

US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations

Hearing on

Strains on the European Union: Implications for American Foreign Policy

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Testimony by

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Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee, Europe is in crisis.

In fact, Europe faces a confluence of crises far more profound than most Americans realize. As a result, the United States risks losing its most important strategic asset in global affairs: a vibrant Europe as a partner of first resort. It's time for the United States to shift from observer to actor, and return to our historic posture of helping to forge European unity – not for the sake of some vision of a united Europe, but so that we have a European partner better equipped to work with us on enormous global challenges.

Today, Europe faces historic tests from its east and its south. To the east, Russia seeks to roll back the gains of the post-Cold War period, aiming to rewrite the rules fundamental to Europe's security, undermine Europe's unity, challenge its core values, and foster instability on its periphery. To the south, the erosion of state authority and borders in the Middle East threatens Europe with mass refugee flows and Islamic terrorism.

And yet the greatest challenge to Europe is not external, but internal. There is a crisis in confidence and a loss of strategic purpose that puts at risk the so-called European project – turning former adversaries into an integrated European Union. Greater integration has failed to restore growth, foster innovation, and create jobs. European publics and leaders question the fundamental political bargains underpinning the European Union. There is a dearth of vision or leadership which only accelerates the erosion of solidarity across the continent, while fueling skepticism toward bureaucratic Brussels and the rise of anti-establishment forces in member states. Historic migration flows compounded by demographic shifts will permanently alter the character of Europe, and the political fallout has only just begun.

Centrifugal forces are pulling Europe apart, as the European Union and its leaders stumble from crisis to crisis. While they often reach short-term agreements, they fail to address more profound, long-term challenges. Today's leaders have not been able to offer the vision and sense of purpose that their predecessors articulated and which gave birth to the Union – through unity, a ravaged population could find peace and prosperity. That formula no longer resonates with reality.

As a result, the Union itself is in question. The United Kingdom may turn its back on the European Union this year, depriving us of a critical voice in shaping not only EU policy, but the future of Europe. Such a decision by London may prompt Scotland to dissolve the United Kingdom, ending the “special relationship” as we know it. These moves could fuel separatist efforts in Catalonia and Wallonia, while opening the prospect of other states leaving the Union. At a minimum, the “Brexit” debate will occupy Europe's political attention span for much of this year.

A stagnating France is struggling to rally Europe around a common counterterrorism policy in the wake of the Paris attacks, much less play its traditional role as an engine of European integration. An ever more powerful Germany and its Chancellor remain perhaps too cautious in their leadership at such a turbulent time. After years of feeling marginalized, populism and nationalism are beginning to rear their ugly head in some of our closest allies in Central Europe. And our Mediterranean allies continue to grapple with the corrosive impact of long-term youth unemployment and slow growth.

Europe is in the midst of an historic transition whose outcome is uncertain and implications little understood. At the same time, American opinion is increasingly ambivalent at best and dismissive at worst of Europe. And yet the stakes for the United States in what sort of Union the EU becomes are enormous.

North America and Europe shaped the post-World War II liberal international order, and when acting together were the most effective force for good globally. We forged a Europe whole, free, and at peace in the post-Cold War with the promise of a Europe as a strong partner of the United States on the global stage. In fact, Europe became the world's largest economy and foreign assistance donor, carries significant political throw weight, and provides the most interoperable and deployable militaries among our allies and partners.

However, Europe's internal challenges have now become a critical strategic problem for us. We risk losing Europe as our most militarily capable, political willing, and financially able like-minded partner to advance common interests and shared values. In short, the United States risks losing its closest partner. Without Europe, the challenges we face will be more difficult and the likelihood of our success will be lower.

The European Union is not headed toward an “ever closer union” that would lead to a so-called United States of Europe. Nor is the European Union on its deathbed; the bureaucracies underpinning the Union often solve problems nations cannot tackle alone and have a tendency to self-perpetuate. There is a compelling need for an integrated single market, a prospect that remains unfulfilled. The European Union is more likely to be pulled during the coming years between political forces that demand the primacy of national sovereignty and the renationalization of some functions, and others who argue that the nature of the challenges facing Europe, whether migrants or productivity, require Union-wide policies. The risk is that Europe remains mired in the politics of the parochial, and becomes a less strategic actor on the global stage.

As Europe's future is in play, the United States has an opportunity to re-engage. As French columnist Natalie Nougayrède wrote in *The Guardian* recently, "It's not that US action in itself would miraculously solve all these problems, but its aloofness has arguably contributed to making them worse." After all, two devastating World Wars taught Americans the costs of remaining aloof to developments in Europe. Indeed, the United States fought in World War II not only to defeat the Nazi menace, but to help Europe emerge from war in a way that would never force the United States to fight again in Europe. After 45 years of Cold War, we forged a bipartisan US policy to fulfill our national aims, and had a remarkably successful 25-year run advancing a Europe whole, free, and at peace. But as challenges grew around the globe, we turned our attention elsewhere and assumed our role in Europe was complete.

