

# TRUMP'S EUROPEAN REVOLUTION

**Ivan Krastev, Mark Leonard**

June 2025

---

## SUMMARY

- New ECFR polling suggests that Donald Trump is transforming political and geopolitical identities not only in the US, but also in Europe.
- Trump's second presidency is recasting the European far-right as the continental vanguard of a transnational revolutionary project, and mainstream parties as the new European sovereigntists.
- It is also transforming geopolitical attitudes and accelerating the shift from a European peace project to a war project.
- Many Europeans support increased military spending, conscription, independent nuclear deterrents, and defending Ukraine even if the US abandons it.
- However, they also doubt that Europe can achieve strategic autonomy fast enough and are therefore inclined to hedge. Conscription is less popular among the young; support for Ukraine may reflect reluctance to confront Russia directly; many hope America will return after Trump.

# Liberty, insecurity, unpredictability

“We are in the process of a second American revolution.” So claimed Kevin Roberts, president of the Heritage Foundation. The Trumpian think-tank’s policy ideas—on everything from education and migration to healthcare and human rights—have helped to shape the seismic change that has upended American politics. But Trump’s revolution, like previous ones before it, is not simply about changing policies and institutions, but about the identity of the country itself. In just six months, the US has shifted from championing liberal democracy to promoting illiberalism and economic protectionism.

This revolutionary transformation reaches far beyond the nation’s borders. In that sense, it is not just an American revolution. It is reshaping Europe, too. Such is the main finding of a major international opinion poll commissioned by ECFR and conducted in May 2025 in 12 European countries, with an overall sample of 16,440 respondents (full methodology below). This paper reports the results of the study, and buttresses them with the political observations and analysis of its authors.

In short: revolutionary change in America signals the collapse of assumptions that have undergirded European security for decades. Reliance on American guarantees, NATO as an alliance of liberal democracies, the promotion of free trade and a taboo against aggressive nationalism—it is all falling away. The new reality is a crisis of the alliance itself, the growing threat of a global trade war and the looming prospect of American troop withdrawal from Europe. And, as ECFR’s polling shows, this in turn is transforming Europe’s political and geopolitical identity.

First, the nature of its political parties is changing. Europe’s far-right forces are transforming from self-styled defenders of national sovereignty into the continental vanguard of a transnational revolutionary movement—aligning themselves with Trump’s bid to remake global order. At the same time, several mainstream parties (supposedly more internationalist) appear to be recasting themselves as the new sovereigntists, defenders of national dignity against ideological interference from Washington.

Second, the EU, which was once a peace project, is becoming a war project—a process triggered by Putin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and that is now accelerating. Significant shares of most populations polled fear worsening conflict, and favour increased defence spending.

Third, like many other revolutions, Trump's European one is exposing paradoxical ideas and the tensions between them. ECFR's polling shows that:

- Europeans are sceptical about Trump, but also relatively relaxed about the reliability of American security guarantees and post-Trump transatlantic relations.
- They are doubtful about their continent's ability to stand on its own two feet in defence matters, but also convinced that their governments should part with American policy on Ukraine.

Our thesis is that Europeans' apparently sanguine expectations about the future of the transatlantic relationship are rooted not in trust in American benevolence, but rather mistrust of their continent's own capabilities. And that their public support for Ukraine is better explained as an emergency policy to replace American boots-on-the-ground in Europe with the fighting power of the Ukrainian army than as pure solidarity with the victims of Russian aggression.

This report delves into all these aspects of Trump's European revolution.

## We hold these truths to be self-evident

Europeans generally have no illusions about Trump. The prevailing view in the countries polled—except for Hungary and Romania—is that his election is a bad thing for American citizens, respondents' own countries and peace in the world. Absolute majorities in half of the countries—Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the UK—hold a negative view of Trump on all three accounts. A mere 12% of Brits believe Trump's election is good for their country.

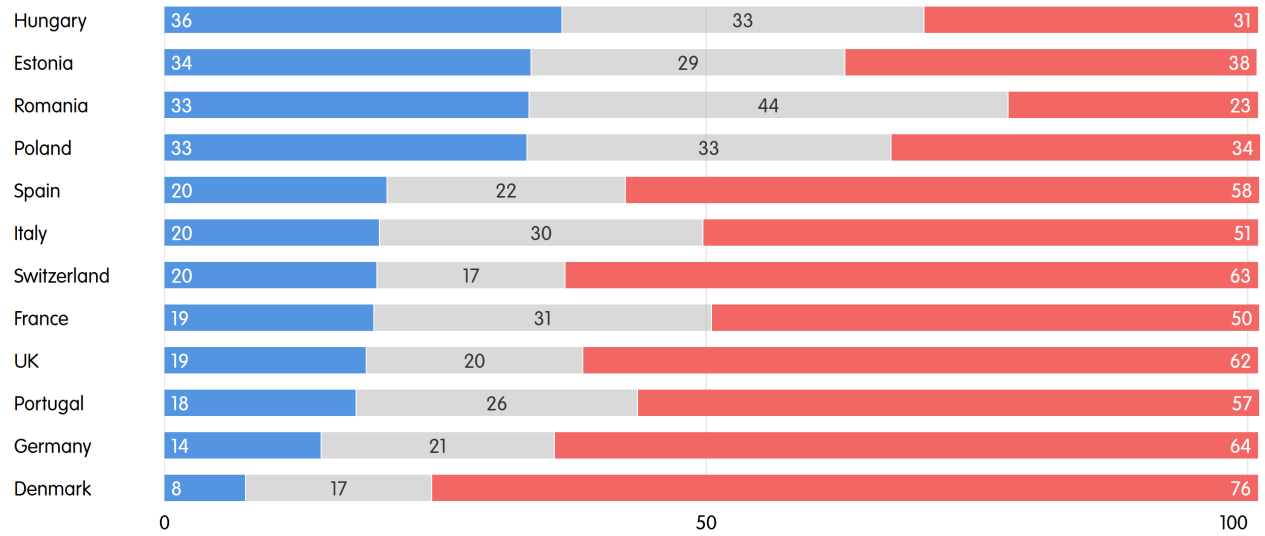
Europeans everywhere, even in more Trump-sympathetic Hungary and Romania, have become more pessimistic about his presidency since his election win. Compared with the poll ECFR conducted in November 2024, there has been a generalised move in this direction. For example, in the immediate aftermath of the US presidential vote most Poles were optimistic about the returning Trump's significance for American citizens and their own country, and Estonians on balance thought his looming presidency positive for his own country and the world. No longer.

