

Position Paper

The EU in a New

World Order



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Introduction

“History moves from one conjuncture to another rather than being an evolutionary flow. And what drives it forward is usually a crisis, when the contradictions that are always at play in any historical moment are condensed, or, as Althusser said, ‘fuse in a ruptural unity’. Crises are moments of potential change, but the nature of their resolution is not given.”
(Stuart Hall, 2010)

Are we currently living through crisis? Every generation believes it lives through a moment of great change. The philosopher Raymond Aron captured this well: “I have never known a generation that did not feel it was living through a crisis.” This should make us watchful – hesitant maybe. And yet, caution should not become blindness – sometimes, the change is real. For Europe, we believe this is one of those times.

The emerging world order is shaping up to be one of chaotic multipolarity, rogue imperialism, and strongman politics. But Europe is not a passive observer. It has its own agency, its own weight, and its own choice to make. Europeans will have to act if they want to live in a different and better world – and acting requires clarity about what Europe is, what it stands for, and what it can uniquely offer.

Some frame the choice ahead as a binary: values or interests, naive idealism or ruthless pragmatism. This paper rejects that framing. Europe’s greatest strength in the emerging world order is precisely the

capacity to leverage its values as strategic assets. It is both the right thing and the smart thing to do. Through the great attractors of enlargement, high standards of living, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law, Europe has built a model that others seek to join, emulate, or undermine precisely because it works. While Russia, China, and an increasingly transactional United States pursue their interests as a value in themselves, Europe should recognise that its values are its interests – and act accordingly.

This paper asks what that means in practice. How should the EU reposition itself across trade, partnerships, multilateral reform, defence, digital sovereignty, climate, finance, and soft power? How can it build strategic autonomy without retreating from global solidarity? And how can an increasingly powerful Europe go hand in hand with a better world order rather than simply a stronger European one?

The answer lies in bold decisions that tie Europe’s foreign policy to a strong democratic centre. A **United States of Europe** would have the legitimacy and resources to act on the world stage: defending international law and human rights, working with partners to reform and empower the multilateral system, and demonstrating that a union of free and equal peoples remains the most compelling political project of our time.

9 Challenges

Moving beyond the post-World War II bipolar world order, we are faced today with a more complex, multipolar and layered reality: a world of multiple modernities, where the Western model led by US hegemony is only one possible offer among several. The international architecture built after 1945, based on shared rules, international law, and multilateral institutions, is under unprecedented strain. What we are witnessing is not a temporary disruption but a structural crisis, accelerated by recent destabilisations and escalating contradictions driven among others by shifts in US foreign policy, the rise of China, the return of Russian expansionism, and the growing weight of the Global South. Two major shifts have reshaped the world since the end of the Cold War: the rise of China as a global power, and, far less expected and most recent, a deep and possibly irreversible break in Europe's relationship with the United States.

In addressing the nine core challenges that follow, Chapter 3 proposes nine corresponding elements of a repositioning strategy for the EU in the changing world order.



Challenge 1:

The break with the United States – from ally to rival

For decades, the United States was Europe's closest ally. Beyond practical commitments in defence, trade, and diplomacy, the relationship rested on something deeper: a sense of shared political identity. Disagreements existed, but they took place within a common framework of values. Washington was not just a military guarantor; it was a source of ideological reassurance. That double certainty – strategic and ideological – is now gone.

The strategic change was gradual. Under Obama, Washington shifted its attention toward Asia, not hostile to Europe, but no longer centred on it. Under Trump's first term, indifference hardened into grievance: Europe was accused of not paying its share in NATO, and of having built its economic prosperity at America's expense, using American security as a shield while running large trade surpluses. The relationship, once grounded in shared values, was reduced to a ledger.

Under Trump's second term, grievance became open hostility. The United States launched a trade war against Europe, imposing tariffs that treated its oldest allies as economic rivals. It made territorial claims over Greenland – an integral part of Danish and therefore European sovereignty – without apology. And when the US struck Iran without consulting its European NATO allies, Europeans were neither informed nor in agreement, yet were pressured to provide support. This is not how allies behave.



The clearest signal of ideological fracture came at the Munich Security Conference in 2025, where Vice-President Vance told a room of stunned European leaders that the gap between the US and Europe was no longer only about strategy – it was about values. He criticised European efforts to regulate online content, questioned whether the EU's diverse societies made it a reliable partner, and was conspicuously silent on Russia and Ukraine. The same ideas appear in the US National Security Strategy of November 2025, which explicitly names Europe's multi-ethnic character as a reason for doubt and signals American support for far-right movements across the European continent. Both pillars of the transatlantic relationship have fallen, and their disappearance leaves Europe more exposed than at any point since the end of the Cold War.

Challenge 2:

The weaponisation of trade and economic interdependence

The era of trade as a purely technical domain, governed by rules, reciprocity, and mutual benefit, is over. Trade has become a weapon. The United States has deployed tariffs as geopolitical instruments against allies and rivals alike. China has used market access, supply chain dependencies, and export controls on critical raw materials as tools of political leverage. Economic interdependence, once celebrated as a guarantee of peace, has been revealed as a source of vulnerability.

For the EU, the consequences are acute. European industries, supply chains, and consumers are dangerously exposed to dependencies that might undermine the application of EU standards (in terms of human rights, Do No Significant Harm Principle, climate ambition and other core European values) while also undermining and weakening European industries through dumping, across multiple critical sectors; energy, critical raw materials, defence, and downstream manufacturing. Strategic autonomy, the capacity to act independently in key domains, has become an existential question that will affect thousands of lives within and outside of Europe.

