TRANSATLANTIC CARDS

How the EU can turn Trump's pro-Ukraine moment into concrete action

by
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While President Trump currently seems more favourably disposed towards Kyiv's cause, this is unlikely to last. The president is prone to changing his mind, and his new-found sympathy may not necessarily translate into material support for Kyiv – despite the recent decision to let Kyiv produce Patriot interceptors. The EU must seize the window of opportunity opened by Trump's *volte-face* before it closes, securing concrete commitments such as pressure on Russia, new support to Kyiv and the production of critical US defence systems for Ukraine in Europe.

Idea

The US announced in May that it was pausing its efforts to mediate between Russia and Ukraine, indicating frustration at the lack of progress in talks, particularly Russia's unwillingness to engage. President Trump argued that Putin should 'make a deal', using language that was previously reserved for Zelensky.

However, this situation may not last. Washington's interest in Ukraine has experienced ebbs and flows before. Ukraine is not a priority for US strategy. The White House has yet to confirm the security guarantees that US negotiators agreed in January 2026. Personal dynamics, like Trump's animosity towards Zelensky and affinity with Putin, could also resurface. Moreover, the war against Iran is likely to further reduce US support to Ukraine, as the need to replenish US stockpiles will delay weapons deliveries to Kyiv. The announcement that the US is pausing its mediation efforts also reinforces concerns about a broader disengagement.

This would harm both Ukraine and the EU. Despite Ukraine's recent military successes, growing indigenous production and new ideas to replace US systems, Kyiv cannot yet manage without external support. Europe cannot yet provide the air defence systems needed to protect Ukraine against Russia's continuing ballistic missile threat. And a possible US disengagement could further reduce Russia's willingness to engage seriously in negotiations.

Impetus

While this state of affairs may be short-lived, it creates a window of opportunity that Europe must exploit to influence the administration.

First, Europe should convince the US to intensify pressure on Russia rather than walking away from the conflict. It should appeal to Trump's desire to end the war and convey the message that this is now feasible: unlike last year, Russia faces mounting domestic and economic difficulties, alongside military pressure from Ukraine. Under the current conditions, tightening sanctions on Russia could alter Putin's calculus and force him to engage seriously in negotiations.

Second, Europe must make a business case for why supporting Ukraine is in the US's best interests. European messaging should focus on themes that appeal to Trump's transactional instincts: a peaceful Ukraine will generate strong returns on investments, including for US companies; a strong Ukraine facilitates burden-shifting, helping the US deal with the 'simultaneity problem'; and a Ukraine embedded in Western economic and security structures will share its innovation experience with allies.

Third, Europe should ensure a continued flow of essential US weapons for Ukraine. However, they should *not* rely on placing orders through initiatives like NATO's Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) or JUMPSTART: severe production bottlenecks in the US defence industrial base would not result in quick deliveries. Instead, Europeans should encourage US companies to manufacture key equipment for Ukraine's defence in Europe – or even in Ukraine itself, as President Zelensky has suggested. Although offshore production is at odds with their broader domestic reindustrialisation agenda, the Trump administration might be more receptive to the idea. Trump himself has signalled interest in producing in Europe. In May, the US Department of State authorised Poland to produce PAC-3 interceptors, and at the NATO summit, Trump gave Ukraine the green light to do the same. Manufacturing in Europe would free capacity in the US defence industrial base, enabling US companies to meet the Pentagon's growing demand.

Establishing these production lines would also serve the commercial interests of US companies seeking to benefit from Europe's rising defence spending. The Rheinmetall-Lockheed partnership to produce ATACAMS missiles, or the Raytheon-MBDA Patriot factory in Germany, offer useful models for cooperation. However, any agreement should clearly stipulate that systems produced in Europe and duly paid for by Europeans should be destined for Ukraine and cannot be moved by the US government to other theatres. If companies want to tap into Europe's growing defence investments, they will need to agree these terms. Otherwise, they are likely to lose access to European money, as governments become less willing to buy US weapons, fearing that they might be redirected elsewhere.

Instruments

The EU can play the following cards to advance these goals.

First, European governments and the EU should make full use of their contacts across the US political system to amplify the case for continued cooperation on Ukraine and sanctions against Russia. Several influential groups within the President's circle are also on Ukraine's side. Congress maintains a pro-Ukrainian position, as demonstrated by the passage of the Ukraine Support Act in the Senate, and a new push to advance the Russian sanctions bill. Trump's base has grown more critical of Russia: the share of Republicans who see Russia as an enemy has risen from 40% to 47% in a year. Even MAGA influencers close to Trump have distanced themselves from the Kremlin, arguing that Russia has been spreading disinformation.

Second, it should use the approved €90 billion support loan as leverage to persuade US companies to produce in Europe. Under the terms of the loan, defence products should in principle be procured only from companies based in the EU, Ukraine or EEA-EFTA countries, with only limited control by third-country parties. To make US companies eligible for funding, they must set up production facilities in Europe. To ensure control is not entirely in the hands of non-European entities, they should set up joint ventures with European counterparts. Concerns among some Member States about spending EU funds on US systems could also be allayed if production were based in Europe. Establishing new facilities would help strengthen Europe's defence industrial base, create skilled jobs and facilitate technology transfer through joint ventures.

Third, Europe should capitalise on its growing links with Ukraine's innovation ecosystem. The US presence in Ukraine remains too limited to capture the full range of innovations emerging from the battlefield. In contrast, European countries and the EU are building extensive links with Ukrainian counterparts, learning more lessons than the US, and adapting their forces. They should exchange these lessons with US officials in exchange for continued military support.

While none of the proposals above will change the fundamental problem – US unpredictability – they would allow Europe and Ukraine to make the most of the current window of opportunity.