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How Relevant Are Continued Ties with Canada?

John Erik Fossum and Amy Verdun

1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to shed new light on how the relationship between Canada and the European Union (EU) contributes to the EU's goals of sustaining a rule-governed world, reducing external dependence, and stemming off the influence of autocracies such as Russia and China. To that end, we need to establish the nature and strength of EU–Canada relations, the scope of EU–Canada goal convergence, and what Canada might contribute towards reducing EU autocratic dependence. The chapter assesses options for Europeans to strengthen ties and open up new markets and strategic supplies, taking the geopolitical perspective explicitly into consideration. As part of that, we consider the constraints (and opportunities) of geography, which includes the geographical distance that exists between Europe and Canada, and both entities' strong ties with the United States (US). The chapter was written before Donald Trump takes office in January 20, 2025. It is expected that Trump's presidency will have serious impacts on Canada - US and US EU relations. There is great uncertainty what these will be. The chapter does therefore not speculate on the effects of Trump II.

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The chapter starts in the first part by examining the historical context and the basic goals, values, and principles that guide the EU and Canada in their external relations. We then review how much convergence there is between the two, and to what extent these two entities are orientated towards each other in practical terms. In other words, how important is an understanding of their historical relationships, convergence in values and goals for the deepening of their on-going collaboration?

The second part looks at geographical and other constraints on each party. For this assessment, we need to keep in mind Canada's close relationship and bonds to the US. How tight are these bonds, and do they vary with political geography so that some parts of Canada are more tightly linked to the US than others? In the twenty-first century, Canada has re-evaluated its heavy dependence on the US and underlines that it is important to reach out to Europe. It sees Europe as a way to diversify away from an overly close relationship to the US. Having said that, Canada's new markets have been in Asia, and it has thus been developing closer ties with Asia. Nevertheless, Canada places great emphasis on promoting liberal values, and it has a long-standing commitment to multilateralism. Against this backdrop, the relationship with Europe is important and provides the reasons for Canada to have embarked on the Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA) and its Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) with the EU, which it signed in 2016.

The third and final part of the chapter looks at the most important options for Europe in terms of strengthening its ties with Canada. As part of that discussion, the chapter reviews a few of the recent crises in which Canada and the EU share strategic goals.

2 Part I: Historical Relations and Basic Goals

2.1 From Canada–Europe to Canada–EU Relations

Europe and Canada have strong ties that predate the EU by many centuries. After all, the United Kingdom (UK) and France were Canada's two 'founding nations'.¹ It is also at the core of Canadian identity and its cultural manifestation that both English and French culture and language characterise Canada (Resnick, 2005). The francophone connection and its shared history make the relationship between Canada and France of particular interest. The historical ties to Europe were highly formalised and constitutionalised. In effect, Canada only patriated its constitution from the UK as its colonial mother through the Constitution Act, 1982 (Canada, Department of Justice, 2013).

In this connection, looking back in time, it was no coincidence that Canada's first constitution, the British North America Act, originated in 1867, 2 years after the end of the American Civil War. At the end of that war, the victorious Northern US states had amassed a large army, and there were concerns in both the UK and Canada about

¹ Many nations and peoples had existed on Turtle Island, prior to the creation of the present-day political entity 'Canada', without clear links to France and the UK. For an account of this history, see Dickason (2001).

US expansion northwards (Buckner, 2017). That did not materialise, so the relations between what is now Canada and the US have been peaceful since the Treaty of Ghent was signed between the UK and the US in 1814 (Treaty of Ghent, 1814).² Canada and the US have since the 1930s formed a pluralistic security community, a notion marked by shared identity and mutual trust (Greaves, 2021, with reference to Deutsch et al., 1957). These observations underline the triangular Europe–US–Canada relations as the historical backdrop to today’s Canada–EU relations (to be further explained below).

2.2 Canada–EU Relations: Basic Goal Convergence

With these observations in mind, it should come as no surprise that the Canada–EU relationship has been profound since the EU’s inception in the 1950s (Verdun, 2021). In effect, the Canadian government has recently noted that ‘(t)he European Union (EU) is a strategic partner for Canada. The Canada–EU relationship is based on shared values, a long history of close cooperation, and strong people-to-people ties. Our ever-growing relationship with the EU is the oldest formal relationship the EU has with any industrialized country, dating back to 1959’ (Government of Canada, 2023a). The Canadian government identifies the following areas as marked by strong bilateral Canada–EU ties: political and security cooperation, trade and investment, science and energy, agriculture, environment and fisheries, and justice and home affairs. In the following, we will touch on most of these issue-areas.

