

Time for the United States of Europe

USofE

A Humanist Call for European Federation

As the Trump administration upends transatlantic alliances, imposes tariffs, and dismantles the post-war world order, Gerd Leonhard argues that Europe's moment of reckoning has finally — and irreversibly — arrived.



01 THE WAKE-UP CALL

Why 2025 changes everything for Europe

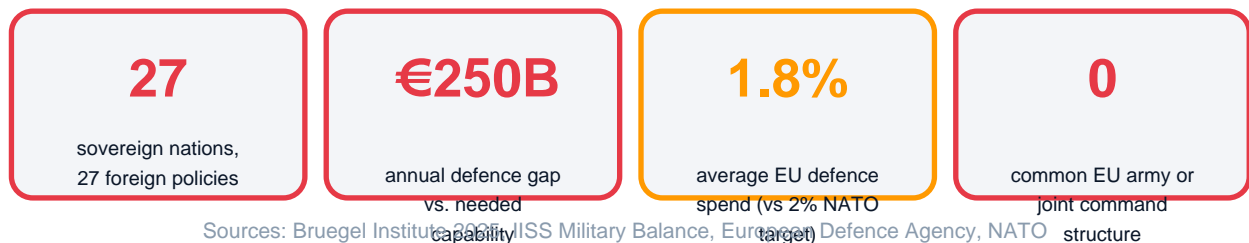
For decades, European integration has moved at a diplomatically cautious pace — two steps forward, one step back. But the return of Donald Trump to the White House in January 2025 has shattered the comfortable assumption that America would always be Europe's indispensable protector. In a matter of weeks, the Trump administration imposed sweeping tariffs on European goods, floated the idea of seizing Greenland from Denmark, signalled a willingness to negotiate with Moscow over Ukraine without European input, and openly disparaged EU democratic norms. The post-war transatlantic compact is broken.

“If not Brussels, then Moscow. It's your decision. That's geopolitics. That's history.”

— Volodymyr Zelenskyy, February 2025

Gerd Leonhard's February 2025 essay argues that this is not merely a geopolitical inconvenience — it is the long-overdue forcing function that Europe has needed to confront its structural fragility: 27 member states, 27 foreign policies, 27 defence budgets, and no single voice capable of speaking for the continent with democratic authority.

Europe's Strategic Vulnerability — Key Numbers (2025)



European Threat Landscape — Urgency Assessment



AI & technological sovereignty gap



HIGH

Threat severity ratings are Leonhard's qualitative assessments, corroborated by Bruegel, ECFR, and Carnegie Europe (2025)

02 THE CASE FOR USofE

Why deeper federation is now the only logical answer

Leonhard's central argument is straightforward: in a world of continent-sized superpowers — the United States, China, India — individual European nation-states are simply too small to be sovereign in any meaningful sense. France and Germany alone cannot replace the American nuclear umbrella. A single EU member cannot negotiate trade terms with Washington or Beijing as an equal. No individual government can fund the AI and semiconductor industries needed to compete with Silicon Valley or Shenzhen.

The USofE is not Leonhard's invention — it is a vision that stretches back to Victor Hugo, Winston Churchill, and the founders of the European project. But the 2025 geopolitical earthquake has transformed it from a federalist dream into a practical necessity.

Six Pillars of a United States of Europe

Common Defence

Joint EU army & command

Single Voice

One foreign policy seat

EU Fiscal Union

Common budget & bonds

Digital Sovereignty

AI, data & chip strategy

Climate Union

Binding green transition

Democratic Reform

End of national vetoes

Each pillar is a domain where fragmented national action has failed — and where only federal-level authority can deliver the scale required

“**Europe has all the ingredients for a great federation — shared values, rule of law, democratic traditions, and the world's largest single market. What it has lacked is the political will to act as one. That excuse is gone.**

— Gerd Leonhard, February 2025

Leonhard is careful to distinguish his USofE from a centralised superstate. Drawing on the Swiss and German federal models — nations he knows intimately as a Zürich resident — he envisions a subsidiarity-based federation where cultural identity, language, and local governance are fiercely protected, while the big domains (defence, trade, foreign policy, AI, climate) are handled at the continental level.

03 PRECEDENT & COUNTERPOINTS

Has it been done before, and what are the objections?

