself between the world's two largest economies – the U.S. and China – would affect the situation of other countries. The prospect of targeting other countries, including partners, could lead to a chain reaction of imposing secondary tariffs. Those may be

used by Trump to put pressure on issues unrelated to economic cooperation, as already shows the idea of “25% drug traffic related tariffs” on goods from Canada and Mexico²⁷. The U.S. administration could also replicate China’s playbook in its economic approach to Europe. Playing on divisions within the EU, U.S. may decide to introduce more precise tariffs against specific countries rather than broad customs on the entire EU economy sectors. In the meantime, China will also try to draw attention of European countries to get more involved in economic cooperation with them²⁸, pointing to the protectionist policies of the U.S. government.

Most likely, it is an issue of economic cooperation, with trade and customs at the forefront, that will be a constant factor complicating transatlantic political cooperation in the coming years²⁹. On the other hand, the possibility of linking

²⁷ Julia Kollewe, *Trump vows 25% tariffs on Mexico and Canada and deeper tariffs on China*, The Guardian, 26 Nov 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/nov/25/trump-mexico-canada-tariffs-border>

²⁸ Marcin Przychodniak, *China Tempting EU Members and the Effect on Transatlantic Relations*, PISM, 11 Jul 2023, <https://pism.pl/publications/china-tempting-eu-members-and-the-effect-on-transatlantic-relations>

²⁹ Liana Fix and Molly Carlough, *The trajectory of US-EU relations in a tumultuous year*, Elcano Royal Institute, 22 Jul 2024, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/the-trajectory-of-us-eu-relations-in-a-tumultuous-year/>

tariffs to issues that are not directly related, such as insufficient military spending or active cooperation with China, reduces the prospects for easing these disputes and reducing their significance in the overall transatlantic partnership. **The EU and its countries should be prepared to negotiate tariffs and point to economic ties that may weaken with the introduction of specific tariffs by the U.S. At the same time, the EU should also be prepared to link tariffs on American products to issues not directly related to trade and economic cooperation. This would allow for a demonstration of readiness to conduct symmetrical retaliation.**

Transatlantic To-do-list

The Forum concluded with its annual transatlantic to-do list which identifies key areas for the transatlantic partnership to address over the next year.

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1. Election Integrity: Governments, civil society, and tech stakeholders must strengthen civic resilience against misinformation, polarization, and cyber threats. Local governments, with their community insights, should lead in fostering trust and engagement. Politicians must avoid divisive rhetoric that harms democratic processes.
 2. Ukraine Reconstruction: Rebuilding Ukraine's critical infrastructure requires a multi-stakeholder approach involving governments, industry, and civil society, supported by international partnerships to secure financial investments for long-term stability and development.
 3. European Defense: Europe must invest more in its militaries and defense industries, with the EU playing a key role in industrial strategy and military aid. Bold actions are needed, including increasing NATO spending (up to 3%

of GDP) and committing 0.25% of GDP to support Ukraine, alongside potential bilateral security commitments.

4. Ukraine's NATO Path: A clear timeline for Ukraine's NATO membership is vital, shaping its future, enhancing NATO's global significance, and deterring Kremlin aggression.
 5. Moldova and Georgia EU Integration: The EU and allies must actively support Moldova's and Georgia's EU integration, share reform experiences, and combat Russian disinformation while fostering public support for EU membership.
 6. Indo-Pacific Strategy: By 2025, the U.S. and EU must align Indo-Pacific strategies to strengthen ties with Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and ASEAN nations, focusing on collective security, resilient supply chains, and sustainable development to counter authoritarian influence.
 7. EU-US Trade Relations: The EU must be ready to negotiate tariffs and link trade measures to broader issues, demonstrating readiness for symmetrical retaliation to safeguard economic ties.
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"Commission Endorses Ukraine Plan, Paving the Way for Regular Payments under the Ukraine Facility." *Neighbourhood-Enlargement*, June 15, 2024. <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/commission->

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