



Transatlantic Expert Group | #2024.02

## Adaptation or Atrophy? The U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council Post-2024

The establishment of the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) in 2021 marked a significant milestone in transatlantic trade relations. It has demonstrated its efficacy in responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine with unprecedented sanctions and advancing economic security initiatives targeting China. However, its achievements in areas such as trade and green technology have been less remarkable. Additionally, it has faced challenges in resolving intricate U.S.-EU trade disputes. The Council's future beyond 2024 remains uncertain and will be heavily influenced by the outcomes of this year's elections on both sides of the Atlantic.

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### 1. Introduction

The inception of what would eventually become the U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was initiated by Brussels, highlighting the growing importance of

technology-related issues in the transatlantic partnership. In a policy communication containing a series of [proposals](#) aimed at strengthening transatlantic relations for the incoming Biden administration, European

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and High Representative Josep Borrell laid the groundwork for the TTC. Following swift internal deliberation, the Biden administration endorsed the concept and actively participated in shaping its design. As a result, the TTC was formally launched by the leaders during the [EU-U.S. summit](#) held in Brussels in June 2021.

The EU initially conceived the TTC as a mechanism to promote trade and improve market access with the United States, particularly in response to the turbulent trade relations experienced during the Trump administration and the lack of political support on both sides of the Atlantic for reengaging in comprehensive transatlantic free trade talks. Accordingly, the idea behind the TTC was to avoid revisiting long-standing trade disputes and instead establish a future-oriented agenda to give the economic relationship with the Biden administration a more positive outlook. Rather than solely focusing on tariffs and market access, the EU hoped that the new format would also facilitate a more formalized structure to discuss technical issues in detail and foster joint standard-setting on new and emerging technologies in the international arena.

Conversely, the Biden administration primarily viewed the TTC as a means to foster alignment with Brussels on matters related to China. These differing interests and objectives have occasionally led to divergent perspectives and tensions within the TTC. However, the role of the TTC has gradually evolved to become more geopolitical and foreign policy-focused following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This event further underscored the importance of robust transatlantic cooperation, bringing the

partners closer together within the TTC framework and prompting a reconsideration of priorities with a greater emphasis on sanctions and export controls, economic security, and reducing risky supply chain dependencies.

Following the last TTC ministerial meeting in Belgium in April and considering the recent elections in the EU and the upcoming ones in the U.S. later this year, it is an opportune moment to evaluate the TTC's progress and explore its future prospects. This policy brief evaluates the accomplishments and deficiencies of the TTC thus far, outlines potential directions for its future development contingent upon the outcomes of the EU and U.S. elections, and offers recommendations to bolster transatlantic cooperation on trade and technology matters in the coming four years.

## **2. Assessing the TTC: accomplishments and deficiencies**

While high initial expectations for the TTC were set, it has consistently played a pivotal role in fostering deeper transatlantic cooperation across various trade and technology issues. Despite criticisms labeling the TTC as merely a "[talk shop](#)," it has demonstrated its utility, particularly at the technical level, by facilitating the exchange of information and alignment of transatlantic approaches in its ten working groups. However, the TTC has fallen short of meeting the lofty expectations set for it, proving largely ineffective in resolving significant transatlantic disagreements, delivering clear policy outputs, engaging external stakeholders in a meaningful way, or spearheading ambitious new initiatives. In consequence, the actual impact of the TTC thus far remains mixed; while undoubtedly beneficial in certain respects, it has

mostly failed to produce any groundbreaking results thus far.