The transatlantic relationship has been a major pillar for how the EU has seen its place in the world. In the post-World War II period and in particular during the Cold War, the EU was relying on transatlantic partners for security and support for multilateralism. Transatlantic partners formed the backbone of the cooperation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). They were also at the heart of the development of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) as part of the broader development of the liberal international order, a ‘political, economic, and strategic order that was explicitly conceived as a solution to the problems that led to the depression and war’ (Deudney & John Ikenberry, 1999, p. 180). Multilevel entities such as Canada and the EU were keen to develop these institutions at the global level (Broschek & Goff, 2020). After the attacks of September 11, 2001, Canada needed to rethink its relationship with both the US and the EU as the largest open border in the world was being reconceptualised (Barry, 2003; Croci & Verdun, 2006). In its immediate aftermath, Canada and the EU display a mixed record in terms of whether they have been able to work towards a closer partnership (Barry, 2004; Bernard-Meunier, 2006).

One of the important reasons for why Canada and the EU have sought each other out is therefore related to their mutual goals, values, and principles (Chaban, 2019; Crowley, 2004; Fossum, 2009). At the same time, whereas both entities support a legally regulated global system, which abides by constitutional democratic

²The final battle was in early January 1815 since news of the agreement took long to reach the warring parties.

principles, both are insufficiently prominent at the global level to determine the outcome (neither Canada nor the EU has much military might or nuclear weapons; neither as an actor has a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council even though two European states, France as EU member and the United Kingdom as a former member state, have such a seat). Nevertheless, for the EU its connection with Canada enables it to reach out to another polity in a similar situation.

The analysis thus far shows that there is a historical continuity in Canada's relationship with Europe and the European Union (Murray & Gecelovsky, 2021; Verdun, 2022; Wood & Verdun, 2010). The relationship between the inhabitants of both polities goes back centuries, and formal relations with the integrated European countries were established as soon as the European Communities (EC) got off the ground early in the post-World War II period.

2.3 Canada: EU Agreements

The first agreement came in 1959 when Canada and the EC signed an atomic energy agreement (Mahant, 1981). Perhaps the most prominent formal relationship was cemented in 1976 when Canada and the EC signed an agreement that provided a basis for economic collaboration (Mahant, 1976, 1981). Canada was looking at the EU as it went through its change from a looser system to a deeper form of economic integration, realising that there were opportunities for Canada (Pentland, 1991). In 2008, Canada and four European countries—Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland—signed the Canada–European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) that was aimed at removing tariffs on almost all (non-agricultural) goods.³

One of the highlights of the recent achievements between Canada and the EU is the signing and provisional application (only 18 of the EU's member states have ratified it⁴) of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) as well as the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), both of which were signed in 2016 (European Union, 2017). Although the EU has set up a large number of Strategic Partnerships and trade agreements with third countries during the first 15 years of the twenty-first century (Ferreira-Pereira & Smith, 2021), achieving these agreements between Canada and the EU was by no means easy (Rayroux, 2019a; Verdun, 2019). The process could easily have derailed (Drache & Trew, 2011; Hübner, 2011). Shortly after that period, the world seems to have turned decisively in a more protectionist direction, with some countries traditionally among the most prominent

³These four countries are part of the so-called European Free Trade Association (EFTA). These four are not member states of the European Union.

⁴CETA received royal assent in Canada. At the time of writing 17 EU member states have completed the domestic ratification: Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and Sweden. (Note that The United Kingdom, before leaving the EU, in 2020 still ratified CETA in November 2018). EU Member states that have not ratified are: Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, and Slovenia (European Council/Council of the EU, 2024; Jean Monnet Network on Transatlantic Trade Politics, 2024a).

liberal democracies (e.g. the United Kingdom and the United States) turning more inwards—when a majority of the voters chose to ‘leave’ the UK (Brexit), and when Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States in the 2016 presidential elections.

With the UK having left the EU, Canada now also has to think about how to relate to the UK in light of that new relationship (McGregor, 2020). It managed to set up a similar trade agreement with the UK as it had with the EU. The governments of both polities had for years been paying special attention to the United States—the leading superpower representing western liberal democracies during the postwar era (Rayroux, 2019b, p. 115; Barry, 1979; see also Smith, 2021). Neither Canada nor the EU really considered the other party as a crucial partner for their international affairs for most of the Cold War period and even during the 1990s when the global economy seemed to have one superpower left, and some observers suggested the ‘end of history’ (Kagan, 2003).

2.4 Security and Defence

During the Cold War, the EU was often characterised as a military dwarf: it did not spend much money on military matters and did not develop a clear strategy. In the period right after the signing of the Maastricht Treaty, although the EU had noted in the treaty that new cooperation in foreign policy and defence ‘might in time lead to a common defence’, scholars were worried about the lack of capability of the EU in the global arena (Hill, 1993). Some of the reasons for the EU’s European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) included a lack of national agreement on defence goals. The period after agreeing to ESDP did not lead to a clear strategy (Hill, 1998). During the Yugoslav civil war, the EU was very much divided (Croci & Verdun, 2006). But even in the subsequent years, it has been difficult for the EU to identify areas in which all member states agree on the course of action. There are members with a history of neutrality versus members that have invested much in security (Mérand, 2008).

