

Schuman Paper
n°804
30th September 2025

Maxime LEFEBVRE

Europeans and Trump: dishonour, impotence or influence?

Responses to the [Turnberry trade agreement](#) between Donald Trump and Ursula von der Leyen on 27 July (formalised in an [EU-US statement](#) published on 27 August) did not mince words: 'shame', 'submission', 'vassalage', 'humiliation', and even the beginning of a 'century of humiliation' for Europe, following the example of China, which was forced to open up its imports of opium in the mid-19th century, marking the beginning of the long decline of the Middle Kingdom.

This agreement must be viewed in the broader context of transatlantic relations during Donald Trump's second term, which includes the situation in Ukraine and, more broadly, the issue of European defence and security. Looking at things in this context, Europeans have so far shown unity, diplomacy and even efficiency. They have begun to learn from their weaknesses, but the road to European power remains fraught with pitfalls.

UKRAINE AND NATO: A SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY OF INFLUENCE

A comparison must be made between the point of departure and the point of arrival (which is not the definitive point as yet). Initially, Donald Trump, without announcing that he would withdraw from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), cast doubt on the American security guarantee, and sought to make his European allies, whom he accused of taking advantage of American protection, pay more. Above all, he claimed he would end the war in Ukraine 'in 24 hours'. The humiliation of the Ukrainian president in the Oval Office on 28 February raised fears among Europeans that the

new US administration would twist Ukraine's arm to force it to capitulate to Moscow.

In response to these fears, European leaders have both engaged in diplomacy and raised the stakes on their conditions. Emmanuel Macron organised a meeting between Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky during the Notre Dame reopening ceremony in December 2024, even before the new president took office, and European countries have since worked tirelessly to bring the American position back to supporting Ukraine. Several high-level meetings, notably in [London](#) and [Paris](#), not only brought the issue of security guarantees to the table, but also provided a concrete European offer that avoided turning to Washington as a supplicant. Key European leaders met with Donald Trump in Washington alongside the Ukrainian president on 18 August, three days after the Trump-Putin summit in Anchorage. In this way, the question of security guarantees for Ukraine became a central condition for a '*just and lasting peace*', so that any cessation of hostilities would not simply confirm Russia's territorial gains (which now controls 20% of Ukrainian territory, compared to 8% before the war), but rather be accompanied by a genuine guarantee of the independence, freedom and future of the Ukrainian nation.

Admittedly, the change in the American position cannot be explained solely by European and Ukrainian pressure. It is also the result of Washington's disappointment with Russia's inflexible stance, unwilling to make concessions on its maximalist demands (disarmament, neutralisation and 'denazification' of Ukraine, recognition of

territorial annexations, and even the lifting of sanctions). It is also a consequence of the reluctance of American public opinion, including within the Republican camp, to openly side with Russia against Ukraine, which would make any agreement reached at any price unpalatable. Donald Trump has reduced support for Ukraine, without stopping it altogether, but he has finally shown growing impatience with Moscow, and things will undoubtedly continue to evolve as Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping showcased their closeness at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin. On the sidelines of the UN General Assembly, Donald Trump notably described Russia as a '*paper tiger*', encouraging Ukraine to '*take back its land*'.

It is not certain that Europeans will ultimately prevail on security guarantees. The deployment of European forces in Ukraine, rejected by Moscow, is in fact an obstacle to ending the fighting. Furthermore, even though the 'coalition of the willing' boasts that it has secured commitments from 26 countries, many of them do not want to get involved without strong American support (which remains hypothetical, even though Donald Trump has spoken of air support), and several capitals (Berlin, Rome, Warsaw) have expressed strong reluctance to deploy ground troops.

The outcome of this debate is uncertain, especially since the question of Ukraine's 'neutrality' or its membership in the Western alliance was one of the '*root causes*' of the conflict, to use Moscow's terminology. But there is no denying that the Europeans have shown a determination to act, linking Ukraine's security to their own. A format of the main capitals, including the United Kingdom, despite its departure from the European Union, has thus crystallised (the former pre-Brexit 'Big 6' format: Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris, Rome, Warsaw), with representatives of the institutions (President of the European Commission, President of the European Council) and the unique personality of Finnish President Alexander Stubb, who is highly regarded in European circles... and by Donald Trump, because he is a good golfer.