# Now that Donald Trump has taken office as US president, do you think his election is a good or bad thing for... In %

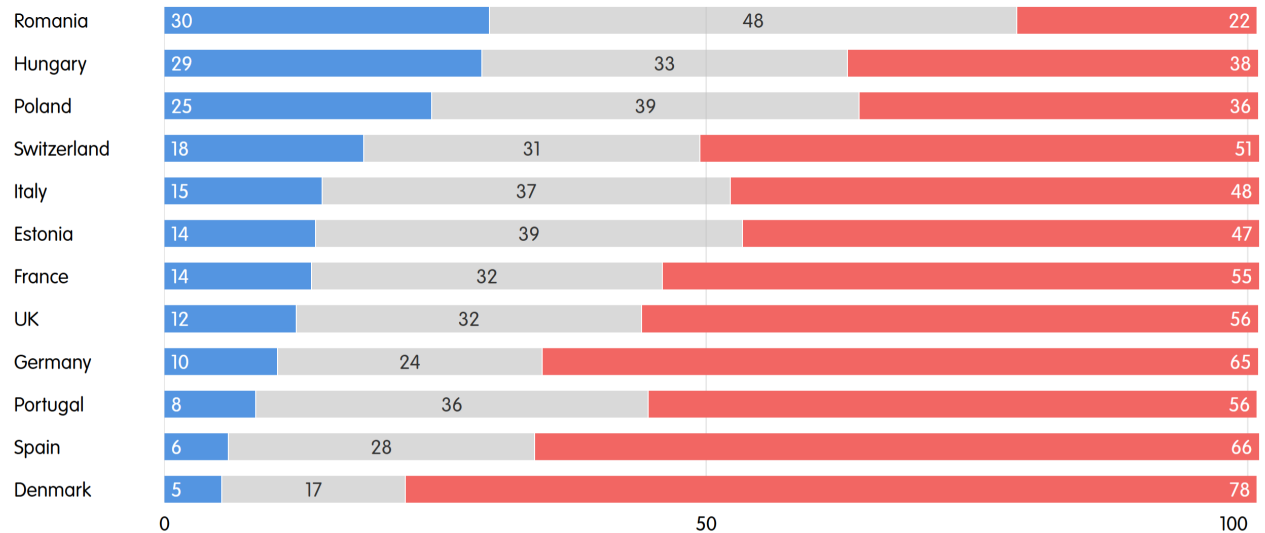
May 2025      Change since Nov 2024

Good thing    Bad thing    Neither

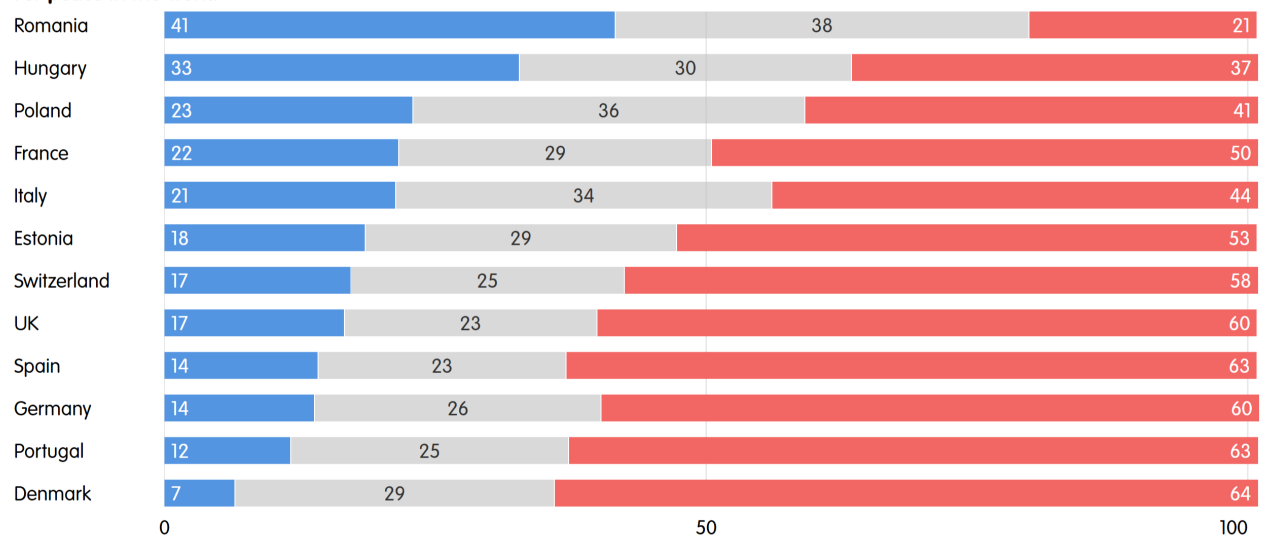
## For American citizens



## For your country



## For peace in the world



Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat · Get the data  
ECFR · ecf.eu

Europeans now are not just pessimistic about Trump, but also critical of his performance so far. The prevailing view among respondents in almost every country is that he has been doing a bad job when it comes to competing against China on the world stage, ending the war in Ukraine and strengthening the American economy. Hungarians, Romanians and Poles are alone among our national samples in returning a mostly positive assessment of his economic policies. Hungarians are isolated in appreciating his efforts to end the war in Ukraine. No European country sees his China record so far as positive.

### Looking at the first months of Donald Trump's presidency, do you feel he is doing a good or bad job in the following areas? Net value, in %

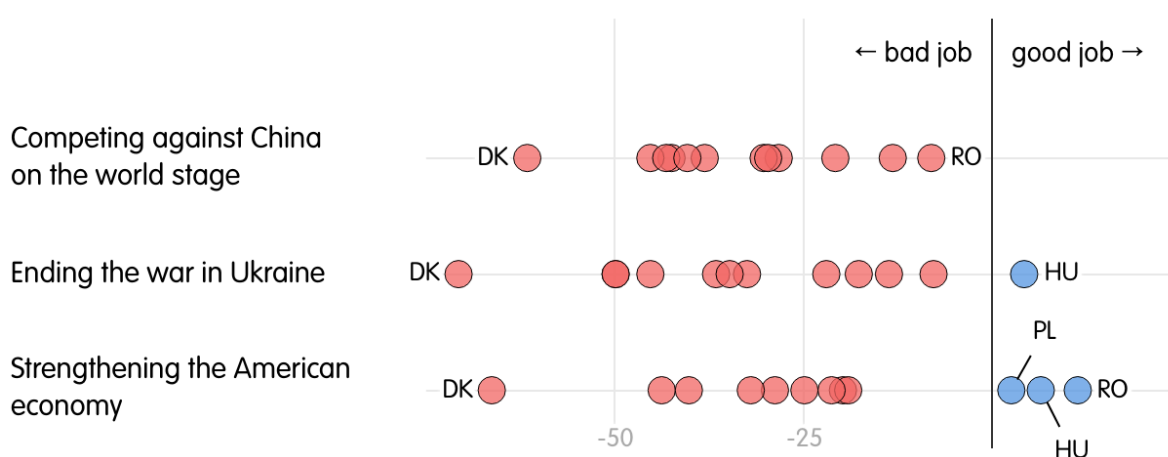


Chart shows net difference between rather good/very good and rather bad/very bad answers. Hover over the chart to see more granular data.

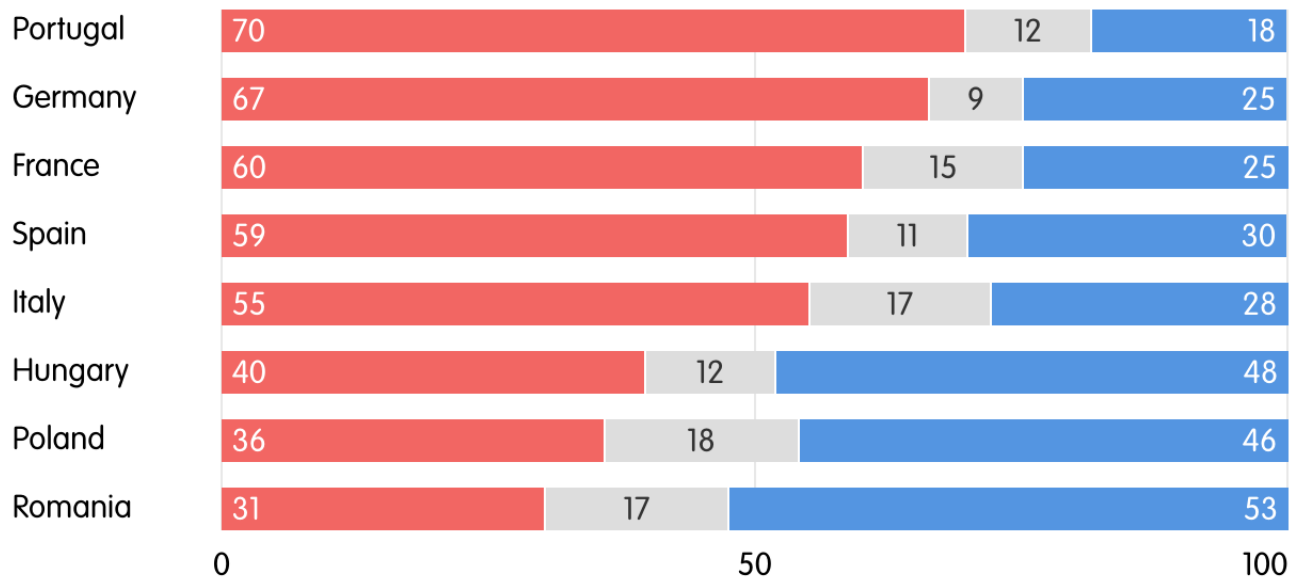
Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxix, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecf.eu

Perceptions of the US political system have suffered too. Absolute majorities in France, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain believe it is broken. Back in January 2024, the last time ECFR polled on this question, this was only true of France and Portugal. Meanwhile Hungary and Romania are the only countries polled where the view of America has improved.

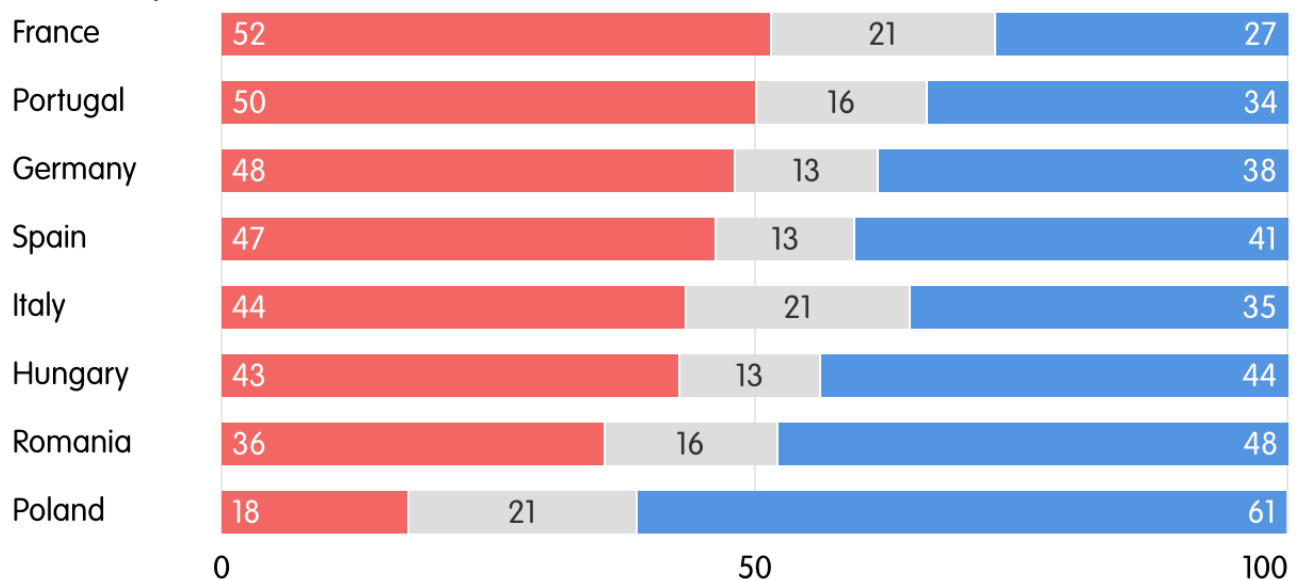
## Thinking about the US political system, do you think it works well or is it broken? In %

Broken Working well Don't know

### In May 2025



### In January 2024



Source: Surveys conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat; and in January 2024 by Datapraxis and YouGov  
ECFR · ecf.eu

# Who are our friends?

But country-level data tell only one part of the story, with some of the most radical changes happening within national party electorates.

