



"From European Strengths to EU Power"

Policy Note - Geopolitics

Regaining Europe's Sovereignty

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*A briefing informed by the discussions of the Third European Conclave,
under the responsibility of the Conclave Executive Board members in their individual capacity.*

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“From European Strengths to EU Power”

FOREWORD

THE CONCLAVE WAS CREATED TO ADDRESS THE UNTHINKABLE.

At a time when European debates were largely dominated by the management of successive crises, **the ambition of the Conclave was to create a space where Europeans could project themselves beyond the turbulence of the moment and reflect on the long-term future of the continent.**

Created with the support and participation of António Costa — now President of the European Council — and with the contribution of major European foundations and corporations, the Conclave brought together a small and diverse group of influential Europeans: prime ministers, entrepreneurs, researchers, trade unionists, civil society leaders, and citizens who had participated in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

The first Conclave, held in November 2023, anticipated what many still considered unlikely: the return of the law of the strongest in international relations.

One year before the second election of President Donald Trump, participants analysed the emergence of a world increasingly shaped by geopolitical rivalry, imperial ambitions, and the growing risk of global disorder. The fifty first Conclavers reached a common conclusion: **Europeans could no longer remain spectators of global power dynamics.**

Europe would have to transform the European Union into a global, sustainable and responsible power, capable of acting in a world increasingly structured by the rivalry of major powers such as the United States and China. But this **European power would be different in nature: it would pursue no imperial domination and remain anchored in international law, multilateral cooperation and democratic legitimacy.**

SUCH A TRANSFORMATION WAS NOT PRESENTED AS AN OPTION BUT AS A NECESSITY. WITHOUT IT, EUROPEANS WOULD RISK BECOMING THE OBJECT RATHER THAN THE SUBJECT OF GLOBAL POWER COMPETITION.

The second Conclave, held in early 2025 in the presence of the Presidents of the European Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, as well as the Prime Minister of Belgium, translated this diagnosis into a concrete agenda.

The report “A Power Agenda for a Global, Sustainable, and Responsible Europe” proposed a series of strategic priorities: developing an independent European defence and security capacity, regaining scientific and technological leadership, and building a new partnership strategy with key global actors such as India, Brazil, and Canada.

Since then, many of these ideas have entered the European debate and begun to influence the agenda of European institutions and national governments.

Recent developments — from growing geopolitical instability to the threat of annexing Greenland, a European territory — have further accelerated this awakening. **The debate about transforming the European Union into a global power is no longer a taboo.**

[The third Conclave](#) therefore focused on identifying the key conditions for such a transformation.

- First, **Europe must seize its momentum for a bold growth agenda**. Discussions held in the presence of the President of the European Investment Bank, Nadia Calviño, highlighted the urgency of developing such an agenda. Competitiveness alone will not be enough. Without stronger growth, Europe risks a gradual decline that would weaken its capacity to defend its interests and fuel political fragmentation.
- Second, **Europe must ensure its technological and digital resilience**. Artificial intelligence, digital infrastructures and data ecosystems have become essential components of economic competitiveness, security and democratic sovereignty.
- Third, **Europe must renew its democratic model and reconnect citizens with the European project**, building a new generation of democratic participation adapted to the digital age and protected from external technological influence.

In this respect, we want to highlight an initiative of which many Conclavers have chosen to be Co-Founders, the [Europa Power Initiative](#), a unique societal, cultural and civic movement¹: its objective, to contribute to create the societal and political dynamics enabling the EU and Europe to transform into a new generation global, sustainable and responsible citizen-driven power and avoiding relegation to a protectorate completely resonates with the works and recommendations of the last Conclave.

These discussions confirm a central reality: Europe possesses extraordinary assets — scientific excellence, economic strength, democratic institutions, and a unique model of cooperation.

Among these assets is something historically unprecedented: **nearly half a billion free citizens who uniquely combine both national citizenship and European citizenship**. This dual democratic belonging constitutes one of the most powerful political innovations of modern history and gives Europe a singular capacity to act collectively while preserving the diversity of its nations.

