

The Great Reset

Interactive
policy brief

Issue 29/2022

Why the Future of Democracy Rests on Robust Transatlantic Cooperation



By Paul Hofheinz

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Founded in 2003 as a non-profit, non-partisan association, the Lisbon Council has emerged as one of Europe's leading think tanks and pre-eminent voices on social and economic change.

For years, the 197 countries of the world have been pulled in two distinct directions.¹ Since the 1648 Peace of Westphalia brought the nation state to the fore, most countries have regulated their affairs through a complex blend of debate, interest adjudication and law making, all of it conducted within a national framework. But the trouble is humankind's affairs seldom stop at any single nation's borders. What happens in one country – the actions it takes, the decisions it makes – routinely affects the quality of life in others. This means nations need to look well beyond their own borders for many solutions – seeking alliances with some or agency over others in order that their people can live in peace and prosperity.

And this divide – the mismatch between the limited reach of national governments and the rising number of global challenges – has never been greater. The Internet, built around borderless peer-to-peer communication, has turned a vibrant, churning world into a cramped village where no news is ever really foreign. Rising inequality – and its handmaiden, social unrest – has shaken the planet and shows every sign of rocking it for years to come. One problem in particular – global warming – packs a very simple message; when the seas rise, they'll rise for all. And there's no safe harbour for any boats unless we can make the harbour safe for everyone.

Which is why initiatives like the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) – a high-level policy pow-wow led by the United States and the European Union – and the common approaches being hashed out in fora like it have taken on such immense importance.² Officially, the TTC is little more than a high-level

¹ The author would like to thank the German Marshall Fund of the United States, the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, the Transatlantic Leadership Network and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars for several outstanding seminars where many of these issues were discussed. The work of those groups and the experts who serve on them is independent. But their knowledge is profound and, without naming names, many of the insights shared here originated in those discussions. Special thanks as well to Rick A. Cherye, Daniel S. Hamilton, Kayvan Hazemi-Jebelli, Karen Kornbluh, Lenard Koschwitz, Tim Lyon, Ann Mettler, Grace Milne, Jason C. Moyer, Michael R. Nelson, Susan Ness, David Osimo and Andrew W. Wyckoff. All errors of fact or judgment are the author's sole responsibility.

² For more information, visit <https://ustr.gov/useuttc> where the principal announcements and press releases are collated. For more, see the stakeholder consultation memos published on the European Commission website at <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/united-states/>.

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'Nations have spent too much time trying to solve global problems with national initiative.'

3 The initiative is staffed by three U.S. cabinet members: Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo and U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai. On the EU side are two executive vice-presidents of the European Commission: Margrethe Vestager and Valdis Dombrovskis.

4 [U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council Inaugural Joint Statement, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 29 September 2021.](#)

5 Ibid.

6 The threat was withdrawn after the U.S.-EU Summit in June 2021. The European digital tax was lifted, as will be discussed later in this policy brief. And a truce was declared in the airline dispute. See [EU-U.S. Summit State: Towards a Renewed Transatlantic Partnership, 15 June 2021.](#)

7 An odd argument recently broke out between the U.S. Government and German automakers. The "Build Back Better" legislation awaiting approval in the U.S. Senate at the time of writing would offer tax credits of up to \$12,500 per car for purchase of an electric vehicle – but the full amount would only be available for cars produced at U.S.-based factories that are fully unionised. Volkswagen, BMW and Daimler all make cars in the U.S., but their plants there – unlike most U.S. automakers – are not fully unionised. The European Commission recently wrote to leading U.S. senators protesting the "unjustified discrimination against EU car and car component manufacturers." See [Joe Miller, "German Carmakers Condemn Biden's Electric Vehicle Subsidy Plans," Financial Times, 11 December 2021.](#)

dialogue.³ Its mission is to "coordinate approaches to key global technology, economic and trade issues ...without prejudice to the regulatory autonomy of the United States and European Union."⁴ It met first in September 2021 – in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, formerly the heart of the U.S. steel belt, which has re-emerged as a high-tech, service-driven economy – and it is due to meet again in "early-to-mid" 2022 at a European venue to be announced. In the meantime, 10 high-level working groups have been formed to hash out policies and prepare decisions for the political level. For an overview, see Table 1 below.

The initiative is part of a key global movement – one that has taken on added meaning in an era where fear, frustration and pandemic have thrown up a complicated set of electoral outcomes. Driven by the imperative to find solutions to national problems despite the growing fact of global interdependence, a multiplying array of multi-national, multilateral talks like the TTC – including guidelines being negotiated at the [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD\)](#) and specifications agreed by the constituent members of the [World Standards Cooperation \(WSC\)](#) alliance, a coordinating body – have provided important platforms for progress. Never before has the work of such relatively obscure bodies taken on such crucial significance. Never before have a set of technical negotiations held out such hope that, far from collapsing, the world's democracies can rally, unite, learn and deliver. For an overview of key fora, see the box on page 10.

At the TTC's first meeting, top U.S and EU officials agreed to "coordination in multilateral bodies, including in the World Trade Organisation, and wider efforts with like-minded partners with the aim of promoting democratic and sustainable models of digital and economic governance."⁵ In other words, so long as they can deliver, two of the world's three largest economies – and the two largest democracies – have a roadmap, and it's a simple one: set aside differences, coordinate at the international level and on the back of that cooperation fight climate change, defend democracy, put safety rails on the Internet and deliver a data economy that serves citizens, generates scientific knowledge and never becomes a tool for entrenching totalitarian government or denying human rights.

Table 1. A Sweeping Agenda for Transatlantic Collaboration

The U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council is divided into 10 working groups, each assigned a topic and asked to prepare solutions and discussions for meetings at the principals level.	
1 Technology Standards Cooperation	6 Misuse of Technology Threatening Security and Human Rights
2 Climate and Clean Technology	7 Export Controls
3 Secure Supply Chains	8 Investment Screening
4 ICT Security and Competitiveness	9 Promoting Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise Access to Digital Technology
5 Data Governance and Technology Platforms	10 Global Trade Challenges

Sources: European Commission/Office of the U.S. Trade Representative

'In few eras has the fate of the planet rested so squarely on the search for mutually agreeable solutions in the quiet corridors of the world's multilateral institutions.'