Chairman Mao Zedong once wrote: “Who are our enemies? Who are our friends? This is a question of the first importance for the revolution.” Likewise, Trump’s revolution has changed the American government’s understanding of who its enemies and friends are in Europe. Relatedly, his return to power has driven an outbreak of political cross-dressing on the continent.

Supporters of populist parties no longer need to be simply against the status-quo; they can now be in favour of the Trumpian counter-project. And those who back mainstream parties no longer need to be simply for that status-quo; they can now draw impetus from being defenders of national and European sovereignty against Trump. The split within Europe between traditionally Atlanticist and more anti-American countries matters less, eclipsed by that between pro- and anti-Trump political forces.

This is best seen in how electorates of different parties perceive the US and EU political systems. ECFR’s poll and comparisons with past results capture that reconfiguration of European political identities in action.

The most important change is that European perceptions of the US political system are now starkly polarised. Looking across the Atlantic, supporters of the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Brothers of Italy (FdI), Hungary’s Fidesz, Poland’s PiS and Spain’s Vox have a predominantly positive view, while mainstream electorates in their countries hold a mostly negative one. Never before—even at the end of 2020, when we first asked this question soon after Joe Biden’s electoral victory over Donald Trump—has ECFR’s polling of Europeans shown a comparable polarisation.

But the difference is most visible in the juxtaposition of the 2024 and 2025 results. For example, voters of all the main Polish parties had a predominantly positive view about the US political system in January 2024, but now only the Trumpian right does, while supporters of the mainstream parties have become much more sceptical about America. Meanwhile, in Germany, voters backing the centre-right Christian Democrats (CDU) and Christian Social Union (CSU), and the centre-left Social Democrats (SPD) used to view the US political system broadly positively where their AfD-voting compatriots considered it broken. Now they have swapped over.

**is it broken?** Net value, by voter intention, in %

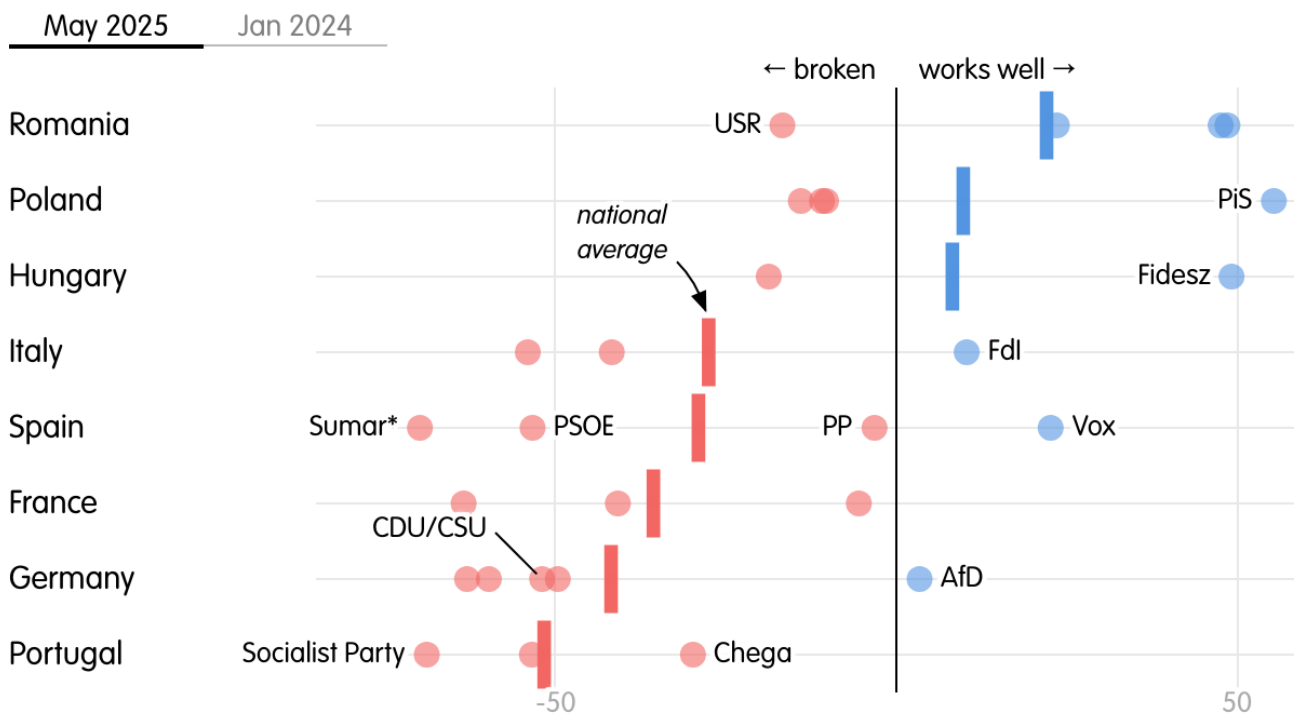


Chart shows net difference between “works well” and “broken” answers. Hover over the chart to see more granular data.

The asterisk (\*) corresponds to electorates whose samples include only between 72 and 99 respondents, therefore requiring greater caution in the analysis of their results.

Source: Surveys conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat; and in January 2024 by Datapraxis and YouGov

ECFR · [ecfr.eu](http://ecfr.eu)

Perceptions of the EU political system also seem to be diverging. Of course, electorates of such far-right parties as the AfD, the FdI and France's National Rally (RN) have never been great fans of this. But for some parties on the Trumpian right, especially Portugal's Chega, PiS and Vox, the negativity is newer. PiS voters held a mostly benign view of the EU back in 2021; Chega voters mostly saw the EU as “working” in 2022; and Vox voters were positive about the EU as recently as January 2024. But now, all these electorates have joined the rest of the far-right in mostly seeing the EU as a broken system.

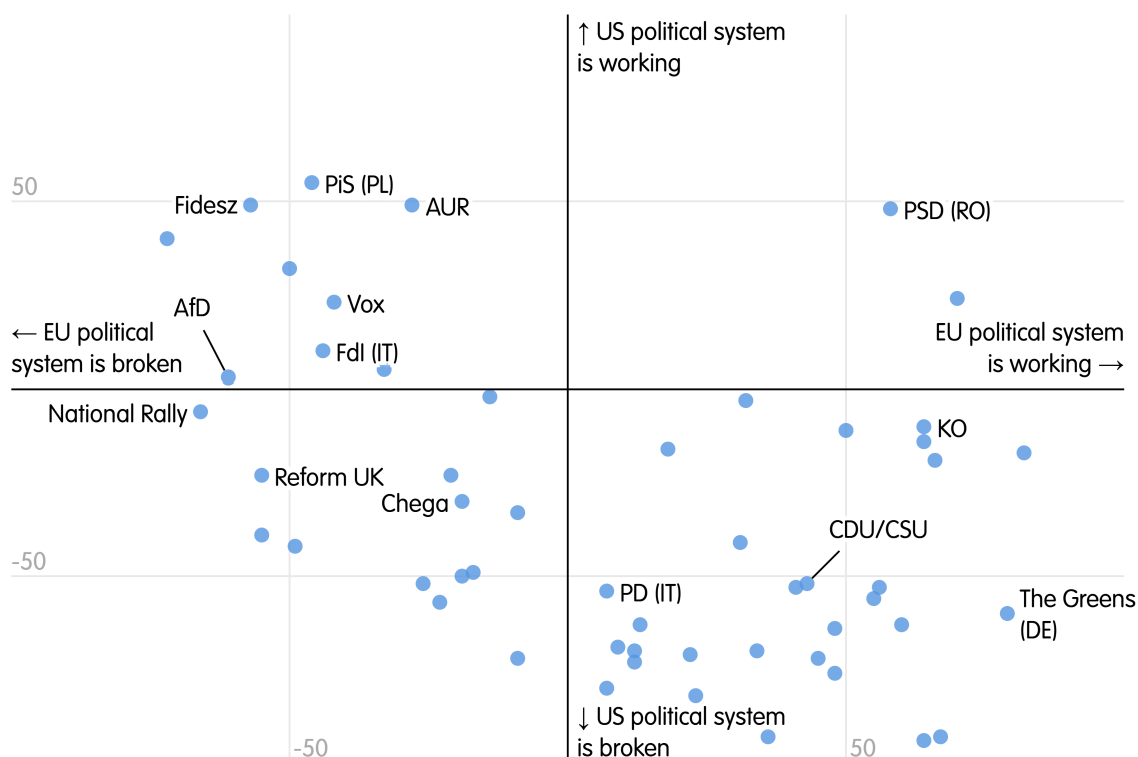


Simultaneously, voters of many mainstream parties appear to be rallying around the European flag—most visibly in France and Germany. In the latter, for example, compared with January 2024, there has been an improvement in the EU’s image among voters of the CDU/CSU, the Greens, the SPD and the socialist Die Linke (“The Left”). A similar pattern is visible among centrist, centre-left and centre-right voters in France.

