

Next-Generation European Political Leaders' Views on Transatlantic Cooperation

Bruce Stokes

The next generation of European political leaders believe the United States and Europe can work together in dealing with shared challenges such as China, technology, climate change, the economy, and security.

While generally supportive of greater European self-reliance, young European parliamentarians see limits to the European Union's autonomy.

Transatlantic cooperation in dealing with China enjoys general support, while there is some skepticism about future collaboration with the United States on technology and climate change.

While trust in the United States took a beating in the Trump era, next-generation European leaders are guardedly hopeful about its future reliability. But much depends on Washington's ability to deliver on climate change.

Germans go to the polls on September 26 in historic elections. After 16 years in power, Chancellor Angela Merkel, a strong proponent of close U.S.-European ties, is stepping down. All three major candidates for the chancellorship are confirmed transatlanticists. But, whoever prevails, a new era is about to begin in German and European politics and in Europe's relationship with the United States.

The next generation of political leaders who will soon step onto the governing stage are now waiting in the wings across Europe, in national parliaments and in the European Parliament. In the years ahead, they will help shape Europe and its ties with the United States. Their priorities and their views on the future of the transatlantic relationship will determine whether the two sides can work together in dealing with challenges they share: China, climate change, technology, the economy, and security.

Napoleon Bonaparte once observed: "To understand the man you have to know what was happening in the world when he was twenty." These young parliamentarians have experienced a different United States than their older colleagues. Their worldview was shaped after the end of the Cold War and the emer-

gence of China as a global power. And the circumstances that shaped the meaning of the transatlantic relationship for their older colleagues are increasingly being replaced by a set of new, complex global challenges, such as climate change.

The Next Generation's Worldview

"People in the 50s and 60s lived in a different environment vis-à-vis the United States," suggested a member of the centrist Free Democratic Party (FDP) in Germany's Bundestag, "They were surrounded by U.S. culture." And yet, today even many older European political leaders advocate greater European strategic autonomy or technological sovereignty (effectively some decoupling from the United States). Pundits warn that Washington is unreliable in the wake of the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Younger Europeans have experienced a different United States. "What are [they] thinking?" a Social Democratic Party (SDP) parliamentarian in Berlin rhetorically. "It starts with September 11 and then Iraq, George W. Bush, Afghanistan, Abu Ghraib, Trump, climate, and China." Their different experience means that they have a positive but nuanced view of future

The interviews on which this brief is based followed on from the 150 interviews conducted as input to *Together or Alone: Choices and Strategies for Transatlantic Relations for 2021 and Beyond*, the 2020 report by a task force convened by the German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Bundeskanzler-Helmut-Schmidt-Stiftung. To supplement the initial set of task force interviews and to better reflect the views of young European political leaders, 40 additional conversations were conducted with members of the European Parliament and national parliaments across Europe, between April and August 2021. Those interviewed represented a range of political parties from 16 European countries. All but a few were under the age of 40.

These interviews do not necessarily represent the full range of opinions held by young European political leaders, each with their own experiences, ideologies, and nationalities. Rather, this publication reflects a sampling of the views of those who were willing and able to be interviewed in English. As such, given their interests and language facility, they may be more supportive of transatlantic cooperation than a more diverse set of interviewees. To ensure candor, all conversations were on a not-for-attribution basis.

The discussions were framed by, although not limited to, the challenges identified by the task force: China, technology, climate change, economic recovery, and security.

transatlantic relations. They support continued collaboration with the United States, yet they voice differences over how to deal with China or technology, and they share a general desire for Europe to enhance its capabilities. At the same time, they generally acknowledge that Europe cannot go it alone if it is to successfully deal with the challenges of the 21st Century.

The Allure of Decoupling

Europe has long chafed against its subsidiary role in the transatlantic relationship. This has periodically manifested itself, for example, in widespread opposition to the Vietnam War and the Iraq War. And more recently in the reaction against President Donald Trump's America First policies, his disparagement of multilateral institutions (particularly the European Union), and his threats to pull the United States out of NATO.