It's a powerful vision, perhaps, but warm words and good intentions are the easy thing to generate. The fact is, the preceding period has seen an almost unprecedented unravelling of the once fruitful U.S.-EU cooperation. Differences in the early '00s over the Iraq War were easy to spot, but easier to miss was the recent threat of U.S. tariffs on French wine – some €1.2 billion worth – developed to protest an ongoing dispute about airline subsidies and a digital tax which Americans felt was aimed unduly at U.S. companies.⁶ And what about the unseemly sight of a European Commission president in the White House, armed with flashcards and a PowerPoint, patiently explaining to a U.S. president why a tariff on German automobile imports would trigger a devastating European response and run counter to U.S. interests.⁷

America – under President Donald J. Trump – bears a heavy responsibility for starting this not-so-low-level conflict. But Europeans have taken some complicated shots as well. Europe's highest court threw out a carefully negotiated data-sharing agreement with the United States, the EU-U.S. Privacy Shield, which governed data flows between the two continents – while national regulatory agencies, including the Irish Data Protection Commission, simultaneously cast doubts on “standard contracts,” an alternative legal basis for transferring data.⁸ The result is a growing level of panic on both sides of the Atlantic – a fear that this relatively technical dispute could bring a premature and unexpected stop to dataflows that at least 16 million jobs depend on.⁹ And what about the digital markets act, the European initiative that aims to punish platforms and companies that grow too large in the digital-services sphere?¹⁰ European Commission Executive Vice-Presidents will tell you, po-faced, that there is nothing anti-American about the proposal put forward in December 2020.¹¹ But the debate in the European Parliament tells another story. There, members of the European Parliament were forced to raise the thresholds beyond which non-market remedies could be applied – i.e., data and intellectual property at targeted companies expropriated so it can be forcibly shared with rivals – because they acknowledged too many European companies would fall afoul of it.¹²

These difficult issues have two things in common: 1) first and foremost, they are all conflicts driven by clumsy national or regional efforts to regulate common problems, things that every country faces – keeping the Internet safe, protecting personal data from unjustified government access, reversing climate change, delivering jobs, guaranteeing contestable markets and ensuring fair treatment to newcomers, and 2) they all have bigger, better solutions if countries can work together well enough to find the sweet spot where robust, multilateral and mutually-agreed solutions are found.

And those sweet spots can be found. One of the great successes of 2021 – and there were a few – was the stunning, unexpected and warmly welcomed global minimum corporate tax rate (GMCTR) agreed in early 2021 and finalised at the October 2021 G20 meeting in Rome, Italy. This agreement – which sets a minimum 15% rate on corporate income worldwide and moves taxing rights on large multinationals to “market jurisdictions” where sales are made – grew out of

⁸ [Quentin Ariès and James McAuley, “Europeans are Skeptical of Trade Truce with Trump,” *The Washington Post*, 26 July 2018.](#)

⁹ The 16 million jobs figure is from Daniel S. Hamilton and Joseph P. Quinlan's *Transatlantic Economy 2021* and covers “workers in mutually ‘on-shored’ jobs on both sides of the Atlantic.” The real figure, which is difficult to quantify, is certainly much higher; commercial sales across the Atlantic in a single year account for \$6.2 trillion [€5.2 trillion] according to the same survey. See [Daniel S. Hamilton and Joseph P. Quinlan, *The Transatlantic Economy 2021: Annual Survey of Jobs, Trade and Investment between the United States and Europe* \(Washington DC: Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins University SAIS and Woodrow Wilson Center, 2021\).](#)

¹⁰ [European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation on Contestable and Fair Markets in the Digital Sector: Digital Markets Act* \(Brussels: European Union, 2020\).](#)

¹¹ [Margrethe Vestager, *Statement by Executive Vice-President Vestager on the Commission Proposal on New Rules for Digital Platforms*, 15 December 2020.](#)

¹² [Francine Cunningham, “Influential MEP Aims to Increase the Threshold for Companies to be Designated ‘Gatekeepers,’” *Bird and Bird News Centre Blog*, June 2021.](#)

'Humankind's affairs seldom stop at any single nation's borders.'

¹³ The tax agreement has solid European roots. While he was German finance minister, Olaf Scholz presented a joint Franco-German proposal to the OECD committee on fiscal affairs (Germany then held the chair). Once U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen signed on, the Franco-German proposal became the basis of the final agreement. For more, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Global_minimum_corporate_tax_rate.

¹⁴ AmCham EU, "Global Leadership: A Transatlantic Opportunity," 24-26 March 2021.

¹⁵ Leigh Thomas, "136 Countries Have Agreed to a Global Minimum Tax Rate: Here's What It Means," *Reuters and the World Economic Forum*, 01 November 2021.

a complex, six-year, 136-country negotiation at the OECD, the 38-nation global think tank which has emerged as a crucial platform for working out trans-national protocols.¹³ Few people saw it coming. At a conference convened in March 2021 not one of the high-level participants identified a global tax agreement as part of the "low hanging fruit" that might be harvested in coming weeks.¹⁴ The problem was considered too intractable – particularly after living so long with a U.S. administration hostile to international agreements. And yet, there it was. The Europeans, after some hesitation, withdrew a proposed digital tax, which had itself triggered U.S. threats of retaliatory measures, which were also withdrawn. And the GMCTR is set to go into effect, world-wide, in January 2023.¹⁵

This policy brief will look again at that low-hanging fruit and call on political leaders to step up their efforts to reach global agreements through the multilateral fora proliferating everywhere. It will highlight three key areas – climate change, digital regulation and security by design – where transatlantic collaboration could deliver better domestic – and international – policy.