One of the most notable positive functions of the TTC has been its role as the bridge between the respective co-chairs from the United States and the European Union, along with their teams of working-level officials. Since its establishment in June 2021, the TTC has convened twice annually at the principal level, totaling six meetings thus far from the inaugural meeting in [Pittsburgh](#) in September 2021 to the most recent one in [Leuven](#) in April 2024. They have provided a platform for U.S. and EU principals to present a united front, set the agenda, review progress, and announce tangible outcomes elaborated upon by the ten working groups. Moreover, these regular ministerial meetings have offered a rare opportunity for busy principals not only to oversee official proceedings but also to build trust and engage in strategy-level discussions on crucial topics with their counterparts. The significance of rebuilding transatlantic trust should not be underestimated, especially after the Trump administration, and the strong personal connections between U.S. and European officials within the TTC context have contributed to managing disagreements such as those surrounding the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

### Previous TTC Ministerials

1. Pittsburgh, PA	September 29, 2021
2. Paris-Saclay	May 15–16, 2022
3. College Park, MD	December 5, 2022
4. Luleå	May 30–31, 2023
5. Washington, DC	January 30, 2024
6. Leuven	April 4–5, 2024

At working group level, the TTC has facilitated ongoing structured coordination and

occasional informal exchanges between officials in Brussels and Washington. A notable example of the benefits of operational coordination within the TTC was the swift and decisive response by EU and U.S. officials to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This collaboration led to the implementation of unprecedented sanctions and export controls. Similarly, the TTC has helped U.S. and EU officials align their approaches to economic security measures such as investment screening and dual-use export controls vis-à-vis China, in close coordination with other G7 partners.

Although the TTC has generated relatively few headline-grabbing announcements, its working group structure has facilitated incremental progress, particularly on complex technical issues. This includes forging common frameworks and agreements on principles and information-sharing. While cooperation between the U.S. and the EU on digital and technology issues was often lacking during the Trump administration, the TTC has enabled progress on new issues where neither side has clear rules yet, allowing for more flexibility in finding common approaches compared to more entrenched traditional trade issues.

Several of these achievements stand out as particularly significant. Notably, the TTC's collaborative efforts in developing a joint roadmap for AI risk management and trustworthy AI have advanced a unified transatlantic approach to global AI governance. Additionally, the EU-U.S. voluntary joint code of conduct for AI, established within the framework of the TTC, laid the foundation for the [G7 Hiroshima AI process](#), demonstrating how transatlantic alignment within the TTC can be leveraged in broader multilateral forums.

Moreover, the TTC has played a pivotal role in institutionalizing dialogue between U.S. and EU entities, including standard-setting bodies and newly established AI oversight offices on both sides of the Atlantic.

The TTC has also played a key role in promoting standard-setting initiatives, including those related to 6G technology, establishing common definitions and terminologies for emerging technologies such as AI and quantum computing, and facilitating coordination on semiconductor supply chains and subsidies. Additionally, it has helped coordinate efforts in international standard-setting bodies such as the International Telecommunication Union. In some cases, the TTC has contributed to reducing disputes or mitigating trade tensions. An example is the EU digital regulatory agenda, including the Digital Service Act and the Digital Markets Act promoted by the von der Leyen Commission. While the EU repeatedly rebuffed U.S. requests to discuss these regulations within the TTC format, the TTC nevertheless provided a valuable forum for voicing concerns, which eventually helped forge greater transatlantic alignment on digital regulatory matters.

However, despite its merits and contributions, the TTC has fallen short of expectations. It has been notably limited in addressing or resolving bilateral tensions between Washington and Brussels regarding trade and technology matters, though to be fair, resolving long-standing differences has never been its primary intention. A clear example of this shortfall is the transatlantic tensions triggered by the Biden administration's passage of the Inflation Reduction Act in August 2022, which many Europeans perceived as discriminatory and noncompliant with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules. Instead of

attempting to reconcile differences over the IRA within the TTC framework, Presidents Biden and von der Leyen established a [separate task force](#), with senior officials convening outside the TTC. Similarly, on antitrust and competition issues, officials initiated a parallel initiative, the [Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue](#) parallel to the TTC. While having other U.S.-EU discussion formats outside the TTC is not necessarily a flaw, it raises questions about how well-connected these parallel efforts are to the TTC.