Far from witnessing a civilisational decline, Europe may in fact be entering a new phase of expansion. For the first time in history, a political community is growing and attracting new members not through domination or strength relationships, but through **equality between states, the rule of law, fundamental human rights, shared prosperity, and sustainable development**. Through these principles, the European project seeks to give *civilisation* its fullest expression.

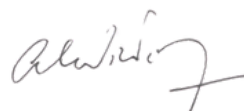
Europe must now develop the political will and strategic coherence necessary to transform these assets into power.

THE CONCLAVE WAS CREATED TO ADDRESS THE UNTHINKABLE.

Its ambition today is to help Europeans achieve what may soon become unavoidable: the emergence of a European power capable of shaping the future rather than suffering it.

Guillaume KLOSSA
Chairman of the Conclave

António VITORINO
Chairman of the Advisory Board



¹ Launched in 2025 at the initiative of a dozens of personalities including Philosopher Slavoj Žižek, Business Leaders Jean-François van Boxmeer and William Kadouch-Chassaing, Trade Unionist Ether Lynch, former EU Commissioners Mariya Gabriel, Nicolas Schmit and Margrethe Vestager with the engagement of 250 Co-Founders and the contribution of several European Parliament Representatives, including first Vice-President Sabine Verheyen, and Vice-President Younous Omarjee.

OVERVIEW

The Question of Power

Across the continent, citizens, institutions, and governments are rediscovering a question that had long remained implicit within the European project: the question of power. Where public debate understandably focuses on the urgency of crises, spaces for strategic reflection become indispensable. They allow us to step back from the immediacy of events and to consider the long-term direction of our collective project. This was and is the ambition behind the creation of the Conclave.

Conclave 2026

The third edition of the Conclave, which took place in Brussels in January 2026, focused on **Growth, Democracy, and Geopolitics** — with **digital capacity as a cross-cutting theme** — under the overarching perspective: *"From European Strengths to EU-Power."* The exchanges resulted in four policy briefs.

The key recommendations of each thematic brief are outlined below.

Geopolitics

- Build a Post-American Order for Europe
- Support Ukraine and Defend Europe
- Engage Member States to Deliver on Shared Defense Priorities
- Boost European Defense Innovation
- Operationalise the Mutual Assistance Clause in the EU Treaty Article 42.7
- New Formats of Partnership and Cooperation in Trade and Public Goods

Digital Capacity

- Activate Demand and Procurement as the Fastest Sovereignty Lever
- Act Across the Full Digital Stack, Not Isolated Technologies
- Embed AI into Industrial and IoT Products Before the Next Product Cycle Closes
- Secure Democratic Resilience Through Sovereign Digital Public Infrastructures

Growth

- Barriers Down for Firm Dynamics
- Single Markets for Services and Digital
- Free Way for a Capital Markets Union
- Increase Public Investment
- Allocate Defense Resources as a Catalyst for Productivity and Industrial Renewal

Democracy

- Extend Qualified Majority Voting in Targeted Domains
- A European Sovereign News Infrastructure
- A Democratic Sovereignty Doctrine
- From Participation to Democratic Intelligence
- Trusted European Datasets to Strengthen AI Integrity

REGAINING EUROPE'S SOVEREIGNTY

Rapporteur: Dr. Giovanni Grevi, Senior Associate Fellow at the Brussels School of Governance

In the session on geopolitics, moderated by Malgorzata Bonikowska, President of the Center for International Relations, and Maria João Rodrigues, President of Re-Imagine Europe, we had a keynote speech delivered by Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for Defence and Space. We discussed in particular three questions:

- **European defence: multiple routes, clear direction?** – Moderated by Malgorzata Bonikowska, President of the Center for International Relations
- **Transatlantic relations: breakdown, subordination, or transformation?** – Moderated by Philippe Etienne, former Ambassador of France to the United States and Germany
- **Partnership diplomacy: ad hoc risk-management or order-building?** – Moderated by Peter Grk, Secretary General of the Bled Strategic Forum