Perhaps most importantly, the TTC dialogue offers a crucial chance to shore up democracy and address common problems that can only be solved through joint action. In fact, national action, taken unilaterally, can have the opposite effect – as we will see in this policy brief, it often entrenches differences and makes the actual problems harder to solve at the global level.

What's more, the world sits at a unique moment on top of a unique set of challenges and experiences. Democracies have not yet figured out how to cope with the unruliness that broadly expanded access to communication through the Internet has brought. But the civil service – acting with their elected counterparts – have developed an unprecedented layer of global cooperation – a unique dialogue and decision-reaching process that holds out the possibility of real solutions to protracted problems. This policy brief will look at those areas of potential cooperation for the common good – with a special focus on the TTC dialogue.

The Imperative of Collaboration

Global problems have always been with us. After all, the Romans could hardly act without some knowledge of what the Parthians might be up to. But the spread of technology, the advent of a truly global economy combined with the imminent arrival of the world's eight billionth citizen mean cooperation is no longer just desirable: it's a must have. But digital technology – the thing that powers so much of what happens in the world today – can cut two ways. It empowers many previously excluded people with access to knowledge and the ability to organise and connect. But it also empowers dictators, giving them unprecedented ways of policing behaviour and controlling entire populations. The challenge of democratic governments is to ensure that the technology is used to strengthen democracy. And to ensure that autocratic governments can't use it to undermine democracy itself.

'The U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council offers a crucial chance to shore up democracy and address common problems.'

There are several promising pistes:

I. Climate Change

There is no area where global cooperation is so clearly a *sine qua non* for success as the fight against climate change. Indeed, that need is so evident that it has already given birth to one of the world's largest multinational negotiations – the Conference of the Parties (COP) meetings of the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#), now in its 27th round. Lately, it has become popular to slag off the U.N. climate meetings – focusing on the absence of major breakthroughs or all-encompassing solutions.¹⁶ But the conference is not without its achievements, which might be worth remembering in this context. For starters, there is the dialogue itself. Would the world be better off without 197 nations sitting around the table discussing a problem that affects all but can be solved unilaterally by none? Certainly not. Then there is the effort to drag developed world/developing world tensions into the discussion. Many criticised the watering down of commitments to phase out coal-fired power generation in the recent COP26 in Glasgow as if all nations had failed.¹⁷ But few pointed out that the last-minute objections to tough language on coal came from China and India. Put simply, it is wrong to muddy the issues by putting the blame solely on the backs of rich countries, many of which are showing willingness to take on difficult domestic reforms and stepping up with massive offers of aid. All countries need to move. And countries on the development path perhaps have the most to gain from using this global forum to promote their development in sustainable and sustainably green ways. But they don't always see it that way. There's clearly some more convincing to do.

And COP26 – held under social distancing rules – did give birth to a host of meaningful, bilateral agreements which are themselves signs of important progress. The EU and U.S. led a coalition of 103 countries – covering 70% of global economic activity – to join the Global Methane Pledge, a collective agreement to reduce national and regional methane emissions to 30% of their 2020 level by 2030.¹⁸ Methane is the second largest contributor to global warming – behind only carbon. The agreement – which China, India and Russia refused to join – includes some important fine print: it says the parties will work on a common methodology for measuring methane outputs. Seemingly non-controversial, those words mean progress will be monitored and evaluated – both crucial elements of success. Elsewhere at COP, the U.S. and China unexpectedly launched the “U.S. China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s.”¹⁹ The agreement pledges joint action from the world's two largest economies on methane emissions (the Chinese refusal on the methane pledge notwithstanding), the transition to clean energy and de-carbonisation. And it includes the crucial phrase “in the 2020s,” which means, effectively, now.

¹⁶ Damian Carrington, “‘Blah, Blah, Blah:’ Greta Thunberg Lambasts Leaders over Climate Crisis,” *The Guardian*, 28 September 2021.

¹⁷ Robert Hales and Brendan Mackey, “The Ultimate Guide to Why the COP26 Summit Ended in Failure and Disappointment (Despite a Few Bright Spots),” *The Conversation*, 14 November 2021.

¹⁸ Statement, *Launch by the United States, the European Union and Partners of the Global Methane Pledge to Keep 1.5 Degrees within Reach*, 02 November 2021.

¹⁹ Press Release, *U.S. China Joint Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s*, 10 November 2021.

'The mismatch between the rising number of global challenges and the limited reach of national governments has never been greater.'

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[John Kemp, "Climate Change Targets are Slipping Out of Reach," Reuters, 16 April 2019.](#)

²¹
[Bentley Allan and Todd Tucker, "The EU, U.S. Steel Deal Could Transform the Fight Against Climate Change," The Washington Post, 31 October 2021.](#)

²²
The EU has worked hard to frame its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) in ways that are World Trade Organisation (WTO) friendly. But other nations have objected to many provisions and a host of WTO challenges are foreseen. The notion of sector-specific agreements has emerged as a potentially potent, less confrontational way of getting a community of nations behind common measures. See Ibid.

²³
One of the best explorations of digital rules is still the first – Hal Varian and Carl Shapiro's seminal *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy*. See Hal R. Varian and Carl Shapiro, *Information Rules: A Strategic Guide to the Network Economy* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Review Press, 1998).

²⁴
The list is up to date as of 09 December 2021.

Obviously, these steps on their own won't hold atmospheric carbon levels to 450 parts per million, the proximate goal nations pledged at COP25 in Paris in 2015.²⁰ But they are steps in the right direction – and crucially they set up pathways for global delivery in key areas. And, indeed, as crucial as global agreement is, it's the lesser-known U.S.-EU dialogue that may hold the key to ultimate success. In October 2021, on the eve of COP26, the U.S. and EU agreed to set aside their damaging steel-sector tariffs and work towards "the world's first carbon-based sectoral arrangement" in the steel- and aluminium-smelting sector.²¹ The deal – prompted by EU plans to impose a Common Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), effectively a carbon tax on goods coming in the EU – is built around definitions: the two sides will attempt to measure "life-cycle emissions" in the steel and aluminium sectors – and later they will place restrictions on imports when it can be determined that the steel was not made with environmentally friendly methods.²² The deal is meant to change future behaviour and market expectations – it puts the world's steel-making nations on notice that carbon use will not be unwittingly exported by buying goods from countries with lower environmental standards and it gives steel makers a strong incentive to reform. And it frees the U.S. and EU from a nasty fight over goals and objectives in an area where they fundamentally agree.

