



DEFEND THE WEST

EUROPEAN CIVILIZATIONAL
RENEWAL AGENDA

“Under an America First administration, we have both the authority and the obligation to act, not as passive observers of decline, but as stewards of a civilizational inheritance that has long bound our nations together.”

Overview, Purpose, & Scope

Americans have a direct interest in the fate of Europe through a civilizational bond and culture grounded in history, heritage, language, and a shared responsibility to defend Western civilization. As Walter McDougall wrote in his *The Mighty Continent: A Candid History of Modern Europe*:

The only definition that makes sense is one based not on the characteristics of countries or peoples today, but on their historic roots. Thus did a textbook titled *Western Civilization* by authors Carlton J.H. Hayes, Marshall Baldwin, and Charles Cole describe the roots of its subject in these words:

The European Civilization consists, first, in the fusing of ancient peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean into a conscious community of settled life, commerce, expansion, and artistic achievement. Second, in the Greco-Roman traditions of language, philosophy, art, law, and political concepts of monarchy, aristocracy, democracy, and dictatorship. Third, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, with its fruitful spirituality and ethical norms for personal and social behavior, and the distinctions it drew between the individual and society, liberty and authority, mercy and justice, and what is Caesar's and what is God's. Fourth, in the traditions both of individualism and social responsibility, hence repeated revolt and revolution. Finally, it includes an expansionist tradition born of a missionary zeal, whether religious or political, ever pushing outward, first to Europe's frontiers, then across the Atlantic, and at last around the whole world.

"In sum," McDougall continued, "the modern West is whatever sprouted from those ancient roots and bore fruit, whether sweet or bitter."

Unfortunately, the friendly sentimentality that typically undergirds the transatlantic bond is no longer sufficient, nor even appropriate, to the circumstances of decline in which much of the continent finds itself. The negative trends are not identical across all our allies, with some demonstrating subtler and others more pronounced shifts away from our common values. The marked moral, spiritual, and demographic shifts among our allies are not externally inflicted: It is a path chosen and embraced by many of Europe's national ruling elite, along with the leadership in the European Union (EU). It is both alarmingly real and substantially more advanced than is commonly understood in American policy circles.

Beneath the surface of stable institutions and enduring cultural prestige, many European nations are experiencing profound deterioration in civic trust, demographics, financial stability, and national identity. Long-standing political, legal, and cultural frameworks that once sustained these nations' prosperity are increasingly weakened by Leftist ideology and the threat of Islamism. This deterioration is systemic in nature and affects core functions of governance, increasingly making Europe less democratic and less free. Absent robust and deliberate reform, these trends will further erode European nations' reliability as allies.

For the purposes of this framework, “Europe” refers to the geographic continent and the nation-states historically rooted within it, while also encompassing the distinct civilizational tradition that has developed over centuries. “Western” or “European” values refer to a defined set of political, legal, and moral principles that emerged from the synthesis of classical antiquity and Judeo-Christian moral tradition. These values include the God-given dignity of the individual, the existence of unalienable rights, equality before the law, freedom of speech and conscience, representative self-government, and the rule of law. They constitute the operative foundation of European societies, shaping institutions, cultural norms, and shared understandings of justice and moral responsibility regardless of individual religious belief. The preservation of Europe as a coherent civilizational and political entity, therefore, depends on the continued maintenance and transmission of these values.

Why This Matters for the American Interest

Right now, the most powerful and consequential governments in Western Europe actively oppose the civilizational foundations that made them great; in other words, Europe is against the Europeans. Among the manifestations of this opposition to their civilizational foundations are the erosion of these countries’ defense industrial bases, their appeasement of Islamist platforms, and their open disagreements with the United States on coordination to address geopolitical challenges. As such, the Trump Administration has made it the policy of the U.S. government to “cultivate resistance to Europe’s current trajectory within European nations.”

The 2025 National Security Strategy describes:

“civilizational erasure ... [by] the E.U. and other transnational bodies that undermine political liberty and sovereignty, migration policies that are transforming the continent and creating strife, censorship of free speech and suppression of political opposition, cratering birthrates, and loss of national identities and self-confidence.”