Having said that, in broad terms, since the early noughties, notably Canada but also the EU adopted an extended notion of security—human security—which can be summed up in three core traits: (a) an expanded notion of security less exclusively focused on the military dimension; (b) a focus on the individual as a key source of reference; and (c) a commitment to multilateralism, the rule of law, and human rights.⁵ This approach was accompanied with a decline in defence spending. In this period, the role of NATO changed from more military to more political—something that Canada had been advocating since its early days (Zyla, 2010, p. 30).

⁵For the EU, the first significant step towards a strategic approach to security was the 2003 European Security Strategy. From this basis, the notion of human security was introduced as a means of concretising it and directing it towards the distinctive traits of human security (Xavier, 2013). For a useful summary of the principles underpinning human security, see Kaldor et al. (2008). For an early assessment of Canada’s highly ambitious approach to human security, see McRae & Hubert (2001).

Since then, a string of events has challenged this commitment to human security, perhaps less the problem definition (that insecurity has many sources, including environmental degradation, etc.) and more the ability to rely on multilateralism and a rule-bound world to address the challenges. With the election of Donald Trump in 2016, it became particularly clear to both Canada and the EU that relying overly much on the US might not be in the strategic interest of either Canada or the EU. Both started reviewing their defence spending and overreliance on the US. Reducing overreliance can be achieved through greater, more extensive bilateral EU–Canada cooperation. But in the area of security and defence, both entities depend on the US and are committed to multilateralism. It is therefore natural that close Canada–EU collaboration will extend into such multilateral forums as NATO, where Canada and the EU have sought to collaborate closely. Further, since the 2014 Ukraine–Russia war, Canada has sought to be more involved in Eastern Europe and collaborate more explicitly with the EU as well as with East-Central European EU member states.⁶ Canada stepped up its efforts in the region, making it their largest military action in a generation.⁷ An example of this effort is ‘Operation Reassurance’—Canada’s operation in East Europe. It is Canada’s largest on-going international operation; renewed in 2022.⁸

The commitment to human security can be seen as an attempt to tie the US into a multilateral rule-bound system. As such it could be seen as a way of mitigating or managing the strong dependence on the US that both the EU and Canada experience in the field of security and defence. The decline of the global liberal order will therefore not only shift attention from the individual (human security) to the security concerns of states (and collective entities such as the EU); it will expose even further the EU’s and Canada’s strong dependence on the US. Canada–EU relations in the areas of security and defence must be considered with explicit reference to the role of the US which within and without NATO sets the terms of the triangular EU–Canada, Canada–US, and EU–US relations. We address that in further detail below.

2.5 Canada: EU Trade and Investment Relations

CETA, which went into provisional application in 2017, represents a new regulatory framework for trade (but not investment as that part of the agreement has not come into effect yet). An overview of Canada–EU trade performance shows that CETA has had a significant effect on Canada–EU trade.⁹

⁶An example is the visit of the Polish Prime Minister to Canada (Trudeau, 2023).

⁷The Canadian government (minister of defence) signed a roadmap for scaling up from a Battle Group to a Brigade in Ukraine, deploying also a Forward Command Element and an integration of a Canadian-led Brigade headquarters (Government of Canada, 2022a, b).

⁸<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/military-operations/current-operations/operation-reassurance.html>.

⁹For an overview of trade between Canada and the EU growth, see Jean Monnet Network on Transatlantic Trade Politics (2024b).

In terms of overall effects of their relationship for the EU and Canada combined, the assessment must take into account that the economic size of the EU is much larger than that of Canada; hence, in terms of economic strength, the relationship is quite asymmetric. For Canada, the EU is its second-largest global trading partner for goods and services. The same applies for two-way direct investment. Under both headings for Canada, the United States is its largest trade and investment partner. The Canadian government lists the following figures:

- In 2022, trade in Canada–EU combined goods and services reached a value of \$146.4 billion.
- In 2022, the stock of Canadian direct investment in the EU was valued at \$248.8 billion, representing 12.5% of Canada’s total foreign direct investment (FDI) outward stock.
- In 2022, known stocks of EU FDI in Canada were valued at \$180.9 billion, representing 14.3% of global FDI in Canada (measured by Ultimate Investing Country basis) (Government of Canada, [2023a](#)).

Although these figures show a substantial amount of trade, when we compare the EU’s trade with the US, the number is dwarfed by it: the EU traded about eight and a half times more with the US than it did with Canada in 2022 (Eurostat, [2023](#)). Canada is a major oil trader given its large oil deposits (329 billion barrels as of December 2017). It was in 2018 listed as the world’s fourth largest producer, with around a 5% share of daily world production. Production of crude oil is occurring mostly in the Western provinces (95%) and the rest (5%) comes predominantly from Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada Energy Regulator, [2023b](#)). Heavy oil is produced only in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland.

