



**HAUT-COMMISSARIAT  
À LA STRATÉGIE  
ET AU PLAN**

*Liberté  
Égalité  
Fraternité*

**Policy Paper**

**No. 2025-01**

**July 2025**

## **Note to the Heads of State and Government**

# **“Weimar of Ideas”: A shared strategic agenda for Europe**

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*This note draws on a series of discussions with experts from multiple think tanks. Part of the participants contributed in a personal capacity. The views, interpretations and recommendations expressed here do not necessarily reflect the positions of every individual involved, nor of their respective organisations.*

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## Context and Purpose

*Europe is undergoing a period of critical transformation. The resurgence of geopolitical rivalries, the acceleration of climate change and technological transitions, as well as the rise of global economic competition exposes the European Union to multiple risks: economic stagnation and technological lagging, growing fragmentation among Member States, strategic dependencies in key sectors, and vulnerabilities in its collective security and defence.*

*In this context, the first edition of the “Weimar of Ideas,” launched by the High Commissioner for Strategy and Planning, Mr. Clément Beaune, brought together on July 7 and 8, 2025, in Paris, around thirty experts from leading think tanks in France, Germany, and Poland. This initiative aims to foster renewed strategic dialogue beyond official diplomatic channels, by forging a shared ambition and building common ground. France, Germany, and Poland—longstanding partners and pillars of the European Union—have a strategic responsibility to lead this effort and shape Europe’s collective response to today’s challenges. Through innovative analyses and actionable recommendations, the Weimar of Ideas seeks to lay the foundations for a collective agenda to strengthen Europe’s sovereignty and unity.*

*At the conclusion of rich and focused working sessions held at the Palais d’Iéna, these experts discussed a series of concrete proposals. This note, the result of their collective work, is structured around three key priorities: strengthening Europe’s defence and strategic autonomy in the face of renewed geopolitical risks; boosting the continent’s competitiveness amid global economic, technological and climate shifts; and enhancing the EU’s institutional capacity to prevent political stalemate and drive future reforms.*

## 1. Facing Geopolitical Risks: The Strategic Imperative for European Defence

### Identified goal

Strengthen European defence and autonomy

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### Main proposals

- The war in Ukraine and European Security
  - Reinforce support to Ukraine to ensure it prevails over Russian aggression, and to reduce Russia's capacity to threaten Europe's security in the near future.
  - Assert Europe's role in ongoing negotiations over the future European security architecture, which must not be shaped by the United States and Russia alone.
  - Discuss France's nuclear deterrent impact in European security.
  - Prepare gradually and with pragmatism for a possible and progressive U.S. disengagement from European security.
  - Establish a "European Defence Council" for strategic leadership.
  - Deepen ties with non-EU NATO partners (e.g., Canada, U.K., Norway) and global partners (e.g., Japan, South Korea, Australia, India).
- EUDITB and industrial ramp-up
  - Accelerate defence industry cooperation (joint R&D, production, SMEs involvement).
  - Build an integrated European defence industrial base (European preference in procurement).
- Citizen involvement and democratic acceptance
  - Improve public awareness that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine affects all of Europe.
  - Involve citizens and the European Parliament in security debates to build legitimacy.

European defence stands at a turning point. Russia's war in Ukraine, combined with growing signs of a potential U.S. disengagement from NATO and the European theatre, exposes the European Union to heightened security risks. These developments come as

Europe faces persistent vulnerabilities: a fragmented defence industrial base, dependence on American military capabilities, and vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure and energy supply.

Beyond these structural weaknesses, a deeper challenge emerges: Europe's strategic autonomy still doesn't exist, and its societies are not prepared for a protracted confrontation. Even if the war in Ukraine is yet perceived as Europe's war challenging our own security, are we ready to assume all the consequences of this? Clearly not, and it leaves room for external manipulation and internal divisions.

In this context, there is a shared strategic imperative: investing urgently to improve Europe's strategic autonomy and deterrence. This requires an immediate response to the war in Ukraine, and the gradual consolidation of a truly autonomous European defence — reducing gradually our external dependencies, particularly on the U.S. Two levels of action emerge: urgent measures to face the war in Ukraine and security threats from Russia, and structural reforms to build Europe's long-term strategic military and industrial autonomy.