Multiple political events in recent months, including Chancellor Friedrich Merz’s much-discussed comments about the need to achieve Europe’s independence from the US, suggest that Trump’s re-election is currently one of the main drivers of that shift. It would make sense that the emergence of an appealing, rival political model across the Atlantic should lessen the EU’s attractiveness in the eyes of far-right voters, just as mainstream voters vest more hope in the union as a bulwark against that same Trumpian alternative.

Patterns in the data reinforce this impression. Voters of most far-right parties covered by ECFR’s new poll hold both a predominantly positive view of the US political system and a predominantly negative view of the EU one. Among most mainstream electorates the reverse is true. Almost inexistant are the parties whose voters hold a predominantly positive view of both political systems. So in early 2025, it seems that being pro-EU means being dubious about the US—and vice versa.

### Perceptions of the EU and the US political systems. Net value, in %, by voter intention



The asterisk (\*) corresponds to electorates whose samples include only between 72 and 99 respondents, therefore requiring greater caution in the analysis of their results.

Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxix, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecf.eu

# Capital of the revolution

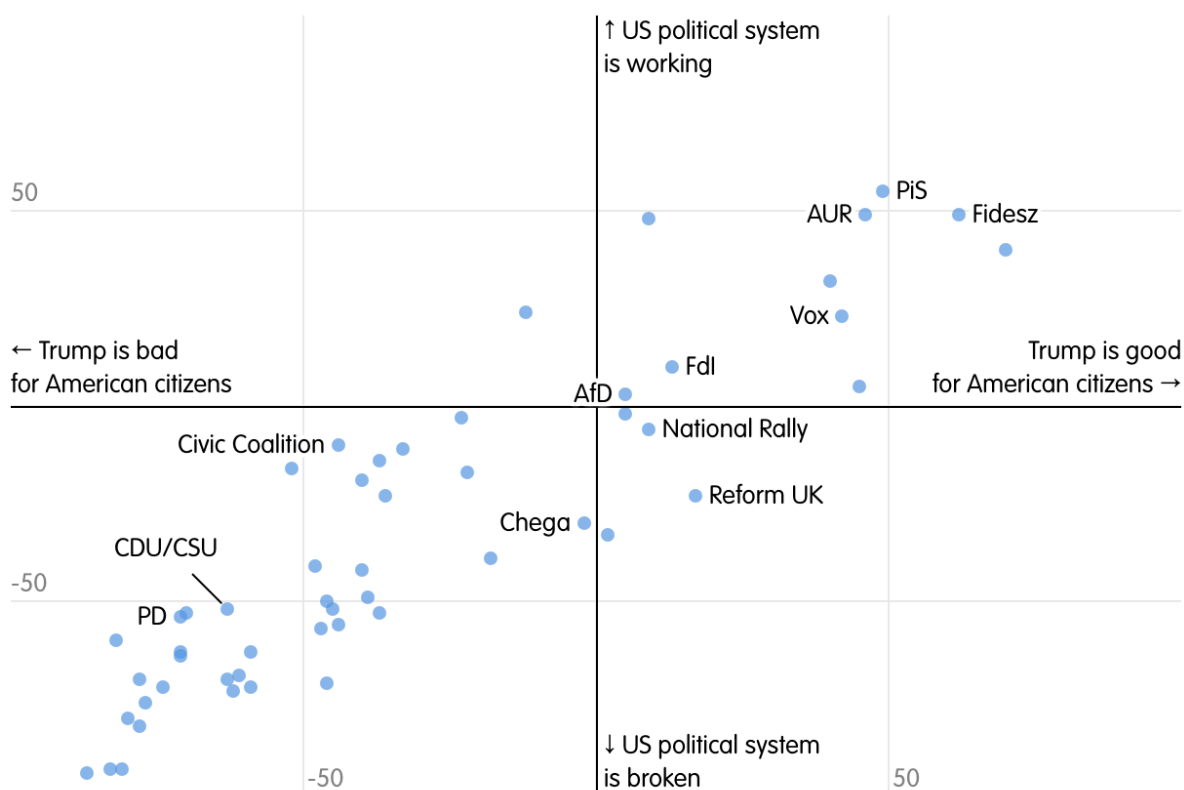
That Trump's America presents a credible alternative model for Europe's far-right could prove especially significant over the long term. Before the mid-2010s, many far-right parties were confined to the fringes of political life, and acted as protest parties. This was both a blessing for them (as they were not subject to scrutiny as potential parties of government) and a curse (as this made it harder to imagine them governing). With Brexit and the election of Trump in 2016, it became newly possible to imagine them taking power.

In the past, some far-right parties expressed sympathy for Vladimir Putin and his opportunistic crusade against “woke values”. But Russia is too weak and unsuccessful to be a model for any European country, and to inspire broad swathes of the electorate. That is not true of the US. Those who see the European status quo as the problem can now point to the American system under Trump as one that works in a rich and powerful country—and where, as vice president J.D. Vance alleges, freedoms are truly respected, unlike in Europe.

As such, EU-US relations are now increasingly ideological. The relationship between far-right European parties and Trump could even come to resemble that between the old European communist parties and the Soviet Union, whereby they feel obliged to defend Trump and to imitate him. Witness, to cite one early example, Fidesz's Viktor Orban and Austria's far-right Freedom Party praising the president's brutal treatment of his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office in March.

This too is borne out in ECFR's new polling. Like in the days of the cold war, the French and the Italians are the revisionists: just as the “Eurocommunists” of the French and Italian communist parties at points sought greater distance from Moscow, the capital of the revolution, so the RN and FdI today are cooler towards Trump's Washington than some of their counterparts elsewhere in Europe. This pattern is reflected among their supporters. More widely, admiration of Trump clearly correlates with positive views about the US political system, with supporters of most far-right European parties positive about both. Especially at a time when that system is undergoing such a drastic transformation, that seems to suggest admiration not just for the president but for his whole project.

## Perceptions of Donald Trump and of the US political system. Net value, in %, by voter intention



The asterisk (\*) corresponds to electorates whose samples include only between 72 and 99 respondents, therefore requiring greater caution in the analysis of their results.

Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecf.eu

This dynamic could yet redefine the east-west divide within Europe. In the transatlantic crisis driven by the Iraq war in 2003, the question was whether central and eastern Europe would side with the US or with the old core of the EU. Today, pro-American inclinations in those countries are more partisan: not confined to, but especially intense among, supporters of political parties that share and admire Trump's authoritarian instincts. Meanwhile, supporters of mainstream parties in these central and eastern countries—Romania being an exception—are now as anti-Trump as their western counterparts. For Hungary's opposition, attitudes toward America are heavily shaped by the affinity between Trump and Orban.

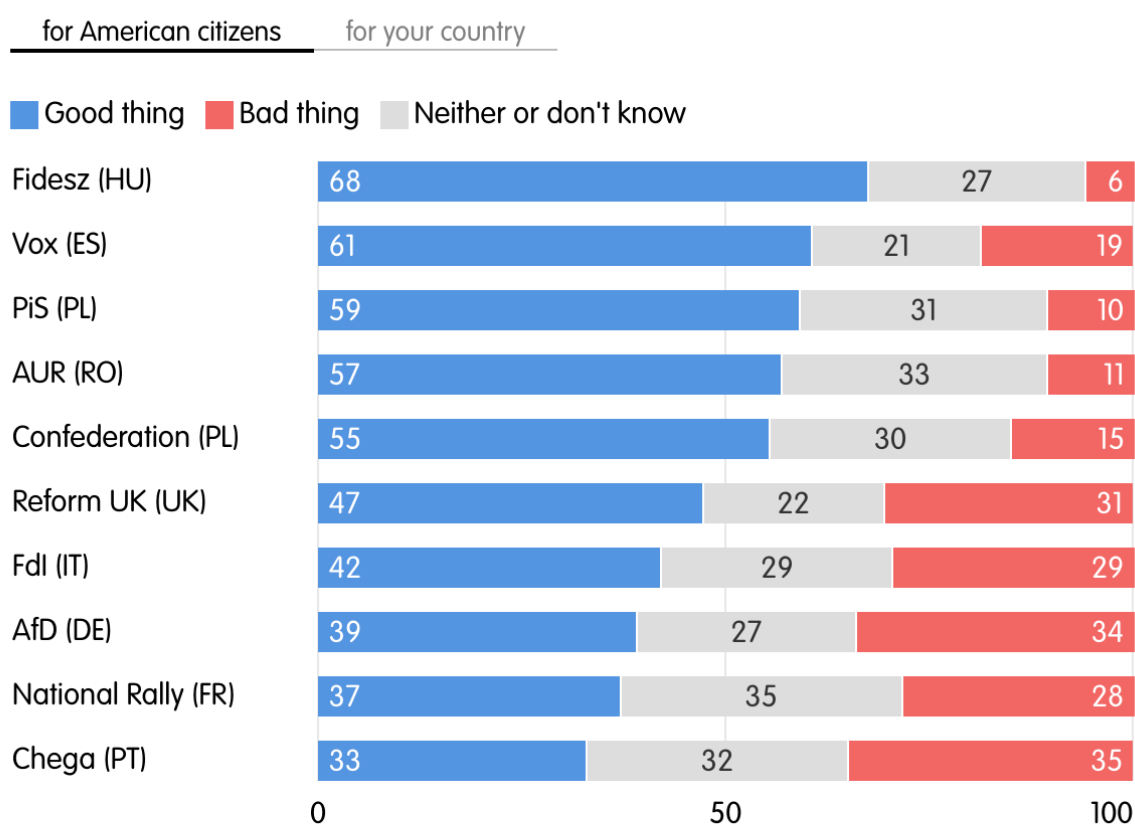
Our hypothesis, however, is that the Trump effect will play out differently in the eastern and western parts of the EU.