Canada exports 75% of total oil production abroad (Canada Energy Regulator, [2023b](#)), but as much as 96% of its oil exports go to the US (Government of Canada, [2023c](#)). Canada exports more than half of its natural gas and, on the whole, is a net exporter. Much of it goes to the United States (the US West, the US Midwest,¹⁰ and the US East). The structure of Canadian oil and gas trade reflects the strong vertical pull from the US on Canada’s patterns of internal and external trade. That in turn is also reflected in the fact that some parts of Canada import gas from the US (Canada Energy Regulator, [2023a](#)). Canada is the sixth largest producer of natural gas, which is being produced in Western Canada, and Eastern Canada receives its gas via pipelines (Canada Energy Regulator, [2023b](#)). Canada nevertheless is also an importer of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) even if it also exports some (Government of Canada, [2023d](#)).

Thus, we see that the production of oil and gas in Canada differs across provinces. Although Canada is a major oil and gas producer, that is not balanced out evenly across the Canadian provinces. Oil and gas production and trade as well as oil exports speak to an important geopolitical aspect of Canada and Europe’s reality,

¹⁰Of Canadian crude oil export in 2020, 58% went to the US Midwest (Canada Energy Regulator, [2023b](#)).

namely the strong bonds with the United States. For Canada, as noted above, that exerts a very strong vertical pull that serves as a major constraint on any effort to integrate the Canadian domestic market through (horizontal) interprovincial trade.¹¹ It would appear quite obvious that the fact that the location of most of Canada's oil and gas is in the Western provinces, the strong trade patterns these provinces have with the US, the entrenched patterns of infrastructural Canadian–US interweaving (through pipelines, etc.), and the long geographical distance to European markets represent significant constraints on Canada's ability to greatly increase its oil and gas exports to Europe. It should also be noted that the internal Canadian distribution of resources will politicise—along governmental lines pitting oil and gas producing and exporting provinces against importing and consuming ones—every effort to move Canada towards a transition to a post-fossil fuel world.¹²

The assessment of Canada–EU relations in security and defence as well as in trade and investment underlines the need to include the US in the assessment. Hence, we need to pay explicit attention to the triangular dynamics of Canada–EU–US relations. Both the EU and Canada exhibit a somewhat ambivalent relationship to the US. Each of them needs the US, and both are closely tied to it. At the same time, both are afraid of getting too close; too much bound up with the US. This dependency varies considerably from one sector to another. It also differs across EU member states and among Canadian provinces. Some member states and some Canadian provinces are more directly and closely associated with the US than others, and the bonds vary across sector or policy area. Before exploring these dynamics, we will briefly examine one area that is of particular importance to Canada, where it is a major player, namely the Arctic.

2.6 The Arctic

From a geopolitical perspective, the role of the Arctic is important, given that Canada is a major Arctic player and that the EU is also present by virtue of three of its member states, Denmark (with Greenland), Sweden, and Finland being Arctic states. In addition, the two closely associated EEA-EFTA states Norway and Iceland are also Arctic states. Furthermore, Russia is currently the only non-NATO country. The Arctic is 'an ocean surrounded by continents' (Byers, 2014, p. 112). That implies that the governing system of the Arctic is a mixture of international law (such as the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention [UNCLOS] and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) and the national laws of the states that are the main Arctic inhabitants and operators. This strong presence of international law underlines that the Arctic is difficult to confine to a distinct geographical area (Battarbee & Fossum, 2014).

¹¹That vertical pull played an important role in the Canadian government's attempt to control oil and gas during the 'energy wars' of the 1970s and early 1980s (see Fossum 1997).

¹²"The trade-environment relationship has been politicized in Canada perhaps longer than in any other part of North America or Europe." (see Blair, 2021, p. 2).

Geopolitically speaking, it has also proven difficult to isolate the Arctic from conflicts. Haglund and Jockel (2014) provide an interesting historical account of how the US was afraid to set a precedent in the Northwest Passage (with bearings on its relationship to Canada) that would have repercussions for US strategic policy in Southeast Asia.

Canada has played a central role in establishing the governing framework for the Arctic, with the Arctic Council at its pinnacle, where Canada and the three EU member states Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are among the members (Battarbee & Fossum, 2014). The EU has also largely through its member and affiliated states entered the Arctic fray and has developed its own Arctic policy, which was updated in 2021 (European External Action Service, 2021).

The Arctic is in many ways the ‘canary in the coal mine’ in terms of climate change, given that global warming has been particularly high in that region. The Arctic Council reckons that the Arctic is warming three times faster than the rest of the world.¹³ Sustainable development is a major challenge for the environmentally fragile Arctic. An important issue for the EU has been to view the Arctic as part of its green transition strategy (European Commission, 2021). Other important issues are geostrategic in that the melting of the Arctic icecap opens up space for new sea lanes, both the Northeast and the Northwest Passages, with the security implications that will have.