### **1.1. Short-term: Addressing the War in Ukraine**

The war in Ukraine is the immediate and defining test of Europe's will and capability to cooperate in its own defence, to do whatever it takes to ensure its security, and to define and uphold its European interest. Making sure Ukraine prevails and reducing Russia's capacity to threaten Europe in the future are essential. A Russian success would deepen European vulnerabilities and undermine Europe's credibility, both with its own citizens and its neighbors.

Beyond military support, Europe must urgently scale up its political and financial commitment to Ukraine. This includes the formalisation of a new European financial package, possibly integrated into the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). While increased spending is necessary, spending must also be more efficient and more coordinated. A key priority should be to support European integration and to prevent a return to nationalism and costly fragmentations.

On the ground, Europe should consider deploying training or supervision missions on Ukrainian territory after a cease-fire has been achieved and supporting efforts to gain dominance in the skies. This would demonstrate Europe's capacity to act, and limit Ukraine's dependence on non-European actors.

Accelerating Europe's industrial response is essential, particularly through the rapid co-development of defence technologies between European partners and with Ukraine. This includes joint research and development efforts, an acceleration in industrial production

of drones and other critical capabilities, and the support for opening the defence market to SMEs and civil-sector companies, which offer greater agility and speed.

A more structured dialogue between industry and institutions at the European level is also essential. The creation of a “European Armaments Forum” could bring together the EU Commissioner for Defence, DG DEFIS, the Director and staff of the European Defence Agency, and be chaired by the European External Action Service (EEAS), in coordination with the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission.

There is a pressing need to increase public awareness and understanding across Europe. The war in Ukraine is still too often seen as a distant conflict, rather than as a direct threat to Europe’s security. Communication efforts and an informed and open debate are essential to counter antagonistic narratives and sustain public support. The EU should build up its collective resilience through stronger coordination and concrete common action against deliberate fake news and viral “information” attacks from Russia and other players.

The sensitive question of France’s nuclear deterrence, and the possibility to extend its scope to the EU, must also be addressed. This issue should notably be addressed within the Weimar Triangle, as part of a broader reflection on Europe’s strategic posture. The polarising nature of the topic highlights the need to launch a structured debate on the future role of nuclear deterrence in Europe’s security.

European nations must also confront a geopolitical paradox: they wish to decide the future of their security and be associated to the negotiations that will shape the end of the war, but at the same time, they are hesitating to engage and invest directly. In the face of a possible U.S. disengagement, Europe should be prepared for a managed transition and must be ready to provide an autonomous response.

## **1.2. Medium to Long Term: Building Strategic Autonomy**

Beyond the immediate response to the war in Ukraine, Europe must consolidate the foundations of its strategic autonomy over the medium and long term. This requires both industrial integration, institutional and military strengthening, to move from fragmented national efforts towards truly common defence capabilities.

The first priority is to reinforce and integrate the European defence industrial base. This requires accelerating the European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) deployment, supporting common procurement, European preference in defence procurement, ensuring a higher proportion of added value comes from European actors. This would help consolidate industrial capacities and foster economies of scale in the defence industry. It can also be a huge opportunity for European reindustrialisation, innovation, and competitiveness.

To avoid costly duplications and fragmentations, resources should be pooled via a coordinated industrial platform, facilitating joint development, production, procurement and operation of critical capabilities. The scope of the European Defence Fund should be extended to cover both development and industrial production.

At the same time, Europe should deepen its partnerships with non-EU NATO allies, such as U.K., Canada or Norway and global partners such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and possibly India to diversify its industrial and strategic ties beyond the transatlantic framework.

On the institutional side, stronger governance is needed. One key proposal is the creation of a “European Defence Council,” distinct from the Foreign Affairs Council, to provide political leadership, plug in the national defence ministries deeper into the EU and drive strategic coordination in defence matters.

Greater involvement of the European Parliament and public opinion is also essential in shaping defence priorities. This would help build democratic legitimacy and public support for the long-term effort to strengthen European defence.

## 2. Addressing Economic Decline: The Sense of Urgency

### Identified goal

Boost Europe’s competitiveness and resilience

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### Main proposals

- Unlock private capital by establishing a concrete and ambitious roadmap for a genuine European Savings and Investments Union.
- Refocus industrial policy on a limited number of strategic sectors, supported by streamlined, coordinated, and enforceable EU-wide rules.
- Reform energy and climate policies with an ambitious and pragmatic approach — by ensuring technology neutrality and accelerating infrastructure integration via interconnectors.
- Bolster open rule-based trade, including protection from unfair practices and a de-risking approach where necessary, especially in critical industries.