The [Europeans](#) have also significantly increased their military aid to Ukraine, which now exceeds that of the

United States. Ukraine remains dependent on American intelligence and certain American equipment such as anti-missile systems. The Europeans have increased their production and purchases in the United States to help Ukraine withstand the ongoing stand-off. In response to 'Russian' incursions, discussions are underway about a 'drone alliance' controlled by Ukraine, which is wreaking havoc behind Russian lines.

This is where the Ukrainian issue converges with that of the Atlantic alliance. By proposing the €800 billion [ReArm Europe](#) plan (financed by debt) in March, the President of the European Commission took the lead in responding to American criticism of insufficient European military spending. But she also demonstrated the Europeans' readiness to take greater responsibility for their own defence. The French fought hard to ensure that the common part of this plan, based on joint debt, endorsed the principle of a minimum share of 65% of European equipment in joint acquisitions (SAFE Regulation). As the European Commission has only a limited defence budget, the effort will mainly fall on the Member States, but it is already clear that the main beneficiaries of the SAFE instrument (€150 billion), which will allow them to borrow at preferential rates, will be Poland, Romania, France, Italy and Belgium (the latter three countries being hampered by high national debt). Germany has lifted its 'debt brake' to increase its military spending from €80 billion to €150 billion.

This European rearmament, which has been underway since at least the start of the war in Ukraine, has meant that Europeans were in a good spot to negotiate the turning point of (24-25 June). The main takeaway from this summit is that the US President forced Europeans to increase their military spending from 2% of GDP (the threshold set by the Wales summit in 2014, after Russia's first show of force in Ukraine) to 5%, and to commit to purchasing American equipment. The reality is more complex. The Europeans would probably not have made this commitment themselves, any more than they did in 2014 for the 2% target. It is a commitment made within the framework of NATO under American pressure. The Europeans have voluntarily embarked on this rearmament because they themselves see the need for it. Only Pedro Sanchez's Spain has refused the

5% target (even though there are no exemptions in the Hague communiqué). The 5% figure itself breaks down into military spending proper (3.5%, including military aid to Ukraine, which will bring it in line with the current level of defence spending in the United States) and civil and infrastructure investment (1.5%). The German rearmament plan thus aims to reach 3.5% of GDP in military spending by 2029. The deadline set by NATO is actually further away (2035!), with a review clause in 2029, i.e. after the next US presidential election.

What was less noteworthy about this summit was what the Europeans achieved: first, the presence of Donald Trump, which was not a foregone conclusion. The summit was cut short and [the declaration](#) was shortened (five paragraphs, readable by all, which is not in itself a bad thing compared to the long, indigestible communiqués produced by this type of meeting). Most importantly, the communiqué restates the guarantee of [Article 5](#) of the Washington Treaty (collective defence) and affirms that the Allies 'will support [Ukraine...] over the long term'. On the enlargement of NATO to include Ukraine, the communiqué is a step back from previous statements reaffirming (continuously since 2008) that Ukraine would join NATO. But in reality, this enlargement process was already on hold due to Russian opposition (especially since the start of the war in Ukraine), and the communiqué does not invalidate previous commitments.

On the sensitive subject of arms purchases from the United States, the Europeans have committed to nothing more than continuing and accelerating transatlantic cooperation (including in the Turnberry declaration, which refers to 'substantially increasing' purchases of American arms, without giving any figures). The fact is that a large proportion of acquisitions are already made in the United States (55% of European imports, according to [SIPRI](#), over the period 2019-2023, a figure that is increasing due to arms purchases for Ukraine). At the same time, France persuaded its partners in the SAFE programme to accept the principle that 65% of acquisitions should be made in Europe (except when the equipment is not available there). A good example of rebalancing is Denmark's decision to equip itself with French-Italian SAMP/T anti-missile systems rather than American Patriot systems.

The outcome of European efforts in these areas can therefore be considered positive. Europeans have stood firm in their positions. By acting in unison, they have demonstrated diplomacy, influenced the Trump administration to avoid drifting towards an uneasy peace with Putin, and secured the reassertion of the transatlantic link and continued support for Ukraine. They have simply agreed to increase their defence efforts, which was already their trajectory, and which is consistent with their wish to influence security issues. Ursula von der Leyen reiterated [in her speech to the European Parliament on 10 September](#) that Europeans must take responsibility for their own security (as has been repeated since 2016) and establish '*a strong and credible European defence posture to guarantee our security*', even if '*NATO will always remain essential*'. This posture is essential at a time when there are doubts about the sustainability of the American commitment to the Atlantic alliance. The European evolution, which has been significant in recent years, is undoubtedly only just beginning.