The TTC could well play a crucial role here, as well. Working Group 2 – one of 10 working groups set up to negotiate between meetings of the principals – is committed to "climate and clean tech." Coming on the back of the steel agreement, its mandate is to "jointly explore the methodologies, tools and technologies for calculating embedded greenhouse gas emissions in global trade." That's more than just bureaucratic double speak. It means the body is prepared to set out a common approach to measuring things which could become the basis for wide-ranging commitments at a later date. The work – if agreed at the U.S.-EU level – could become the basis for a global carbon-pricing system where carbon-use is priced into all goods sold on global markets. And that, in turn, would incentivise progress in other areas – and make national climate-change-fighting measures easier to develop and justify.

II. Digital Governance

It's easy to forget that digital technology is relatively new. The modern wedge of the industry took shape in the 1990s against a regulatory backdrop designed to allow innovation to flourish before new rules set in.²³ But that time has now come. To date, Europe has led the way on the rule part – adopting a tough cross-economy privacy regulation years before other nations saw its need or utility. But Americans have led the way, too – not so much in regulation, but in being the epicentre of the fourth industrial revolution, home to several former startups which now serve as the world's five largest companies: Apple Inc., Microsoft Corporation, Alphabet Inc., Amazon.com Inc. and Meta Platforms Inc..²⁴ American companies are the inventors and almost sole proprietors of online search, social media and cloud computing.

'One of the great successes of 2021 was the stunning, unexpected and warmly welcomed global minimum corporate tax rate.'

The result is a strange anomaly: Europeans have almost no global technology companies – *The Economist* estimates that of the top 200 technology companies in the world, only eight are European.²⁵ And yet, Europeans are among the most avid Internet and social-media users in the world – leading American search engines and social-media platforms enjoy higher usage in Europe than in America.²⁶ Americans, by contrast, have the world's largest companies, and yet regulation at the federal level fails to move far beyond aggressive debate and dadaesque hearings in the U.S. Congress, where old men in suits show how little they know about a phenomenon that has touched nearly every aspect of the lives their constituents are nominally leading.

Perhaps because of the unique incentives, Europeans have responded with an aggressive new strategy – put in place while Donald J. Trump was still president – which involves hobbling the American companies in ways that are, sometimes admitted openly, intended to help European companies develop in their place. But it is unclear how or if these punitive measures will do anything more than extract a pound of flesh from American companies whose services Europeans continue to use in droves.²⁷ And it could easily turn the European high-tech landscape into an investment wasteland, one whose rules are seen as anathema to growth despite the preponderance of deep technology and advanced scientific knowledge which Europe boasts.

And this is where the TTC could come in. Working Group 5 is “tasked to exchange information on our respective approaches to data governance and technology platform governance, seeking consistency and interoperability where feasible” adding “we also plan to engage in a discussion on effective measures to appropriately address the power of online platforms and ensure effective competition and contestable markets.”²⁸ In the area of artificial intelligence, the two parties vow to undertake a joint study on AI's use, potential abuse and ways of regulating it in the right direction. And it sets out an array of areas where mutually agreed rules could help, including “illegal and harmful content and their algorithmic amplification, transparency, and access to platforms' data for researchers as well as the democratic responsibility of online intermediaries.”

Frankly, both sides could use some assistance. The U.S. market is palpably under-regulated – many states, like California, have had to step in with state-level laws on things like privacy because the federal government seems unable to act.²⁹ But Europe, too, could use a boost. Its efforts to build national footprints in the digital area will not be helped by regulation that punishes success with thresholds and ex-ante regulation. Put simply, the dialogue offers an excellent forum for reasoning through these common problems together.³⁰ And it holds out hope of reaching common solutions that would 1) avoid a transatlantic trade war as the proposed digital tax almost did, and 2) hold out hope that the big platforms can be effectively regulated at the global level. The agreement would have the full, joint weight of the U.S. government and the EU regulatory bodies behind it. See the box on page 8 for a view of how this joint approach might look.

25 The figures are from [Charlemagne, “Europe’s History Explains Why It Will Never Produce a Google,” *The Economist*, 13 October 2018](#). See also, [The Economist, “Europe is Now a Corporate Also-Ran. Can It Recover Its Footing?” *The Economist*, 05 June 2021](#).

26 Facebook has 308 million active daily users and 419 million active monthly users in Europe including Russia and Turkey. By comparison, Facebook has 195 million active daily users and 258 million active monthly users in the U.S. and Canada. The figures are from 2020. See [Facebook, Inc. Annual Report 2020](#). Google also had a larger share of the online search market (93%) in Europe than in the U.S. (88%) in 2020. See [StatCounter, “Search Engine Market Share Worldwide,” accessed December 2021](#).



'Nations need to look well beyond their borders for many solutions.'

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See also, [Paul Hofheinz, "Gatekeepers or Market Makers? What the Evidence Tells Us," The Forum: A Lisbon Council Initiative, 18 January 2021.](#)

28
Op. cit. *U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council Inaugural Joint Statement.*

29
The U.S. has tough data privacy rules in three areas – health, education and finance – but they apply mostly in a sectoral context. In recent years, there has been much discussion in policy circles about a broader U.S. privacy law, which was once thought would be an early initiative of the Joseph R. Biden administration. But no concrete proposals have emerged. For an interesting discussion of a little-known 2012 Obama-era initiative, see [Natasha Singer, "Why a Push for Online Privacy is Bogged Down in Washington," The New York Times, 28 February 2016.](#)

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In December 2021, European Commission Executive Vice President Margrethe Vestager, U.S. Federal Trade Commission Chair Lina Khan and Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter of the U.S. department of justice antitrust division met in Washington DC to formally launch the EU-U.S. Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue, a new forum to run in parallel to the TTC. The dialogue will take place at "high-level meetings as well as regular staff discussion" and concentrate on "developing common approaches and strengthening the cooperation on competition policy and enforcement in the technology sector." Visit https://ec.europa.eu/competition-policy/system/files/2021-12/EU-US_Joint_Dialogue_Statement_12.6.21_1.pdf.

