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Relationship status: It's complicated

The transatlantic partnership can no longer be taken as a given. Europe needs to become master of its own destiny

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Ever since his victory in the US presidential election, Donald Trump has consistently, tirelessly called into question the achievements of the group of states known as The West. Be it international law, humanitarian principles or multilateral agreements, the 45th President of the United States of America has attacked the basis of the transatlantic relationship without offering viable alternatives.

In the EU, meanwhile, a new system of values and legal process has been established that has become a cornerstone of discourse between Europe and America.

As such, policymakers, business leaders and voices in civil society within the EU are now following every step – and every tweet – from the White House with increasing disquiet: the US has the world's largest economy and its most powerful military; it is also the EU's most important partner in many areas of foreign policy and security cooperation.

Indeed, for all the bewilderment with which Europe follows America's internal policy debates in areas such as gun control or the relationship between the state and the individual, in many EU member states there is a broad consensus across party lines that the US remains Europe's core ally when it comes to resolving conflicts around the world and tackling international issues of all kinds.

Yet in almost every key area of foreign policy, the US and EU are moving apart. In three core threats to peace and human wellbeing worldwide – the proliferation and potential use of nuclear weapons, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and climate change – the US has, under Trump, turned its back on the consensus reached in the West, a consensus that over many years it has done so much to shape and defend.

Trump has put a question mark over the Iran nuclear deal, recognised

Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and relegated a two-state solution to the realm of the far-off future, and announced his intention to take the US out of the 2015 Paris climate accord. The EU needs to respond to this change with a joint strategy as quickly as possible.

The Iran nuclear deal

President Trump does not tire of calling into question the deal with Iran on its nuclear programme. With the deal agreed for a period of 12 years and brokered by the High Representative of the European Union on Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU now finds itself having to insist that the agreement be kept to in Washington while seeing that its terms are implemented through a regime of strict and transparent checks.

At the same time, however, the EU should take seriously the US government's concerns about Iran's destabilising role in the Middle East. Hemming in the conflict between the region's two powers, Saudi Arabia and Iran, will require dialogue between them and neighbouring states as well as important organisations in the region such as the Gulf Cooperation Council.

The EU could take on a role as mediator, ideally alongside the US, but should be prepared to start the process alone if necessary.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

With his decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, President Trump has disqualified the US from its role as a mediator between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Having time and time again publicly called the two-state solution into question, on 6 December he announced that the US would recognise Jerusalem. In so doing, he complied with demands from the right-wing Israeli government, which sees the city as the nation's only capital and will not accept it as the seat of government of both Israel and a Palestinian state.

Reactions to Trump's decision came swiftly from the Palestinian side: President Mahmoud Abbas equated the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital with a US withdrawal from the role of broker in the region. The Islamic fundamentalists of Hamas called on the Palestinian populations of East Jerusalem, the Gaza strip and the West Bank to rise up against Israel in a third intifada.

As a result, the process of reconciliation between Abbas's Palestinian National Authority and Hamas – only recently reactivated after years of dormancy – is in danger of failing.

Representatives of the EU member states, meanwhile, reacted with a joint statement at the United Nations in New York: 'We do not agree with the United States' decision to recognise Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. It is not consistent with UN Security Council resolutions and will not contribute to peace in the region.'

For the EU, this part of the Middle East is somewhat closer to home than Iran. Many member states have historic ties to the region's states, and as both Israel's most important trading partner and the biggest donor to the Palestinians, the EU as an institution has plenty of leverage it can use to play a positive role in resolving the conflict.

As such, the EU now needs to fill the hole left behind by the US – not to do the opposite of President Trump and take sides with Abbas (who has not exactly been conspicuous by his willingness to compromise and take concrete steps towards reconciliation with Hamas), but to act as an impartial broker between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority.

At the same time, it must pressure the region's Arab states, Egypt first and foremost, to take an active role in the reconciliation between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas; without unified leadership of the Palestinians there can be little hope of peace talks with Israel.

By the same token, President Trump must be persuaded to publicly declare his support for Jerusalem as an undivided capital of both Israel and a future Palestinian state, to keep the possibility of a two-state solution on the table.

The US is and will remain Israel's most important ally; it retains enormous political capital and economic interests in the region and has the ability to influence it. For an EU that has made it its goal to resuscitate the Middle East peace process, this means helping move the initiative announced by Trump several months back in the right direction.

Yet Europe would be foolish to expect too much: in view of Trump's one-sided and uncritical support for Israel, the US can, for the foreseeable future, offer little more than damage limitation. The EU is far better placed to act as an effective mediator between the Israelis and the Palestinians and should summon the courage to fill this role, launching its own initiative for peace in coordination with the US and the Arab

nations – a course of action that was requested in a resolution on implementing a two-state solution in the Middle East passed in the European Parliament on 17 May.

The fight against climate change

No less radical than Trump's rejection of the two-state solution is his reversal of US policy on international climate protection. While the country was, under former president Barack Obama, active in working with the EU to help agree the Paris climate accord, on 1 June Trump announced the country's withdrawal from their provisions.

Although this decision will not come into force until November 2020, the United Nations' climate conference in Bonn this year showed that the current US administration cannot be relied on when it comes to climate change. During a podium discussion, for instance, the US delegation unabashedly talked up coal, natural gas and nuclear power as the energy sources of the future.

Here, too, the EU must now show more leadership and creativity to maintain the Paris Agreement as the central architecture for the international fight against climate change. That means systematically and continually promoting the role of climate protection in the EU's dealings with other countries and institutions while making sure to keep its own house in order. Its member states will have to give it the resources it needs to do this.

To date, European-level climate diplomacy has been a matter for a handful of experts in the European External Action Service and the European Commission. While this may be sufficient for developing a strategy, it will not be enough to implement one. The EU will need a noticeable increase in qualified personnel in this area; it must also become more inventive in how it interacts with local politicians and regional governors, NGOs and business and industry associations.

This year was the first in which representatives of sub-state bodies took part in the UN climate conference. The US was represented not just by the federal government but by an alliance named *We Are Still In*, consisting of state governors, senators, mayors, CEOs and representatives of universities who – in contrast to the country's official position – intend to uphold the Paris accord. Together, the more than 2,500 leading figures represent 127 million Americans and almost €6 billion of the country's economy.

I have commissioned a report in the European Parliament into the EU's

climate diplomacy, which must be completed by summer 2018. The importance of the Parliament in diplomatic affairs relating to climate protection was demonstrated by Californian Governor Jerry Brown's visit to the house in November this year.

In the report, I expect the Parliament to recommend supporting the European External Action Service in its efforts to create and strengthen a European framework for national climate change initiatives at member-state level.

The EU delegation in Washington has already developed a strategy on how to persuade US policymakers to implement the Paris Agreement. These initiatives need to be expanded and supported by member states and the European Parliament.

In the fight against climate change, the EU must not limit its transatlantic approach to its relations with the US but should seek to further deepen its partnership with Canada. The Ceta free-trade agreement signed off at the beginning of this year contains an important clause with respect to climate protection in which both the EU and Canada take it upon themselves to implement the Paris accord.

In a resolution of 8 February 2017, the European Parliament stated that future trade agreements must take this and a range of other standards enshrined in Ceta relating to issues such as sustainability and the environment or employment law as the absolute minimum for future deals. This makes Ceta the basis for any future trade negotiations with the US – which will not, therefore, be able to avoid the Paris Agreement and its goals.



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