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President Obama Goes to Europe: Top Five Policy Recommendations

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President Obama's visit to Europe this week will be an important opportunity for the U.S. President to restate America's commitment to the transatlantic partnership, strengthen the NATO alliance, and shore up European opposition to Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Across the Atlantic, President Obama should also take note of the mounting disillusionment with the European Union, expressed in recent European parliamentary elections, and voice his support for the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination in Europe, as well as economic freedom and free trade.

Below are Heritage's recommendations for what the President should do and say in his meetings with European leaders and in his public and private statements.

1. Develop a New Strategy to Deal with Russia

Recent events have confirmed what many already knew: The so-called Russian reset is dead. The difference between Russia and the West right now is that Russia has a strategy that it is willing to follow, while the West only has a response to events in Ukraine. The U.S. and its allies in

Europe need a new approach and strategy to deal with Russia. The West should be united in its firm opposition to Russian aggression against eastern Ukraine and its illegal occupation of Crimea. President Obama should also reject Russia's covert support of anti-Ukrainian agents and activities in eastern Ukraine.

Some of Europe's leading powers, including Germany, have resisted tougher measures against Russia for fear of weakening their economic and trading ties with Moscow. Spain has allowed the Russian navy to use its ports in North Africa, while France has been actively arming the Russians through a series of lucrative defense deals.

President Obama should clearly voice U.S. disappointment with Spain's and France's collaboration with Moscow and request that each nation cease its support to the Russian navy while the crisis in Ukraine continues. It is unacceptable that two important U.S. allies in Europe are offering support to the Russian military at a time when Moscow is attempting to dismember Ukraine and undermining the security of the Baltic States.

2. Bolster the NATO Alliance and the Baltic States

During his visit to Europe, President Obama should underscore the central importance and role of the NATO alliance in underwriting transatlantic security and reiterate America's commitment to the mutual defense of NATO member states. The President should make clear to Russia that any armed aggression toward a NATO member will immediately cause him to call for NATO to invoke Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at
<http://report.heritage.org/ib4234>

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The President should emphasize that the survival of NATO depends on the development of increased defense capabilities by European member states, as well as on the willingness of all NATO member states to stand up to Russian efforts to re-establish a sphere of interest in the independent states of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus.

President Obama should halt base closings in Europe and pledge a firm commitment to America's military presence across the Atlantic. It is time for NATO to scrap the 1997 agreement with Russia, which limits the basing of NATO assets in Central and Eastern Europe. This would offer more opportunities for joint military training and demonstrate U.S. commitment to transatlantic security.

3. Lift Restrictions on the Export of Natural Gas and Other Forms of Energy to Europe

President Obama should back the lifting of restrictions on the export of natural gas and other forms of energy to U.S. allies in Europe. Reducing energy dependence on Russia would dramatically weaken the economic grip Moscow has on parts of Europe and reinforce the position of NATO allies. Much of Russia's power in Central and Eastern Europe is the result of its control of energy supplies and distribution systems.

Diminishing Russia's economic leverage over the region should be a key component of America's response. This could largely be accomplished simply by liberalizing global energy markets. The U.S. has antiquated and unnecessary restrictions on exporting liquefied natural gas and crude oil, and lifting these restrictions should be a priority.

4. Support National Sovereignty in Europe

A politically unified Europe is not in the interest of the U.S., and the President should not back "ever closer union" within the European Union, including in the critical areas of foreign policy and defense integration. A Europe of independent nation-states would best advance U.S. interests in Europe, a robust and enduring transatlantic alliance, and democracy inside Europe.

Washington should actively promote strong bilateral relationships with individual European nations. This should include strengthening the vital U.S.–U.K. Special Relationship, supporting the development of a comprehensive missile defense program in Europe, and backing the expansion of the Visa Waiver Program to include allies such as Poland.

The U.S. should end its support for political and economic integration in the EU, which has only encouraged the creation of a fundamentally undemocratic federal Europe that is frequently anti-American in outlook. Europe needs greater freedom and self-determination rather than supranationalism and big government. As Margaret Thatcher famously remarked, "That such an unnecessary and irrational project as building a European superstate was ever embarked upon will seem in future years to be perhaps the greatest folly of the modern era."¹

5. Advance Genuine Free Trade and Economic Freedom

Unlike the creation of the European single market, which dismantled trade barriers within Europe, the European single currency is an inherently political project designed to centralize both political and economic decision making across the EU without regard for democratic accountability. With the ongoing European debt crisis, America's stance should be guided by the defense of national sovereignty, opposition to U.S. and EU bailouts of governments or financial institutions, and committed leadership in advancing economic freedom. The U.S. has nothing to gain by propping up the euro, which is increasingly likely to break apart.

In his meetings with European leaders in Brussels, the President should be cautious about the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which could well lead to increased regulation and the importation of the EU's managed market into the U.S. A transatlantic agreement that does not empower consumers and open market opportunities for entrepreneurs would be a bad deal for everyone, especially the U.S. A better alternative for Washington would be to sign free trade agreements with individual European nations if they leave the EU, starting with the United Kingdom if the British people vote to exit the EU in the promised 2017 referendum.

1. Christopher Booker, "The Commonwealth Is Where Britain Belongs," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 9, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/christopherbooker/8053083/The-Commonwealth-is-where-Britain-belongs.html> (accessed June 3, 2014).

The Transatlantic Alliance Matters

A strong transatlantic alliance should be at the heart of both U.S. foreign policy and President Obama's message when he travels to Europe this week. The Obama Administration has attached little importance thus far to the transatlantic alliance, and Europe has barely figured in the Administration's strategic planning.

As he travels to Europe this week, President Obama should seek to reinvigorate partnerships with America's key friends and allies in Europe and support policies that advance national sovereignty and economic freedom across the Atlantic. He should stand firm with America's NATO allies in the

face of the Russian bear and be serious about rebuilding America's military capacity in the European theater. If the world's superpower retreats from Europe, the only beneficiaries will be the enemies of freedom, especially in Moscow.

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