



TRANSATLANTIC VISION 2030 Renewing the partnership

Stimulating debate through thought papers

A New Transatlantic Partnership for the Digital Age

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Purpose

This paper constitutes a recommended point of departure for renewed transatlantic partnership fit for the digital age, calling for a political commitment to engage on our broad agenda of digitally-driven common interests, and setting out a pathway for longer-term Transatlantic political engagement and, where appropriate, joint action.

It has been produced by the author at the request of the Transatlantic Policy Network (TPN) within the framework of TPN's broader effort to set out a policy agenda and action plan for Transatlantic Partnership with horizon 2030. It will serve as one of five substantive contributions to this renewed effort, alongside inputs on the political, economic, security and sustainability dimensions of future Transatlantic partnership. Unsurprisingly, each of those four analyses again reflects the ever-growing impact of digital technologies and capabilities.

Method

While much of the current digital policy agenda for Transatlantic partners is well-trod on both sides of the Atlantic, the acceleration of digitally-driven transformation across our economies and societies continues to generate new – and in many cases more difficult - issues demanding political engagement.

For this exercise, we have drawn on the work of the European Internet Forum (EIF), a unique multi-stakeholder membership platform which notably includes some 50 Members of European Parliament. Much of this perspective also continues to reflect discussion of the digital dimension within TPN over recent years, notably within Transatlantic Week roundtables, as well as the content of two previous EIF reports, *The Digital World in 2025* (hereafter “EIF 2025”) published in 2009, and its sequel, *The Digital World in 2030* (“EIF 2030”) published in 2014.

The revised list of issues included herein for possible priority Transatlantic engagement is a direct input from the recent EIF publication, *Toward 2030: The Top 10 Digital Trends That*

Will Shape Europe's Future and Demand Political Leadership. Its unique value lies in its reflection of the composite view of EIF's political, business and associate members, all of whom have had the opportunity to register views as it was produced.

Why put “digital transformation” at the heart of Transatlantic partnership?

The reality of digital transformation on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world has today unquestionably become the single most powerful underlying driver of change across our societies and economies. No community, no sector, no sphere of human endeavour is immune, and there is no opting out.

In EIF 2030, published in 2014, we observed that “core digital technologies are evolving and converging rapidly, fuelled by real-time, real-world data, driving us toward a Knowing Society and creating the foundation for an avalanche of innovative software platforms and other digital tools available and affordable to anybody and everybody, everywhere for virtually any purpose.”

And today indeed, after a 19th century industrial and social revolution driven by steam power, followed by the 20th century revolution in mass production, we are now actually entering – for better or for worse - the reality of this long-anticipated third, 21st century industrial revolution, driven by the evolution and convergence of digital communications technologies.

Indeed, it is no exaggeration to affirm that the future of our “western” democracies – and therefore our Transatlantic partnership – now depends on common strategies and policies to transform the very foundations of our economic prosperity, social cohesion, collective security and governance through the pervasive uptake of digital tools and technologies. In one intriguing analysis, this “Zuckerberg” moment has been compared, in its power to transform civilization, to the 15th century “Gutenberg” moment.

It therefore follows – indeed has become ever more self-evident - that there can be no decisive progress toward a fully functioning 21st century partnership between the United States and Europe (of the sort first envisioned by TPN 27 years ago) without a common - or at least interoperable - policy framework fit for the digital age.

Moreover, as has been stressed many times by many parties in many venues, notably TPN, on both sides of the Atlantic (and beyond), if Transatlantic partners do not institutionalise our dialogue and cooperation to set the principles and standards we wish to see govern the digital world of tomorrow, others will. The technology itself knows no borders, and time is running out. Doing so will also create what has now become the essential foundation for greater Transatlantic market integration in the digital age.

This being the inescapable reality, the two questions for Transatlantic partners at the political level remain:

1. Most importantly, how can we create, commit to and engage in at the political level a Transatlantic Partnership agenda fit for the digital age?
2. What should be initial priority issue areas for a Transatlantic Partnership fit for the digital age?