Concerning the development of a passage in the North, the role of Russia is key. The reason is that the largest country in the world accounts for 45% of the geographical Arctic, is a major resource extractor, and has privileged access to sea lanes—especially the Northeast Passage. In that context, and with regard to security, it is interesting to note that, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the Arctic was held out by some as the exception in the sense that it remained peaceful and was marked by a generally speaking high respect for the rule of law (e.g. Brende, 2016; although for an opposing view, see MacDonald, 2015) which some have called ‘Arctic exceptionalism’ (Käpylä & Mikkola, 2015, p. 5). Käpylä and Mikkola (2015) warn however that the conceptualisation of the Arctic in this way brings with it risks of underappreciating the situation in the north and the interaction between local security and geopolitical pressures.

In the extension of that it is important to note that the relatively undisturbed situation has been changing in recent years. We see a more significant militarisation of the Arctic (Special Senate Committee on the Arctic 2019; Choi, 2020). As the European Commission noted in its updated Arctic policy from 2021, thus before the Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine, ‘[m]ilitary build-up across the Russian Arctic seems to reflect both global strategic positioning and domestic priorities, including dual use of infrastructure’ (European Commission, 2021). Russia was the leader of the Arctic Council until May 2023. After the Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the other members suspended their activities. However, in May 2023 Russia did hand over the chair to Norway—an indication that there are mutual efforts to keep tensions somewhat down in that region.

¹³ <https://arctic-council.org/explore/topics/climate/#:~:text=The%20temperatures%20in%20the%20Arctic,and%20the%20global%20climate%20system.>

In terms of Canada–EU relations in the Arctic, there is a clear value convergence in that both are concerned with the basic goals of climate and environmental protection, sustainable development, and international cooperation. Both parties seek to ensure that activities are as much as possible subject to the rule of law rather than power politics and on the whole favour international collaboration over going-it-alone. This overlap in goals does not mean that there is necessarily full convergence in policies and action. If we look at resource development, we need to keep in mind that Canada is a major petroleum producer and exporter and has long looked to the North for additional sources of resource extraction (Fossum, 1997; Stephen, 2012). Both Canada and the EU are internally divided on such resource development. The EU is almost exclusively made up of petroleum-importing countries, but Denmark and especially Greenland (which left the EU in 1985) depends on resource development (Østhagen, 2012), whereas Norway, which is closely affiliated with the EU, is also involved in large-scale petroleum extraction in the Arctic.

To sum up, both in terms of goals and joint agreements, Canada and the EU are closely aligned, and this value convergence can serve as an important bulwark against autocratisation. The Canada–EU alignment manifests itself in memberships in international organisations as well as multilateral agreements. Through these vehicles, Canada and the EU usually seek to promote the rule of law, international law, and profess a willingness to collaborate on protecting human rights.¹⁴ In terms of their attitude to trade, Canada and the EU both prefer openness and free movement of goods and services (to some extent) although they do not always agree on all of the specific details. The scope for Canada–EU convergence and for each to pursue its values is profoundly affected by their relations with the US.

3 Part II: Triangular Canada–EU–US Relations

EU–Canada relations may have to traverse a distinct triangular Canada–Europe–United States geostrategic constellation where Canada by dint of geography is closely linked to the US but at the same time has strong bonds and affinities with Europe. These bonds and affinities to varying degrees have been drawn on in efforts to balance out the strong US influence. Geopolitics broadly speaking is therefore necessarily a vital determinant for how Canada navigates these triangular relations. It follows that the bilateral relationships, Canada–EU, Canada–US, and EU–US, but also broader patterns of general collaboration at the multilateral level are involved. At the same time, with the rise of the Indo-Pacific in recent decades, both Canada and the US have had to reconsider the relative weight of Europe in their overall relations with other countries overseas.¹⁵

¹⁴A notable exception to meeting these goals and norms is the Canadian and EU response to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict that flared up in October 2023.

¹⁵An example of the importance placed on the Pacific is illustrated by a recent speech of the Canadian Minister of Defence (Anand, 2023).

Canada's strong partnership with the US makes it easy to see Canada as a 'little brother' (or 'sidekick') to the US. Where the US is the dominant player, the EU from time to time ignores Canada. In other instances, such as having agreed to a trade agreement with the EU, Canada is seen as a place where businesses can 'dry run' the rules in the hope that oneday also trade between the EU and the US could be further liberalised.

By having a strong relationship with the US and being located to the North of the United States, Canada has more 'power' than one ordinarily attributes to a country with only 40 million people. Canada is however less visible in Europe than the US is; it is less often in the news, and Canadian politics rarely make headlines in Europe. When it does, it is often about climate change issues, Canada–EU relations (for instance about CETA), or in recent years the actions of the Canadian government in response to the increased tensions related to the war in Ukraine.