In recent years, some degree of greater European independence has been advocated by older European leaders. "The times in which we could completely rely on others are over to a certain extent," said German Chancellor Merkel in 2017.¹ "We Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands." In 2018, European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker opined: "What we want is to become more autonomous" and "the time for European sovereignty has come."² France's President Emmanuel Macron has been the most vocal advocate of European autonomy. "It's not that we want to undo the existing alliances or partnerships," he said in July, but Europe needs its own military and technological capabilities because "cooperation cannot be dependence."³ These calls for more European autonomy have become louder after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. "It's clear that the need for more European defense has never been as much

as evident as today," said EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell at a meeting of European ministers of defense and foreign affairs in September.⁴

Among younger leaders there is also a desire for Europe to be better able to stand on its own, but this is tempered with a recognition of its limitations. "Donald Trump was good for European sovereignty," observed a member of France's Assemblée Nationale from Macron's centrist La République en Marche! (LREM) party. "It is not crazy to build European sovereignty. [But] the will to get this independence in air, space, and cyber domains is brand new in the EU." Another LREM member endorsed Macron's desire for European independence while acknowledging the complexity of any decoupling: "Now that the U.S. is not predictable, we have got to be sure if we have to do something we can do it. We can't be too dependent on the U.S. [But] we fully realize we can't be completely independent." A Greens member of Germany's parliament voiced qualified agreement: "To get the means to achieve our objectives we need to be more sovereign in some areas than in others. That means in the defense sector we won't be able to [be sovereign] in the short run. In the digital sector the EU has more to offer than the U.S. and in some parts of green tech as well. [But] I differentiate [that] from autonomy, doing everything on our own and decoupling from the rest of the world."

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Such support for greater European self-reliance is not old-style anti-Americanism. "This is not aimed against the U.S.," asserted a member of the European Parliament from the center-right Austrian People's Party. "Strategic autonomy is about a Europe that is more capable of contributing within its borders and abroad...not as a way to confront the U.S., but to

1 Giulia Paravicinia, "[Angela Merkel: Europe must take 'our fate' into own hands](#)," Politico, May 18, 2017.

2 Jean-Claude Juncker, "[State of the Union 2018](#)," European Commission, September 12, 2018.

3 New York Times, "[Macron Tells Biden That Cooperation With U.S. Cannot Be Dependence](#)," January 29, 2021.

4 Al Jazeera, "[EU pushes for more defence autonomy amid Afghanistan fallout](#)," September 2, 2021.

better support it. Strategic autonomy contributes to transatlantic cooperation.”

At the same time, not all young parliamentarians think decoupling is necessarily feasible. “In a world beset by systemic rivalry,” said a Greens member of the Germany’s legislature, “we won’t survive if [Europe and the United States] don’t stand together.” A member of the European Parliament from the center-right Croatian Democratic Union party concurred: “We have to be honest. We cannot effectively act on the global stage because we still must find a unanimous consensus among the EU27.” A member of the Spanish Congreso de los Diputados from the conservative Popular Party offered an even blunter assessment: “We shouldn’t aim for autonomy. This is not a good idea. We do not have capacity to do so. We need to be positioned on the right side of history, which is with the United States.”

Transatlantic Trust and the Afghanistan Pullout

Transatlantic cooperation in the face of shared challenges requires Europeans to have confidence in the reliability of the United States. “Trust is the essential ingredient for talking together, let alone working together,” observed one young Social Democrat in the Parlament Federacije Bosne i Hercegovine. A Greens parliamentarian in Germany agreed: “We need to trust each other,” she said. “That has to be the baseline to solve the big challenges [we both face].”

Washington’s abrupt pullout from Afghanistan and its failure to consult and coordinate on a joint exit strategy with its European allies sparked criticism from older foreign policy elites in Europe, but a more restrained reaction from the next generation of political leadership. “The [German] public perception is very much focused on internal topics and on the German failure when it comes to Afghanistan,” observed an FDP member of Germany’s parliament. “I hardly hear any blaming of the U.S. and their trustworthiness towards allies and the Afghan people.” An Austrian People’s Party member of the European Parliament thinks there is shared responsibility for the failure in Afghanistan: “The West has failed as a

whole. There is no point in pointing the blame as this would only play into the hands of our opponents.”

Nor is the U.S. president shouldering the blame among young European parliamentarians. “The overall positive public image that President Biden has here,” said a Christian Democrat member of Sweden’s Riksdag, “makes him able to do, or perhaps get away with, things that President Trump couldn’t do. If Trump were still president and the same thing happened in Afghanistan, people here would generally have a stronger reaction. [So] while the development in Afghanistan is tragic, I don’t think it changes public trust in America.”