Key recommendations include:

- **Build a Post-American Order for Europe**
- **Support Ukraine and Defend Europe**
- **Engage Member States to Deliver on Shared Defense Priorities**
- **Boost European Defense Innovation**
- **Operationalise the Mutual Assistance Clause in the EU Treaty Article 42.7**
- **New Formats of Partnership and Cooperation in Trade and Public Goods**

“Now is the time to deliver: build Europe’s defence readiness by combining resources, organising ourselves better, and sustaining the political will to deter and defend — so that Europe comes out of this moment more united, more capable, and more secure.”
Andrius Kubilius, European Commissioner for Defence & Space, 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The geopolitics session of Conclave 2026 concluded that Europe is confronting **a structural shift in the international system that has transformed sovereignty from a long-term aspiration into an immediate strategic requirement**. Recent transatlantic tensions, Russia’s continued war against Ukraine, and intensifying great-power rivalry have revealed the scale of Europe’s exposure — and the costs of failing to convert economic strength and institutional capacity into geopolitical leverage.

Participants emphasised that Europe’s response must go beyond crisis management. Regaining agency requires a coherent power agenda combining three priorities: **reshaping transatlantic relations around credibility and resilience rather than dependence; accelerating the construction of a European defence and industrial base capable of delivering at scale; and advancing a proactive partnership strategy that links internal economic reforms with outward-facing engagement on trade, technology, climate, and connectivity**.

The session identified a **decisive moment for action**. Without rapid progress on defence integration, technological sovereignty, and coordinated external strategy, Europe risks deeper vulnerability and political fragmentation. Conclave 2026 therefore framed the challenge ahead in operational terms: **translating ambition into sustained investment, institutional reform, and collective political resolve**.

Introduction

In times of fundamental transformation, slow motion is equivalent to regression. In 2023, the [inaugural Conclave](#) called for a ‘Copernican revolution’ to reposition the European Union as a global power through strategic investment in defence, technology, and partnerships. By early 2025, the [second Conclave](#) intensified this mandate as the second Trump administration took office. Yet, the envisioned revolution remains unrealised. Despite reform pledges, Europe’s legacy of inertia and fragmented national agendas persisted while the international order shifted. Consequently, over the past year, Europe has remained in a reactive posture, scrambling to contain damage rather than proactively shaping geopolitical developments.

Throughout 2025, the rift between the rhetoric of European sovereignty and the reality of Europe’s vulnerability widened. This gap reflects a deficit in collective leadership capable of converting Europe’s latent assets into strategic agency. Adversaries — both external and internal — exploit this vacuum to undermine European cohesion. **In 2026, the imperative is to take action to narrow and eventually close this gap, turning aspirations into reality.**

As Europe continues to face Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the early part of the year has witnessed two major disruptive crises. For one, President Trump attempted to pressure Denmark and Europe into accepting the US acquisition of Greenland. Such disdain for partners and disregard for international law shocked Europeans into envisaging resistance and counter-measures, before the Trump administration backtracked. For another, the US and Israel launched a large-scale attack on Iran, triggering a new major war in the Middle East that threatens global energy security and economic stability. Despite the nefarious track record of the regime in Teheran, this deliberate attack violates international law and further undermines the rules-based international order. The Trump administration’s erratic, unilateral instincts provide the common thread between these otherwise unrelated crises.

In this environment, as US Treasury Secretary [Bessent put it](#), “Europeans project weakness.” Withstanding systemic competition and deterring adversaries requires tangible power and strategic depth, not merely good intentions. Empowering the Union is therefore a prerequisite not only for defending European interests but for preserving its democratic values. As Mario Draghi [observed](#), “a Europe that cannot defend its interests will not preserve its values for long.”