The geopolitical situation has made an impact on Canada and the EU, both of which are heavily constrained by their membership in NATO. Often when discussing the transatlantic relationship in military terms, the thought goes out to the EU–US relationship rather than the 'other transatlantic relationship' (DeBardeleben & Leblond, 2010; see also Dolata-Kreutzkamp, 2010; Haglund & Mérand, 2010; Rudd, 2011). To add to these perceptions is the fact that NATO membership to some extent is restricting, in part because the United States spends more money on the military than the next ten countries combined (Zyla, 2010, 2019) and has much more clout in the military domain; in this domain, the US reigns supreme. The US has in recent years been pushing other entities to take a larger interest in military matters. In the context of NATO, the aim of spending at least 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence has been reinforced—something that not only Canada but little under half of the other countries of the NATO alliance have failed to achieve (CTV, 2023).¹⁶ NATO has long been considered a very successful military alliance although it has also been depicted as in crisis (Long, 2006, p. 19). The Ukraine crisis from 2014 onwards has fuelled the *raison d'être* of NATO (Sperling & Webber, 2017).

In terms of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that was signed in 1988, this agreement was received with some scepticism at the outset (Ayres, 1996). A decade later, most of the criticism of it has subsided in Canada (Bennett, 2004). However, Donald Trump in his role as the 45th President of the United States renegotiated that agreement. Some of the changes are seen as mostly cosmetic (for instance, the US can now call it USMCA (whereas Canada names it CUSMA)). Some changes are related to international trade agreements that have found their way into the new agreement.

NAFTA and its successor have not been seen to have constrained Canada's room for manoeuvre towards creating trade deals with the EU; it was able to sign the CETA without there being a restriction due to NAFTA/USMCA. Scholars have

¹⁶In February 2024 (before Sweden joined) only 18 of 31 members are due to spend 2% GDP on military in the year 2024, see <https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-chief-says-18-countries-meet-2-military-spending-target-2024-02-14/>.

identified some room for innovation, but, to date, these particular benefits have not yet materialised (Dadush & Dominguez Prost, 2023). For instance, there are some areas where modernisation can occur, notably in the domain of digital trade. USMCA can remove significant barriers to the import and export of digital products. Regarding property provisions USMCA offers more stringent protections for patents and trademarks (Flores-Macías & Sánchez-Talanquer, 2019, p. 20), as well as possibly better labour conditions (Chapter 23 of the USMCA, see Santos, 2019). There are also some areas where there is more protectionism, for example in the percentage of an automobile that has to be produced in North America in order to qualify for zero tariffs (Schott, 2018).

Generally speaking, Canada and Mexico feel they are worse off in the new USMCA than they were under NAFTA but lacked the negotiating power to force a better deal (and a deal was better than no deal). Scholars are divided on the question of whether the changes are important (Beaulieu & Klemen, 2020) or contribute to the deinstitutionalisation of previously well-functioning trade agreements (Flores-Macías & Sánchez-Talanquer, 2019).

In other words, the relationship between Canada and the US is asymmetric, in particular in those areas in which the US has considerably more clout (for instance, dollars spent or political power in international organisations such as the United Nations). Canada has relatively more clout where the interest of Canada is larger (relatively speaking) but also where Canada can claim to be a larger player (for instance, in the Arctic) (Greaves, 2021) although with the election of Trump the security community in North America was also out of balance (Greaves, 2020). This degree of asymmetry has an impact on the relationship between Canada and the EU.

If we look at Canadian interest in Europe and combine it with Canada's ties with the US, a new picture emerges: the transatlantic relationship can be strengthened by having Europe work more closely together with Canada. Furthermore, with geopolitical shifts, especially post-COVID-19, there have been concerns about security with regard to strategic supplies of important minerals. The EU has spoken more and more about strategic autonomy as a way to highlight its need to become a more prominent player internationally (Biscop & Howorth, 2022). As the animosity between China and the US has increased, doubts have been raised about relying too much on China to be the provider of minerals and metals but also industrial goods.

Another area where Canada has taken a major geopolitical interest is Ukraine. This increased interest followed the Maidan Revolution (or Revolution of Dignity) in Ukraine as well as the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. Enlargement hopes had been challenging for Ukraine and other post-Soviet countries, and the geopolitical troubles before this time had already been poorly understood by the EU. During the time of the Arab Spring, the EU responded to geopolitical changes in the region by offering aspiring members a closer connection through the European Neighbourhood Policy. (Dandashly & Chira, 2023; Verdun et al., 2011; Verdun & Chira, 2011). Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia obtained EU candidate status in 2022.

During the period 2014–2022, Canada was a significant player in this region and started to expand its efforts considerably. This interest and commitment to assist in

the area has expanded further since February 2022.¹⁷ Canada has, for instance, opened more embassies in East-Central Europe and has been one of the major contributors to Ukraine's war efforts. Canada has also played an important role in the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group to send donations to Ukraine.¹⁸ This Canadian contribution to expanding its diplomatic outlets in Eastern Europe should however be placed in the context of the cooperation within NATO; in no way has Canada been seeking to go outside the purview of NATO. One could argue that Canada plays an important role in NATO here. Furthermore, the full-scale Ukraine war has thus far had a certain 'NATOification' effect on the EU in that NATO plays such a central role in supporting Ukraine. The strong role of Canada in trying to support Ukraine, its commitment to collaborating within the NATO context, and its willingness to punch above its weight have given Canada more standing in the EU context. One notable observation is that the EU has allowed Canada to participate in PESCO. In June 2022, Canada requested from the EU that it be involved in the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which is one of the pillars of EU defence policy in which 25 member states cooperate (Council of the EU, 2023). The EU had agreed on November 5, 2020, that some countries that are not EU members could, in exceptional circumstances, be permitted to collaborate in projects.