Whatever the impact of the Afghan pullout on young leaders’ views of the United States, this occurs against the backdrop of severely eroded Europe’s trust in its ally during the Trump era. By the end of the Trump presidency, U.S. favorability was down a median of 31 percentage points in Europe and at its lowest level ever in four of seven European countries consistently surveyed by the Pew Research Center.⁵ “For the first time,” lamented an LREM parliamentarian in France, “we saw the U.S. wanting to decouple politically from Europe. For the first time we had to deal with issues without having the United States being here to reinforce or foster NATO.”

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Favorable views of the United States rebounded sharply with Biden’s election: in June it was up 34 points in France, 33 in Germany, 29 in Italy, 23 in the United Kingdom, and 22 in Spain. In most countries this recovery spanned all age groups.⁶ The views of young

5 Pew Research Center, [America’s Image Abroad Rebounds With Transition From Trump to Biden](#), June 10, 2021.

6 Ibid

parliamentarians generally mirror that rebound. “We are very happy that Biden is president,” observed an LREM member of France’s parliament. A member of Modern, a liberal party in the lower house of Poland’s Sejm noted: “The election gives us a chance to rebuild trust and EU relations with the United States.”

Yet, thanks to the damage done by the Trump administration, doubts linger among some young leaders over the future of transatlantic cooperation. “I have taken American leadership in the world for granted,” admitted a member for the center-right Moderate Party in Sweden’s parliament. “But the change of perspective in the United States means Americans are not willing to take on that leadership.” An even more skeptical FDP parliamentarian in Germany complained: “The [German] public still believes that the United States always puts its own interests first, before common interests with Europe.”

Next-generation leaders also voice skepticism about their elders’ assumption that shared values are a glue that will always hold Europe and the United States together despite their policy differences. For many, values are situational. Common principles—such as a belief in the rule of law—are cited as the reason the United States and Europe should cooperate in dealing with China. At the same time, values differences over privacy, climate change, or the role of government are foreseen as obstacles to future transatlantic cooperation.

“Trust doesn’t just depend on who’s the president,” asserted an SPD member of Germany’s parliament. “We have to talk about the hearts and minds of citizens. Especially, do Americans agree with our points of view on fighting climate change and the ways of regulating things?” He has his doubts. As politicians, the next-generation leaders are mindful that the next “hearts and minds” test is the 2022 U.S. congressional elections, with the possibility that the Senate and House of Representatives could end up controlled by America First Republicans. “I trust America,” said a skeptical Greens parliamentarian in Berlin. “But I don’t trust the political system.” Nor do some trust the

American people, many of whom voted for Trump in 2016 and almost reelected him in 2020.

The Future of Transatlantic Cooperation

Despite their elders’ rhetoric about European autonomy and sovereignty, and some of their own desire for greater European self-reliance, next-generation European political leaders are generally supportive of working with the United States in the face of shared challenges.

China: The Common Competitor

Already prior to the recent developments in Afghanistan, China was a growing preoccupation in transatlantic relations, thanks to mutual concerns about its growing economic competitiveness, assertive military posture, and suppression of human rights. Brussels and Washington had set up a strategic dialogue on China, and NATO was talking about China as a security threat for the first time.

Transatlantic publics were also concerned. Seven-in-ten American respondents see China as a rival, as do a median of nearly five-in-ten European ones, according to a German Marshall Fund 2021 survey.⁷ On both sides of the Atlantic slightly fewer millennials, the cohort of next-generation political leaders, label China a rival. At the same time, European and American respondents generally agree on striking a tougher stance in dealing with China over human rights, cybersecurity, and climate.

Most young European political leaders back closer cooperation with the United States in dealing with China. “China is the most fundamental long-term challenge to internal coherence of the transatlantic community,” observed a Modern parliamentarian in Poland. An FDP member of Germany’s legislature asserted: “Public opinion on China is shifting in Germany towards acknowledging China as a risk. I believe this will lead to a closer consideration of

⁷ German Marshall Fund of the United States, [Transatlantic Trends 2021](#), June 2021.

America as ‘trustworthy’ when it comes to security and issues concerning China.” A Moderate Party parliamentarian in Sweden agreed: “We have to work together with the United States on China. China has a long-term plan, and if we don’t work together, we will definitely lose.”

Some of the most outspoken criticism of China and support for transatlantic cooperation in dealing with it comes from young right-wing politicians. “China’s power is growing, not only the military, but also their economic might and scientific abilities,” argued a member of the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany’s parliament. “When it comes to this confrontation, everyone has to decide who they will support. We can’t hide from this conflict. We have to pick a side, the U.S. side. Our side has to support the U.S. against growing Chinese influence.” A member of the right-wing League party in Italy’s Camera dei Deputati agreed: “We need to contain China, that is the foremost challenge.” And, unprompted, he said: “We have to stand with Taiwan.”