The need for Europe to remain true to European heritage, as the document states, is crucial for the sustainability of reliable partners in defending trade routes, deterring shared adversaries—Russia, the People’s Republic of China, Iran, and North Korea—and preserving the cultural foundations that once made the Atlantic alliance a force for stability. The 2026 National Defense Strategy, too, clearly states that the America First approach means “America’s alliances and partners have an essential role to play—but not as the dependencies of the last generation.”



What happens in Europe increasingly
shapes the operating environment for
American democracy.

Beyond these strategic considerations, Europe's internal trajectory carries direct implications for the American constitutional order and the everyday liberties of U.S. citizens. When close allies normalize restrictions on speech, expand state authority over political expression, or redefine fundamental rights in ways that depart from long-standing Western traditions, those precedents tend to move along a transatlantic "transmission belt of ideas," carried through multinational institutions, regulatory frameworks, technology platforms, and elite networks that operate seamlessly between Europe and the United States. The result is a gradual harmonization of norms that can place pressure on American companies, policymakers, and courts to conform to standards that may conflict with First Amendment protections and other core principles. In this way, what may appear as internal European policy choices can, over time, reshape the operating environment for American democracy itself.

At the same time, this transmission belt runs in both directions, creating a reinforcing dynamic between Europe's trajectory and similar currents within the United States. Policy innovations, legal theories, and cultural shifts developed in one context are often cited, adapted, and amplified in the other, forming a feedback loop that accelerates their adoption. This synergy means that challenges to sovereignty, free expression, and social cohesion are not isolated phenomena but part of a broader transatlantic pattern. If left unaddressed, this pattern risks compounding internal divisions in the United States while weakening the shared foundations that have historically underpinned effective alliance cooperation. Articulating this connection clearly is essential: Safeguarding American interests requires not only managing external threats, but also recognizing and responding to the ways in which allied societies can influence the trajectory of our own.

Under an America First administration, we have both the authority and the obligation to act, not as passive observers of decline, but as stewards of a civilizational inheritance that has long bound our nations together. Changing geopolitical dynamics and new technologies underscore the urgency surrounding European allies' responsibility to contribute to U.S. efforts to shape an international order that prioritizes the security and prosperity of the American people. By insisting on accountability, sovereignty, and renewal abroad, we protect American workers, families, faith communities, and national security at home. This is because the economic policies, regulatory standards, immigration, and defense capabilities shaped in Europe directly influence American markets, border conditions, and alliance structures, meaning that instability or misalignment abroad inevitably translates into tangible costs and risks for the United States. The U.S. has extraordinary leverage and geopolitical urgency to promote renewal in Europe—and we should act now to realize it.



Principles & Priorities

Consistent with the 2025 National Security Strategy, the U.S. must orient its European policy toward reversing the continent's decline, particularly the “civilizational erasure,” while restoring its capacity to shoulder its share of the burden for collective defense. Europe's loss of global economic share, regulatory suffocation, collapsing birthrates, erosion of national identity, and suppression of political dissent represent significant issues that demand a re-evaluation of the nature of our alliance and relationship. These are all issues for European nations to address. That said, the perpetuation of these trends has implications for the strength of U.S. engagement with these countries and for the values we have historically shared. American engagement should prioritize the reestablishment of political liberty, sovereign self-government, and cultural self-confidence across the continent. This includes encouraging resistance to supranational overreach, along with strengthening and working with those who share our vision for renewal. Our public affairs must continue to reinforce freedom of expression and democratic accountability even in trade, security, and defense conversations.

At the same time, U.S. policy should reaffirm that the preservation of Western civilization depends not only on sovereignty and security, but also on the protection of the natural rights and inherent dignity of every person. These rights are not granted by governments, institutions, or international bodies, but are unalienable and grounded in the enduring moral and legal traditions that shaped the West and informed the American founding. American engagement with Europe should therefore encourage governments to uphold equality before the law, freedom of conscience and expression, due process, democratic participation, and protections against political persecution and state reprisal. The United States should continue to support policies and institutions that defend fundamental freedoms, strengthen civil society, and ensure that technological, legal, and political systems serve the common good rather than coercive ideological ends. A durable transatlantic partnership requires nations that are not only capable of defending themselves but also committed to preserving the liberties that give the alliance its legitimacy, cohesion, and moral purpose.