Challenge 3:

Russia's return to expansionism and the challenge to European security

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 shattered the post-Cold War European security order. For decades, European security rested on the assumption that large-scale territorial war on the continent belonged to the past. That assumption is gone. Russia has demonstrated not only the willingness but the capacity to wage prolonged conventional warfare against a European neighbour, framing its aggression in explicitly civilisational terms as a challenge to the European project itself.

The war has exposed the structural fragility of European defence: 27 fragmented national defence systems with overlapping capabilities, incompatible procurement standards, and a collective dependency on US security guarantees that Washington has signalled it may no longer be willing to provide unconditionally. The question of how Europe defends itself, and at what cost, is now unavoidable. It is also inseparable from a deeper question about what kind of international order Europe wants to uphold: one based on the inviolability of borders and the rule of law, or one governed by spheres of influence and great-power prerogative.



Challenge 4:

China's rise and the competition of models

China's emergence as a global power is the defining long-term structural shift of our era, simultaneously an economic, technological, geopolitical, and ideological challenge. Economically, China has become the EU's largest source of imports and a formidable competitor in sectors where Europe has historically led, including electric vehicles, clean technology, and advanced manufacturing. Technologically, China is competing for primacy in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, and digital infrastructure, investing at a scale and speed that challenges both European and American dominance.

Geopolitically, China is actively building alternative multilateral architectures through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the expansion of BRICS, offering developing countries a different model of engagement, often with fewer governance conditions attached. The competition is also ideological. China offers an alternative account of development, sovereignty, and international order that many countries in the Global South find more attractive than a Western model they associate with conditionality, historical exploitation, and double standards. Reasserting European values is not sufficient as a response. The EU must demonstrate, through concrete action and credible partnership, that its model delivers results, for Europeans and for others.

Challenge 5:

The erosion of multilateralism and international law

The international rules-based order, built painstakingly over decades through the UN system, international law, and multilateral institutions, is under sustained attack from multiple directions simultaneously. Russia has violated the UN Charter's most fundamental prohibition: the use of force against the territorial integrity of a sovereign state. The United States has retreated from multilateral commitments, withdrawing from the WHO, the Paris Agreement architecture, and key arms control frameworks. Israel has conducted actions that constitute genocide with impunity. China has contested international legal rulings it dislikes, most notably in the South China Sea. Veto power in the Security Council has rendered collective responses to major violations of international law effectively impossible.

The danger is not only that individual violations go unpunished. It is that the norm itself erodes. When powerful states act outside the rules with impunity, smaller states draw the rational conclusion that rules apply only to those without the power to ignore them. International law's authority rests ultimately on its universality, and once that universality is visibly selective, the entire architecture begins to hollow out. As perhaps the most rule-bound major actor in the international system, the EU has more to lose from this erosion than any other.

Challenge 6:

The digital and technological sovereignty deficit

The EU is heavily dependent on a small number of US technology corporations for the digital infrastructure on which its economy, public administration, and democratic processes increasingly run. Cloud services, artificial intelligence, social media platforms, and search infrastructure are dominated by companies whose headquarters, legal jurisdictions, data governance practices, and, increasingly, political alignments are outside European control. The recent rapprochement between US Big Tech and the Trump administration has added to this economic dependency an acute political dimension.



This is not merely a competitiveness problem. A democratic society that cannot control its own information infrastructure, cannot guarantee the integrity of its public discourse, and cannot protect its citizens' data from foreign governments or private actors operating under foreign law is not fully sovereign in any meaningful sense. As artificial intelligence and cloud computing become ever more transformative, reshaping healthcare, education, energy, and security, the stakes of this dependency will only grow. Europe did not build its political model over decades only to outsource its digital foundations to actors whose interests and values increasingly diverge from its own.

Challenge 7:

The Global South's shifting alignments and the crisis of development

The countries of the Global South are not passive objects of great-power competition. They are increasingly active agents with growing economic weight, demographic significance, and geopolitical leverage. The expansion of BRICS in 2024 and 2025, the growing assertiveness of the African Union, and the increasing capacity of regional organisations like ASEAN, MERCOSUR and the African Common Economic Area to set terms rather than accept them all signal a profound shift in the distribution of international influence.

Many of these countries simultaneously face acute development challenges: debt distress, climate vulnerability, food insecurity, and inadequate health infrastructure. These challenges are not incidental. They are in significant part the result of structural inequities in the global economic and financial system, and of climate damage caused overwhelmingly by industrialised countries. How the EU engages with the Global South, whether through genuinely partner-centred investment and equitable conditionality or through a continuation of the extraction and coercion that has characterised historical relationships, will determine whether it can build the coalitions it needs to remain a relevant actor in a multipolar world.

Challenge 8:

Planetary crises without borders: climate breakdown, pandemic risk, and food insecurity

Climate breakdown, pandemic risk, and food insecurity share a common feature: they are threats that recognise no borders, whose costs fall disproportionately on those least responsible for causing them, and that cannot be addressed by any single state or bilateral arrangement. They require collective action at a scale that only robust multilateral frameworks can provide, and they are occurring precisely at the moment when those frameworks are most under strain.