Moreover, while discussions in the TTC helped mitigate a transatlantic trade war in response to the U.S. steel and aluminum tariffs imposed by Trump by forging an agreement to delay the imposition of tariffs on the EU, they ultimately failed to reach agreement on a new green steel club. This club was intended to address shared concerns about Chinese overcapacity while also resolving transatlantic differences over the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). In another instance, the TTC facilitated discussions on a critical minerals agreement to address EU concerns about the IRA but did not manage to finalize the deal. These examples suggest that the TTC format, while conducive to dialogue and coordination, is not effective as a problem-solving mechanism for trade issues.

In some respects, the TTC has underperformed or lacked ambition. The transatlantic dispute concerning the IRA presented an opportunity for the U.S. and the EU to collaborate on fostering a more unified approach towards green industrial policy. Despite the EU's proposal for an ambitious [green transatlantic marketplace](#), the accomplishments within the TTC thus far — such as progress on common approaches to EV charging stations,

green procurement, or e-invoicing — have been relatively modest. Additionally, the trade track in the TTC has shown little tangible progress. For instance, while the TTC has helped make strides in standards for sustainable trade, it has fallen short on the issue of mutual recognition of conformity assessments for green tech products.

The lack of progress on trade is less about the effectiveness of the TTC format and more about the changing politics surrounding trade in Washington. It still highlights the EU's inability to present an attractive trade agenda within the TTC that the U.S. is willing to engage with.

Several factors account for the mixed performance of the TTC. Firstly, the structure of the working groups has been inconsistent. Although there are ten different working groups, their effectiveness has varied, and prioritization within the TTC has sometimes been lacking. Additionally, the regularity of biannual ministerial meetings has pressured working

groups to produce results, leading to unrealistic expectations given the need for deliverables on complex issues that do not lend themselves to short-term wins.

Of greater concern are the limited opportunities for industry to provide input and participate in detailed discussions within the TTC. While some attempts have been made to involve stakeholders — with varying degrees of success — the outcomes have been mixed. This has caused many in industry and civil society to feel disconnected from the format, lacking real opportunities for input, and gradually becoming disengaged. This is despite the fact that in many areas, such as critical technology domains like AI and semiconductors or supply chains, the private sector holds significant knowledge and expertise but currently lacks incentives to share data or provide input into the TTC working groups.

## List of TTC Main Outcomes and Deliverables

Working group	Key outcomes
Technology standards cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint AI Roadmap with three working groups</li> <li>• Coordinated positions in international standard-setting bodies</li> <li>• Fostering dialogue between AI agencies</li> <li>• Joint Task Force on Quantum established</li> </ul>
Climate and clean tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint Catalogue of Best Practices on Green Public Procurement issued</li> <li>• Launching the U.S.-EU Clean Energy Incentives Dialogue</li> <li>• Common standard for megawatt charging systems for EVs</li> <li>• In-person stakeholder dialogue on sustainable trade</li> </ul>
Secure supply chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Semiconductors supply chain joint early warning mechanism activated</li> <li>• Agreements on semiconductors subsidy transparency and supply chain early warning mechanisms signed</li> <li>• Information exchange on non-market economic policies affecting semiconductors global supply chains</li> <li>• Mutual recognition on marine equipment and pharmaceutical goods</li> <li>• Minerals Security Partnership Forum established</li> </ul>
ICTs security and competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Vision and Roadmap for 6G adopted</li> <li>• Agreement for collaborative research on 6G</li> <li>• MoUs to scale up and support secure connectivity packages in third countries</li> </ul>
Data governance and technology platform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement on principles to protect children and combat gender-based violence on online platforms</li> </ul>
Misuse of technology threatening security & human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint recommended actions for online platforms on protecting human rights defenders online issued</li> <li>• Common methodology to address foreign information manipulation and interference adopted</li> <li>• Structured threat information exchange on foreign information threats and responses</li> </ul>
Export controls cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint principals on export controls, cooperation on Russia export controls</li> </ul>
Investment screening cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Joint principles on investment screening, dialogue on economic security</li> <li>• Discussions to align approaches on outbound investment screening</li> </ul>
Promoting SME access to and use of digital technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Report on SME digital tools</li> <li>• Talent for Growth Task Force</li> </ul>
Global trade challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade and Labor Dialogue established</li> <li>• Information exchange on non-market trade practices</li> </ul>