THE 'UNEQUAL TREATY' ON ECONOMIC AND TRADE ISSUES: A GEO-ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CHOICE

In contrast, the situation appears negative on the economic and trade front. The Turnberry trade agreement is a bad deal, both asymmetrical and unequal, whereby European exports are taxed at 15% while American exports are duty-free (at least on industrial goods). The European Union was aiming for a balanced free trade agreement (zero tariffs on industrial goods). It threatened retaliation but surrendered without a fight. It handed Donald Trump a victory, even though he has adopted a hostile stance towards it. It endorsed a breach of the universal standards of the GATT and the WTO (most-favoured-nation clause, reciprocity). It appeared weak. The image is particularly disastrous in the eyes of the public, with 77% of Europeans believing that this agreement primarily benefits the US economy, 60% wanting Ursula von der Leyen to resign, and 52% feeling 'humiliated'. For the French in particular, who are attached to the idea of universality and equality among nations, this is a repugnant agreement. How can it be justified that American wines can enter virtually duty-free while French wines will be subject to a 15% tax? Emmanuel

Macron responded a few days after the agreement by stating that the Union had not been sufficiently '*feared*' and that '*France will not leave it at that*'.

What is particularly contentious is that the agreement was concluded without any time limit, under the guise of 'predictability' for economic actors, whereas the NATO agreement on military spending included at least one review clause after the next US elections. Some fear that the United States will not honour its commitments and will decide to introduce new tariff measures.

Nevertheless, an analysis must take other considerations into account.

Firstly, the agreement must be examined in detail. Certain goods are exempt from taxation, such as aircraft and aeronautical parts, generic medicines and precursors, due to the integration of production chains on both sides of the Atlantic. Others are not exempt from higher taxation, such as steel and aluminium. The European Union's 15% rate has often been compared with the 10% rate obtained by the United Kingdom, but in the case of the British, the rate is added to existing taxes (including when they are very high), whereas for the EU it replaces previous taxes (which were already 5% on average, bringing the increase to 10%). The agreement can be seen as limiting the damage, particularly in comparison with the 30% tax contemplated by Washington and preserving what can be preserved of transatlantic economic integration.

The question then is whether Europeans would have had any interest in a trade war, and in winning it. The composition of trade shows that Europeans export one and a half times more goods to the United States than they import, particularly in medicines, pharmaceuticals and motor vehicles. The surplus reached €200 billion in 2024 (half of which was generated by Germany). And a large proportion of imported goods are primary goods, particularly liquefied natural gas (LNG) purchased as a substitute for Russian gas, and goods integrated into production chains (aeronautics, pharmaceutical industry). All of this has limited Europe's capacity for retaliation. It also explains why many countries, particularly Germany, Italy and Ireland (the latter having taken advantage of its favourable tax regime to attract companies, such as

pharmaceuticals), preferred to pay a capped surcharge in the hope of preserving their exports, rather than a high tax that would have reduced their exports and, therefore, their output and jobs. The same reasoning inspired other countries that accepted such asymmetrical agreements with the United States. France, Europe's fourth largest exporter to the United States, has a relatively more balanced trade balance and had less to lose, but it was relatively isolated in its refusal to accept an asymmetrical agreement and also had interests to protect (aeronautics, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and beverages).

A trade war would have been costly in terms of predictability for economic actors, growth, jobs, inflation and investment. It would have further unravelled transatlantic relations and the global economy. Perhaps the standoff would have led to a more favourable agreement... or perhaps not. In the past, trade wars have ended with agreements: for example, at the end of the 19th century, between Germany and France and between Germany and Russia. Despite the political and strategic rivalry between Germany and these two countries, there was a converging economic interest in trade. On the other hand, there was no agreement between the United States, which was very protectionist at the time, and its competitors. And the United Kingdom agreed to remain free-trading and open up its imports, despite the protectionism of other powers, such as the United States and Germany. The choice is not necessarily between a good agreement and a bad agreement, but between an agreement and no agreement.