Europe faces a moment of heightened strategic vulnerability. Global economic competition is intensifying, driven by China's rapid rise, growing geopolitical instability, and the accelerating climate and environmental crisis. Together, these dynamics expose Europe not only to external pressures but also to the risk of internal economic decline.

This challenge is not limited to Europe's global economic standing. It also concerns the defence of its model of prosperity: an economy that combines competitiveness with social cohesion and long-term sustainability.

Against this backdrop, Europe must develop a shared sense of purpose and act with greater unity. In an increasingly contested global environment, defending Europe's economic interests also means defending its model and values.

In this context, four key strategic priorities emerge to strengthen Europe's economic competitiveness and resilience: mobilising more investment more effectively, focusing and simplifying industrial policy, prioritising pragmatic energy and climate actions, and pursuing open yet realistic global partnerships.

## **2.1. Mobilising Investment**

One of the key priorities is the need to better mobilise private capital. This could start with a precise roadmap for the various steps achieving a European Savings and Investments Union (SIU), aiming to pool Europe's savings and channel them into productive investment across the continent.

Many savers today invest outside Europe, particularly in the United States, where returns are higher; or leave their savings in low yielding deposit accounts. This highlights the need for Europe to stimulate its own economic dynamism and make itself a more attractive place to invest. This objective is closely linked to the imperative of a more integrated and dynamic Single Market. Financial and economic integration must go hand in hand.

The Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) remains a key tool to support long-term investment in the EU and there is a strong case for more joint spending on European public goods. However, political debates often remain stuck on recurring issues: whether to increase the overall budget, or how to balance spending priorities. In light of the current challenges and the negotiations for a new MFF, a more pragmatic approach is needed. While remaining a powerful instrument supporting the cohesion needs of some regions, the MFF should also be better aligned with Europe's strategic investment goals: defence and security, advanced technologies, critical industries, and the green transition. Especially as the role of the EU budget will remain more limited than national budgets and private money, it needs to be flexible, transparent, and targeted.

## 2.2. Industrial Strategy: Strategic Focus and Simplification

Europe must better define its strategic sectors and adopt a shared doctrine that clearly states its industrial priorities. The goal is to be selective, identifying sectors essential to resilience and competitiveness, and supporting them explicitly. This requires a more assertive, and where necessary selective, industrial policy — encouraging a “Buy European” policy in public procurement, strengthening industrial financial support for selected sectors, and adjusting the regulatory framework to support European industries. However, such measures must be coordinated with a strong EU-level governance to avoid national fragmentation and wasteful subsidy races among Member States.

Environmental and climate regulations are a key part of the European model and an essential tool for achieving the Paris Agreement. They should not overly hinder industrial competitiveness. Even beyond the environment and climate, diverging national regulation and policies prevent European industry from utilising the full potential of the continent’s economic scale. Efforts are needed to avoid overregulation, reduce gold plating at national level and ensure actual level-playing field (e.g. through streamlining EU rules and preferring in some sectors regulations to directives). Simplifying, harmonising, and completing the Single Market remains a key priority: this means reducing regulatory barriers and creating a more predictable environment for European firms.

## 2.3. Energy and Climate: Pragmatism and Prioritisation

Energy should be a key strategic priority for Europe’s competitiveness, sovereignty and its green transition. More coordinated action on grid integration, modernising the infrastructure, expanding storage, and opening-up energy markets is needed. Climate policy must combine ambitious mitigation and adaptation strategies at the EU level. Achieving a carbon-neutral Europe will require overcoming national differences by promoting technology neutrality, ensuring that different paths to decarbonisation can coexist.

## 2.4. Global Partnerships: Open but Realistic

Europe faces a difficult balancing act in global trade. It must protect itself from China’s aggressive industrial policy and overcapacity, and from the United States’ increasingly confrontational trade stance. Yet global trade has long been and remains a driver of Europe’s prosperity.

The EU should remain open to global trade and further diversify its partnerships with other countries and regional players through renewed trade agreements, while also being less naive and making stronger use of its trade defence instruments. Preserving as much



as possible global cooperation and rule-based trade governance while safeguarding strategic industries and develop domestic demand within the Single Market will be essential to maintaining Europe's role in the world.