U.S. policy must also make clear that Europe bears primary responsibility for its own defense and long-term security. The 2026 National Defense Strategy signals an era of reduced European military dependence on the United States and affirms that Europe possesses sufficient economic and military power to manage regional threats independently. American support will increasingly be conditioned on demonstrated European capacity for self-reliance, disciplined governance, and strategic realism. This includes curbing dangerous external dependencies, countering hostile economic and technological practices, and preventing the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from becoming an open-ended security guarantee without equal burden-sharing. Working to incentivize European nations to reclaim sovereignty and rebuild institutional strength is necessary for a continued and meaningful partnership. A confident, self-sustaining Europe is essential to American interests; a dependent, fragmented, and demoralized Europe is not.

Areas of Focus

The following are areas of focus needed to address the structural, political, and cultural realities that now shape Europe's trajectory and determine its capacity for long-term partnership with the U.S.

Decline of Civil Society and Loss of National Identity

Across much of Europe, civil society has become increasingly shaped by progressive and left-aligned advocacy networks that have benefited from decades of sustained private and philanthropic funding. Significant portions of this support, including funding from U.S. organizations such as the Open Society Foundations, have contributed to a structural imbalance that leaves institutions on the Right, as well as overtly Christian institutions, comparatively under-resourced. This asymmetry has significantly narrowed the range of acceptable public discourse and weakened pluralism within democratic systems. At the same time, ideological currents associated with radical secular progressivism and Islamism have placed sustained pressure on traditional social structures, democratic norms, and inherited civilizational values. The EU serves as a vehicle through which these ideological frameworks are forced on ordinary citizens in the form of binding regulations. Compounding these trends are the marginalization of Christian faith in public life, particularly in Western Europe, and the broader decline of Christianity as a formative cultural force. This erosion has weakened both Western and Eastern Europe's cultural fabric and has contributed materially to their ongoing demographic and moral crises.

To respond, U.S. public diplomacy and foreign aid should support the development of healthy civil societies by increasing assistance to free media, educational institutions that share and promote our civilizational values, and aligned advocacy groups. Redirecting aid for this purpose will provide for the long-term strengthening of the continent's heritage, faith, and civic responsibility.



The erosion of Christianity as a formative cultural force has weakened Europe's cultural fabric.

Diminishing Political and Religious Liberties

Across Europe, commitments to the very freedoms key to its flourishing are under growing strain. Censorship and selective enforcement of speech regulations have narrowed the space for democratic debate and forced ideological Leftism on both European and American citizens. At the same time, the persecution and marginalization of religious communities, including imposing government ideology on Christian heritage sites such as the Valley of the Fallen in Spain, reflect an alarming erosion of liberty. These are serious issues that should worry the entire Western world because they weaken Europe's credibility as a defender of our civilizational values.

To respond, the U.S. should pursue sustained diplomatic engagement with European partners to reinforce free speech and religious liberty as essential pillars of the transatlantic alliance. This effort should be complemented by U.S.-led initiatives to expand support for the protection of vulnerable faith communities and cultural heritage sites, while providing legal and institutional assistance to organizations defending civil liberties. In cases of credible persecution, the U.S. should consider, on a case-by-case basis, granting humanitarian and political asylum to individuals targeted for protected speech or religious practice.

Mass Illegal Migration and Loss of Sovereignty

Meaningful political and economic renewal in Europe is increasingly constrained by centralized European Union governance structures that limit national autonomy over immigration, fiscal policy, and social regulation. Many governments lack the institutional flexibility necessary to respond effectively to mass illegal migration, rising social fragmentation, and declining public confidence. In Western Europe, prolonged failures in border enforcement and integration policy have contributed to the erosion of civil society and national identity. As a result, reasserting democratic accountability and national sovereignty (including serious debate over the future of EU membership in some countries) is viewed by many reform-oriented leaders as a prerequisite for restoring public trust and advancing coherent strategies for renewal and responsible engagement with the United States.