Disinformation is another promising area. The EU is offering tougher rules in its digital services act, currently working its way through the arcane European decision making process.³¹ But Europe already boasts an effective mechanism – and two years of experience – for addressing lies that spread online through its code of practice on disinformation programme.³² This 66-member public-private partnership works with the European Commission to identify and weed out disinformation. Every three months managers must report the level of posts deemed false or inauthentic on a platform – and the number taken down. Later, a group of regulators, advertisers and non-governmental organisations evaluate those filings under the European Commission's supervision. The complex system solves a central problem in this debate: it takes the decision about what constitutes disinformation out of the hands of private companies and governments and it puts that power in the hands of a broad community, using transparency and

The Faces of Change



Margrethe Vestager @vestager · Dec 9, 2021

I think that you are right @davidcicilline. We will work for it. Inspiring each other!



David Cicilline @davidcicilline · Dec 9, 2021

An absolute pleasure to meet with @vestager, @amyklobuchar, @RepKenBuck, @SenatorDurbin, @SenMikeLee, and @ossoff to discuss the need for rules to protect fair competition online.

Make no mistake, change is coming on both sides of the Atlantic. It must.



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Source: Twitter

'National action, taken unilaterally, can often entrench differences and make the actual problems harder to solve at the global level.'

reporting requirements as a cleanser. The rules are set to be toughened later this year. And the code recently attracted 16 new organisations and companies to join – including Adobe, Reporters Without Borders, Twitch and WhatsApp – holding out the prospect that this innovative way of defining common standards and effectively policing a complex phenomenon could serve as a model of good governance and effective community-based initiative.³³

III. Security by Design

To be sure, the Internet has brought the world together in crucial ways – and its achievements are not entirely ephemeral. Behind the e-mail, posts, searches and video streams stands a complex communication network – one based on standards and global norms that are evolving and still very much in development.³⁴

But a major fight is brewing there as well. The fact is, while the U.S. withdrew into an isolationist position under President Trump – and the European Commission dealt with a leadership transition – the Chinese moved aggressively to fill the gap.³⁵ Buoyed by the success of Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd. and other national telecommunications companies, they stepped up their presence in the international standard setting bodies, boldly declaring their intention to unite behind a China Standards 2035 agenda and often arriving to meetings well organised with talented delegations and well-crafted positions.³⁶

At the International Telecommunications Union (ITU), a United Nations agency where governments set common global standards for the telecommunications industry, the Chinese tabled a proposal for a 'New IP' protocol system which, if adopted, would embed Chinese views of how the Internet should operate – including requirements that people who use the Internet register in a central directory and provisions under which governments could cut citizens off the Internet at will.³⁷ In 2019 alone, China submitted 830 proposals to ITU technical committees, more than the next three countries – South Korea, the U.S. and Japan – combined.³⁸ And this regulatory juggernaut is backed by real money, too; the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative earmarks an estimated \$385 billion [€339 billion] for loans that might be used to purchase Chinese equipment and "advice" that might be given on how best to use it.³⁹ In 2019, under the short-lived government of Giuseppe Conte, Italy joined the initiative, becoming the first European country to do so.⁴⁰

Despite its disengagement, the U.S. was among the first to spot the Chinese problem, i.e., the threat posed by allowing equipment made by companies owned by the Chinese government and military to be installed at key nodes in western communication networks. President Trump moved aggressively to ban Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd. and 70 of its affiliates from participation in U.S. cellular networks on "national security" grounds. The ban initially blocked all U.S.-based companies – including some headquartered in Europe – from cooperating with or using equipment from the blacklisted companies and set in motion a confusing scramble to comply. U.S. President Joseph R. Biden later ratified and strengthened the measure, adding additional Chinese companies to the list and closing a

31 [European Commission, Regulation on a Single Market for Digital Services \(Digital Services Act\) and Amending Directive 2000/31/EC \(Brussels: European Commission, 2020\).](#)

32 Visit <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/code-practice-disinformation>.

33 Ibid.

34 For an interesting discussion on the evolving norms, see [David D. Clark and Marjory S. Blumenthal, "The End-to-End Argument and Application Design: The Role of Trust," Federal Communications Law Review, March 2011.](#)

35 For a good overview, see [Julianne Smith, Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Carisa Nietzsche and Ellison Laskowski, Charting a Transatlantic Course to Address China \(Washington DC: Center for a New American Security and German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2020\).](#) The lead author of this study, Julianne Smith, is now U.S. ambassador to NATO.

36 [Mark Montgomery and Theo Lebryk, "China's Dystopian 'New IP' Plan Shows Need for Renewed U.S. Commitment to Internet Governance," Just Security Blog, 13 April 2021.](#)

37 Ibid. See also, [Hascall Sharp and Olaf Kolkman, "Discussion Paper: An Analysis of the 'New IP' Proposal to ITU-T," Internet Society, 27 April 2020.](#)

38 Hideaki Ryugen and Hiroyuki Akiyama, "China Leads the Way on Global Standards for 5G and Beyond," *Financial Times*, 05 August 2020.

‘Seen correctly, the era in which we live is not a nihilistic one.’

The Great Reset: Global Talks and International Fora

Governments still make policy and citizens still vote in elections. But the need for global rules has spawned a plethora of top-level bodies hashing out world-improving agreements through multilateral negotiation. Here’s a short guide to several of the most important.