With populists governing in Hungary, Slovakia and potentially soon the Czech Republic, and

PiS-backed Karol Nawrocki winning the recent presidential election in Poland, the rival American model could prove particularly powerful in these states. Trump could use trade terms and other measures to strengthen friendly governments there. In Poland especially, with PiS also aspiring to return to power in the next parliamentary election, the model he represents could become a major political dividing line.

In western member states, by contrast, Trump could have an effect akin to that of Brexit: alienating voters and rallying them around pro-European sentiment. That toxic reputation could put a ceiling above populist support. After all, in countries such as France, Germany and the UK sympathy for Trump is strikingly low. Even among supporters of populist parties in these countries, significant shares (for example, 34% among AfD voters, 28% among RN ones, and 31% among Reform UK ones) consider Trump’s re-election as “very bad” or “rather bad” for American citizens.

**Now that Donald Trump has taken office as president of the US, do you think his election is a good or bad thing for for American citizens?** Selected parties, by voter intention, in %



Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecfr.eu

As America is still an overwhelmingly powerful country, far-right parties' association with him could yet give them some of the trappings of incumbency. It is reasonable to expect that his failures—or his policies (like trade tariffs) harming ordinary European voters—could tarnish them by association. This may help to explain those French and Italian holdouts against enthusiastic Trumpianism.

But mainstream politicians hoping to exploit either Trump's general toxicity in Europe, or the failures of his administration, should calibrate their expectations carefully. Our polling finds that opposition to the president is much starker in Denmark—the object of the president's aggressive claims on Greenland—even than in other western European states. The opening graphs in this paper show that currently 86% there believe the US political system is broken, and the share of population considering his re-election a bad thing for American citizens has increased from 54% to 76% in a matter of six months. This implies that harnessing the political force of anti-Trump feelings—as Mark Carney did in Canada's recent election—will depend significantly on how directly targeted by his administration Europeans in any particular country feel.

## Aux armes, citoyens

The British-American historian Tony Judt titled his 2005 book on post-1945 Europe “Postwar”. In his interpretation, the EU was not just born from the ashes of the second world war but was defined by the very quality of having transcended conflict. That Europe— *Europe as postwar*—is now history. Of course, this sentiment began to become widespread after Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. But Donald Trump's return to power has made it a rule.

Particularly in the immediate post-cold war years, Europeans were reluctant to invest in their military capabilities and content to rely on American protection and economic interdependence. As the US commentator Robert Kagan wrote in 2002, “Europe's rejection of power politics, its devaluing of military force as a tool of international relations, have depended on the presence of American military forces on European soil [...] American power made it possible for Europeans to believe that power was no longer important.” He concluded: “on major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus.” The EU's European Security Strategy the following year declared that: “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free.”

ECFR's poll confirms that most Europeans are now waking up to the post-postwar reality that they now live in a very different world. While fears of a Russian attack on NATO territory do not entirely reflect the urgency expressed by some analysts (albeit this is felt strongly in certain frontier states, like Estonia, Poland and Romania), it is the mounting fear of nuclear conflict that most clearly characterises the new European anxiety. It is reasonable to posit

that Trump’s revolution—and the doubts this has cast over America’s commitment to European security—has exacerbated this.

**Generally, in your daily life, how worried are you about the following potential events? Very worried or somewhat worried, in %**

	DK	EE	FR	DE	HU	IT	PL	PT	RO	ES	CH	UK
EU falling apart	11	17	21	24	24	25	32	65	40	55	25	16
NATO falling apart	23	29	26	32	24	26	47	66	47	49	28	26
Your country attacked by Russia	17	52	28	37	19	27	65	54	54	47	19	27
Use of nuclear weapons	34	45	45	55	45	58	64	85	62	76	55	45
Major European war (beyond Ukraine)	32	53	41	50	41	45	65	77	59	69	44	36
Third world war	32	45	45	50	45	50	65	82	59	73	45	40

Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat · [Get the data](#)  
 ECFR · [ecfr.eu](#)

Amid these fears for Europe’s peace and order, Europeans appears to be evolving from (borrowing Kagan’s formulation) Venusians to Martians:

- Most of ECFR’s respondents, with the notable exception of the Italian ones, believe that defence spending must rise.
- In several countries, including the Weimar trio of France, Germany and Poland, majorities support reintroducing mandatory military service.

- Majorities in most countries, except for Italy and Hungary, would favour the development of an alternative European nuclear deterrent.
- Majorities in some countries would even support developing a national nuclear deterrent. In the two, Denmark and Estonia, majorities support increasing defence spending to at least 5%.
- And a majority of French respondents (although not one of the British ones) support extending their country's nuclear arsenal.

### At the current time, would you support or oppose... Net value, in %

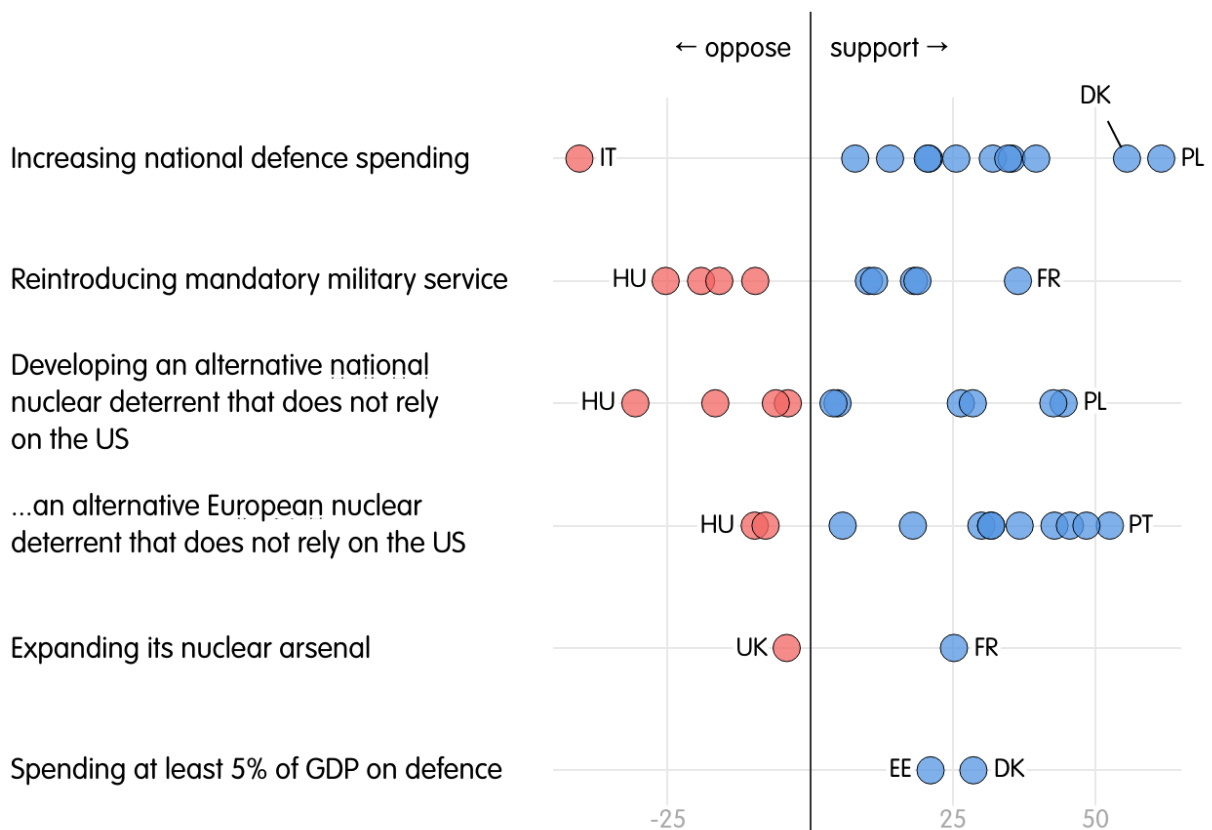


Chart shows net difference between "support" and "oppose" answers. Hover over the chart to see more granular data.

Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecf.eu

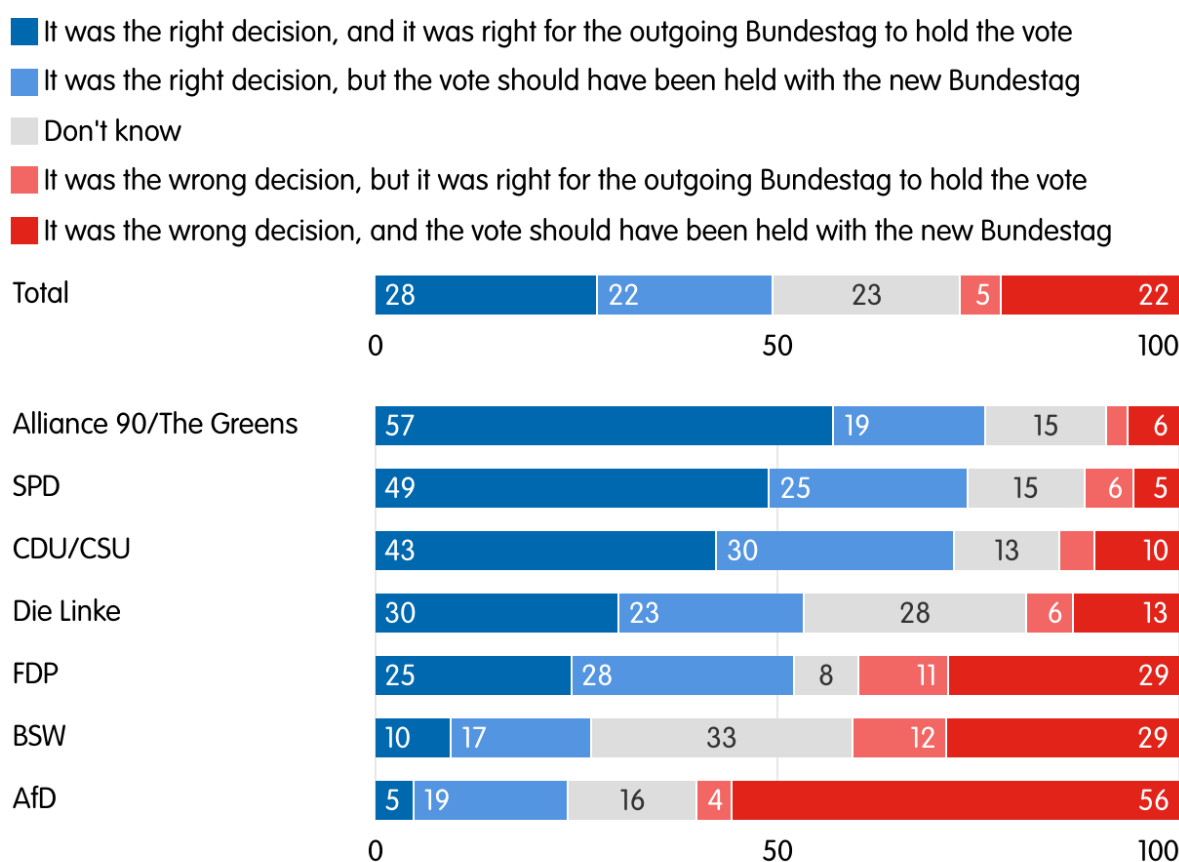
This Martian turn even encompasses some far-right parties. For example, in France, supporters of both supporters of the RN and Emmanuel Macron's Renaissance back expansion of the country's existing nuclear arsenal. When it comes to developing a national

alternative to the US nuclear umbrella elsewhere, far-right parties are split. Some, like Chega, Poland's Confederation and Vox, are strongly supportive of it where others, like AfD and Fidesz, are strongly opposed. Across all 12 countries polled, the 5 electorates most supportive of reintroducing mandatory military service are a mix of moderates and populists: the CDU/CSU, the RN, Renaissance, France's centre-right Republicans and Vox.

Europe's remilitarisation is not just a cultural and logistical challenge but also, at its most elemental, a budgetary one.

Here the polling picture is mixed. At a time when government budgets are under strain, the significant public appetite to increase national defence spending—even at the expense of fiscal taboos—is all the more noteworthy. For example, a one-off question asked only in Germany saw 50% of respondents agree that the previous Bundestag's last-minute vote to loosen the country's onerous debt brake was right. Only 27% consider this move, which releases defence spending above 1% of GDP from the brake, the wrong decision.

### Thinking about the outgoing Bundestag's vote in March to loosen the debt brake, which of the following comes closest to your view? In Germany, by voter intention, in %

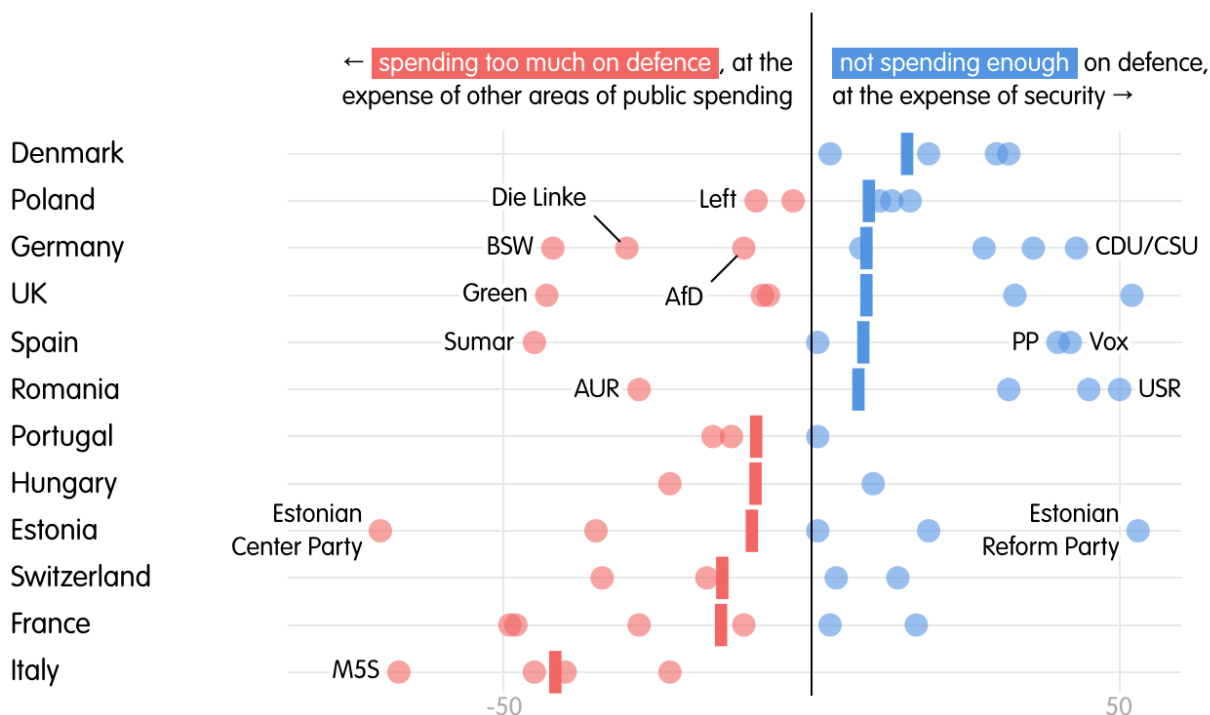


Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxix and YouGov  
ECFR · ecf.eu



Yet most countries are also strongly divided on whether it is a greater risk to spend too much or too little on defence. That seems to reflect concerns about other the impact on other government budgetary priorities, at a time when the increased cost-of-living continues to preoccupy voters.

## Which of the following two scenarios are you personally more worried about? Net value, by voter intention, in %



Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecf.eu

## A fork in the road

Europeans also seem to be aware that they are still somewhere between Venus and Mars—and that they face dangers on the way. The continent's circumstances may have become more threatening, but adapting to those will take some time. ECFR's poll findings hint at a recognition of this uncomfortable fact among our respondents.

They are divided on whether the EU can truly become independent from the US on security and defence, or overcome its internal divisions to act as a unified global player. Only minorities in every country believe the EU can compete economically with the US and China. Danes, again, are the exception on this. Indeed, they stand out as being the most optimistic on all three points, just as Italy and Hungary constitute the other end of the spectrum.

## Do you think that, in the next 5 years, it's possible for the European Union to... Net value, in %

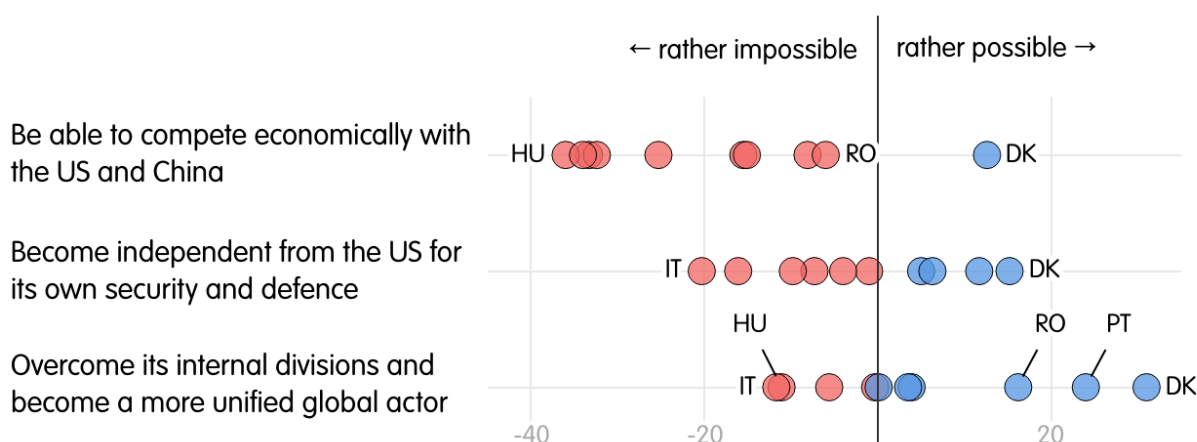


Chart shows net difference between "it is perfectly possible"/"it is possible though quite difficult" and "it is very difficult"/"it is practically impossible" answers. Hover over the chart to see more granular data.

Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecf.eu

Three main signs hint that Europeans want to buy time: their wariness about military service that they might themselves have to serve, their desire to back Ukraine to fight on their behalf, and their hope that America may yet turn back from Trump's revolution and recommit to the continent's protection.