It would be logical for the agreement reached to lead to a rebalancing of transatlantic trade, and we are already seeing signs of increased investment in the United States. But what is the point of all this? If Europeans have a trade surplus with Americans, it is because they are more competitive. If they manage to maintain their exports despite the surcharges, it is a sign that they will remain so. Through their protectionist policy, the United States is shielding itself from global competition, but will this make it stronger, given that its industry now accounts for only 12% of GDP, compared with 25% thirty years ago? Americans will have to pay more for their imported products, which will fuel inflation, or they will no longer be able to afford them. Will they manage to produce

more? Helmut Schmidt, former German Chancellor once day said (with Germany in mind) that a country with a trade surplus is actually working for other countries because it produces the goods that others consume. Will Americans, whose trade deficit was interpreted by some as a levy on the rest of the world (financed by the 'dollar privilege'), start working harder for others? And if trade balances out in the future, won't Europeans be in a more favourable position to consider retaliation and renegotiate tariffs?

The European Union also made commitments in the Turnberry agreement to purchase \$750 billion worth of energy products from the United States, \$40 billion worth of microchips, and to invest \$600 billion in strategic sectors (by 2028). This was interpreted as another sign of the one-sided nature of the agreement. But these commitments are political and not legal, if only because the European Union does not have the power to purchase energy products or make investments. They are merely estimates and forecasts of what states and companies will decide. The 2028 deadline will also coincide with the US presidential election, and it is not certain that the next Republican candidate will see any benefit in highlighting that the agreement has not been respected. If the next US administration wants to renegotiate the deal after that, the situation will return to square one, with a new negotiation on all elements.

The European Union has again been heavily criticised for failing to raise the issue of services, a sector in which the US has a huge surplus (€150 billion, particularly in intellectual property rights and digital services) that largely (but not entirely) offsets the trade deficit. There has been no agreement among European countries to tax American digital companies, particularly through fiscal policy, which requires unanimous decision-making. And it is true that this surplus reflects the dominance of American digital giants, since Europeans have so far failed to produce giants like GAFAM. At least they have preserved their digital sovereignty by refusing to amend their legislation despite American pressure. Donald Trump attacked the Europeans after the Turnberry agreement, but this is a red line, and it must remain so. After some hesitation, the European Union imposed a new [3 billion € fine on Google](#) for

its self-referencing practices, which violate European competition rules.

The Turnberry agreement is in fact a geo-economic and geopolitical choice. Could the European Union afford a trade war with the United States while being in a quasi-war with Russia and in a 'systemic rivalry' with China? Should it preserve the transatlantic economy and global trade, or escalate protectionism and push the United States further down its nationalist path? In the global context, it accepted the asymmetry of the relationship and prioritised maintaining the transatlantic link, which is consistent with its position on Ukraine and NATO. It settled for an unequal agreement, like other countries that have concluded similar agreements with the United States (South Korea, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, the United Kingdom and Thailand). These agreements implicitly reconstitute a Western bloc whose unity seemed to be threatened by Donald Trump's second term. Geo-economics thus joins geo-politics. The fact that the European Union has chosen diplomacy over war does not mean that it has chosen impotence.

But we must obviously also draw lessons from what has happened. First, it is clear that we have changed worlds, not only because of the return of war and power struggles, but also because of the return of protectionism. This is not just the end of the dream of the '[end of history](#)' and 'happy globalisation' after the Cold War. It is also a return to the world before the Second World War, when protectionism was considered legitimate and natural. The United States has turned its back on the ideology of free trade, and this is likely to be a lasting change. Although they supported the creation of the WTO in 1994 (Marrakesh Agreement), they began to criticise and weaken the supranational dispute settlement body under Presidents George W. Bush and then Barack Obama, until Donald Trump finally blocked it systematically during his first term. Through a combination of nationalism, isolationism, economic selfishness and the primacy given to geopolitics, the United States no longer believes in free trade as the foundation of prosperity and security.

In this context, the European Union faces a formidable challenge. Based on free trade and the internal market, the common trade policy must contend with the

resurgence of protectionism and the politicisation of trade. The approach of the [Directorate-General for Trade and Economic Security](#) is intrinsically free-market. For the time being, it is sticking to this approach, not only through the Turnberry Agreement, but also through the pursuit of new free trade agreements (India, Indonesia, MERCOSUR, Mexico) and the establishment of an alternative mechanism for settling trade disputes with partners who agree to it (57 countries). This “plurilateralism” is a response to the crisis facing multilateralism.