The climate crisis is accelerating faster than most models predicted a decade ago, with cascading consequences for food systems, migration, and political stability. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that global health security is a geopolitical issue: pharmaceutical supply chain dependencies, inequitable vaccine distribution, and the collapse of international coordination mechanisms all had direct consequences for European security and prosperity. Food insecurity, already weaponised as an instrument of war by Russia, is set to worsen with the recent escalations in Iran and as climate impacts on agricultural systems intensify, particularly in regions with which the EU seeks deeper partnership. These are not separate crises but interconnected dimensions of a single challenge: the preservation of global stability in a world where the political will and institutional capacity for collective action are simultaneously most needed and most threatened.



Challenge 9:

The contest for cultural influence and the crisis of democratic attraction

Alongside military, economic, and technological competition, a parallel contest is underway for cultural influence and narrative power. Social media platforms have become arenas of geopolitical competition, with foreign actors deliberately amplifying division, undermining trust in democratic institutions, and eroding the social cohesion that makes collective political action possible. The recent US National Security Strategy's explicit targeting of European multi-ethnic societies and its signalling of support for far-right movements across the continent marks an unprecedented rupture: for the first time, a formal ally has identified European cohesion itself as an adversarial interest.

The United States was historically the world's dominant soft power. That strategic commitment has collapsed. The dismantling of USAID, the withdrawal from UNESCO frameworks, and the subordination of cultural exchange to transactional nationalism have created a vacuum that China is moving deliberately to fill, investing in cultural infrastructure and media presence across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and offering an alternative account of modernity that a growing number of countries find compelling.

Europe has extraordinary assets in this contest: cultural depth and diversity, a proven model of pluralistic democratic governance, and the magnetic pull of its educational institutions and creative industries. But assets unused are assets wasted. Translating them into deliberate, strategic soft power, and defending European cultural space against external interference in the process, is one of the defining political tasks of this generation.

Volt's Vision for the EU's Role in the New World Order

At a time when classic sovereignty-oriented state-based foreign policy is in decline and is increasingly outweighed by geoeconomic dynamics, driven by the globalised circulation of goods, capital, people, and information, and by ever-closer economic interdependencies, the EU needs a new, holistic foreign policy perspective. One that puts particular emphasis on the bloc's unique qualities, and integrates it effectively and mutually beneficially into the shifting world order as outlined in the previous chapters.

“Faced with [the] imperative to adapt and renew diplomacy, the trajectories of actors vary according to their capacity to insert themselves into global governance, their ability to mobilize multi-level and multi-sector resources, and their capacity to renew their diplomatic instruments.”
(Mballa and Michaud, 2026:6)

The solutions and proposals set out in this chapter rest on two foundational claims. First, that the European Union must strategically prioritise autonomy and independence in key fields in order to gain the room to manoeuvre and exercise influence in the international system, not as an end in itself, but as the precondition for meaningful action. Second, that increasing stability, sustainability, and sustainable development globally is not only a moral imperative but directly beneficial to the quality of life within Europe, as well as beyond its territorial bounds. A more stable, more equitable world order is in the EU's interest – and the EU is one of the few actors with the scale, the institutional depth, and the values-based legitimacy to help build it.

These two claims are not in tension. Strategic autonomy and global solidarity are two sides of the same coin: an EU that is less dependent, more coherent, and more financially and technologically sovereign is also an EU that can be a more generous, more reliable, and more credible partner.

We take the UN 2030 Agenda – co-signed in 2015 by 193 UN member countries – as the globally agreed minimum consensus of what constitutes progress toward a better quality of life as a common global good, and have streamlined its three pillars of sustainability throughout this vision: economic sustainability (equitable growth), environmental sustainability (resource preservation), and social sustainability (justice and inclusivity). This is not an arbitrary choice. It is grounded in the EU's own foundational commitments: Article 21(1) TEU states that the Union's action on the international scene “shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement,

and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.”

In a world where these principles are under unprecedented pressure – from authoritarian revisionism, from the weaponisation of economic interdependence, and from the deliberate erosion of multilateral norms, defending and advancing them is no longer only an ethical position. It is a strategic one.

The following nine sub-chapters set out our concrete vision across the key domains where the EU must act: from trade and strategic autonomy to defence, digital sovereignty, global commons, financial architecture, and soft power. Each chapter explains not only what we propose, but why the proposed solutions are effective – and what accountability mechanisms must accompany them. Each concludes with a tiered set of policy proposals, mapped across this mandate, the next decade, and our longer-term vision for what a progressive, sovereign, and globally responsible EU could ultimately look like.

- ★ Trade & Strategic Autonomy – From dependency to diversification: dependency warning system, trade specialisation and more sectoral deals
- ★ Non-Eurocentric Partnerships – From conditionality-as-coercion to interest partnerships, and the EU’s humanist counter-offer
- ★ Multilateral strategy & coalitions – Multispeed Europe and the EU’s three-gears approach to multilateral collaboration
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1: Trade & Strategic Autonomy

From dependency to diversification: dependency warning system, trade specialisation and more sectoral deals

As outlined previously, geoeconomic shifts are at the core of many of the changes in the world order we are observing today. The **weaponisation of trade** and tariffs by global powers has recently peaked – and with it, the realisation that trade diversification and strategic autonomy are two sides of the same coin of dependency reduction, and thereby both essential elements of foreign policy. While Europe is a huge economic heavy weight, it lacks the coordination to react to the shifting economic world order and the quickly evolving sector dependencies.