### 3. Preventing Political Stalemate: The European Union's Moment of Truth

#### Identified goal

Rebuild trust and make EU governance more effective

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#### Main proposals

- Reform decision-making within the current treaties (more qualified majority voting, smaller Commission).
- Strengthen rule of law enforcement and democratic safeguards (European Democracy Resilience Fund).
- Give the European Parliament legislative initiative powers.
- Foster the initiatives to develop a shared European identity and narrative.
- Hold informal summits to define common goals.
- Make enlargement a strategic opportunity to modernise EU institutions.

The European Union faces a profound political challenge. Despite relatively high levels of trust in EU institutions compared to national ones, euroscepticism and populism are gaining ground, exposing a disconnect between European governance and its citizens. Many Europeans still perceive the EU as a technocratic and distant entity, with limited emotional resonance and unclear political purpose.

This democratic disconnect is compounded by deeper structural challenges: a fragmented decision-making process, an incomplete strategic vision, and persistent challenges in East-West relations. At the same time, external pressures—from geopolitical rivalry to technological and energy dependencies—underscore the need for the EU to clarify its global role and strengthen its internal cohesion.

In this context, a shared priority emerges: rebuilding political trust and institutional effectiveness, to ensure the EU remains a credible and cohesive actor on the global stage.

This requires acting within the current treaties, leveraging existing legal frameworks while pursuing political and institutional reforms. Several reform priorities can be pursued, combining institutional adjustments, political leadership and strategic vision, to equip the EU for the challenges of the coming decade.

### **3.1. Reforming Decision-Making and Leadership**

The EU's decision-making process remains hampered by unanimity requirements, particularly in foreign and security policy. Existing legal tools, such as *passerelle* clauses and reinforced cooperation formats, are underused.

To overcome these deadlocks, qualified majority voting should be extended in strategic areas. Flexible formats for willing coalitions should be promoted, and the number of Commissioners reduced to foster a more efficient and de-nationalised executive.

Beyond technical adjustments, political leadership is essential. A “moment of truth” among EU leaders is needed to define the Union's strategic priorities, including enlargement and long-term reform goals.

### **3.2. Strengthening the EU's Democratic Legitimacy**

Democratic backsliding within Member States undermines the EU's internal coherence and global credibility. Rule of law mechanisms remain too slow and inconsistently applied. Citizens continue to struggle with understanding the division of competences between the EU and its Member States, reinforcing a perception of democratic deficit.

To address these weaknesses, the EU's rule of law instruments should be strengthened, including budgetary conditionality and enhanced monitoring. A “European Democracy Resilience Fund” should be created to support civil society and independent media. Clarifying competences between the EU and Member States would help reinforce subsidiarity and transparency. The European Parliament should be granted a right of legislative initiative, and a stronger role in the appointment of the Commission.

The possibility for the EU to develop the ability to suspend or exclude a Member State that persistently violates democratic values should be considered, in order to preserve the Union's internal coherence.

### **3.3. Rebuilding Trust and a Shared European Identity**

Reconnecting European institutions with citizens and Member States requires framing the EU not just as a technical framework, but as a shared democratic and philosophical

project. This includes developing a more inclusive narrative of European identity, integrating the perspectives of newer and smaller Member States.

To foster political cohesion, informal political summits of EU leaders could be organised, in ad hoc formats. These meetings would aim to define a shared political contract, clarifying the Union's long-term objectives and rebuilding a sense of strategic unity and common purpose among Member States. Unlike formal European Council meetings, these summits would offer a more flexible setting, allowing for longer, open-ended political discussions beyond day-to-day crisis management.

An extended Erasmus programme and targeted communication campaigns should be launched in parallel to strengthen a sense of belonging among European citizens and counter neo-authoritarian temptations. This must be complemented by a robust response to information warfare and to the influence of non-European social media platforms, which are often used to amplify hostile narratives.

### **3.4. Making Enlargement a Strategic Opportunity**

Enlargement could exacerbate governance complexity and institutional inertia. It should be used as an opportunity to rethink institutional frameworks and the budget, and to improve the EU's efficiency.

The inclusion of smaller and Eastern Member States in EU reform debates is essential to overcoming the perception of a West-dominated process. Enlargement should be reframed not as a technical response to crises, but as a strategic lever for Europe's development and security.

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