Looking towards 2026 and beyond, the alternative to European sovereignty is a path of accelerated decline and fragmentation, including the menace of an illiberal Europe. The Conclave’s ‘European Power Agenda’ hinges on meeting the material, institutional, and political requirements to take primary responsibility for Europe’s defence, on moving towards European technological sovereignty, and on proactively pursuing partnerships in support for rules-based cooperation. While achieving these objectives requires sustained investment and diplomatic skill, establishing a clear sense of purpose is the essential first step.

This Policy Note examines three closely connected dimensions of this roadmap: the future of transatlantic relations, the European defence agenda, and global partnerships.

Setting the Scene & Key Structural Changes

A Change of Paradigm in Transatlantic Affairs

The transatlantic partnership has entered a stage of deep, unprecedented crisis, and its future hangs in the balance. Driven by an extractive paradigm of profit-maximisation, President Trump is unilaterally revising the foundations of transatlantic relations, raising costs for Europe while seeking to divide the EU. **Transatlantic tensions on key policy issues — from trade to European security and digital regulation — represent the tips of a much larger political iceberg. The Trump administration features a raw, power-driven worldview rooted in nationalism, unilateralism, and nativism. Its foreign policy is directed to fulfil narrowly defined American interests, weaponising Europe’s vulnerabilities whenever it proves expedient.**

The Trump administration poses an explicit challenge to the liberal values that have structured both European integration and the transatlantic partnership for decades. The December 2025 [US National Security Strategy](#) elevated interference in European politics to a foreign policy goal, aimed at debasing European integration. The Greenland crisis has further eroded trust in Washington. A mid-January [survey](#) across various EU member states revealed that over half of respondents consider President Trump an “enemy of Europe” (with only 8% seeing him as a friend), 83% feel that transatlantic relations are deteriorating, and 64% define current US foreign policy as predatory.

At the same time, Europe remains reliant on the US for its defence (NATO, weapons supplies) and prosperity (as its largest export market, and a source of key digital technologies and energy). Finance is another critical dimension of Europe’s vulnerability. For one, the US can leverage the centrality of the dollar to condition access to finance to political alignment. For another, Europe is exposed to Washington’s decisions regarding the management of its growing public debt and trade deficit. [Scenarios include](#) interventions to weaken the dollar to favour US exports while keeping interest rates low through coordinated action between the Treasury and the Fed. [Measures discussed](#) at the outset of Trump’s second term even encompassed potential US [debt restructuring](#), pressuring partners to swap short-term Treasury bonds for very long-term ones in exchange for tariff relief or security guarantees. While such course of action may appear far-fetched, the connection between fiscal, monetary, and trade policies under the Trump administration presents clear risks for European sovereignty, the role of the euro, and Europe’s competitiveness.

While the Trump administration has exposed the extent of Europe’s dependence on the United States, compounded by Russia’s ongoing aggression in Ukraine, it did not create this vulnerability. This condition is the product of European complacency and strategic delusions. **Recognising Europe’s dependence and vulnerabilities cannot be an alibi for resignation; it must be the starting point to remedy an untenable situation.**

Europeans face a paradigm shift that goes deeper than specific policy disputes. This is a transition from an order where the US enabled European integration by providing security and political reassurance (albeit under the glass ceiling of American hegemony) to one where the US is undermining integration while disengaging from the transatlantic partnership. Looking ahead, it is difficult to anticipate whether this course of action will outlast the current administration. President Trump’s approval ratings are down and a majority of the American public supports the partnership with Europe. However, America is a deeply polarised society, foreign affairs do not play a major role in national elections, and the centre of gravity of US grand strategy has long been shifting away from Europe. **Plainly, Europe’s future cannot depend on the vagaries of US politics.**