Even though the recently introduced Anti-Coercion Instrument can be a strong tool against weaponisation of trade, strategic autonomy begins internally, with clarity over the EU's own vulnerabilities. This means systematically surveilling and mapping where European industries, supply chains, and consumers are dangerously exposed to single suppliers and systemic overcapacity shocks – in energy, the green transition, digital infrastructure, defence, and downstream manufacturing.

To institutionalise this vigilance, we call for a **standing dependency warning system** and an annual EU dependency summit, bringing together lawmakers, industry practitioners, and researchers to flag critical exposures before they become leverage points for adversaries or whole industries disappear.

Accelerating the build-out of renewable energy is an essential part of this strategy: dependence on fossil fuels from unstable or hostile suppliers, as the wars in Ukraine, Iran and the broader Middle East have shown, is a strategic vulnerability as much as an environmental one.

From that foundation, not only capacity building but also trade agreements must be redesigned: not around abstract liberalisation, but around **concrete strategic interests** and European needs. The feedback from partner countries is clear: value-narratives can have paternalistic undertones – knowing clearly what European interests are creates a transparent basis for negotiation.

We call for **specialisation of trade agreements** – more targeted, more sectoral, and more precisely matched to specific strategic dependencies. This is not a retreat from trade, nor protectionism: it means replacing unwieldy omnibus agreements with focused, interest-based deals that give the EU real leverage where it matters most. While others are calling for scaling up, we are calling for **smarter**. Making trade an instrument of the EU's internal architecture of resilience.

- ❓ What we need is something some experts are calling “conditional protectionism” to counter heavily subsidised industries actively undermining European production.

2: Non-Eurocentric Partnerships

From conditionality-as-coercion to interest partnerships, and the EU's humanist counter-offer

China is outperforming the EU not because its offer is better in values, but because it is **better targeted to partner countries'** actual needs. Take what works well and copy it: the EU should also increase sensible **locally-guided investments** in infrastructure and facilities partner countries want and need: meaning, providing what Global Gateway is still often failing to achieve – investments where they are actually welcome and sustainable, informed by consultation of local authorities, NGOs, civil society and SMEs. The interest-driven approach has to go both ways and leave Eurocentric preconceptions and decision-making throughout the project cycle behind. Projects with clear economic or trade related interest for EU businesses should however not be financed with Official Development Assistance (ODA), as they would be currently, and instead be cross-financed from the European Competitiveness Fund (Art. 11).

The previously outlined more sectoral approach to trade-agreements also responds to the fact that developing and emerging economies are often more focused on specific export sectors and depend on export relationships for their own employment rates, economic stability and overall growth. The resulting **interest-based partnerships** are preferable to partner countries and proof more sustainable in the long-term.

But: The EU's answer cannot be only to try and out-bid China on infrastructure investments (eg. in African partner countries) - it **must offer what China cannot**: human capital, mobility, Erasmus, worker protection and genuine, reliable conditionality (climate/environmental, human rights, international law) that flows in both directions.

Currently, the EU's credibility as a partner-centred actor is undermined by the **conditionality-as-coercion model** that has characterised many existing agreements for decades. The 2024 partnership agreement between the EU and the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States(OACPS) is a case in point: it imposes highly specific legal commitments on the return and readmission of irregular migrants, while offering little in the way of reciprocal mobility or visa facilitation. This model, where conditionality flows in one direction only, reinforces colonial power dynamics and signals disregard rather than partnership. It must be replaced.

The alternative is to flip the logic entirely. Human capital is Europe's truly unique strategic asset and mobility an impactful trading chip - but flipped: No longer "if you stop migration movements you get trade and money" but rather "**enabling mobility as a soft power**".

Rather than wielding migration prevention as a lever, we call for the EU to offer visa facilitation, Erasmus access, Talentpool partnerships, and training, knowledge and technology transfer as proactive tools of engagement. Not as coercion, but as the foundation of an environment in which the EU's own strategic needs – critical raw materials, market access, upstream products, skilled workforce, collaboration on cross-border challenges – are met through genuine **interest-based partnership** rather than reluctant compliance. This is soft power with strategic intent: what China cannot offer, and what Europe, if it chooses, uniquely can.



3: Multilateral Strategy & Coalitions

Multispeed Europe and the EU's three-gears approach to multilateral collaboration

Traditional multilateralism is destabilised and increasingly captured by vetoes. Principles of the multilateral rules-based order are undermined by coercive diplomacy, and questioning of the legitimacy of the UN and its function in global peace governance. Yet we must not lose sight of what it has delivered: the Agenda 2030, the architecture of international human rights law, and the Paris Agreement were all multilateral achievements. Abandoning multilateralism hands the field to great-power unilateralism and strongman politics.

The EU's answer is a three-gears approach: **defending multilateral institutions** while simultaneously **building faster, issue-specific coalitions** alongside them. One-size-fits-all multilateralism does not work in the current global system – the instrument must be matched to the challenge.