To respond, specific policy recommendations should include enhanced bilateral deportation and repatriation agreements, coordinated counter-trafficking and anti-smuggling initiatives, expanded intelligence and law-enforcement cooperation, and support for national legislative frameworks that reassert sovereign authority over border enforcement and asylum adjudication. The U.S. should subsequently work with its European allies to adopt skills-based legal immigration systems, end structural incentives for unlawful migration, and implement integration policies grounded in assimilation, civic responsibility, and social cohesion.

Over the longer term, success would also be reflected in the establishment of durable national policies capable of balancing humanitarian aims with public order, cultural proximity, and sovereignty.

Serious Demographic Decline

Europe is facing a profound demographic challenge, with nearly all countries now operating well below replacement birth rates and experiencing accelerating population aging. This decline is compounded by rising secularization, weakening family formation, and cultural shifts that discourage long-term social investment. Over time, shrinking and aging populations threaten economic dynamism, fiscal sustainability, and national resilience, while increasing dependence on migration as a substitute for domestic population growth introduces additional social and political pressures. Without comprehensive policies that strengthen families, reinforce cultural continuity, and encourage



sustainable population growth, Europe's long-term strategic and economic competitiveness will continue to erode.

To respond, the U.S. should advance bilateral initiatives that strengthen family formation, parental support, and long-term workforce participation across Europe. Integrating pro-family benchmarks into trade, labor, and development agreements, expanding research on fertility decline and workforce sustainability, and supporting tax and housing policies favorable to marriage and child-rearing are necessary starts to encourage family formation across the West. The U.S. should also deepen cooperation with aligned governments on parental leave frameworks, childcare accessibility, and labor policies that enable long-term workforce participation without undermining family stability.

In addition, the U.S. should work with aligned international partners to elevate demographic decline as a significant economic and national security concern. Policy coordination should encourage the exchange of best practices on reversing fertility decline, reducing cultural and regulatory disincentives to marriage and parenthood, and strengthening the social and institutional conditions necessary for durable family life. Markers of success include rising fertility and marriage rates, increased labor-force stability among young families, improved public confidence in long-term demographic sustainability, and the adoption of durable family-centered policies across allied European states.

Military and Economic Dependence on the United States

Despite stated commitments to “strategic autonomy,” many European states are and will remain heavily dependent on the United States for security, intelligence, and defense capabilities, while continuing to benefit from imbalanced trade arrangements. Unequal burden-sharing within NATO persists, and Europe lacks the ability to deter emerging threats independently. Addressing these structural dependencies is essential to building a more balanced, durable, and credible transatlantic alliance.

A renewed sense of national purpose within Europe is instrumental in altering this trajectory. Stronger civic solidarity and cultural confidence tend to reinforce public willingness to support defense investment, military service, border security, and long-term strategic planning. Nations with higher levels of social cohesion are generally better positioned to sustain sacrifice, maintain political stability during crises, and mobilize national resources in response to external threats.

To respond, U.S. policy and engagement should push for increasing European defense spending and industrial capacity through clear benchmarks like sustained movement toward or beyond the NATO 2% defense spending target, increased domestic defense manufacturing output, modernization of strategic capabilities, and expanded readiness and force-projection capacity among allied militaries. Greater security cooperation must be expanded in counterterrorism and cyber defense, through enhanced intelligence-sharing agreements, joint counterterrorism task forces, coordinated cyber defense operations, and increased interoperability exercises among allied military and security services. The U.S. should strengthen institutional ties with European militaries by embedding advisory personnel within allied ministries and enhancing interoperability across national defense systems through NATO. Trade, investment, and financial cooperation should be unapologetically conditioned on measurable progress toward equal burden-sharing and strategic autonomy. At the same time, the transatlantic economic relationship should move toward greater reciprocity, including reducing discriminatory regulatory treatment of U.S. technology firms and expanding mutually balanced market access for strategic industries and goods.

Conclusion

The objective of this framework is to encourage American policy that fosters the conditions necessary for the renewal of our shared Western civilization: accountable self-government, secure borders, robust civil society, durable families, protected liberties, and a reinvigorated sense of cultural strength. The United States possesses significant diplomatic, economic, and institutional leverage to encourage this renewal and should employ it deliberately, consistently, and in alignment with long-term American interests.

