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Recommitting the United States to European Security and Prosperity: Five Steps for the Incoming Administration

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Europe is less secure, and less securely prosperous, today than it was when President Obama entered office in 2009. The responsibilities for these failures do not rest only with the United States: Washington cannot help Europe if Europe does not help itself. Nevertheless, U.S. policy towards Europe since 2009—and in increasing measure, since 1991—has been fundamentally misconceived. The Trump Administration should re-examine all aspects of that policy.

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. policy toward Europe has drifted far from its initial premises; Europe itself has changed beyond recognition. The U.S. needs to recognize this fact. President Trump should direct the National Security Council (NSC) to oversee a comprehensive study of U.S. policy toward Europe, a study based on enduring American interests in Europe, the lessons of the post-1945 era, and on the new features of Europe that have emerged since 1991.

This study should be based on the premise that European security and prosperity are fundamental interests of the United States, interests best advanced in the security realm by NATO and in the economic realm by free cooperation within and among free democracies.

1. Take Advantage of the Opportunities Created by Brexit

By the end of March 2017, Britain will trigger Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, which will start its exit from the European Union (EU), a process that will be complete within two years. By leaving the EU, Britain will recover the power to negotiate its own trade deals. When President Obama imprudently intervened in the June 2016 referendum on Britain's EU membership, he threatened that, if Britain voted to leave, it would be at the "back of the queue" for a trade deal with the U.S. Now that Brexit is a reality, Britain should be first in line.

While Britain cannot sign a deal with the U.S. before it officially exits the EU, it can start to discuss now, at various levels of formality, the parameters of the deal. The aim of the U.S.—and Britain—in these discussions should be to secure the best deal that can be done quickly, not a perfect deal done slowly. The deal should focus on:

- **Eliminating** tariffs and quotas on visible trade,
- **Ensuring** the continuation of the investment freedom both countries enjoy, and
- **Developing** systems of mutual recognition for standards in a few high-value areas.

Such a trade deal would be good for both nations, and would set a valuable example of liberalization for the rest of the world.¹

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4646>

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2. Rethink Support for the European Union

After the end of the Cold War, the U.S. believed it could safely reduce its exposure to Europe and increasingly came to see support for the EU as central to its European policy. U.S. backing for the EU is therefore not a sign of U.S. commitment to Europe. It is the sign of the waning of that commitment, the end of serious U.S. thought about how it should uphold American interests on the continent, and the outsourcing of those interests to the EU.

If the U.S. continues to base its European policy on unthinking support for the supranational EU, it will continue to see rising political illiberalism, more economic strains, and a weaker transatlantic security relationship. The EU encourages these developments by:

- Infringing on national sovereignty,
- Preventing the creation of genuine transatlantic free trade areas,
- Harming transatlantic security,
- Distorting European immigration policies, and
- Wasting taxpayer money.

These things are not in the interests of the nations of Europe or of the United States.

The true interest of the U.S. is to return to the ideas that saved Europe after 1945:

- Economic freedom,
- Multilateral cooperation for security and prosperity, and
- Democratic national government.

The U.S. should therefore re-examine its support for the EU, and instead focus on building and sustaining closer relations with European governments.²

3. Constrain the Russian Bear

The U.S. cannot afford to approach Russia as though the problems it is creating are separate and unrelated. At the heart of these problems is a single one: the nature of the Russian regime.

Clarity in U.S. strategy toward Russia begins with understanding that President Putin's regime is an autocracy that justifies and sustains its political power by force, fraud, and an ideological assault on the West in general and the U.S. in particular. The U.S. needs to approach Russia as Russia is, in reality, not as the U.S. wishes Russia to be. As a result, the U.S. needs to start from a position of strength. Beginning with weakness only encourages Russian aggression.

In order to constrain Russia, U.S. policy should include the following actions:

- **Imposing** reputational, rhetorical, economic, financial, and military costs on Russia;
- **Strengthening** existing U.S. sanctions on Russia for its illegitimate invasion and occupation of Crimea and Ukraine;
- **Increasing** military and political support to Ukraine;
- **Increasing** the strength of U.S. forces deployed in Europe; and
- **Recognizing** that Russia is making a wide-ranging effort to suborn the nations on its periphery and developing, as required by the fiscal year 2017 National Defense Authorization Act, a strategy for countering its information war.