Europe's Defence: The End of *Pax Americana*

The future of Europe's defence policy hinges on one fundamental recognition: in the words of [Chancellor Merz](#), *pax Americana* in Europe is over. This does not imply that NATO will collapse or that the US will fully disengage from the continent. However, the Trump administration has made it clear that Europeans must “take the lead against threats that are less severe for us [the US] but more so for them [Europe], with critical but more limited support from the United States,” as the new [US National Defence Strategy](#) has reiterated. **Undersecretary of War for Policy Colby has called for moving towards “NATO 3.0”**, with Europeans assuming primary responsibility for the continent's conventional defence while the US continues to provide extended nuclear deterrence and specific critical capabilities. His assertion that the US wants “partnerships, not dependencies” appears a practical starting point to plan the complex, but necessary, transition towards NATO 3.0. However, this logic is frequently obfuscated by President Trump's disparaging remarks about Europe and NATO, which undermine the Alliance's cohesion.

Despite Secretary of State [Rubio's](#) recent attempts to offer some reassurance to Europe at the Munich Security Conference, after the Greenland crisis, the political reliability of the Trump administration remains in question. While President Trump allows Europeans to purchase American weapons for Ukraine, he has regularly sidelined Europe when engaging with the Kremlin. He has frequently echoed Russian narratives while seeking a reset of Russo-American relations to bolster bilateral business ties. Furthermore, it remains unclear to what extent the Trump administration might make American engagement in European defence conditional on Europe meeting US demands in other sensitive domains, such as digital regulation or trade. Most recently, President Trump warned of a “[very bad future](#)” for NATO if Europeans do not help the US cope with the fallout of the war that the US and Israel have deliberately started against Iran, by contributing to unblock the Strait of Hormuz. Given this unpredictability, **supporting Kyiv and defending Europe will become largely a European responsibility — and the ultimate test of European unity.**

A Disrupted International Order

The weaponisation of interdependence and the crisis of multilateralism are mutually reinforcing trends, leading to a steady aggravation of global challenges. As the global order falters, we are, in the words of Canadian [Prime Minister Carney](#) at Davos, “in the midst of a rupture, not a transition.” Major powers increasingly neglect, instrumentalise, or outright abandon multilateral frameworks. The US has recently opted out of 66 international bodies and regimes, while China is building an extensive portfolio of partnerships to foster its international influence. In response, many middle powers pursue *ad hoc* multi-alignment, striving to diversify their partnerships to hedge against volatility. Too often, however, these efforts amount to little more than short-term diplomatic *bricolage*.

Europe's Recent Track Record

Walking a Transatlantic Tightrope

Faced with transatlantic upheaval, the risk for Europe is twofold: fragmentation and inertia. US antagonism might pull Europeans apart instead of bringing them together and, after each crisis, some may be tempted to revert to business as usual, hoping that the storm has passed. Both would be strategic mistakes. Europeans must rise up to the challenge and advance their integration outside the comfort zone of American hegemony. This requires deepening strategic trust among themselves. The experience of the past year proves that Europe's weakness invites more demands and disdain from Washington, while the Trump administration recognises strength — especially when accompanied by market turmoil. **Dependencies across the Atlantic run deep and [work both ways](#):** Europe holds several ‘[cards](#)’ to bring pressure to bear on the US, if forced to do so. What is clear is that goeconomic escalation would be harmful to both sides.

The European Defence Agenda Between Incremental Progress and Structural Constraints

The EU defence agenda advanced significantly in 2025, outlining new instruments to support national spending, enhance military mobility, and foster innovation. The challenge now lies in converting this agenda into large-scale outcomes. **Defending Europe with diminished US support is a matter of both resources and political resolve.** By [one estimate](#), replacing all US capabilities assigned to the Euro-Atlantic theatre would cost approximately \$1 trillion. [Another estimate](#) suggests that Europeans must increase collective annual defence spending by roughly €250 billion to meet the recent 3.5% NATO core defence spending commitment.