An interesting question concerning Canada–EU relations—given Canada's strong support for Ukraine and the large contingent of Ukrainians in Canada—is whether Canada has been actively promoting Ukraine becoming an EU member, thus adding to the pressure on the EU to admit Ukraine. Although there have not been public statements to that effect, one indication pointing in that direction is the joint statement from the European Commission and the Canadian Prime Minister's Office (PMO) from March 2023 that offers support from Canada: 'Additionally, Canada welcomed the EU's June 2022 decision to grant candidate country status to Ukraine, opening a pathway for accession to the EU and serving as a key driver for advancing Ukraine's reform agenda' (European Commission, 2023a). Nevertheless, reasons have also been found for assuming that Canada may have been wary of offering full support for this because Canada has not wanted to be seen as getting directly involved with EU affairs (since it is not an EU member); additionally, Ukraine has been very far off from the requirements for accession to the EU in several areas (Bastasin, 2023), so it has been considered that offering a fast track would not be in the best interest of the EU (it would also make an EU state directly involved in a major conflict—something that makes Ukrainian membership in NATO right now impossible (some reports say Canada is in favour of still having a fast track for Ukraine to join NATO though others say that Canada supports membership but not a fast track—see, for instance, Brewster, 2023). As an interesting add-on, there has been some push-back from NATO countries on Ukraine's growing demands to be acceded into NATO.¹⁹

¹⁷ Prime Minister Justin Trudeau visited Poland already in March 2022 to express Canada's support for the Ukrainian effort in the Russian-Ukrainian war (see Trudeau, 2023).

¹⁸ DVIDS—Ukraine Defense Contact Group (dvidshub.net).

¹⁹ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/zelensky-calls-nato-plan-for-ukraine-membership-absurd>.

NATO itself has become strengthened in the wake of the outbreak of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine. NATO has been expanded to include Finland and Sweden. Canada has from the outset been supportive of NATO membership for Finland and Sweden. Canada was the first to ratify their requests to join and underlined how the addition of these two countries would be a big positive for NATO's ability to defend and protect the Arctic (Government of Canada, 2023e).

After the end of the Cold War, some scholars wondered whether there would be a need to continue NATO as the immediate threat from countries such as Russia had subsided; yet, the alliance kept its place, albeit with somewhat less prominence (Croci & Verdun, 2006, p. 1). As an institution, it moved along and got involved in peacekeeping. It had a role to play in the Yugoslav Civil War for instance. At its most recent communique, at the time of writing, in Vilnius in July 2023 (following a similar summit in Madrid in summer 2022), the final Communiqué, though speaking about its goal of defending a 'rules-based international order' (NATO 2023) and its defensive mission, NATO was adamant that some countries were undermining 'peace in the Euro-Atlantic' (article 5 of the Communiqué). It also placed full responsibility for the war in Europe with Russia. In the Communiqué, it also speaks negatively of North Korea's nuclear weapons program (article 57 of the Communiqué) and China's ambition 'to control key technologies and industrial sectors' (article 23 of the Communiqué) as well as terrorist organisations and emphasises the role of climate change. In other words, from being a fairly dormant organisation, NATO had a quick rebirth in recent years and is now setting a clear path for military objectives and collaboration.

Despite having made a real commitment to support Ukraine in its war against Russia, how much leverage does Canada have if it wants to collaborate with Europe? There might be another dimension here, considering Canada's long historical bonds with Europe, even pre-EU. In the post-Brexit period, an interesting question is whether a greater UK–EU divide might spill over into Canada–EU relations. The rationale for that is that Canada is a member of the Commonwealth, and the UK King remains the head of state; there could be a question of what part of Europe to prioritise—the UK or the EU.

An interesting issue-area where this tension could play itself out would be in the area of security and defence policy, given that the UK refused to include that in its Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) with the EU. If we consider then whether such a possible tension or dichotomy plays out in the matter of Ukraine, we do not find much support. The reason is that Ukraine is located on the Eastern border of the EU. To assist Ukraine, the UK needs to collaborate with EU countries that are most implicated in the war (Poland, the Baltic states, and Germany). Traditionally, the United Kingdom has been one of two dominant military players in the EU context, but, with its departure from the EU, that role has disappeared. At this point, the UK seeks to collaborate with the EU. On the matter of Ukraine, the interests are pretty close. The G7 and the EU have declared sanction packages together and ensure coherence among them. In terms of the impact of Canada on the EU, one may ask to what extent the link with Canada may serve as a vehicle for impact that the EU could use to affect the US. At this time, there does not seem to be the impression

that the EU uses Canada to ‘get to’ the United States. In fact, in recent years, it seems that Canada has not been considered a major military factor to reckon with. For example, Canada was not involved in the nuclear agreement AUKUS, and Canada was not involved in the joint statement by the five of the G7 that have nuclear weapons to condemn the attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023, and express strong support for Israel. Discussion about this matter within Canada on the day following the attack led to the point that neither Canada nor Japan has nuclear weapons and that the choice had been to issue that statement merely with the five countries.