1. A fast-moving crisis calls for plurilateralism: a coalition of the willing sets a standard among themselves, with others joining as it suits them, much as plurilateral agreements function at the WTO.
2. A long-term structural relationship calls for regionalism: durable institutional ties with ASEAN, the African Union, and MERCOSUR, built not only around trade but around shared governance standards and resilience. We call for cooperative initiatives such as Joint Parliamentary Assemblies to become standing instruments of diplomacy, institutionalisation, scrutiny, and mediation in crisis management between the blocs.
3. A negotiation where China or the US is setting the terms calls for a middle powers coalition: countries that individually lack leverage but together represent a significant share of global GDP and political weight. Given the BRICS' strategic expansion in 2025 and increasing global economic and geopolitical weight and institutionalisation, we call for a strategic European approach to addressing member countries of the BRICS with which closer collaboration could be envisioned, and to propose an alternative partnership to autocratic models.

This three-tier approach for the EU's foreign policy corresponds to our call for a Multi-Speed Europe. Within the EU itself, what emerges is a kind of European 'onion': an inner core should be able to move towards the USE at greater speed, the current EU should apply its fundamental values much stricter, candidate countries should get a fairer 'more for more, less for less' approach and an outer layer of friends like the UK, Norway and Canada should be kept closer with deep trade, technology and defence partnerships.

Such a system should never lead to ‘first and second class’ member states; only to accelerate deeper integration by those willing and able to go faster, with the same ultimate end-goal: a United States of Europe.

The EU’s distinctive role in this toolkit is not that of a traditional superpower – it is that of **the world’s most credible convener and broker**, precisely because it is neither China nor the US. It carries legitimacy without dominance. That is a rare and underused asset.

The red thread across all three gears is **international law as a common language and trusted principle**. Partner countries and regional organisations, especially in the Global South have recently increasingly recommitted to international law as a reference point, notably since the US’ substantial ideological and material retreat from multilateral collaboration. But without accountability, norms are worthless. The EU must ensure that ICC and ICJ rulings are not undermined or delegitimised and champion a **standing accountability mechanism** for violations of international law: For cases of crimes against core international law: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression, we call for:

1. the creation of an International Centre for the Prosecution of Core International Crimes – building on the success of the International Centre for the Prosecution of the Crime of Aggression (ICPA) in prosecuting Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, the EU should champion a respective body for all major violations of international law, including genocide and crimes against humanity.
2. the development of a complete EU legislative and funding framework, strengthening the Joint Investigation Teams (made up by at the minimum Eurojust, the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation and the Fundamental Rights Agency, as well as where applicable the EU Genocide Prosecution Network) and expanding their mandate to pursue cross-border violations of international law effectively, not just condemn them rhetorically.

4: Multilateral Reform: One Voice, One Seat

Towards a Common European Foreign Policy and reformed decision-making structures at the United Nations

The three-gears approach only works if the EU speaks with a **single voice**. Fragmented national positions in multilateral fora undermine every coalition the EU tries to build. Through no other tool does the EU become a united entity like through the de jure and de facto status of a unified actor in the international arena (Mballa 2026: 90).

In the long term, the EU needs a **European Union Ministry of Foreign Affairs** leading a genuinely Common European Foreign Policy, including in all multilateral institutions.

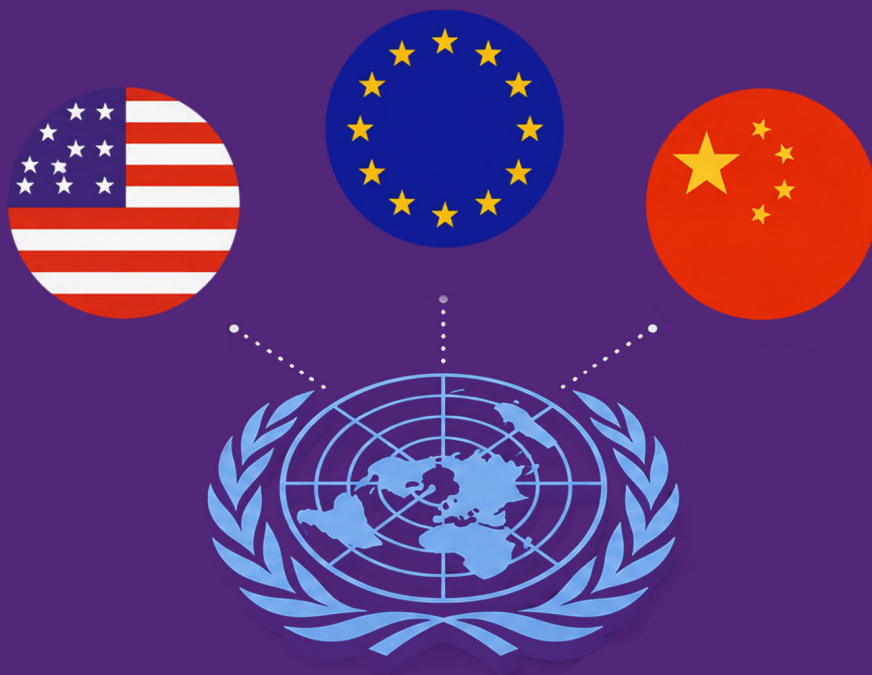
In the shorter term, decision-making for multilateral intervention must be reformed: we call for the transfer of France's **permanent UNSC seat to an EU seat** held by a representative with the equal political standing to a Commissioner confirmed by majority vote by the EP, complemented by a standing EU representation across all UN agencies to coordinate member state positions and action across sectors.

On UN reform more broadly, we call for a Security Council that better reflects the world as it is: in the short-term, more permanent seats drawn from underrepresented regions, an increased total number of seats to reflect regional, economic and population diversity, and as a long-term ambition the abolition of permanent seats in favour of regular elections by the General Assembly from a pool of regional groupings, including seats for regional organisations such as the African Union.