Against this background, four main structural challenges continue to affect progress to meet well-known capability shortfalls, consistently both with NATO requirements and with the goal to establish the capacity for Europe to fight on its own, if necessary. **Defence markets remain fragmented, tight fiscal space constrains defence budgets in many European countries, EU member states are reluctant to coordinate their national defence planning, and Europe lacks adequate frameworks to deliver cutting-edge defence innovation and technologies.**

Defence policy decision-making remains largely disaggregated in Europe. Beyond the (predominant) national level, bilateral or "mini-lateral" partnerships have proliferated, creating a patchwork of initiatives. Although flexibility can be an asset, replicating this model of disjointed cooperation and declaratory commitments risks squandering resources. In the decade preceding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Europe's NATO members [spent \\$3.15 trillion](#) on defence, yet the output in terms of actual, deployable capabilities remains embarrassingly low.

Paving the Way Towards a New Partnership Agenda

In a highly uncertain and contested strategic environment, the EU and its member states have framed in recent years a predominantly defensive strategic agenda focused on defence investment, resilience, and economic security. **While bracing for coercion is necessary to protect Europe, it is not sufficient for advancing Europe's global clout.** In early 2025, the EU's competitiveness agenda signalled a shift of emphasis towards unlocking Europe's growth potential, alongside a new foreign economic policy blueprint. Recently, the EU has sought to expand and deepen partnerships spanning economic security, trade, digital, climate, and energy issues. New policy outlines have been put forward in 2025, such as the EU's external digital strategy and the EU's global climate and energy vision. The Global Gateway connectivity strategy provides a broad framework for infrastructure investment across Europe's neighbourhood and the Global South. In the last few weeks, the EU has signed an ambitious trade deal with MERCOSUR and concluded a trade agreement and a security and defence partnership with India.

Some of these deals have long been in the making, while other initiatives are the product of tentative steps, experimenting new models of engagement and cooperation. These multiple strands must now be connected as part of a larger strategy and narrative, moving decisively from a reactive to a proactive approach. **Empowering Europe requires sustained engagement to support international law and rules-based cooperation, which is a prerequisite for European prosperity and security.**

With traditional multilateral bodies diminished by competing agendas, the question is whether coalitions of like-minded partners can sustain existing regimes, such as those for climate and global health, and co-shape new rules, such as for the digital frontier. To be sure, this is a demanding course of action, since several middle powers currently privilege ad hoc multi-alignment and feature heterogenous priorities. At the same time, **the majority of middle powers and smaller states have a keen interest in averting subordination to assertive super-powers and in relying on a system of predictable norms and rules. These aspirations can and should be met by a suitable partnership offer.**

Strategic Game Changers

A New Transatlantic Equation

Regarding transatlantic priorities, Europe must determine not only how to de-risk from President Trump's destabilising foreign policy and attempts to undermine the EU, but also how to foster a viable partnership when political conditions in Washington permit. That starts by reducing Europe's dependency on the US. Doing so will require both confident engagement to defuse crises and negotiate deals, and steady determination to deter or respond to coercion. Both tracks must point towards the transition to a sovereign Europe. **The transatlantic equation requires inversion:** instead of accepting subordination to secure a US commitment to Europe that increasingly depends on American domestic politics, Europe should leverage its sovereignty agenda to reset the partnership.

Ultimately, Europeans must build a post-American order for Europe. This does not mean a geopolitical divorce from Washington, nor an anti-American order. It is simply an order that does not rest on the US, but on Europe's choices and norms. Likewise, priorities for EU external action should be framed through the lens of Europe's own agenda, rather than the prism of a volatile transatlantic relationship. If Europe wants agency, it must also take much more responsibility, starting with investing in its own defence to establish a strong European pillar of NATO, and working with Washington to support Ukraine for the long haul. **The only option for Europe will be [partnership through strength](#),** if partnership is on offer at all.