### 3. Future of the TTC: Options and considerations

While both U.S. and EU officials have praised the TTC as a success worth preserving, its future remains uncertain and will depend largely on the outcomes of the 2024 elections on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite the outcome of the recent European Parliament elections, Brussels officials have strongly expressed their desire to sustain the bilateral TTC format with Washington but are also open to considering a slightly revised structure. However, there are internal differences within various parts of the European Commission on how to evaluate the TTC.

In contrast, U.S. officials have been somewhat less definitive, considering the potential for a Trump administration to disrupt such plans. While a second Biden administration would likely maintain the TTC in some form, it might streamline operations by reducing the number of working groups and ministerial meetings, refocusing more on economic security-related topics. Nevertheless, the Biden administration would also prioritize institutionalizing cooperation on trade and technology issues through other avenues such as the G7 or bilateral arrangements with partners like Japan and the United Kingdom, potentially diminishing the importance of cooperation with the EU within the TTC.

Conversely, a second Trump administration would almost certainly lead to more volatile transatlantic trade relations. The prospect of a return to a transatlantic tit-for-tat tariff war could spill over into other areas of U.S.-EU cooperation, potentially undermining progress made in the TTC. Moreover, in the event of a tariff confrontation between Washington and Brussels, it is unlikely that the TTC could play a mediating role in finding a solution, given Trump's preference for personal interactions

with foreign leaders and his skepticism of the EU. There is therefore a serious risk that Trump officials would view the TTC as a relic of the Biden era and seek to abandon it altogether, favoring reduced engagement with Brussels in favor of bilateral ties with individual member states.

However, certain elements of TTC cooperation, where there is deep synergy, could still continue at the technical level without overall political direction. This would especially be the case for digital and technology issues, where even a Trump administration would likely see the need to cooperate with the EU to agree on common approaches, as the U.S. would continue to grapple with these issues itself.

In the interim period between the recent elections in the EU in early June and the forthcoming elections in the U.S. in November, the TTC format will linger, albeit with a significantly reduced level of activity. Some of the issues outlined in the joint statement from the April ministerial meeting in Leuven will require additional follow-up work within the working groups. Moreover, the period between the European Parliament elections and the U.S. presidential elections could witness isolated progress at the working group level. However, more ambitious agreements will likely have to wait until after both elections.

With limited official activity during this time, external stakeholders may need to take the lead in driving discussions on issues to foster progress. The realization that much of what has been agreed on in the TTC could easily be discarded by a less cooperative political leadership might spur additional efforts to solidify especially promising areas of cooperation at the agency level or through specific industry-led initiatives that would be more challenging to dismantle.

#### 4. Conclusions and recommendations

While the TTC has not met its [initial high expectations](#), with certain areas showing underperformance and external stakeholders disengaged due to the lack of tangible deliverables or opportunities for input, the format has nonetheless made invaluable contributions to fostering stronger transatlantic cooperation on a range of trade, economic, and technology issues. At the end of the Trump administration, transatlantic relations were in dire straits, characterized by broken trust, sharp tensions, and disagreements across several areas. The establishment of the TTC signaled a mutual commitment to setting aside such differences and investing in a more strategic and forward-looking U.S.-EU relationship.

The TTC has proven highly valuable by establishing a structured framework for convening U.S. and EU officials at both principal and working levels. It has advanced alignment between the U.S. and the EU on fundamental principles and approaches underlying various intricate trade and technology issues. Additionally, it plays a pivotal role in mitigating tensions and facilitating the resolution of disagreements that might otherwise impede progress on the broader transatlantic agenda.

Moreover, by fostering consensus on principles and approaches across a broad spectrum of trade and technology matters, the TTC actively promotes defensive and offensive strategies on critical topics such as AI, semiconductors, 6G, and economic security. However, the TTC's inability to make significant progress on trade issues is more a result of changes in the U.S. approach towards globalization and free trade than a flaw in the format itself.