The first of these comes across in the contrast between the catastrophist fears of our poll respondents (charted in the previous section) and the often minority shares of fighting-age populations who would support mandatory military service. This might point to some combination of pacifism or individualism among those voters. But it could also speak to an honest assessment of the fact that Europe is militarily not yet ready to contend with these alarming futures.

**At the current time, would you support or oppose your country reintroducing mandatory military service?** Net value, by age, in %

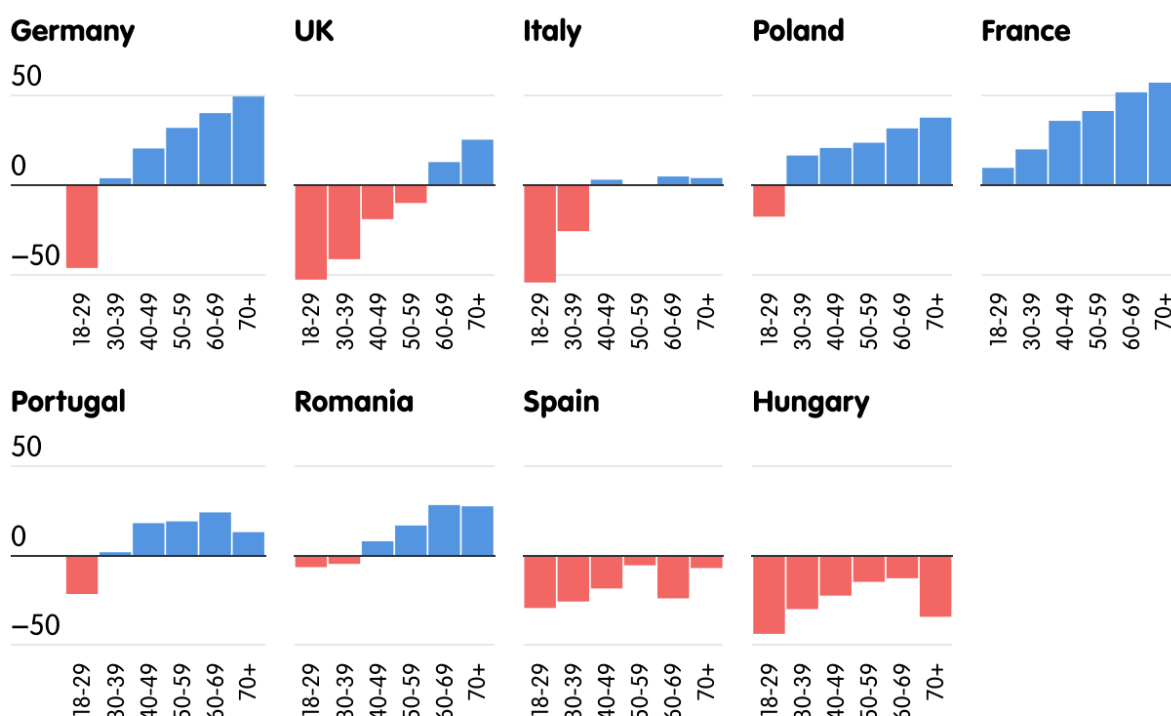


Chart shows net difference between “support” and “oppose” answers  
 Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxix, YouGov and Norstat  
 ECFR · ecf.eu

The second suggestion of a time-buying realism among Europeans is present in the fine details of their answers on Ukraine. For Europe, an outright Russian victory in Ukraine would be an existential threat. Preserving Ukraine as a sovereign state with a credible armed force is the best substitute for fragmenting US military guarantees. In line with that perspective, our data show that most Europeans would not want Europe to withdraw all of its military support for Ukraine, push Ukraine to give up on territory occupied by Russia, or lift economic sanctions on Russia—even if Trump’s America did these things first.

A benevolent interpretation is that Europeans support an autonomous European policy to stand with Ukraine, and do not want to blindly follow Trump’s lead. But another (and mutually compatible) reading of those data is that Europeans want Ukrainians to continue fighting on their behalf.

**Imagine the US took each of the following actions. Do you think Europe should or should not do the same? Net value, in %**

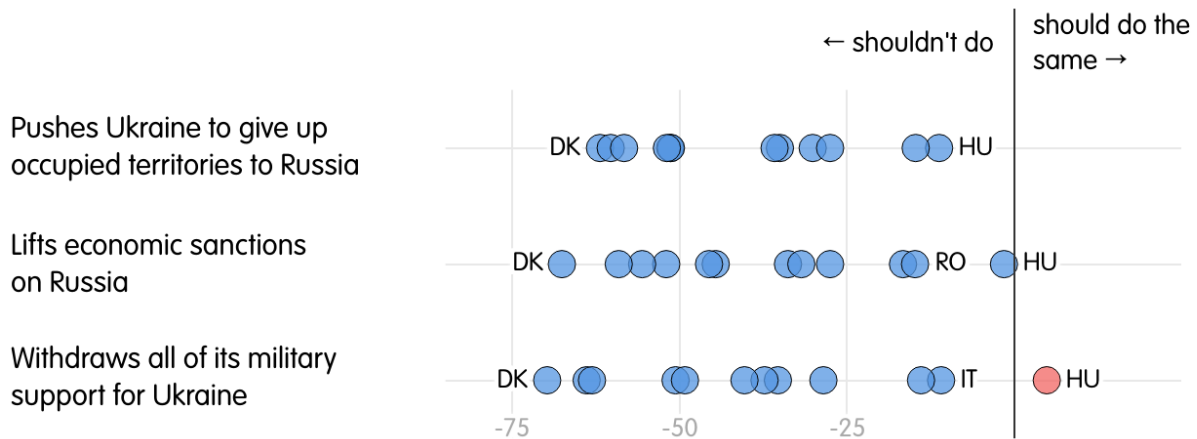


Chart shows net difference between “should do the same” and “should not do the same” answers. Hover over the chart to see more granular data.

Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · [ecfr.eu](https://ecfr.eu)

The third sign that Europeans know they have some way to go before they reach Mars is that they do not declare themselves despairing about the transatlantic relationship. The prevailing view in every country is that Europe can maintain the US military presence on the continent, and avoid a trade war with Washington. In only two countries—Denmark and Germany—do most respondents doubt Europe’s capacity to continue relying on US nuclear deterrence.

# Do you think it's possible for Europe to establish a relationship with Donald Trump's America which would allow Europe to... Net value, in %

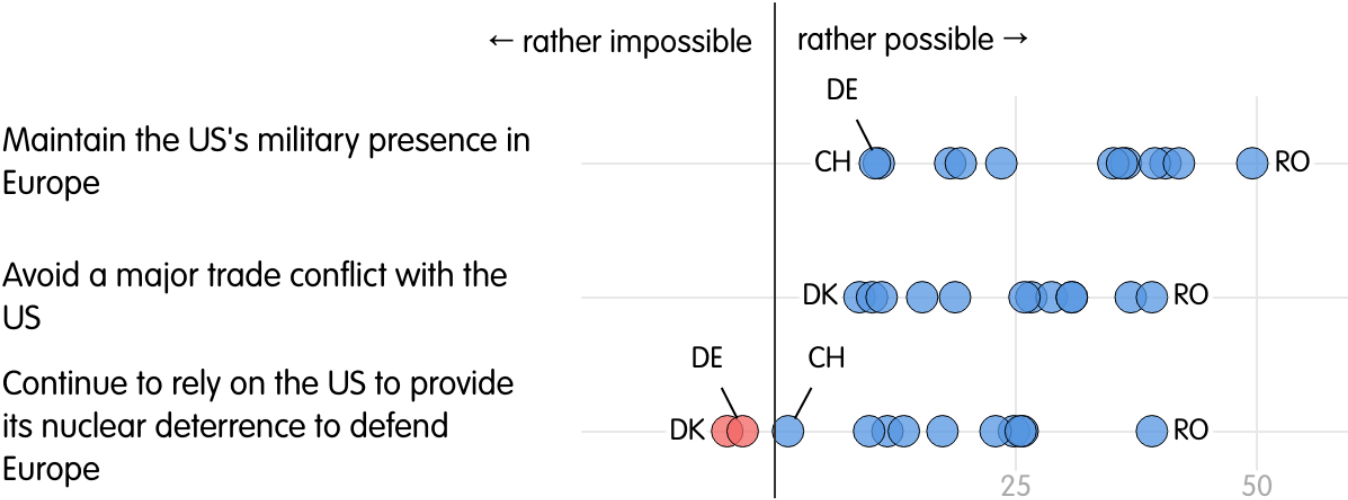


Chart shows net difference between “it is perfectly possible”/“it is possible though quite difficult” and “it is very difficult”/“it is practically impossible” answers. Hover over the chart to see more granular data.