How can we create, commit to and engage in, at the political level, a Transatlantic Partnership agenda fit for the digital age?

To begin to address this broader dimension, we would do well to go back to the future:

- On the 9th of November 1989, the Berlin Wall came down.
- On the 23rd of November 1990, the Presidencies of the United States and the (then) European Community (EC) and its Member States adopted a Transatlantic Declaration of EC-US Relations, establishing an “Institutional Framework for Consultation” across a broad spectrum of “Common Goals” based on EC competences and beyond the well-established NATO defence alliance.
- On the 25th of December 1991, the flag of the Soviet Union flew for the last time over the Kremlin, sending shock waves around the world and confronting Transatlantic Partners with both the need and the opportunity to rethink, restructure and recommit to our partnership across the full spectrum of our common political, security and economic interests in a post-cold-war world.
- On the 3rd of December 1995, the United States and the (now) European Union adopted the New Transatlantic Agenda (NTA – with the decisive support of TPN), recognizing that, “Today we face new challenges at home and abroad. To meet them, we must further strengthen and adapt the partnership that has served us so well.” The NTA goes on to set out four major common goals, institutional linkages and an initial “Joint EU/US Action Plan.
- Crucially for our present purposes – recall that the NTA was the very first commitment undertaken by the European Union under the then-new Common Foreign and Security Policy provisions of the 1993 Maastricht Treaty, and was also endorsed by the US Congress.

In short, with the NTA Transatlantic Partners have a model for responding to major global shock through the redefinition of, commitment to and engagement in our common purposes. Global digital transformation is this generation’s major global shock. Moreover, it is a “horizontal” shock wave, impacting the full spectrum of our common interests.

However, not only has the NTA never been updated, the only reference in 1995 to what would become our shared digital future is this pro forma sentence: “To allow our people to take full advantage of newly developed information technology and services we will work toward the realisation of a Transatlantic Information Society.”

No wonder that today we continue to lack the core political commitment, priority issues framework and agreement on engagement and joint action necessary to deliver outcomes in view of our foreseeable and expanding agenda of vital common interests in global digital transformation over the next decade.

Moreover, there is growing recognition on both sides of the Atlantic within both digital supply-side communities and downstream demand-side stakeholders that on-going efforts to remove specific actual or foreseeable barriers to what is increasingly a digitally-driven Transatlantic partnership across the full breadth of our common interests lack an overarching political commitment of sufficient strength and scope to deliver outcomes.

In order to address this fundamental, mission-critical weakness, we need to create a new pathway to a Transatlantic Partnership fit for the digital age, based on two mutually supportive tracks:

- Track 1: We endorse this recommendation from Bruce Stokes in his companion input on economic partnership ([A New Beginning for the Transatlantic Economic Partnership](#)): Create a Digital Dialogue with business, labour and consumer representatives, to make recommendations by 2021 regarding what both Europe and the United States should do to deal with the challenges and opportunities posed by the emerging digital economy.
- Track 2: Incorporating the ongoing thinking and output of this Digital Dialogue on the economy, engage in a full update of the 1995 New Transatlantic Agenda, to take account not only of the ever-growing impact of digital technologies and tools across the full spectrum of our current and future common interests, but also of the dramatically changed and changing global context for Transatlantic Partnership 2030.

To recall, the NTA first made clear our core purposes, principles and shared values. What purposes, principles and values do we share and wish to see prevail in the digital world of 2030? These questions need to be addressed at the political level before proceeding to agree, address, and update as needed, priority issue areas where Transatlantic partnership will be essential in pursuit of the digital world we wish to see emerge.

What priorities for a Transatlantic Partnership fit for the Digital Age?

In 2017 we proposed to TPN five issue areas¹ for initial Transatlantic digital focus. These were the product of consultation with all EIF members. For each, we also noted the treaty and legal basis for EU competence to engage with the United States.