Ultimately, the TTC is more than just a discussion forum for the U.S. and the EU to convene and coordinate on bilateral trade and

technology matters. It embodies a paradigm shift in globalization, one that prioritizes collaboration with like-minded partners, mitigates risk associated with geopolitical adversaries, and fosters the development of forward-looking joint strategies for technologies poised to define the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moving forward, if there is political commitment in Washington and Brussels to sustain the format in some capacity in 2025, expectations for the TTC will likely need to be tempered somewhat.

Primarily serving as a transatlantic forum for discussing and coordinating on a wide array of transatlantic trade and economic matters, a clear advantage of the TTC is that it allows for progress on more technical issues that might otherwise be challenging to address.

At the same time, the potential for the TTC to adopt a bolder and more ambitious stance should not be overlooked. The format could play an even more important role as a type of 'economic NATO,' focusing on strategically significant areas amid global geostrategic competition, particularly on evolving digital and technology issues. However, this would require both Washington and Brussels to demonstrate greater willingness to compromise and set aside domestic politics to forge a more unified transatlantic competitiveness and resilience agenda. This agenda aims to unlock opportunities posed by emerging technologies by aligning respective industrial policies and subsidies on both sides of the Atlantic, and addressing challenges by strategic rivals such as China. Former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta's recent call for a "[transatlantic single market](#)", aiming to bring the U.S. and the EU closer together in a world marked by growing geopolitical competition, deserves serious consideration in this regard.



## Recommendations

### **Conduct an official evaluation of the TTC:**

Before automatically committing to keeping the TTC format unchanged, both the U.S. and the EU should jointly engage in a comprehensive review to evaluate what aspects of the format were successful and what aspects were not. Based on this assessment, recommendations should be prepared for how to enhance the effectiveness of the format in the future. External stakeholders should be given the opportunity to provide input into this assessment.

### **Elevate the TTC to serve as the central nervous system of transatlantic economic coordination:**

The proliferation of various TTC-adjacent U.S.-EU dialogues and task forces, such as U.S.-EU Cyber Dialogue, Joint Technology Competition Policy Dialogue, and EU-U.S. Task Force on the Inflation Reduction Act, should be reassessed in light of the necessity to ensure alignment among these initiatives. While some of these efforts involve different participants than those typically involved in the TTC, it is crucial to establish a strong connection between them and the TTC to ensure coherence. The potential of the TTC to serve as a comprehensive platform for transatlantic coordination on a wide range of trade and tech issues should be enhanced by establishing a proper feedback mechanism for these initiatives to report back to the TTC and vice versa.

**Streamline the working group structure:** Instead of a sometimes cumbersome mix of ten working groups with varying levels of effectiveness and significant staff time commitments on both sides of the Atlantic, the TTC would benefit from a more streamlined format. Following a thorough review of the working groups' effectiveness, efforts should

be directed towards reducing or consolidating the number of groups to focus on particularly promising or strategically important areas such as economic security, AI and emerging technology standard-setting, or green industrial policy. Conversely, the working group on SMEs, for example, has not made significant progress, and discussions there could be held outside of the TTC format. A more radical proposal could involve separating the tech and trade tracks entirely within the TTC. Given the TTC's greater success on digital and technology issues, establishing a stand-alone Transatlantic Tech Council involving key principals on both sides could be beneficial, allowing for more targeted progress in those areas. Conversely, a separate Transatlantic Trade Council could expand beyond transatlantic tariff discussions to promote greater alignment of U.S. and EU approaches in addressing China's non-market policies and industrial overcapacity. This coordination could involve tariffs against Beijing in sectors such as EVs and green technology.