4. Lead NATO Back to Basics

NATO was founded in 1949 to protect the territorial integrity of its members and—if required—defeat a Soviet invasion. While NATO's members are no longer worried about the spread of communism, many current NATO members are worried about protecting their territory from Russian expansion and influence.

1. See Ted R. Bromund, "U.S. Interests in the United Kingdom and Europe After Brexit," *Heritage Commentary*, September 14, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2016/9/us-interests-in-the-united-kingdom-and-europe-after-brexite>.

2. See Ted R. Bromund "America's Outdated Europe Policy: In 2017, the Next President Must Adapt to New Reality," *Heritage Foundation Issue Brief* No. 4559, May 18, 2016, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2016/05/americas-outdated-europe-policy-in-2017-the-next-president-must-adapt-to-new-reality>.

The cornerstone of the NATO alliance is its founding treaty, which states in Article 5 that an attack on one member is an attack on all members. If the U.S. were to walk away from this commitment in the face of Russian threats, serious security consequences with significant economic implications would ensue. Of course, the U.S. cannot sustain NATO on its own. Full burden-sharing by NATO's European members is both a military and political necessity.

NATO needs to return to basics, with territorial defense as its primary goal and the focus of its capabilities. NATO does not have to be everywhere in the world doing everything all the time, and it should shy away from out-of-area military interventions. If the U.S. deems a military intervention outside NATO's area of responsibility necessary, it should be executed through a "coalition of the willing"—not through NATO.

5. Adapt A Realistic Approach on Migrants and Terrorism

The massive number of migrants to Europe pose many challenges to European nations and societies. The "open door" policies of Berlin and Stockholm have amplified the scale of the crisis. European nations need to adopt immediately a more cautious approach.

Islamist terrorists have reached Europe hidden in migrant flows in order to commit attacks. Islamist propaganda has also radicalized individuals already on European soil. Encrypted messaging apps have allowed terrorists overseas to capitalize on this radicalization by remotely encouraging, planning, and supporting attacks.

To respond to the challenges of the migrant crisis, European nations should:

- **Invest** in border security and properly vet migrant flows, with a particular emphasis on individuals with non-existing or fraudulent documentation;
- **Deport** people who are rejected for asylum or who have committed criminal offenses;
- **Develop** better screening methods for migrants;
- **Equip** adequately intelligence agencies and police to better target and disrupt domestic terrorist threats;

- **Share** with the U.S. best practices and implement policies to prevent radicalization and discredit Islamist ideology; and
- **Provide** more robust military assistance to destroy terrorist groups overseas before they are able to commit further atrocities in Europe.

What the U.S. Should Do

The Trump Administration should repair U.S. policy on Europe by:

- **Conducting** an NSC-led study on the ways to advance enduring U.S. interests in Europe;
- **Rapidly negotiating** a liberalizing U.S.–U.K. free trade area;
- **Re-committing** to European security by leading NATO back to basics and ending U.S. support for European Defense Integration; and
- **Encouraging** our European allies to take a realistic approach towards migrants and to aggressively tackle the scourge of Islamist radicalism.

Conclusion

As in 1945, the first U.S. interest in Europe is peace. The threat to peace in Europe today derives from its troubled periphery, from an aggressive Russia to the chaotic Middle East, as well as from its own policy errors. Europe's central error has been its increasing economic and political centralization, manifested in the increasing supranationalism of the EU. The U.S. can and should stop supporting this error.

The U.S. also values prosperity and democracy. These issues are closely linked to the U.S.'s support for the EU. While many EU economies would have slow growth or high debt without the euro, the euro has made their position worse. That, in turn, has placed their political systems under stress. Both the U.S. and the EU need to re-learn a lesson from the 1930s: Bad economics lead to bad politics, and make the burden of bad political decisions harder to bear.

It is still in the interests of the U.S., as it was in the 1940s, to help Europe's democracies defend themselves from external threats. The best tool for that purpose is still NATO. Any organization, including the EU, which detracts from this transatlantic

instrument does a profound disservice to American and European interests. Recognizing this, and recommitting the U.S. to leadership in Europe, is profoundly in the interests of all.

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