In June of this year (2019), EIF released the results of our latest membership-wide consultation, *Toward 2030: The Top 10 Digital Trends That Will Shape Europe's Future and Demand Political Leadership*. EIF's primary purpose with this exercise has been to help frame and focus the digital agenda across the EU institutions as they take up a new five-year mandate following European Parliamentary elections and renewal of the European Commission.

But we also recommend this agenda as a useful starting point for Transatlantic partners in a process of joint prioritisation within both our digital economy dialogue and the wider political framework of a renewed NTA. Prioritisation of these – and any other - specific issues as they arise now or in the future should be assessed on the basis of three criteria:

1. Strength of the EU as competent partner.
2. Degree of difficulty to converge policy and legislation given current state of play on both sides.
3. Importance of Transatlantic cooperation in global perspective.

These 10 issue areas (not prioritised) are:

Defence of democracy

If our open societies become ungovernable and our democratic institutions untenable under attack from malevolent interests enabled by digital technologies, all other issues become academic. Attacks on press freedoms and performance are a particular and growing concern.

Emerging technologies

Rapidly evolving digital technologies will transform all sectors and play a crucial role for society in confronting many challenges we face, notably for the environment, resource efficiency and climate change. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the most consequential evolving

¹ 1) The future of work; 2) The need to deliver in a timely manner common policies in the interest of citizens and consumers; 3) The need to clarify and address the expanding sphere of data policy; 4) The need for common third country trade and investment policies adapted to the digital world; 5) The need for shared global leadership to integrate individual freedoms and human rights with the responsibility of the state to protect citizens, in line with agreed values and principles.

digital capability, founded on hyper-convergence of a spectrum of established and emerging technologies. Meanwhile, concerns over AI ethics and inbuilt biases grow.

Data

The boundaries of “data policy” are expanding in a ‘Knowing Society’ where the collection of data, access to data, ownership of data, “softwarisation” and the exploitation of data in real-time are becoming the primary sources of economic and political power.

Data privacy and security

Privacy and consumer protection concerns, notably in response to rapidly-evolving surveillance technologies, will remain at the heart of the Knowing Society. Acquirers of personal data – including governments - will, therefore, remain under ever-growing pressure not only to protect personal data from breach and unauthorised use, but to make it controllable by data subjects.

Anti-trust policy

Pressure grows for adaptation of fundamental principles underlying anti-trust policy and enforcement to reflect new, digitally-driven, data-dependent, global market dynamics.

Very high capacity connectivity

Ubiquitous, high-performance 5G, fibre and comparable network technologies are increasingly understood to be the essential common infrastructure. This enables globally competitive digital transformation in all vertical sectors, shaping the future global balance of both hard and soft power while also increasing exposure to cyber-security risks.

Online harm

Strategies, organisations and tools to combat digitally-enabled threats to our economies, societies and governance will demand constant evolution and increasing resources in a context of growing “tech-lash” with calls for internet regulation to re-establish trust.

Future of work / social stability

Digitally-driven transformation is the key to future economic growth through growth of labour productivity, but also raises concerns over the character and distribution of future employment and, thus, social stability. In the Knowing Society, virtually all jobs across all sectors will require digital skills, creating new demands on education and training to meet the soaring demand for ICT-capable professionals.

Tax

Digital transformation of our economies and societies will increasingly challenge established fiscal strategies, policies and boundaries, calling for more cross-border cooperation.

Digital leadership

Worldwide pursuit of global leadership in core digital technologies, products and services, notably by the US, China and other Asian tech powers, raises new geopolitical issues and choices for Europe, particularly for Transatlantic partnership and for Africa, a strategic priority and opportunity for Europe's tech and investment community. Meanwhile, nationalist tendencies in a growing number of countries raise the risk of a fragmented and weaponised internet.

This paper is the responsibility of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of any individual participant or organization.

This thought paper was commissioned by the Transatlantic Policy Network and forms part of a series designed to catalyse new thinking and ideas to renew and strengthen the transatlantic partnership and agenda. The views expressed are those of the author and are not necessarily endorsed by the Transatlantic Policy Network.