But the reality of the world means that trade issues must be viewed more through the prism of reciprocity and security. A change in mindset has begun, notably under France's leadership, for example through the introduction of a system to monitor foreign investment, reciprocal controls on the opening up of public markets and public subsidies, a form of carbon tax at the borders, taxes on Chinese electric cars, an instrument to combat economic coercion, etc. This development must continue, because the European Union will only be able to save its internal free trade if it also agrees to protect itself.

The second lesson is the weight that Germany now carries in the European system. Not everything can be reduced to nationality, and the European Union's *raison d'être* is to bring people from different countries together to work. But the fact is that the Commission is controlled by Ursula von der Leyen and her chief of staff Björn Seibert. ‘Kaiserin Ursula’ took advantage of her re-election to remove any internal counterweight^[1] and she has established herself as a central figure in the European system and as Donald Trump's main interlocutor, including by participating in meetings on security guarantees for Ukraine (an area in which the Commission has no established competence), to the detriment of the President of the European Council, Portugal's António Costa (who is in principle responsible for foreign and defence policy). The Germans also have a very strong influence in the European Parliament, where they have the largest delegation, with highly committed MEPs, and a habit of working across political groups in coalitions. The Commission's Director-General for Trade, Sabine Weyand, and the Chair of the European Parliament's Trade Committee, Bernd Lange, are both German.

Germany is the most populous country in the European Union, the most powerful economically, the most competitive in terms of trade, with healthy public finances and soon to have the largest defence budget in Europe. It is not surprising that European choices largely reflect German preferences, even if there are also differences in political assessment among German officials: Boris Pistorius, Minister of Defence, has challenged the Commission President's encroachment on defence issues. American protection, the mercantilist approach to trade policy, the importance of car exports, the creeping renationalisation (in the form of “contractualisation” with Member States) of the common agricultural policy and cohesion policy (see the Commission's proposals for the next [multiannual financial framework](#) 2028-2034), majority voting in foreign policy are among these long-term German preferences, and they may be shared by other countries.

France, by contrast, traditionally wields influence through the strength of its executive power, but it is weakened by its mediocre economic performance (a trade deficit of €100 billion, a public deficit of more than 5% of GDP, the highest compulsory levies, and unemployment above the eurozone average), its excessive debt and its internal political crisis. It remains influential in the system, having secured recognition of nuclear energy as necessary for the energy transition in 2023, but current developments prove Hubert Védrine right when he says that the Franco-German partnership has not existed since German reunification.

THE CHALLENGE OF EUROPEAN POWER

Europeans have avoided the worst with the Trump administration, both politically and economically. Their strategy of diplomatic influence has yielded results. It has come at the price of base flattery of the American president^[2], presenting an unflattering image to the public and fuelling feelings of humiliation. But it has its logic and its effectiveness. It buys time if Europeans are able to learn from the changes underway.

Above all, it has allowed them to maintain their unity, which is no small achievement. Among the [possible scenarios](#) on the eve of Donald Trump's second term

^[1] Cf. the dismissal of Thierry Breton, who resisted her, and Michel Barnier's criticism of the ‘authoritarian drift’.

^[2] Cf. See, for example, the nickname ‘Daddy’ given to Donald Trump by Mark Rutte, Secretary General of NATO

was that of 'fragmentation', encouraged by a US administration hostile to the European Union (see J.D. Vance's speech in Munich on 14 February), by nationalist leaders aligned with the new American positions (Fico, Meloni, Orban), and by the general rise of nationalist and populist movements in Europe. This scenario has been avoided, with the United Kingdom recently re-engaging in European affairs after the difficult years of Brexit, for example with the Franco-British summits of [2023](#) and [2025](#), the EU-UK [summit on 19 May](#), and the signing of a [German-British treaty](#) in July.

However, we must guard against excessive optimism. In Germany, France, Italy, Poland, the United Kingdom and other countries, nationalist parties are leading the race. Europeans still believe that together they will be stronger in an increasingly threatening world, but the time for 'ever closer integration' is over, as the Brexit vote illustrated. Enrico Letta made this lucid observation: *'I don't think we would be able to do what Delors and his generation accomplished'* with the launch of the single market, the European Union and the single currency. The European Union survives by overcoming crises (the eurozone, terrorism, migration, the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, etc.), demonstrating its extraordinary resilience. But it no longer has an integration agenda, even as new enlargements are being considered (the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova). Citizen exercises (citizen consultations in 2018, conference on the future of Europe in 2021-2022) have not led to a revision of the treaties, which is complex to achieve due to the requirement of unanimity.