The China views of next-generation leaders depend, in part, on where they are from. Reflecting differing national interests and experience, some young parliamentarians urge caution. “We don’t have 100 percent identical interests with the United States on China,” noted a Greens member of Germany’s parliament. “German policy toward China is driven by commercial interest. Our economy depends on exports to China. As long as we are that dependent, it will be hard to take a tough stance on China.”

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Twelve Central European EU member states and five Balkan countries are members of the 17+1 format, Beijing’s effort to tie Europe into its Belt and Road Initiative. Hungary has growing trade ties with China. The benefits of such links with China have not lived up to expectations but their promise has created an East-West divide in Europe. “In Croatia the situation is

different from the United States,” observed a member of the European Parliament from the Croatian Democratic Union. “China is not on peoples’ radar. It’s going to be, but at the moment we are not at that phase. We haven’t had a troublesome experience with China, unlike other European countries.” A Social Democratic parliamentarian in Bosnia and Herzegovina agreed: “There is no China issue in Bosnia. We don’t have much fear of China.”

So, despite general enthusiasm for transatlantic cooperation in dealing with China, young European political leaders must first sort out their own internal differences over the issue.

Technological Leadership

The China challenge is, in part, an economic one posed by the country’s growing prowess in emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, advanced computer chips, and quantum computing. Beijing has the money, the scientific talent, and the market size to compete with Europe and the United States. Next-generation European political leaders are wrestling with what to do about this. And in the 2021 GMF survey six-in-ten Europeans and Americans back transatlantic cooperation on technology issues as an effective way to compete with China, a sentiment shared by millennials on both sides of the Atlantic.⁸

A Greens parliamentarian in Germany saw the situation in terms of realpolitik: “Developments in history have always been decided by technology. So, if there is one area where we need to cooperate, it is on technology issues.” A Moderate Party parliamentarian in Sweden put it pragmatically: “On technology, we don’t have the capacity in Europe. We have no choice, no option but to cooperate with the United States.”

Possibly because next-generation parliamentarians have experienced such rapid technological change in their own lifetimes, they are ambitious about and at ease with transatlantic technological cooperation. “One of the best ideas would be to work together in

⁸ Ibid.

some fields similar to what we are doing in Europe with Airbus,” suggested an LREM parliamentarian in France. “We need such a big Europe-U.S. project.” A member of the European Parliament from the New Austria and Liberal Forum proposed: “We should have something similar to a NATO spending goal for research. This would be a measure of competitiveness, but also a way to put public pressure to have more investment in technology. The rest of it is a regulatory issue. We need regulatory changes to make it easier for companies and research institutions to make cooperation easier.”

But regulatory convergence is easier said than done. The EU considers itself a global regulatory trend setter, a point of pride among young European parliamentarians. But when it comes to technological cooperation with the United States, observed a member of the European Parliament from Greece’s socialist PASOK party, “different views on standards are the issue.”

Moreover, cooperation in developing future technologies—be they military or commercial—goes against European ambition for technological sovereignty, particularly in Germany. “I don’t want Europe just to be the place that sets standards,” protested a Greens parliamentarian in Berlin. “I want technology to be developed here as well.” A Greens colleague agreed: “If we already have companies and actors that are relevant, I see no sense to going with American companies and taking U.S. standards and destroying our European companies. I don’t want Europe just to be the place that sets standards. I want technology to be developed here as well.”

It will be the task of the recently established U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council to coordinate transatlantic technological cooperation while also managing evident differences. Next-generation European political leaders are supportive, but skeptical.

Economic Revival and Transformation

The transatlantic market is the richest and most deeply integrated trading and investment relationship in the world. It is also troubled by a long history of commercial disputes, the recent failure to conclude a Transat-

lantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), and a lingering trade war initiated by the Trump administration. Against this backdrop, roughly three-quarters of Americans and a median of nearly as many Europeans in the 2021 GMF survey support closer transatlantic economic cooperation, a view strongly shared by millennials on both sides of the Atlantic.⁹

“It is a pity that TTIP didn’t work, but we definitely can cooperate closer on trade,” said a Popular Party parliamentarian in Spain. “This is one of the things we can work on with the U.S. It is very tangible for people.” A member of the European Parliament from Austria’s liberal NEOS party sounds a similar note: “I was always a big fan of TTIP. It was sad that it did not come together. Free-trade agreements will need to take a new role. Why does no one have the imagination to form a climate-neutral trading agreement, which in my opinion would be a great idea. The larger trading area we have the more we are ‘immunized’ from China’s influence.”