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The mother of all negotiations. 197 nations are members. In 2015, countries agreed to limit global temperature rises to 1.5-2.0 degrees celsius above pre-industrial levels. The problem is, it’s a goal and not a programme. Negotiations over how to reach the target are ongoing. In 2021, the convention delivered little but the pressure of annual meetings and the high-stakes format gave birth to several important multilateral initiatives, including the *Global Methane Pledge* and the *U.S.-China Glasgow Declaration on Enhancing Climate Action in the 2020s*.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

This year, 130 governments joined a stunning agreement, brokered by the OECD, establishing a global minimum corporate tax applicable worldwide. The 38-member government-owned thinktank’s *Guidelines for Recipient Country Investment Policies Relating to National Security*, *OECD AI Principles* and *Communiqué on Product Safety Pledges* have become the standard bearers for global collaboration in these areas. Crucial talks on global guidelines covering “government access to personal data” opened in December 2020.

U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council

“Without prejudice to the regulatory autonomy of the U.S. and EU,” the Trade and Technology Council has been set up to bring the U.S. and EU back together on key issues of future regulation. The talks are divided across 10 working groups (see Table 1 on page 2). For now, negotiators have done little but discover how wide a gap remains on many issues. But the mere fact that the U.S. and EU are talking is news. A solution reached between these two regions – accounting for some 42% of global gross domestic product – would be a powerful signal that the world’s democracies can still work together. And it would lead to better, more effective regulation for domestic markets as well.

European Union

The EU is a pioneer of multi-government solution making. One founder, Jean Monnet, crafted a unique – and uniquely successful – way of bringing nations together around common decision making and pooled sovereignty; It’s still called “the Monnet method” in EU circles. Today, the EU is focused on reaching net-zero-carbon emissions by 2050 and completing its so-called “banking union,” which would transfer bank-sector rule-making from national to EU level. Last Autumn, the EU agreed a common “backstop” offering continent-wide systemic support to the banking system in case of trouble.

Budapest Convention on Cybercrime

Negotiated in 2001 at the Council of Europe, this little-known global treaty has been ratified by 65 countries, including the United States. It aims to set common rules against cybercrime, including agreeing the legal powers necessary for investigation and prosecution for hacking, computer-related fraud, child pornography and other offenses. Russia, which opposes the Budapest Convention and refuses to cooperate with most international investigations, recently proposed a rival convention on cybercrime at the United Nations.

'The challenge of democratic governments is to ensure that technology is used to strengthen democracy.'

loophole that had allowed the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to issue exemptions.⁴¹

The decision – taken unilaterally on the U.S. side – caught many Europeans off guard. For better or worse, many European carriers had been attracted by the Chinese companies' generous terms for high quality network equipment. There was just one problem: a mounting pile of evidence showed that the Chinese government could – and probably already was – using this prominent spot in Europe's technology stack to spy on people and possibly to steal commercial secrets.⁴² And, even if they weren't, these network nodes could easily be "upgraded" to spy at a later date through firmware updates.

The blow up took place against the backdrop of a crucial set of decisions regarding the rollout of 5G-based broadband cellular networks and the development of a so-called "sixth generation wireless communications standard," or 6G, destined to play a role in smart cities and autonomous cars.⁴³ Several competing initiatives have emerged. The biggest of them – the Third Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) – brings most the world's most important telecommunications technology companies together under one roof. Huawei Technologies Co. Ltd, Telefonaktiebolaget LM Ericsson, Nokia Corporation and AT&T Inc. all participate. And membership is spread regionally through the active participation of seven leading national organisations.⁴⁴ Elsewhere, the O-RAN Alliance – made up primarily of network operators – is developing an "open radio access network for 5G," which will offer an "open-architecture" solution to run on "vendor-neutral" hardware, thereby decreasing reliance on any single 5G hardware provider and taking crucial standards decisions away from dominant equipment providers.⁴⁵ The European Committee for Electrotechnical Standardisation (CENELEC) continues to be influential – largely thanks to the major European footprint in the cell phone market and its one-for-the-ages hit – the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) – developed in 1991 by the [European Telecommunications Standards Institute \(ETSI\)](#), a constituent member, at the behest of the European Commission.⁴⁶

The diversity of these bodies is indicative of an important fact. Standard setting in the democratic world is largely the outcome of a broad-based process, one built on values of inclusion and often left largely up to the private sector – which usually means companies but also NGOs and consumer advocates. That undoubtedly helps deliver buy-in if and when decisions are taken, but it is not always the most linear way of making things happen.

And while technology is neutral, the standards and laws that govern it are anything but. Good, careful regulation can make technology use and deployment a net win for society. But bad regulation can quickly turn little-known standards into market closing tools that protect incumbents or impose the recondite world views of, say, the world's autocracies, which fear an open Internet, on the rest of us.

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A CNAS/GMFUS paper notes that "China is rarely subtle about what it expects in return" for loans and investment. Examples include pressure on Greece, which received a Chinese investment in Piraeus Port, to block an EU statement criticising China for human-rights abuses at the U.N. Human Rights Council. In March 2020, the Chinese ambassador to the Czech Republic criticised that country for launching a research project with Taiwan shortly after China delivered a large shipment of respirators and masks intended to help with the pandemic. See *Charting a Transatlantic Course to Address China*, op.cit.
More recently, China has moved to punish Lithuania for withdrawing from a China-led diplomatic initiative and increasing diplomatic ties with Taiwan. Though no official change of policy has been announced, Chinese trade officials have blocked European goods at Chinese ports because, they said, some parts originated in Lithuania. Goods from France, Germany and Sweden have been affected. See [Jakob Hanke Vela, Giorgio Leali and Stuart Lau, "France Eyes Quick Anti-China Action to Bail out Lithuania in Trade War," Politico, 06 January 2022.](#)

40
In Europe's neighborhood, Montenegro borrowed \$944 million [€709 million at the 2014 exchange rate] from China's Exim Bank to build a highway from Bar, an Adriatic Sea seaport, to the Serbian border. The highway remains unbuilt. Repayment of the loan, which amounts to almost one-fifth of the country's annual gross domestic product, has begun and is severely straining the Montenegro economy. The country has requested repayment assistance from the European Union. See [Euractiv, "Montenegro Starts Paying off \\$1 Billion Chinese Road Loan," Euractiv, 22 July 2021.](#)

'Europe's efforts to build national footprints in the digital area will not be helped by regulation that punishes success with thresholds and ex-ante rules.'