### **Reduce the frequency of ministerial meetings:**

While the ministerial format has effectively built trust and advanced strategic discussions between TTC co-chairs, it has also imposed unnecessary pressure to deliver results every six months. Transitioning to an annual TTC ministerial meeting, supplemented by occasional informal check-ins, could afford working groups more time to address technical issues and prepare substantial policy deliverables and noteworthy announcements, thereby sustaining stakeholder interest. Reducing meeting frequency and improving efficiency would also foster greater buy-in from working-level officials to devote time to TTC working groups amidst their existing workload. Additionally, aligning the annual TTC

ministerial meeting with regular EU-U.S. summits would facilitate attendance by key principals. In this regard, extending an invitation to the EU High Representative for foreign policy to join TTC ministerial meetings could be beneficial, considering the U.S. Secretary of State's participation. This move is particularly relevant as the TTC has acquired greater geopolitical significance following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the heightened focus on economic security vis-à-vis China. However, hosting too many principals in a single room may also hinder in-depth discussions. To address this, the TTC ministerial format could either organize separate sessions with select officials on specific topics or seek to facilitate broader discussions on cross-cutting issues with the wider group of officials.

**Establish a TTC secretariat to formalize external stakeholder engagement:** While a loose coordination format offers flexibility, creating a more robust institutional mechanism to institutionalize TTC progress could enhance stability and ensure continuity in the face of potential political changes on both sides of the Atlantic. The TTC has faced limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with industry groups, which perceive it as too insular and uninterested in industry input. A notable exception was the Transatlantic Initiative on Sustainable Trade in-person event in Washington in January, which was widely perceived as effective, although it may have been held too late in the TTC process to achieve meaningful impact. Moving forward, more such in-person stakeholder meetings should be encouraged, along with assigning individuals to chair working groups in these stakeholder groups to ensure that recommendations are taken forward. In the event of a Trump presidency in 2025, the role of external stakeholders in driving progress in the

absence of political support may become even more critical. Establishing a small TTC secretariat consisting of only a few dedicated working-level officials could therefore provide a focal point for external stakeholders to handle stakeholder input in a more structured way and better facilitate sharing of data and information between stakeholders and officials. However, proposals for establishing a permanent TTC secretariat must also be carefully evaluated to consider whether added bureaucracy could hamper the effectiveness and agility of the format.

**Boost opportunities for legislative engagement:** Exploring avenues to engage legislators in a dedicated TTC legislative forum should be actively pursued to add more structure and legitimacy to the format amid political shifts on either side of the Atlantic. Since TTC discussions cover numerous issues such as emerging technologies that require legislation, involving legislators earlier in the process would also promote better U.S.-EU regulatory coherence. A TTC legislative forum involving members of the U.S. Congress and the European Parliament could, for instance, take place alongside the existing Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue that convenes bi-annually on both sides of the Atlantic.

**Leverage the TTC's potential as a docking station for collaboration with other like-minded partners:** The concept of the TTC serving as a docking station for cooperation with other like-minded partners warrants further exploration. Establishing a loose information-sharing and coordination mechanism could better facilitate the involvement of partners such as other G7 members like the United Kingdom and Japan once consensus is reached between the U.S. and the EU within the TTC. One possible idea

could be to invite the UK, especially if the Labour Party wins the next UK general election and would promote stronger ties with the EU, as an observer member in the TTC. The aim would be to advance common standards that can later be extended to include other aligned third countries. For instance, European Commission Vice-President Margarethe Vestager's calls

for a "trustworthiness" criterion on critical clean technologies could serve as a good example of how progress in the TTC on establishing such a criterion could then be taken to the rotating G7 secretariat for broader adoption by the club, similar to previous work on the AI code of conduct.

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## About

This policy brief is a product of the [Transatlantic Expert Group](#) which was established by the Bertelsmann Stiftung together with the Bertelsmann Foundation in Washington, DC. The Transatlantic Expert Group identifies vulnerabilities arising from economic interdependencies, analyses the consequences for the political capacity of the EU and the US to act, and develops strategies to improve transatlantic cooperation in order to increase mutual resilience. The findings of the expert group are published in a series of policy briefs. [You can find all policy briefs here.](#)

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