John Mearsheimer, a prominent representative of the realist school of international relations, [analyses](#) the consequences of the American withdrawal and the rise of nationalism in Europe: *"Centrifugal forces will increase, and there will be more tensions between European countries. Once the Americans are no longer the dominant force in European security policy, Europeans will have serious difficulties in developing a capacity for joint action."* This is a pessimistic analysis, like all those of the realist school, but it is not without lucidity, and it sheds light on the pressing interest that European countries may have, for their own security, in preserving both their unity and the transatlantic relationship.

Europeans have so far avoided fragmentation. They have also avoided becoming 'vassals', in the sense that they have been able to define their interests and act proactively to defend them. They have chosen to adapt, to 'turn a blind eye' to Donald Trump's bluster and to implement a strategy of diplomatic influence, at the risk of projecting an image of weakness. Was there any other choice? At least Europeans have avoided the worst and gained time. What is desirable is for them to move towards a reawakening, towards an assertion of power, so that Europe ceases to be a geopolitical 'herbivore' in a world of geopolitical 'carnivores', to use the expression coined by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. A few ideas can be put forward here.

In terms of defence, rearmament, European defence cooperation and mutualisation must be pursued. The European Union has developed a number of instruments, but the effort rests primarily with the Member States, as this remains an eminently national competence. European countries must continue their discussions on a possible European security guarantee that does not undermine the existence of NATO, because Europe needs a second line of defence and security at a time when the American guarantee is weakening. An end to the war in Ukraine would provide a 'test case' for the possibility of formalising a European guarantee for Ukraine's future security. This also requires further discussions on the contribution that French and British nuclear forces can make to Europe's security against Russian nuclear power.

On the economic front, an agenda has been defined to strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy, competitiveness and economic security: reducing critical dependencies in key sectors ('[Versailles Agenda](#)' in 2022), protecting critical infrastructure, the [Letta report](#) on the completion of the internal market, the [Draghi report](#) on competitiveness, mobilising European savings to stimulate investment in Europe, and mobilising public funding. Europe must continue its energy transition because of climate change and because it strengthens its autonomy (renewable energies, nuclear power). It must catch up in the digital field and remain in the race for artificial intelligence. It must remain an attractive place to produce and a major exporting economy. It must reduce its dependencies on batteries, semiconductors

and critical raw materials. It must remain a space power and an agricultural power.

The German ordoliberal model (rigorous management of public finances, a competitive and export-oriented economy, co-management with social partners) remains a source of inspiration for Europe. But Europe has always been built on a three-pronged approach: 'competition that stimulates, cooperation that strengthens, solidarity that unites', in the words of Jacques Delors. It is also necessary to maintain this aspect of solidarity, which ensures European cohesion (regional policy aid, the social protection base, the post-Covid recovery plan that has primarily helped Italy and Spain). Community instruments and funding must be the catalysts for cooperation that can only be based on the Member States: in foreign policy, defence, space, industrial policy (through state aid) and economic security.

Global developments are also forcing Europe to place greater emphasis on protection and reciprocity in its external relations. Admittedly, it is trade and interdependence that create wealth. But 'plurilateralism' with selected and willing third countries will not save multilateralism from the new geopolitical competition. Increasing geopolitical tensions mean that greater attention must be paid to economic security and 'fair

trade'. Under the impetus of France in particular, much has already been done. The European Union should draw conclusions from the protectionist shift in the United States by focusing more on its internal market and agreeing to protect itself and mobilise public power (at both national and European level) in order to consolidate its economic power without being naive about the outside world. This is a change of approach from the liberal principles that have long guided European integration within the framework of a liberal Western world, and it is a debate that will continue between traditionally open countries (in northern Europe) and countries that advocate protection (such as France).

Emmanuel Macron put it aptly: *'To be free in this world, you have to be feared, and to be feared, you have to be powerful.'* This is also true in the economic sphere, and it is the lesson that Europeans must learn from their tumultuous relations with Donald Trump in recent months.

Maxime Lefebvre

Diplomat, former ambassador, professor of international relations and co-director of the Geopolitical Institute at ESCP Business School.

You can read all of our publications on our site:

www.robert-schuman.eu/en

Publishing Director: Pascale JOANNIN

ISSN 2402-614X

The opinions expressed in this text are the sole responsibility of the author.

© All rights reserved, Fondation Robert Schuman, 2025

THE FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organisation of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.