Changing Gear on the Defence Agenda

A change of paradigm is required to empower Europe to deter aggression and defend itself. National coalitions and EU cooperative mechanisms must be more tightly integrated to focus on priority capability gaps, mobilise capital, aggregate demand and deliver at scale. The European Commission's proposal for '[European Defence Projects of Common Interest](#)' and 'Readiness Flagship Project' is a step in the right direction, but their success depends on political ownership by member states. Furthermore, these initiatives require financial backing far beyond the limited scope of the newly agreed European Defence Industrial Programme. **Defence is a European public good;** the successful issuance of EU loans through the SAFE mechanism should provide a blueprint for the common funding of joint investments, with a significant 'buy European' component. Issuing Eurobonds to strengthen European defence would also enhance the international role of the Euro, at a time when global investors are seeking safe assets beyond the US dollar.

Alongside joint investments, Europe must focus on [smarter spending](#) by enabling its ecosystem of start-ups and high-tech companies to access capital and contracts. Collaborative efforts with Ukraine are essential to benefit from its unique experience in battlefield-driven innovation and strengthen production capacity in both Ukraine and the EU. Supporting innovation requires fast-tracking procurement and ensuring scale-up investment, among other measures. As Europe creates the framework conditions for defence innovation and develops new funding streams, control over the resulting technologies must remain in Europe to strengthen strategic autonomy.

Europe must target these efforts to meet glaring capability gaps and, due to limited resources and time pressure, it must prioritise. Given the changing nature of warfare, **strengthening the digital backbone** of Europe's military forces, including space assets and cyber-defences, is a critical priority. This entails investing in AI, quantum, and cloud computing to enable secure communication, autonomous command and control structures, and the integration of multi-domain, high-intensity operations.

Developing and acquiring core military capabilities by strengthening the EDTIB is a necessary but not sufficient condition to advance Europe's sovereignty in defence and build the European pillar of NATO. **As Commissioner Kubilius recently argued, Europe needs institutional and political readiness too.** This entails establishing mechanisms for effective cooperation between those European countries that are willing and able to take a leading role in Europe's defence, by streamlining decision-making in times of crisis and steering the integration of European military forces. Whichever format for enhanced cooperation is envisaged, institutional design must connect these efforts to the institutions and toolbox of the EU, to ensure broader political ownership and convergent efforts. Strengthening the institutional wiring of European defence also entails defining clear procedures to operationalise the mutual assistance clause enshrined in Article 42.7 TEU. Of course, any institutional solution relies on an essential political requirement: the joint resolve to defend Europe together even if the US were not engaged in future crises.

Framing a European Alternative to a World of Coercion

As the EU partnership agenda expands, different formats and coalitions will be required to advance different goals. Reconciling these drivers and managing trade-offs requires an overarching strategic effort, which involves several dimensions.

First, getting Europe's house in order. Europe's internal divisions affect its international leadership, while the EU's market power is shrinking and development cooperation budgets are slashed. In a nutshell, it is time to change gear, completing the Single Market, strengthening the international role of the Euro and better connecting internal and external investments to diversify supply chains and generate mutual opportunities. **Europe's strength is a partnership multiplier.**

Second, being clear about Europe's priorities and heeding those of others are the two sides of the partnership coin. **Europe should articulate its own interests as a starting point for meaningful dialogue.** This is not about selfishness, but about credibility in the eyes of partners. At the same time, Europe should always be in a listening mode to integrate partners' perceptions and priorities in its own policy-making process upstream, and should be open and consistent where interests differ.

Third, **the EU and its member states must lay out a strong, positive proposition as Europe's selling point on the global stage.** Europe should frame its partnership diplomacy as directed to strengthen broader formats of cooperation, co-shape rules and deliver global and regional public goods. If backed up by adequate resources and consistent behaviour, **Europe's profile as a rules-based partner offers an alternative to a world of coercion. EU partnership diplomacy should contribute to advance the reform of multilateral agendas,** such as via the UN Pact for the Future, and to bolster the G20, reducing the appeal of the BRICS club. Europe should be entrepreneurial, exploring opportunities to connect bilateral partnerships through structured networks and coalitions, such as on digital issues, critical raw materials or climate finance. These coalitions should promote shared agendas at the multilateral level, such as at UN summits on digital, social and climate issues.