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Among the companies added to the ban by the Biden Administration are ZTE Corporation, Hangzhou Hikvision Digital Technology Co. Ltd., Hytera and Zhejiang Dahua Technology Co. Ltd. See [Ron Amadeo, "The U.S. Closes Huawei Loophole, Will No Longer Grant Exceptions for Internet Service Providers," *Ars Technica*, 12 November 2021.](#)

42

[Hosuk Lee-Makiyama, "Stealing Thunder: Cloud, IoT and 5G Will Change the Strategic Paradigm for Protecting European Commercial Interests," *European Centre for International Political Economy \(ECIPE\)*, 2017.](#)

43

A recent European Commission initiative – a proposed revision to the 2010 directive on intelligent transport systems (ITS) which would set smart-mobility network standards throughout the 27-member bloc – ran into unexpected trouble when it was rejected by EU member states. Several countries complained that the standards were too tightly defined and relied too much on WiFi and not enough on cellular networks. The European Commission tabled a new proposal in December 2021. See [European Parliament, "Legislative Train Schedule: Review of the Directive 2010/40/EU on the Framework for the Deployment of Intelligent Transport systems in the Field of Road Transport and for Interfaces with Other Modes of Transport," December 2021.](#)

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The members of the 3GPP consortium are the Association of Radio Industries and Businesses (ARIB-Japan), the Alliance for Telecommunications Industry Solutions (ATIS-USA), China Communications Standards Association (CCSA-China), the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), the Telecommunications Standards Development Society (TSDSI-India), the Telecommunications Technology Association (TTA-Korea) and the Telecommunication Technology Committee (TTC-Japan). Visit <https://www.3gpp.org/>.

China is a good example. Technology there serves a different purpose than it does in the democratic world, where individual rights and consumer protection are goals we seek and values we cherish. With a powerful Communist Party towering over the economy and society, technology is routinely used to keep the 1.4 billion citizens in their place – and even to track the “China tendencies” of foreign journalists and commentators via their social media posts.⁴⁷ A complex system of “social rating” punishes Chinese citizens who criticise the regime or demonstrate behaviour that the government frowns upon. And artificial intelligence (in the form of face-recognition technology) is used aggressively to control the Uyghur population, whose 1.6 million-square-kilometre Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in West China has become tantamount to a prison. To top it off, China bans Facebook outright. The social media network, often derided as a “threat to democracy” in the West, is seen as an organising tool too powerful for the public to possess in China.

Over the years, the U.S. and Europe have usually found easy, common ground in mutual recognition of product standards, accepting “equivalence” as a way of allowing goods to flow across borders. But both regions have been prone to neglect the international fora whose importance has grown as the global economy has become more interconnected.

This is where the TTC comes in. Faced with the unseemly prospect of rising Chinese power in the international standard-setting bodies and bruised from the wounds of a major transatlantic conflict over Huawei, the U.S. and EU pledged that “cooperation in the TTC is intended to feed into coordination in multilateral bodies, including in the WTO.” Working Group 1 will “identify opportunities for collaborative proactive action and defend our common interests in international standards for critical and emerging technologies.” It will also “develop both formal and informal cooperation mechanisms to share information regarding technical proposals in specified technology areas and seek opportunities to coordinate on international standards activities.”

At the end of the day, the West wants nothing more than good governance and fair decisions. That's a harder agenda to defend than one based on backing your national standards against all challengers. But it's a balance that Europe and the U.S. could easily find together. For starters, it would help if they paid more attention to the work unfolding at these international bodies. Leadership elections might be a good place to start. The U.S. and EU have no interest in imposing decisions on these bodies – part of the point of standing for good governance based on dialogue and inclusion is to let the dialogue and inclusion take its course. But they could stand to keep the international bodies firmly united behind an agenda that supports democracy and openness – values that are commonly accepted in the West even as many, many governments elsewhere use digital power to entrench their rule. Put simply, they could work together to avoid letting crucial global agendas be hijacked by autocratic governments.⁴⁸

'The Internet has brought the world together in crucial ways.'

And they did just that, in fact, at the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO), where the U.S. and EU led a block of democratic states to see through the election of Daren Tang from Singapore as the next director general in March 2020 (the Chinese had fronted their own candidate).⁴⁹ The ITU, meanwhile, has been run for eight years by Houlin Zhao, a Chinese ICT engineer. Now Russia is openly campaigning, hoping to put its former deputy minister of telecommunications in the job with Chinese support.⁵⁰ The election is scheduled for September 2022.⁵¹

Artificial intelligence is another crucial area. The U.S. has been slow to figure out how it plans to regulate this fast-emerging technology – though several bills are being discussed in the U.S. Congress and a widely noted blog from the Federal Trade Commission indicated that agency's intention to regulate AI aggressively through the powers it already has.⁵² Europe, meanwhile, is walking sure-footedly through the legislative door. The proposed artificial intelligence act – which groups artificial intelligence into four categories requiring differentiated levels of regulation – is before the European Parliament and EU member states now.⁵³ But there is little difference on the goals here: both regions would like to see AI develop down a safe path; both would like to see AI used to deliver better services and scientific breakthroughs; and both would like to see their companies succeed in a thriving global market – without watching the technology routinely used for repressive human-rights violations elsewhere.⁵⁴ The TTC proposes a joint reflection on AI – looking at what areas might need to be regulated and which not.⁵⁵

The OECD has also emerged as an important forum for negotiating common rules in these and other areas, including investment screening. The four-page *OECD Guidelines for Recipient Country Investment Policies Relating to National Security*, first published in 2009 and updated in 2020, remains the gold standard on these issues.⁵⁶ Through the TTC, Europe and the U.S. recommit to these principles as a platform for future agreement. Every year, the OECD hosts a biannual [Freedom of Investment Roundtable](#) where the protocol's 54 signatories – the 38 OECD member governments plus 16 adherents – can discuss emerging transnational best practice in this field and reason towards common solutions together.

