

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 4506 | JANUARY 8, 2016

Top Five Priorities for U.S. Policy Toward Europe in 2016

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U.S. policy toward Europe in 2015 failed to rise to the significant challenges that confront it. The U.S. is no closer to having a clear and comprehensive strategy to deal with Russia than it was a year ago; it continues to devalue key bilateral and multilateral relationships in Europe for the sake of supporting the European Union (EU); and it took no effective steps to support improved governance in increasingly autocratic Turkey or in the aspiring democracy of Georgia. The devastating Islamist attacks in Paris in December 2015 prove that terrorism is an increasingly serious threat in the heart of Europe, and, from Russia's aggression in Ukraine to the refugee crisis stemming from Syria, the EU displayed its customary obsession with inward-looking bureaucratic processes and supranationalism.

The U.S. should defend European security, sovereignty, and prosperity, not support supranational institutions that undermine all these values. Here are the top five policy priorities in the European region for the Administration and Congress in 2016:

1. Rethink Support for U.K. Membership of the European Union. By the end of 2017, the U.K. will hold a referendum on the results of its renegotiation of membership with the European Union. The U.S. government should adopt an official policy of expressing no preference on the outcome of the

referendum, which is ultimately a question for the British people to decide.

Instead, the U.S. should state that the many links between the U.S. and the U.K. will remain strong no matter what the outcome is of the EU referendum. It is disingenuous to suggest that the U.K. will damage Anglo-American relations by leaving the EU. More broadly, the U.S. should reconsider whether blindly supporting the EU is in America's best interests. The EU is a supranational organization that infringes on national sovereignty. It prevents the creation of genuine transatlantic free trade areas, harms transatlantic security, distorts European immigration policies, and wastes taxpayer money.

2. Ensure Trade Deals with European Nations Advance Economic Freedom. Any Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the U.S. and the EU should be based on free trade, an essential condition for economic growth and prosperity. If the TTIP genuinely promotes economic freedom, it should be welcomed. However, the benefits of any deal should not be oversold; even a perfect TTIP would produce only modest benefits. Furthermore, a bad TTIP could serve as a Trojan horse for bureaucrats in Washington and Brussels, allowing them to increase regulation by harmonizing transatlantic rules, and to create new supranational institutions. A bad TTIP would make both the U.S. and the EU less competitive, reduce economic freedom, infringe upon U.S. sovereignty, and benefit vested interests.

The U.S. should seek to negotiate free trade agreements based on mutual recognition of rules with willing and democratic partners, including

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4506>

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nations not in the EU (such as Norway and Switzerland) and nations that may leave it (most important, the United Kingdom).

3. NATO Summit in Warsaw 2016. It is critical that NATO send a strong signal during July's summit in Warsaw, Poland, that will defend the territorial integrity of every single member state. The Warsaw Declaration should make it clear that collective security and territorial defense will underpin everything NATO does. With this in mind, the alliance should resume regular training exercises for its Article V mission. The U.S. should find more innovative and emphatic ways to press European NATO members to increase defense spending. NATO should establish a permanent base presence, and preposition equipment in both central and Eastern Europe. It will be far easier for NATO to deter Russian threats now than to liberate a member nation from Russia later. In addition, the alliance should underscore Montenegro's joining of NATO by extending Macedonia an invitation to join the alliance and by continuing to work with other candidate countries. NATO faces no shortage of challenges to collective security: The summit should set out clear measures to address them.

4. Increase Support for Ukraine. In 2014, Russia illegally annexed Crimea, invaded Ukraine, and poured men, materiel, and political support into the areas of eastern Ukraine where it continues to foment separatism. Although a ceasefire following the Minsk II agreement remains officially in effect, the region is on the edge of renewed, open war. More than 9,000 people have been killed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. U.S. policymakers should continue to publicly press Russia on its backing and direct support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. The U.S. should also provide defense weaponry to Ukraine as authorized in the 2016 National Defense Authorization Act, including anti-armor, anti-aircraft, and small arms of a defensive nature. The U.S. should also continue training programs for the Ukrainian military and promote political and economic reform. Finally, the U.S. should not seek to buy Russia's cooperation in Syria by dropping its sanctions. Indeed, the U.S. should implement more extensive and severe sanctions against Russia for its illegal invasion of Ukraine.

5. Directly Confront the Islamist Threat. Europe has been the target of numerous Islamist terrorist attacks, including attacks in Paris in January and November 2015. Europe's incoherent and

wrongheaded policy for dealing with a massive influx of refugees from Syria has exacerbated an already heightened risk the continent faced from Islamist plots. Europe faces a dual threat from foreign fighters (roughly 3,500 foreigners from Europe are currently fighting for ISIS) returning home to commit acts of terror as well as home-grown terrorists who have not travelled abroad. Europe needs to confront Islamist terrorism by disrupting terrorist networks, closing foreign fighter pipelines, and improving Europe's record of assimilating immigrants, especially second-generation and third-generation immigrants. Clamping down on foreign-fighter transit and making radical Islamist messages less attractive to immigrant youth should remain a high priority for Europe this year.

U.S. Leadership for Freedom

The U.S. became a power in Europe after 1945 because it realized the need to defend the security of democratic Europe against the Soviet threat. Today, around the peripheries of Europe, from Russia to Turkey, from Syria to North Africa, Europe's security environment is increasingly threatening, and, as the Paris attacks show, these threats do not stop at Europe's borders. The U.S. has failed to react decisively to the decay of the European neighborhood and has instead undertaken a series of failed initiatives, from the so-called Russian "reset" to supporting the ever-increasing supranationalism of the European Union.

The basis of U.S. policy in Europe after 1945 was to support the collective self-defense of the Atlantic democracies through NATO and to promote free trade and economic freedom as a way to enrich and stabilize Europe and ensure that its security would not be undermined from within. This remains the right basis for U.S. policy in Europe. Returning to this policy should be a top priority for the White House in 2016.

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