The Biden administration has demonstrated no immediate interest in ambitious new transatlantic trade initiatives, however. If and when it does, next-generation European parliamentarians could prove to be allies.

Climate Change: The Shared Existential Challenge

In the wake of the recent alarming report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change¹⁰ and with the U.N. Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, Scotland in November, cooperation to slow global warming is high on the transatlantic agenda of younger European political leaders. In Pew Research Center surveys, Europeans (a median of 70 percent) are more likely than Americans (62 percent) to see climate change as a major threat,¹¹ but this gap has narrowed over the

9 Ibid.

10 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate, [Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis](#), 2021.

11 Pew Research Center, [Many globally are as concerned about climate change as about the spread of infectious diseases](#), October 16, 2020.

years.¹² And two-thirds of Europeans and Americans, including millennials, think their countries should do more to address global warming.¹³

The next-generation politicians are attuned to the public mood. “We have to make climate change our ‘Man on the Moon’ challenge,” said an SDP representative in Germany’s parliament. “Something that rallies the people around climate change adaptation, and mitigation.” Yet, while acknowledging the danger posed by global warming, a Social Democratic Party parliamentarian in Bosnia and Herzegovina warned that not all Europeans prioritize climate action: “The issue is not that popular because people feel there are too many other problems to worry about.” Similar sentiments were voiced by some young Polish parliamentarians.

There is also doubt Washington can be relied upon as a climate partner.

There is also doubt Washington can be relied upon as a climate partner. “The big issue is that one of the major parties in the U.S. does not acknowledge climate change as a problem,” observed a Moderate Party parliamentarian in Sweden. “Even if the Democrats are trustworthy, it is a problem that the other party is not.” Such partisanship poses a potential problem for U.S. climate leadership in the transatlantic relationship, cautioned a Swedish Christian Democrat: “If there is any single issue that [threatens Swedish trust in America], it is the way the Biden administration handles climate change.”

Such doubts may be one reason why next-generation leaders offer few ambitious suggestions of how the United States and Europe might work together to slow global warming, despite their support for such collaboration.

Security in a Shared Threat Environment

Concerns about the security threat posed by Russia have been the glue that has held together the postwar transatlantic alliance. But now many Europeans see this security challenge differently than Americans. In Pew surveys, seven-in-ten (71 percent) of Americans have a negative view of Russia, but only 57 percent of French and 50 percent of Italians do.¹⁴ Younger Europeans tend to take a more benign view of Moscow. In Germany, for example, 44 percent of 18-to-29-year-olds hold a positive opinion of Russia, compared with just 25 percent of those 50 and older who see Moscow in such a favorable light. And there are differences within Europe about relations with Russia, defense spending, and future security priorities. The failure of the allied effort in Afghanistan may not help matters.

The views of next-generation political leaders reflect those divisions. They express no reservations about the centrality of the transatlantic security alliance. Nor do they question the role of NATO (although the Swedes interviewed voice no desire for their country to join it.) However, some German parliamentarians, wary of a new Cold War, do not want to have to choose between Washington and Moscow. “We have to get better relations with Russia,” argued an AfD representative in Berlin. “This is one of the issues where our position and that of the United States differ. Germany benefits from better relations with Russia. There are, of course, things to criticize in Russia, as in every country. But we shouldn’t choose between the U.S. and Russia. We must have good relations with both.”

Not surprisingly, Poles and other Central and Eastern Europeans, who were once under Soviet domination, cast a more jaundiced eye on Russia and look to the United States for support. “Small countries in Eastern Europe expect when problems hit that the United States will get involved,” said a representative of the Croatian Democratic Union party in the European Parliament. “Trump built new bases in Poland

12 Pew Research Center, [What the world thinks about climate change in 7 charts](#), April 18, 2016.

13 Data gathered for German Marshall Fund of the United States, [Transatlantic Trends 2021](#).

14 Pew Research Center, [Views of Russia and Putin remain negative across 14 nations](#), December 16, 2020.

and solved our visa problem,” said an appreciative parliamentarian of the right-wing Law and Justice party in Poland. Nevertheless, there is doubt about the United States’ future reliability: “I am worried [about] Biden.” This wariness is shared by some French parliamentarians. “If the U.S. wants to be a strong player vis-à-vis Russia,” observed an LREM member, “they have to show us that they are reliable. The U.S. left us alone with Russia in some instances in the last 10 years. Just strong words from the U.S. will not be enough.”