Fourth, **effective partnerships require political ownership not just at the EU level but also at the national one.** National agendas should be better coordinated and national leaders should regularly carry out joint high-level missions with their EU counterparts. Of course, EU member states will continue to pursue their own partnership and economic diplomacy, but these tracks should converge around shared messages and projects. This would also help catalyse resources through innovative vectors for public-private partnerships. Lessons should be drawn from experience to create faster and more agile streams of international investment finance, better tailored to local conditions and to the priorities of EU partners.

Conclusion

Standing Up for Europe

The Greenland crisis has impressed upon most Europeans that, in a world of great-power rivalry, the difference between pulling together and pulling apart corresponds to the difference between sovereignty and submission. The illegal US-Israeli attack on Iran has triggered a war that is engulfing the Middle East and that carries wide potential ramifications for energy security and economic stability, for both Europe and the world, without clear objectives in sight. Within only two months, these two crises have confirmed the urgency of formulating and implementing a European Power Agenda that involves, among other priorities, taking primary responsibility for Europe's defence, advancing technological sovereignty, and framing a clear proposition for rules-based cooperation. Establishing 'Power Europe' is also necessary to manage relations with the US, whether by striking transactional deals, countering coercion and interference, or revamping the transatlantic partnership, depending on the political developments in Washington.

The EU is the principal vector through which its member states can collectively re-acquire and preserve agency. However, there is a risk that, as the tide of US hegemony recedes, latent tensions between the priorities of EU member states intensify, weakening the Union. Failing to mobilise the largely untapped potential of European integration, including through flexible arrangements and coalitions, would be tantamount to a motion of no-confidence in Europe. European citizens would duly take note of such an act of political and strategic self-harm, which would play directly into the hands of Europe's rivals, both within and outside the EU. Conversely, the [majority of European citizens](#) favour a stronger role for the EU in facing global challenges and providing for European security. To harness this support and build the cohesion necessary for the difficult choices ahead, citizens must be engaged in an inclusive strategic debate across Europe, addressing the challenges of European sovereignty and the massive costs of non-Europe. **If European leaders do not stand up for European sovereignty, blaming adversaries for impairing it will ring hollow to audiences both at home and abroad.**

Further Reading

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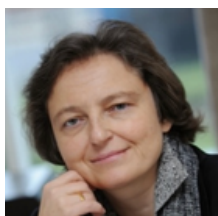
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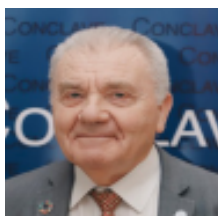
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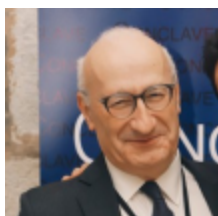
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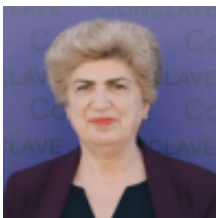
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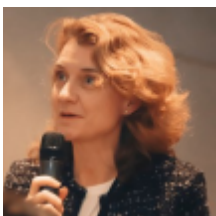
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The Conclave, as a new annual gathering, offers an open invitation to prospective partners passionate about shaping the future of Europe.

Our partner's participation is about becoming part of a movement that envisions a dynamic, forward-thinking Europe. By supporting this new annual tradition of strategic foresight and intellectual exchange, they contribute to a richer, more inclusive dialogue that reflects the diverse perspectives essential for a holistic European vision.

We extend our thanks to the Cabinet of Ms. Nadia Calviño, President of the European Investment Bank, and the Cabinet of Mr. Andrius Kubilius, EU Commissioner for Defence and Space.

Special thanks to the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium and Bruegel for their exceptional welcome, and to Syensqo for the inaugural dinner.