At the same time, decision making in the UN should be reformed so it can function properly and be brought into the 21st century. In the UNSC, unanimity should be replaced by a form of majority voting for matters related to genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes, including resolutions legitimising military interventions. A lower threshold should be introduced for the General Assembly to override UNSC decisions. A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA) should be created as a precedent for representative democracy at UN level that can be expanded in mandate and scope over time, including overriding vetoes by the UNSC. A United Nations World Citizens Initiative (UNWCI) should be created so citizens can have their voices heard directly at UN level.

The EU's internal coordination is unparalleled among regional organisations, and this is an asset beyond its own borders. Where countries lack the capacity to coordinate effectively at a multilateral level, the EU as a convener can step in, facilitating coalition-building not only for its own interests but as a genuine service to the multilateral system.

A note on scope: the UN is currently undertaking an internal reform process – the UN80 – reviewing its financing architecture, seat distribution in the UNGA and UNSC, voting mechanisms, and sectoral structure. This paper does not propose a holistic proposal for UN reform in detail, but rather sets out how the EU should position itself within the existing system and actively shape that process.



5: United for Defense and Prevention

A European Army to defend our peace project

Europe is a peace project, but freedom isn't free. As Robert Schuman said: *"World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it."* Currently, that danger is existential. Russia is waging an imperial war of aggression against Ukraine, a European state, and it will not stop until it loses. Russia will directly invade and attempt to break the EU if given the chance because as a democratic and voluntary alternative, it is a threat to its own autocratic model.

But relying on the United States for protection is a dangerous gamble. Europe counts on NATO for its collective defence, but that organisation only functions with US intelligence, logistics, command and control, strategic enablers and rapid reaction forces. US pressure on Ukraine, unilateral tariffs, interference in our elections, threats to annex Greenland and illegal wars of choice make it clear that, at best, the US sees NATO as an extortion racket or group of vassals. Meanwhile, European militaries resemble bonsai trees: miniature, expensive and fragile. What we need is one solid oak to shelter us from the storm.

Instead of waiting for war to unite us, **we must unite to prevent war**. Two-thirds of Europeans want Europe to be able to defend itself independently. This must be done in three pathways that mutually reinforce each other and respond to different timescales: 1) **a Europeanised NATO**, 2) core groups of countries **integrating faster and deeper**, and 3) a full European Defence Union with a **European Army** at its center.

The EU cannot do this alone – it must consider Europe more broadly. Only by including Ukraine, other candidate countries, the UK, Norway and other key partners can we achieve this with ambitions and the speed of relevance. What emerges is a **European Defence Union** within a Europeanised NATO.

Many European politicians believe meeting a spending percentage and buying from national industries will keep us safe. It will not. We cannot spend our way into security. It is both a failure of imagination and a false dilemma. Instead we call for economies of scale and interoperability through armed forces integration, a full single market for defence, European preference instead of dependence on foreign suppliers, joint procurement as the rule rather than the exception, and European debt with low interest rates. This way, we save up to 100 billion euro per year which can be invested in education, health care, culture, as well as our green and digital transition.

We must stop viewing the defence sector as a budgetary black hole and reimagine it as a powerful **innovation and economic engine**. By stimulating breakthrough technology innovation and investing in start-ups and scale-ups, we break up legacy defence industries, forge a modern military doctrine that is fit for today's battlefield, and create innovations in advanced materials, clean energy and digital systems that will accelerate our green future. Green defence is not a contradiction: dealing with the climate crisis is intimately connected with global stability and the resilience of our societies.

Finally, Europe must help take responsibility for the future world we are building. A just world built on functioning international law and human rights requires a responsibility to protect populations from rogue governments. A future United States of Europe should put a permanent peacekeeping force at the disposal of a reformed United Nations.



6: European Digital Sovereignty, a Tech Eurogroup and Globalising the EU Tech Identity

When it comes to digital services, the EU is heavily reliant on the US – and more specifically on a very limited number of Silicon Valley tech companies that overwhelmingly dominate the European and global digital market. This has given rise to privately owned corporations so powerful economically that their market capitalisation generally exceeds the GDP of almost all EU member states. The recent rapprochement between US Big Tech and the Trump administration has added to this economic power an extremely worrying political dimension. This trend is particularly alarming given that cloud and artificial intelligence services are likely to prove far more transformative for society than online shopping or search engines.

In the new world order, **digital independence** has therefore become not only a matter of competitiveness, but a matter of the highest geopolitical stakes, in terms of European sovereignty, as well as global stability.

In the first instance, we need to reiterate our call for the urgent **development of European alternatives** to key digital tech products and services. For the EU, achieving technological sovereignty is more than ever a question of survival – and one that can only be addressed through coordinated efforts across all levels of governance, combined with strong democratic scrutiny, as illustrated by the recent attempted sale of Digi¹, a critical Dutch digital infrastructure provider, to a US firm.

In the longer term, tech sovereignty would also be a precondition for building intelligence independence from other global powers and for guaranteeing data security in critical fields such as global health – where the absence of a European data-sharing infrastructure forces member states to rely on US or Chinese platforms whose data governance standards are incompatible with European values.