Today's events make clear that's not the case.

Our goal today should be to help restore the Atlantic community's confidence, competitiveness, capacity, and will to act at home and abroad. To achieve this, we can start with several steps.

First, we must shift from observer to actor, and regain our historic role of fostering European unity. The European project began as an American project. That said, we cannot simply return to Cold War-era tactics, and we must recognize that the European Union is far more politically mature and sophisticated. But with political leadership and nuanced diplomacy, we can play an important role in shaping Europe's evolution.

This begins with making it clear that a United Kingdom without a voice shaping Europe is a United Kingdom that risks losing its relevance in the world. In turn, however, a Brussels that doesn't reform itself to gain more legitimacy among the people of Europe will never have the capacity to overcome its biggest hurdles. At the same time, we must engage – not isolate – certain allied leaders, providing them a political and moral tether, and make clear there is no space for illiberal democracies within our community.

Without restoring economic growth, Europe will not regain its confidence. Nor will it significantly increase its investment in defense. So restoring growth is a strategic imperative. Our objective should be to negotiate an ambitious Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) agreement to help create a transatlantic marketplace based on high regulatory standards that help unleash innovation, entrepreneurship, and competition. Such an agreement, along with the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), will help ensure that the leading free markets of the world set the global standards.

Third, we must take bold steps to bolster NATO ensuring our alliance is strong and restoring its centrality to our national security policy. Secretary Ash's announcement yesterday is a major step in this direction. This means adopting policies and postures that deter Russia, including positioning significant combat forces in NATO's eastern flank. We should help build the deterrent capability of our eastern allies and partners, including Ukraine, and cooperate with the United Kingdom, France, and Italy in particular to sustain their military prowess. We should encourage Germany to continue to assume much greater defense responsibilities.

As we commit to Europe's defense, our European allies must step up their own defense investments. We need a stronger European pillar of the Alliance, but we won't achieve that by ceding leadership of the Alliance or passing the baton to the European Union on security matters.

Fourth, the United States must lead Europe in forging a strategy toward Europe's east. Europe faces a fundamental security challenge from Russia, which the European Union is ill-equipped to manage alone – consider the unsatisfactory results in Georgia or Ukraine. The transatlantic community has held together remarkably well on sanctions, but we don't have a comprehensive strategy to avoid allowing Russia to hold Europe's neighbors in the east hostage with frozen conflicts and occupied territories.

Our effort should begin with a redoubled, coordinated effort to help Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova succeed in their transformations at home, deepen the resilience of their societies, and advance their integration into our community and its institutions. At the same time, we should work with Brussels to more decisively eliminate avenues for Moscow to intimidate or influence European nations using energy or corruption. As Russia continues to erode the security architecture and undermine arms control agreements that served Europe so well, we should focus any dialogue with Moscow on ensuring greater transparency and predictability.

Fifth, Europe's southern challenge is equally our own. Instability in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya has helped fuel the historic migration and terrorism threat Europe faces today. In turn, this migration has reversed one of the European Union's greatest achievements of opening borders across its members, and triggered beggar-thy-neighbor responses from governments, further undermining any sense of solidarity within the European Union. The United States has been a central actor in these crises, and as such, carries some responsibility not only to address the sources of the conflict themselves, but to assist Europe in responding to the refugee crisis.

The first step is a more decisive approach to Syria, Iraq, and Libya, as well as a continued military commitment to Afghanistan. But we could also lead in this crisis by joining with Europe on a deeper counterterrorism and intelligence-sharing partnership, and, with Europe, engage cooperative partners in the region on a major capacity building initiative. The United States could also demonstrate moral leadership by being more generous in welcoming refugees from the region's conflicts and avoiding reactionary policies that could curtail too severely programs like the Visa Waiver Program, which undergirds the ties among our societies.

Finally, only the United States can rally the transatlantic community toward a greater purpose: we either come together to shape the future or cede this role to less benevolent actors or chaos.

These aspirations are not unachievable. Together, North America and Europe laid the foundation for an international order that offered the prospect of security, prosperity, and freedom for so many around the globe. However, inward-looking political trends on both sides of the Atlantic, if left unchallenged, will erode our key institutions – the European Union and NATO in particular, but also the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – and allow the global agenda to be set by our detractors. But a new era of US leadership can lead an effort to help adapt, revitalize, and defend an international order which advances security, democratic governance, and prosperity rooted in the rule of law.

The Middle East and North Africa are urgent. Asia is strategic. Latin America offers new opportunities. But if we have to face enormous challenges in the coming years with Europe in disarray, our task becomes even more difficult. If we make a concerted effort now to bolster our closest partner, the United States can play a galvanizing role involving others on so many issues rather than face them alone.

Just as you would in politics, let's start by rallying our base. Thank you.