**EESC sees EU-US partnership as anchor for democracy, peace and security**

**With China and Russia on the offensive, a renewed and reliable transatlantic partnership is the key to maintaining international and legal order and peace. The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) supports the idea of an Alliance of Democracies, ensuring that civil society has significant say in the joint defence of universal values and rights.**

In an [own-initiative opinion](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/strong-transatlantic-partnership-based-common-values-democracy-and-rule-law-key-tackling-global-challenges-and) adopted at its December plenary session, the EESC stressed that together, the EU and the US should be gatekeepers of the rule of law and human rights for all, while also making clear the importance of transatlantic relations for Europe's place in the world. President Biden's initiative to organise a Summit for Democracy at a time when autocracies are on the offensive is only the first step towards building a strong international democratic alliance.

**Christian Moos,** rapporteur of the opinion, underlined 'The idea of universal human rights continues to unite large parts of the EU with the free democracies of the world, above all the United States of America'*.*

**Peter Clever**, co-rapporteur of the opinion, added 'The universal character of human rights is expressed in this comprehensive self-commitment of all in the implementation. This is what makes their value as a basis for dialogue and understanding, especially in conflict-ridden situations with profound differences in interests'*.*

The opinion comes amid an improvement in EU-US relations following the end of Donald Trump's 'America First' presidency. The arrival of the new administration in the US has provided a new momentum and a unique opportunity to build a new transatlantic partnership.

While acknowledging conflicting interests, North America and Europe have historically been close allies in championing democracy and its values across the world. Any attempt to defend this outside the alliance is destined to fail. On one hand, the US, given its own social tensions and the global nature of the challenge, cannot solely manage the task of preserving a liberal international order, and on the other hand, Europe does not have the heft to prevent a hierarchical power-based international order that would have China at its centre.

The EESC highly stresses that only a vibrant civil society can create enthusiasm and safeguard values, and urges the EU to promote and support setting-up a transatlantic platform of organised civil society with contact points in North America and Europe. In addition, transatlantic civil society dialogues should be based on a range of topics including civil rights, disinformation and climate action. Christian Moos particularly emphasised 'The challenge is enormous on both sides of the Atlantic. Democratic civil society is an important factor in shaping a common transatlantic future'.

**Towards a strategy of cooperative containment**

In the face of growing global instability, strategic competition and complex threats, the EU should reconsider its ambiguous concept of 'strategic autonomy' in favour of strategic capacity. The idea of strategic autonomy, developed during the Trump era and supported by many European voices, is misleading and cannot – and should not – mean maintaining an equidistance in relation to other powers. Strategic autonomy in foreign and security policy would not be in the spirit of a strong transatlantic partnership, as Europe is much closer to the US, sharing both the same fundamental values and constitutional democracy based on the rule of law, than to China or Russia.

Therefore, the EESC strongly supports the idea of an Alliance of Democracies and calls on the EU to join in a united front with the United States and the world's other democracies to pursue a 'strategy of cooperative containment' towards China. A cooperative containment that honours and safeguards legitimate Chinese interests, but results in clear and robust diplomatic responses when rights are violated, as in the case of the Uighurs or Hong Kong protesters.

Similarly, in the case with Russia, the EU should put the Nord Stream 2 project on hold until a solution is found in Ukraine, and as long as fundamental breaches of international law continue. This includes the deliberate suppression of the opposition through persecution and the arrest of Alexei Navalny.

The EESC emphasises that this must be a consistent, integral part of the common transatlantic strategy and policy of the Alliance of Democracies. The Committee underscores the role of the OSCE as a key pillar of the Pan-European security architecture together with NATO, with the latter to strengthen and clarify its values internally.

However, first and foremost the EU must speak with one voice in foreign and security policy, and show more responsibility for its own security and strategic capacity. It is important for Member States to recognise that speaking with different voices divests them of all leverageable sovereignty. And sovereignty can only be created if power is pooled and instruments shared.