For a coordinated EU effort: We call for the establishment of a **Tech Sovereignty “Eurogroup”**, composed in equal parts of digital experts and elected or appointed public officeholders – including national ministers and European Commission executives – to coordinate policy strategy on technology, AI, and cybersecurity, and digital media in the way the Eurogroup coordinates monetary policy. Different from the Competitiveness Coordination Tool, this body must ordinarily **consult with the European Parliament’s** relevant representatives. Only such a centralised entity can deliver the coherence needed across all political levels to meet the necessary targets for digital sovereignty.

Externally, EU Tech Sovereignty should trigger a Brussels effect on global tech development. To contribute globally to better tech development, breaking the dependency on US Big Tech monopolies must rely on a coherent set of measures built around three core principles, and one foundational ambition:

1. **Transparency and openness:** Public investment in new technologies should prioritise open-source development, keeping publicly funded innovation a shared European asset. Algorithmic transparency and human supervision must be non-negotiable conditions.
2. **Sustainability:** Technological sovereignty must not come at the cost of environmental commitments. Low energy-consumption data centres, minimal community impact, and AI innovation that actively contributes to, rather than undermines, our climate goals.
3. **Democratic alternatives:** Breaking monopolies means more than regulating incumbents. It means opening the market to new European players operating exclusively under EU law, whose governance models are inherently aligned with European values and digital rights frameworks.

A distinctly European technological identity: Europe does not need to replicate the US model of massive, energy-intensive foundation models. The EU should pioneer a more targeted, efficient, and purposeful vision of AI, investing in specialised models for industrial, scientific, and public sector applications where European expertise already leads.



7: Global Commons Guarantor

Loss & Damage Register, and the EU's responsibility for global health and global food security

While previous chapters address how the EU builds partnerships and coalitions, this chapter asks what we must protect together - the global commons that no bilateral deal or regional bloc can safeguard alone. A substantial and underappreciated threat to global stability comes from challenges that are non-economic in nature, cross-border by definition, and where the costs fall disproportionately on those least responsible: climate breakdown, pandemic risk, and food insecurity.

If the EU wants to be a credible convener and broker in the new world order, it must become the **guarantor of the multilateral frameworks** that less reliable partners are abandoning. While the first priority needs to be strengthening multilateral commitments led by the UNFCCC, to drive climate change mitigation and adaptation, the EU's credibility on climate rests not on declarations but on accountability infrastructure.

Climate: We call for a **Loss & Damage register** – modelled on the Ukraine register – which makes climate harm legible, countable, and actionable. Just as the Ukraine register creates a documented, legally usable record of war damages to underpin future reparations, a climate equivalent would systematically record the economic and human costs of climate-related disasters, creating the evidentiary foundation for liability, compensation, and binding international commitments. Such a register – holding big polluter states to account and emphasising the unequal distribution of climate and environmental harm – would contribute greatly to restoring the integrity of international law.

Global Health: The COVID-19 pandemic exposed both the geopolitical fragility of pharmaceutical supply chains and the cost of treating health as a national rather than a global responsibility. The EU is already the largest contributor to the Pandemic Preparedness Fund, with the upcoming ratification of the WHO Pandemic Agreement the EU must ensure the implementation within its Member States – we call for the establishment of a **strengthened warning and data sharing system built on European tech infrastructure**.

Food Security: We call to **embed reciprocal food security benchmarks** in trade and partnership agreements involving agricultural products, and funding resilience in climate-vulnerable regions. This could include the introduction of Strategic Mutual Reserves (cereals, proteins and fertilisers), Agri-Tech Knowledge Sharing or Dual Sustainability Mandates on imported food, to work towards global stability and more equity in bearing the costs of climate and environmental damage.

With the US having retreated from several of the relevant multilateral frameworks - the WHO, the Paris Agreement architecture, the SDGs – to preserve stability and the EU must now become their active guarantor: financially, diplomatically, and institutionally. This is not charity. A world of greater health security, food stability, and climate accountability is a world in which the EU's rules, standards, and partnerships carry more weight.

8: Fixing a dysfunctional global financial system

The Euro as a geopolitical stabiliser, common taxation, and reforming the global debt architecture

The dollar's dominance is partly structural, but it is also the result of strategic choices the EU has not yet made. When the US imposes sanctions, their effect comes largely from the fact that so much global trade is denominated in dollars, clearing through American financial infrastructure. The EU should push for the same principles of equity we call for in multilateral governance fora, in its position on the global financial system, while using the Euro more deliberately, to reduce coercion in the global financial system, without recreating US hegemony.

We therefore propose three elements to address challenges in the global financial system:

1) Deepening the **euro's international role** as cornerstone of a multipolar financial system, 2) building a **common corporate tax** to fund multilateral institutions, and 3) **reforming the global debt** and sanctions architecture.