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The issue of Europe’s general failure to achieve the NATO goal of spending 2 percent of GDP on defense, a sore point with many Americans, was raised by only a few parliamentarians. Poles proudly noted Warsaw had achieved that standard, a right-wing German lamented his country’s failure, but others largely ignored the issue.

In the Balkans, young parliamentarians see transatlantic security cooperation in more structural terms. They want the United States’ support for their membership in NATO and the European Union, as a means, not only of defending themselves against Russia but also of solidifying their ties to the West. As one Socialist Party member of Albania’s Kuvendi i Shqipërisë observed: “The EU and NATO agenda is part of something bigger, it’s about identity, a mentality of inclusion, this is important.”

Notably, a German and an Austrian expressed security concerns about Africa. “If the French leave Mali, will it be similar to Afghanistan now?” asked a Christian Democratic Union representative in Berlin. “No one has Mali in mind. But, as Afghanistan fades into the background, we will increasingly have to focus on Mali. Many migrants come to Europe and so

we have to be active there.” A People’s Party member in Vienna agreed, suggesting a transatlantic focus on North Africa because instability there will lead to more migration to Europe, resulting in political destabilization in the EU. “I think it is very important for Europe and the U.S. to work on northern Africa,” he said. But, other than more development assistance, he had no suggestions as to what form that cooperation might take.

There is also widespread appreciation of non-traditional security threats. “We already face hybrid warfare from the Russians, Chinese, Turkish, and non-state actors,” complained an Austrian People’s Party member of the European Parliament. “They want to weaken Europe by dividing our societies. Not just Europe, but also America. There must be cooperation among likeminded countries,” in the face of this challenge.

Transatlantic security cooperation, more broadly defined than in previous generations, remains an important priority for young European leaders. Yet its diffuse nature, the experience in Afghanistan, and the Biden administration’s focus on domestic revival and China will make security collaboration even more challenging to pursue.

Conclusion

In the fall of 2021, despite the turmoil of the Trump years and the finger-pointing over Afghanistan, next-generation European political leaders have a hopeful, yet realistic, view of transatlantic relations. They recognize the necessity of and see the potential for new avenues of U.S.-European collaboration in dealing with China, technology, the economy, climate change, and security.

They also acknowledge the challenges ahead. “At the moment expectations are very high,” said a Greens member of Sweden’s parliament. “But Biden will have to deliver to keep that trust in many areas.” Europe will have to step up as well. “It is not a question of trustworthiness,” observed a member of the European Parliament from the Croatian Democratic Union. “Europe has to think about self-sufficiency and stra-

tegic autonomy [because] America will not [always] be there to help solve our problems.”

As politicians, next-generation leaders are sensitive to the cultural and systemic political limitations of transatlantic cooperation. “Sometimes we forget that the EU and its member states have very different political systems than the U.S.” said a Five Star Movement member of Italy’s parliament. “We forget that the United States and Europe can have solutions at different speeds. We think that the relationship is not good ‘because we don’t have results,’ but this lack of

results isn’t a problem with the relationship, but the result from the two different systems.”

Idealistic yet realistic, transatlanticist yet supportive of a more self-reliant Europe, with a post-Cold War worldview and a generational sensibility attuned to the challenges of the 21st century, Europe’s young political leaders are poised to shape future U.S.-European relations, much as the founding generation of the modern transatlantic relationship did 75 years ago. Their voices need to be heard.

The views expressed in GMF publications and commentary are the views of the author alone.

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The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) strengthens transatlantic cooperation on regional, national, and global challenges and opportunities in the spirit of the Marshall Plan. GMF does this by supporting individuals and institutions working in the transatlantic sphere, by convening leaders and members of the policy and business communities, by contributing research and analysis on transatlantic topics, and by providing exchange opportunities to foster renewed commitment to the transatlantic relationship. In addition, GMF supports a number of initiatives to strengthen democracies. Founded in 1972 as a non-partisan, non-profit organization through a gift from Germany as a permanent memorial to Marshall Plan assistance, GMF maintains a strong presence on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition to its headquarters in Washington, DC, GMF has offices in Berlin, Paris, Brussels, Belgrade, Ankara, Bucharest, and Warsaw. GMF also has smaller representations in Bratislava, Turin, and Stockholm.

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