The idea of a federated Europe is far older than most people realise. Leonhard cites a lineage of visionaries who saw integration not as bureaucratic convenience but as a democratic necessity:

Advocate / Moment	Contribution to the USofE Vision
Victor Hugo, 1849	Called for a 'United States of Europe' at the Paris Peace Congress — over a century b
Winston Churchill, 1946	His Zürich speech called for a 'kind of United States of Europe' as the only path to lasti
Altiero Spinelli, 1941	The Ventotene Manifesto, written in a fascist prison, laid the intellectual foundations of
Helmut Kohl & François Mitterrand	Drove the Maastricht Treaty (1992), transforming the economic community into a politi
Emmanuel Macron, 2017–2025	Repeatedly called for 'European sovereignty' — and has finally found allies in the Germ

The Objections — and Leonhard's Responses

- **National sovereignty will be lost:** Leonhard counters that sovereignty is already lost — to markets, algorithms, and geopolitical giants. Federation is not loss of sovereignty; it is the pooling of sovereignty to make it meaningful again.
- **Cultural diversity will be homogenised:** Switzerland runs four national languages and deep cantonal autonomy inside a tight federation. The USofE can and must do the same.
- **Democratic legitimacy deficit:** The EU Parliament must gain full co-legislative power. The solution to the democratic deficit is more democracy — not less integration.
- **It will never happen politically:** Two world wars, a cold war, and a global pandemic did not produce a federation. But Leonhard argues: neither did any of them represent the simultaneous collapse of the US guarantee, a land war in Europe, and an AI arms race. Now all three are real.

04 A ROADMAP TO THE USofE

Practical steps Leonhard proposes for 2025–2030

Leonhard is not a politician and does not draft Treaty language. But as a futurist, he identifies the sequence of moves most likely to unlock federation from the current institutional deadlock:

- 1 Emergency Defence Union**
France and Germany lead an avant-garde coalition to pool military command, procurement, and nuclear deterrence within the EU treaty framework immediately — without waiting for all 27 members.
- 2 End the Unanimity Veto**
Foreign policy and fiscal decisions must shift to qualified majority voting. One member's veto cannot continue to paralyse 26 others on existential issues.
- 3 EU Constitutional Convention**
Convene a citizens' assembly — not just heads of state — to draft a genuine federal constitution. The European Parliament's 2023 reform proposal is the starting point.
- 4 European Digital Sovereignty Act**
Pooled investment in European AI, semiconductor fabrication, and data infrastructure. The Chips Act was a start — scale it tenfold.
- 5 Green & Social Union**
Bind climate targets and minimum social standards at the federal level so that no member can undercut neighbours through regulatory arbitrage.
- 6 Pan-European Political Parties**
Fund and empower truly European political parties — not national parties that show up in Brussels for four-year terms. Democracy needs European demos.

05 THE VISION

What the USofE could look like by 2035

Leonhard's USofE is not a superstate but a **federal democracy of democracies** — a continent-sized entity that can speak with one voice on defence, trade, AI, and climate while protecting the extraordinary cultural richness that makes Europe Europe. He draws on five core principles:

Subsidiarity First	Everything that can be done locally, nationally, or regionally stays there. Only what requires continental scale moves to federal level.
Democracy as the foundation	No technocratic shortcuts. Every treaty change ratified by the European Parliament AND national parliaments AND, ideally, citizens' referenda.
People, Planet, Purpose, Prosperity	Leonhard's 5Ps frame the constitutional goals — not GDP maximisation but human flourishing, ecological stewardship, and shared meaning.
Regulated AI — not banned, not uncontrolled	Europe leads the world in AI ethics. The USofE scales that leadership into a geopolitical advantage, not a bureaucratic handicap.
United in diversity, not despite it	27 languages, hundreds of cultures, millennia of history — this is Europe's competitive advantage, not its weakness.

“Europe was built on the ruins of nationalism. The answer to the crisis of 2025 is not to retreat into those ruins — it is to complete the project that Churchill, Spinelli, and Schuman began. The United States of Europe is not a utopia. It is simply the next necessary step.

— Gerd Leonhard, February 2025

USofE vs. Status Quo — At a Glance

Domain	Status Quo (2025)	United States of Europe
Defence	27 separate budgets, NATO-dependent	Joint EU army, shared nuclear deterrence
Foreign Policy	27 vetoes, paralysed by unanimity	One federal foreign minister, QMV
Trade	EU negotiates, but states undercut	Single federal trade voice & policy
AI & Tech	Fragmented national champions	Continental R&D budget, EU chips

Climate	Binding targets, weak enforcement	Federal climate authority with teeth
Democracy	Democratic deficit, low EP power	Full EP co-legislation, EU constitution

About Gerd Leonhard

Gerd Leonhard is a Futurist, Humanist, author of *Technology vs. Humanity*, filmmaker, and CEO of The Futures Agency in Zürich, Switzerland. He advises governments, Fortune 500 companies, and NGOs on the future of technology, democracy, and human flourishing. His credo: **People, Planet, Purpose, Peace and Prosperity**. He is listed as one of Europe's top 100 most influential people by Wired magazine.