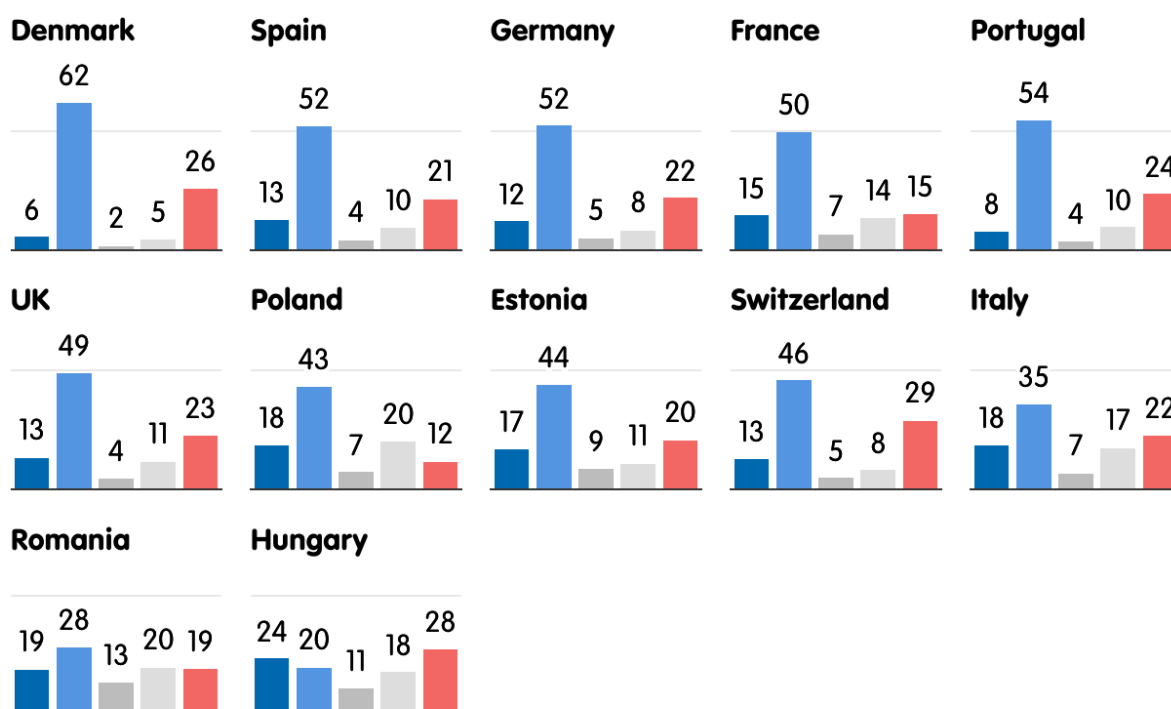
Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat

ECFR · [ecfr.eu](https://ecfr.eu)

Again, there are alternative explanations for this: prime among them being wishful thinking. Further evidence for that comes from our finding that the preeminent view in most countries—and that of an absolute majority in fully 5 out of 12 countries polled—is that the transatlantic relationship will improve once Trump leaves office.

## Which of the following best reflects your view? In %

- Donald Trump hasn't really damaged the relationship between Europe and the US
- Donald Trump has damaged the relationship between Europe and the US, but it will probably get better again once he has left office
- Donald Trump has damaged the relationship between Europe and the US and the damage will probably last even once Trump has left office
- None of these
- Don't know



Source: Survey conducted in May 2025 by Datapraxis, YouGov and Norstat  
ECFR · ecfr.eu

But that does not entirely square with the critical perspective most respondents express about Trump and his administration, or their strong support for defence spending, or the profound fears of war and disorder that many of them expressed. One way of making sense of all this is to posit, as we do, that Europeans simply recognise that the continent cannot yet meet its challenges without some degree of enduring American protection. Seen thus, making the best of the relationship is not really a choice or a question of probability, but an unavoidable imperative.

We have employed a degree of speculation on all three of these points. But together, our

respondents' stark realism about the threats combined with their wariness of actually fulfilling military service, their strong support for Ukraine's ongoing self-defence, and their curious stoicism about a Trump administration that most see negatively seem to add up to a Europe not so much wishfully thinking as scrambling to catch up.

## No, sire, it's a revolution

The shock and drama of Brexit provides a useful model of how Europeans might understand Trump's return and the revolutionary project he is leading.

This paper has shown that they harbour relatively few illusions about the US president (at least, as seen by his opponents). Few Europeans believe he is good for America, their own countries or global peace. These numbers have declined further over the past six months. The prevailing view among our respondents in almost every country is that Trump has been doing a bad job when it comes to competing against China on the world stage, ending the war in Ukraine and strengthening the American economy.

But just as the UK-EU relationship endured post-Brexit, many Europeans seem to expect US-EU relations to adjust, not collapse. They appear to have adopted a “wait it out” attitude towards Trump. If this reflects optimism about Europe's ability to weather Trump—and a belief that Trump is not synonymous with America—is it naivety, or hard-headed realism about the revolution underway? Our reading of the data leans toward the latter.

Perhaps public opinion underestimates the radicalism of Trump's second administration. But in general, the instinct to step back and buy time to prepare for the coming leap is sound. And in the meantime, mainstream European governments can use Trump's prominence and political salience in their countries to reshape their own politics in various ways. The paradox of the current moment is that while Trump is de-ideologising relations with major competitors like China and Russia, he is ideologising relations with Europe.

The French revolutionary philosopher Louis Antoine de Saint-Just allegedly said that “the present order is the disorder of the future.” Europe today is living in the crux of that maxim; an old order transforming into new disorder, dragging old assumptions along with it until they finally collapse under the pressure of events.

European mainstream leaders should not assume that Trump's anti-European rhetoric will have the dramatic impact it had in Canada. Anti-Trump sentiment tends to resonate most when Washington directly targets *your* country, not Europe in general. Denmark illustrates this well. However, the Trump moment does offer a juncture for mainstream parties to stop defending a “present order” that does not work—and to reinvent European identity for a revolutionary new world.

# Methodology

This report is based on a public opinion poll of adult populations (aged 18 and over) conducted online in May 2025 in 12 European countries (Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Switzerland and the UK). The overall sample included 16,440 respondents.

The polls were conducted by Datapraxis and YouGov in Denmark (1,015 respondents; 15-22 May); France (1,511; 15-27 May); Germany (2,053; 15-23 May); Hungary (1,028; 15-27 May); Italy (1,541; 15-26 May); Poland (1,508; 15-29 May); Portugal (1,010; 16-28 May); Romania (1,021; 15-27 May); Spain (1,523; 15-22 May); Switzerland (1,159; 15-27 May), and the UK (2,064; 15-19 May). Polls were conducted by Datapraxis and Norstat in Estonia (1,007; 19-29 May).

Previous ECFR polls referenced in this report include those from [November 2024](#), [January 2024](#), [January 2022](#), [April 2021](#) and [November 2020](#).

## About the authors

[Ivan Krastev](#) is chair of the Centre for Liberal Strategies, Sofia, and a permanent fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences, Vienna. He is the author of “Is It Tomorrow Yet?: Paradoxes of the Pandemic”, among many other publications.

[Mark Leonard](#) is co-founder and director of the European Council on Foreign Relations. He is the author of “The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict”. He also presents ECFR’s weekly “World in 30 Minutes” podcast.

## Acknowledgments

This publication owes a great deal to the outstanding work of ECFR’s Unlock team, in particular Pawel Zerka, who did an extraordinary job of analysing the data and helping refine the authors’ arguments. Jeremy Cliffe was a brilliant editor of various drafts and greatly improved the narrative flow of the text. Andreas Bock led strategic media outreach, Nastassia Zenovich developed fresh and innovative ways of displaying the data and Alessandro Castriotta was a valuable source of support throughout the process. Nele Anders and Julie Morgan managed advocacy, while Anand Sundar navigated successive drafts. The authors also thank Paul Hilder and his team at Datapraxis for collaborating on developing and analysing the European polling referred to in the report. Despite these contributions, any mistakes remain the authors’ own.

ECFR partnered with Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Switzerland’s Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, International Centre for Defence and Security, and Think Tank Europa on this project.



## ABOUT ECFR

The European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) is the first pan-European think-tank. Launched in October 2007, its objective is to conduct research and promote informed debate across Europe on the development of coherent, effective and values-based European foreign policy. ECFR has developed a strategy with three distinctive elements that define its activities:

- A pan-European Council. ECFR has brought together a distinguished Council of over two hundred Members – politicians, decision makers, thinkers and business people from the EU's member states and candidate countries – which meets once a year as a full body. Through geographical and thematic task forces, members provide ECFR staff with advice and feedback on policy ideas and help with ECFR's activities within their own countries. The Council is chaired by Carl Bildt, Lykke Friis, and Norbert Röttgen.
- A physical presence in the main EU member states. ECFR, uniquely among European think-tanks, has offices in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Sofia, Warsaw, and Washington. Our offices are platforms for research, debate, advocacy and communications.
- Developing contagious ideas that get people talking. ECFR has brought together a team of distinguished researchers and practitioners from all over Europe to carry out innovative research and policy development projects with a pan-European focus. ECFR produces original research; publishes policy reports; hosts private meetings, public debates, and “friends of ECFR” gatherings in EU capitals; and reaches out to strategic media outlets.

ECFR is a registered charity funded by the Open Society Foundations and other generous foundations, individuals and corporate entities. These donors allow us to publish our ideas and advocate for a values-based EU foreign policy. ECFR works in partnership with other think tanks and organisations but does not make grants to individuals or institutions. [ecfr.eu](https://ecfr.eu)

The European Council on Foreign Relations does not take collective positions. This paper, like all publications of the European Council on Foreign Relations, represents only the views of its authors. Copyright of this publication is held by the European Council on Foreign Relations. You may not copy, reproduce, republish or circulate in any way the content from this publication except for your own personal and non-commercial use. Any other use requires the prior written permission of the European Council on Foreign Relations. © ECFR June 2025. ISBN: 978-1-916682-94-8. Published by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 4th Floor, Tennyson House, 159-165 Great Portland Street, London W1W 5PA, United Kingdom.