Ultimately, the preservation of Western civilization will depend on whether its nations have the will to steward the inheritance they received and transmit it with confidence to future generations. The present moment demands not passivity, but purposeful action grounded in realism, reciprocity, and civilizational self-respect.

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Leadership Biographies



The Honorable Robert Wilkie

AFPI Co-Chair, American Security

The Honorable Robert Wilkie serves as co-chair of the Center for American Security at AFPI. Wilkie was nominated by President Trump to serve as the tenth Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA). He was confirmed by the Senate after previously serving as the acting secretary of VA. Before confirmation as VA Secretary, Wilkie was the under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness. In that role, Wilkie served as the principal advisor to the secretary and deputy secretary of defense for total force management as it relates to readiness, National Guard and Reserve component affairs, health affairs, training, and personnel requirements and management, including equal opportunity, morale, welfare, recreation, and the quality of life for military families. He also previously served as assistant secretary of defense and special assistant to the president for national security affairs. Wilkie is a colonel in the U.S. Air Force Reserve. He holds an honors degree from Wake Forest University, a Juris Doctor from Loyola University College of Law in New Orleans, a Master of Laws in international and comparative law from Georgetown University, and a master's degree in strategic studies from the United States Army War College. A graduate of the College of Naval Command and Staff, Air Command and Staff College, the United States Army War College, and the Joint Forces Staff College, Wilkie has published many articles. Wilkie also serves as senior national security analyst for Newsmax Television. He holds personal and unit decorations, as well as the Defense Distinguished Public Service Medal, the highest noncareer civilian award of the Department.



Jacob Olidort

AFPI Chief Research Officer, Senior Policy Officer, and Director, American Security

Jacob Olidort serves as chief research officer, senior policy officer, and director of American Security at AFPI. Olidort is a Middle East expert with more than a decade of experience working on national security issues in the U.S. government and in different research institutions. Most recently, he served as an advisor in the Office of former Vice President Mike Pence and as a foreign policy advisor to the late Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Sen. Josh Hawley (R-MO).

He also served in the Central Intelligence Agency and as an advisor on Middle East policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

Outside of government, Olidort served as director of research at the Jewish Institute for National Security of America's Gemunder Center for Defense and Strategy and as a Soref Fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. He taught at American University and George Washington University, was a Fulbright Scholar to the United Arab Emirates, a Rhodes Scholarship finalist, and a term member of the Council on Foreign Relations. Olidort holds a Bachelor of Arts, magna cum laude, from Brandeis University, Master of Arts degrees from Harvard University and Princeton University, and a doctorate from Princeton University.



Kristen Zicarelli

AFPI Fellow, Civilizational Action

Kristen Zicarelli serves as a fellow for Civilizational Action at AFPI. She joined AFPI in 2021 and previously served as director for Civilizational Action, senior policy analyst for Homeland Security and Immigration, and director of production.

Before joining AFPI, Zicarelli worked in the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, where she supported coordination with state and local leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. She also served three consecutive summer terms at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. Zicarelli has completed fellowships with Alliance Defending Freedom, the Claremont Institute, the Faith and Reason Institute, the Public Interest Fellowship, the Hudson Institute, the Hertog Foundation, the Heritage Foundation, the Hildebrand Project, and the Alexander Hamilton Society. She earned a master's degree in international business from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and holds bachelor's degrees in political science and finance from Christopher Newport University.

Zicarelli grew up in both Europe and the United States. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, fitness, photography, classical piano, sacred music, and volunteering as a tour guide at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

ABOUT AMERICA FIRST POLICY INSTITUTE

America First Policy Institute advances policies that put the American people first. AFPI's guiding principles are liberty, free enterprise, national greatness, American military superiority, foreign policy in the American interest and the primacy of American workers, families and communities. Several AFPI national leaders have been selected by President Trump to serve in his cabinet or other important roles, including AFPI chair Linda McMahon, secretary of education; AFPI CEO Brooke Rollins, secretary of agriculture; Pam Bondi, former attorney general; Doug Collins, secretary of veterans affairs; Scott Turner, secretary of housing and urban development; Lee Zeldin, administrator of EPA; Lt. General Keith Kellogg (Ret.), former special envoy to Ukraine and Russia; Kash Patel, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, among others.

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