Lurking behind these initiatives is a strange fact: most standards are too technical and boring for ordinary people to understand. But that doesn't make them any less important. Agreed standards are the fuel that has driven global commerce forward.⁵⁷ They are also the principal tools for protecting the population – in health and safety terms but also in fundamental areas like market access and fairness. The U.S. and EU have every reason in the world to collaborate here, but that doesn't mean they will. The effort must be on defining common goals, being open to new approaches and working past minor differences towards major agreements. Basic alignment in key areas could deliver even more protection to citizens – and shore up the values of openness, human rights and democracy in a global context for decades ahead.

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The "open architecture" is intended to be fully compatible with the 3GPP standards being negotiated elsewhere. Visit <https://www.o-ran.org/>.

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A recent study from the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation found that ETSI had more members elected to crucial committee chairs and vice-chairs than any other agency in the 3GPP project, indicating their influence remains large in this crucial body. See [Alexandra Bruer and Doug Brake, Mapping the International 5G Standards Landscape and How It Impacts U.S. Strategy and Policy](#) (Washington DC: Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, 2021).

47
[Cate Cadell, "China Harvests Masses of Data on Western Targets, Documents Show," The Washington Post, 31 December 2021.](#)

48
Wolfgang Ischinger, chair of the Munich Security Conference, calls this "security by design." In a widely-read op-ed, he called for the EU to create an "Office of the Chief Security Officer" to vet EU proposals – including digital – for the security implications. The intervention was intended to highlight the fact that many digital-technology regulatory measures have key security implications; he writes that those implications need to be taken into consideration as decisions are made. See [Wolfgang Ischinger, "It's Time to Security Proof the EU's Future," Politico, 26 October 2021.](#)

49
[World Intellectual Property Organisation, "WIPO's Coordination Committee Nominates Singapore's Daren Tang for Post of Director General," WIPO press release, 04 March 2020.](#)

'Technology in China serves a different purpose than it does in the democratic world.'

The Way Ahead

The TTC talks are not a solution to the world's problems. But they offer a useful and helpful path towards resolving them. Put simply, nations have spent too much time trying to solve global problems with national initiative. These efforts are doomed to fail. They simply cannot succeed in an economy as large and heterogenous as the world's has become. They won't save democracy. They won't reverse rising inequality. And they won't take us to net-zero-emissions on any conceivable timeframe.

But collaboration offers a different perspective. Seventy years ago, Europe's founders saw this. People like Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet understood that the path to peace lay through economic integration – and integration would be driven by a process of mutual problem solving, common analysis and ultimately a "pooling" of sovereignty, which is actually a very clever way of leveraging it. And the experiment has worked. More recent efforts to undo that collaboration – including Britain's painful exit from the EU and the awkward years of the Trump Administration – have only demonstrated the harm that comes when the world's democracies revert to clumsy attempts to solve global problems on their own.

Seen correctly, the era in which we live is not a nihilistic one. Public discourse has deteriorated, driven by populism and amplified by a technology whose power still sits awkwardly at the heart of democracy. But a rival – and very positive – process has been at work as well. Put simply, in few eras has the fate of the planet rested so squarely on the search for mutually agreeable solutions in the quiet corridors of the world's multilateral institutions. And few eras have known as many potential avenues towards peace and prosperity as this one.

While populists decry the inability of institutions to deliver – wanly blaming our governing bodies for failure and blithely using their indignation to tear those institutions down – it falls on the rest of us, the working men and women, the officials who sit in the trade negotiations and standard-setting bodies every day, to rise to the occasion and do everything we can to serve as the glue that holds democracy together and moves the world forward in crucial ways. The big issues will be decided at the political level and the ballot box – that's how it has always been and how it should be in a democratic society. But seldom has the work of the civil service assumed such critical importance. It's up to us to grasp the historic chance offered by the ongoing dialogue and the unprecedented scope for finding better solutions to problems that plague us all. An opportunity – once in a generation – has been handed to us.

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[The Russian Government announced the candidacy of Rashid Ismailov](#) in April 2021.

51

See also [Kristen Cordell, "The Upcoming International Telecommunication Union Election: Go Down-Ballot," CSIS Commentary, 21 July 2021.](#)

52

[Elisa Jillson, "Aiming for Truth, Fairness and Equity in Your Company's Use of Artificial Intelligence," Federal Trade Commission Blog, 19 April 2021.](#)

53

[European Commission, Artificial Intelligence Act \(Proposal\), 21 April 2021.](#)

54

OECD AI Principles could provide a good starting point. The principles were agreed in record time, and, only one month later, adopted almost wholesale into the G20 agenda at the Osaka summit. Visit the OECD AI Principles Observatory at <https://oecd.ai/en/ai-principles>.

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For an excellent analysis of the scope for global collaboration, see [Cameron F. Kerry, Joshua P. Meltzer, Andrea Renda, Alex C. Engler and Rosanna Fanni, Strengthening International Cooperation on Artificial Intelligence \(Brussels and Washington DC: Centre for European Policy Studies \(CEPS\) and Brookings Institution, 2021\).](#)

56

See [OECD, Guidelines for Recipient Country Investment Policies Relating to National Security \(Paris: OECD, 2007\)](#) and [Ibid, Recommendation of the Council on Guidelines for Recipient Country Investment Policies Relating to National Security \(Paris: OECD, 2020\).](#)

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See especially the fascinating discussion in Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

‘The U.S. and EU could work together to avoid letting crucial global agendas be hijacked by autocratic governments.’

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‘Never before has the work of such relatively obscure bodies taken on such crucial significance.’

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ISSN: 2031-0935 (digital); 2031-0927 (print)

The interactive policy brief is published by the Lisbon Council. The responsible editor is Paul Hofheinz, president, the Lisbon Council.



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