1. The euro remains underrepresented in global reserve holdings and trade invoicing relative to the EU's economic weight. Actively promoting euro-denominated contracts in **strategic sectors** – energy, raw materials, defence procurement – would reduce EU trading relationships' exposure to dollar-zone coercion and give European sanctions policy an independent foundation. A strengthened euro is a precondition for a more effective and **credible EU sanctions architecture**: one that does not depend on the US dollar and financial infrastructure to function. The development of European payment infrastructure, with the introduction of the retail and wholesale digital euro, the creation of bilateral swap lines between EU Member States or partner countries, the emission of a permanent EU safe asset would further extend the euro's reach in international transactions, reduce EU exposure to foreign exchange swings and, inter-alia, increase the independence of European financial services.
2. To combat tax evasion and create own resources for the UN, the EU should be the leading champion of the **global common corporate tax base** pushed through by the Biden administration in 2021 and agreed among UN member states. Strengthening the OECD minimum tax framework of 15%, which remains limited in scope and enforceability, to establish a universal floor that eliminates tax evasion and a race to the bottom. This becomes particularly urgent, as the US under Trump have viewed themselves as exempt from this taxation framework. Importantly, additional revenues generated through this mechanism, in resulting from the difference to an established national corporate tax under 15%, should be channeled toward **funding UN agencies and multilateral institutions**, giving the international system a stable, independent financial base that does not depend on the political will of any single contributor state,

without straining national budgets further. This is both a fiscal justice argument and a strategic one: it recognises international cooperations as accountable geopolitically relevant elements while creating own resources for the multilateral system.

3. The **reform of the international finance and debt architecture** is equally urgent. The current system is structurally biased against developing countries: it offers too little liquidity when crises hit, too little flexibility in restructuring when debt becomes unsustainable, and too little development lending for the scale of investment the green and digital transitions require. The governance of global financial institutions such as the IMF or the World Bank reflects a post-war distribution of power that no longer corresponds to the world as it is. Despite reforms in 2016 that marginally increased China's voting share, the IMF remains dominated by the US, Europe, and Japan, with the US retaining effective veto power over key decisions (cf. Petrone 2025). The World Bank's governance structure suffers from similar democratic deficits.

To improve partnerships with Global South countries and create enabling environments for economic growth the EU should support meaningful **voting reform in both institutions**, alongside establishing a robust multilateral **debt restructuring framework** – including A) structured renegotiation of the debt of the sixty-plus countries currently in debt distress, within and beyond the Paris Club – and B) **institutionalising the Debt Pause Clause Alliance**, moving towards a ratification by the European Union and its Member States with one unified voice. This alliance of international banks and countries commits since 2025 to an **automatic suspension clauses in loan contracts** with developing countries that trigger a pause on repayments in the event of large-scale natural disasters or severe economic shocks.

It is the reformed global financial architecture that makes the partner-centred diplomacy of sub-chapter 2 possible, and a direct counter to the debt dynamics that have allowed other powers to convert development finance into political leverage.



9: Soft Power & People

Culture, Values, and Enlargement:

Europe as a great attractor in a polarised world

Culture has become a site of foreign policy – most visibly in the recent US National Security Strategy targeting European cohesion and self-understanding as a **deliberate vector of geopolitical destabilisation**. In a multipolar, highly polarised world, soft power is not a luxury but a strategic necessity.

Where hard power coerces and economic power incentivises, soft power enables the informal consensus-building, the diplomatic goodwill, and the rapid-response credibility that make collective action possible before crises harden into conflicts. Soft power draws from three mutually reinforcing sources: a society's culture; its values and domestic policies; and its conduct on the international scene. The EU, if it chooses to invest deliberately in all three, has extraordinary assets across each.

A **United Europe** is one of the strongest counterweights to both US and Chinese hegemony, not only economically but idealistically. Soft power works because states are drawn to models they find successful and worth emulating. Here **values and culture** are not separate categories but mutually constitutive. European culture, in all its diversity, is the living expression of the values the EU claims to stand for: pluralism, creative freedom, critical inquiry, and the coexistence of difference. Investing in culture has strong foreign policy implications.

For decades, the United States understood this: Hollywood, jazz, literature, and art were deliberate instruments of American soft power projection, backed by public and private investment and carried by a cultural sector with global reach. That strategic commitment has recently collapsed, leaving a cultural power vacuum that no single actor has yet moved to fill. The EU should step into that space, but not by dominating or homogenising, but rather in the same convener role outlined in previous chapters: **creating platforms, funding exchange, and amplifying diverse European voices** rather than projecting a single one.

We call for a **Common European International Cultural Relations Policy**, that builds on the 2016 Strategy and the recent Culture Compass proposal.

Another recent best practice to learn from: The **Korean Wave Model** offers a further instructive model. South Korea did not become a global cultural force by accident – it invested deliberately in cultural export as national soft power, turning K-pop, film, and design into instruments of diplomatic reach and economic return. The EU can do something similar: offering a wealth of cultural heritage and highly sought-after educational facilities for the world’s talent, students, and tourists, while at the same time, deploying **cultural relations as a distinct and active strand of Enlargement**, Neighbourhood, and rapprochement strategies. In conflict resolution and crisis diplomacy, the value of people-to-people ties and cultural familiarity is already well recognised, it is time to systematise that insight across all of the EU’s external relations.

We want to position Europe as the compelling project that it is: Enlargement itself should be understood through this lens: not merely as a technocratic accession process, but as the **expansion of a sphere of shared values**, cultural convergence, and people-to-people exchange. Europe is the only place in the world that has more than a dozen countries lining up to voluntarily become part of it, because EU membership transforms entire societies’ democracies, economies and security for the better. A reunified European continent of 500 million citizens and more than 35 countries will have the resources to power the green and digital transition, the educated populations to boost innovation, and a geopolitical power to protect its neighbourhood and defend international law globally. Every new wave of enlargement injects new ideas, new cultures and new energy into the EU whose purpose is constantly being built. Through stronger rule of law safeguards, budget conditionalities and a reformed enlargement process itself; many new countries can join the Union while minimising the risk of future backsliding.