4 Part III: Canada–EU Collaboration in Strategic Minerals, Digital, Climate, Research, and Innovation

Some of the most challenging crises that the EU has gone through involve migration, finances, Brexit, the COVID-19 crisis, and the war in Ukraine.²⁰ Reflecting on these various crises and the avenues for collaboration that open up in their wake, one can see possibilities for the EU and Canada to collaborate a fair bit more in the area of trade, security, and the Arctic. Beyond those policy areas, there are a few other policy fields in which Europe can further advance its relationship with Canada and benefit from it.

In this context, it is important to underline that, in today’s increasingly uncertain and unstable world, both exhibited by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, the world is, as noted above, turning more protectionist. States and non-state political systems such as the EU are turning their attention to the security implications of what has come to be termed strategic minerals. The Canadian government has recently noted that ‘Canada and the EU are working together to ensure the security of supply of critical minerals and related value chains, both essential to building a net-zero and digital economy. This includes through the Canada-EU Strategic Partnership on Raw Materials, which is helping to deliver new trade and investment opportunities, while supporting the highest environmental and social standards and building research and innovation partnerships’ (Government of Canada, 2023a). The Canadian critical minerals strategy is very extensive and lists the following: aluminium, antimony, bismuth, caesium, chromium, cobalt, copper, fluorspar, gallium, germanium, graphite, helium, indium, lithium, magnesium, manganese, molybdenum, nickel, niobium, platinum group metals, potash, rare earth elements, scandium, tantalum, tellurium, tin, titanium, tungsten, uranium, vanadium, and zinc (Government of Canada, 2022b). Having said that the publicly available documents on the Canada–EU strategic partnership are not very explicit on how many of these critical minerals are explicitly involved in the cooperation and how large the

²⁰At the time of writing, tensions in the Middle East are high. The main research done for this chapter precedes the outbreak of major hostilities among Israelis and Palestinians that erupted in October 2023.

volumes are, but it is noted that ‘[i]mportant investments and production decisions both by European companies in Canada and Canadian companies in the EU, as well as partnerships have been announced in strategic areas including the battery value chain, rare earth elements and potash’ (Government of Canada, 2023f).

There is also energy cooperation within the context of the High-Level Energy Dialogue (HLED) under the Strategic Partnership Agreement. This forum was established ‘to foster increased bilateral contacts and cooperation on energy[:] the HLED provides an annual forum to discuss energy policy issues, such as market transparency, maintaining a safe, sustainable and competitive energy supply, as well as research and development activities in this dynamic field. Current areas of focus are energy security and the clean energy transition’. (Government of Canada, 2023a).²¹

Collaboration in research and innovation is an area where both Canada and the EU want to advance. There have been prominent criticisms in the media in recent times, pointing to Europe staying behind in the developments in artificial intelligence and the digital transformation. Canada also needs to ensure they are not left behind. Collaboration in research and innovation can be an answer to it. In July 2024 the EU and Canada signed an agreement that allows Canadian academics and universities to be part of the Horizon program.

Another area in which Canada and the EU would benefit from doing more together is in the area of sustainability and energy transformation. The European Commission whose term started in 2019 and will end in 2024 ensured that a few agenda items were higher on the agenda than others (European Commission, 2023b). These included green policies but also the digital transition. Although Canada has traditionally had a different energy landscape than Europe and has not had the best record on sustainability, both entities need to ensure they play their part in combatting further global warming (Bongardt & Torres, 2022; Knodt et al., 2023). The CETA agreement also has the potential to tighten ties between professionals in Canada and the EU. With the geopolitical winds blowing in a different direction, Canada and the EU may want to cherish their agreement and explore how much collaboration is possible in these different domains to deal with these current challenges.

In some cases, these various elements come together. For instance, in the context of NATO, at the July 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius, the founding MOU was signed to create a Climate Change and Security Centre of Excellence in Montreal (sponsored by Canada and by 11 NATO countries; see Government of Canada, 2023b). Taken together, considering its many aspects, the relationship between both Canada and the EU has not yet fully met its potential.

²¹ See also: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_23_6054.

5 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the relationship between the EU and Canada. In terms of how Europe can benefit from this relationship. The chapter has demonstrated that the relationship is not a simple one. In working with Canada, Europeans gained the opportunity to strengthen transatlantic ties. For instance, by signing the CETA agreement and the Strategic Partnership Agreement, the EU has opened up and further consolidated new markets. It has made it possible to secure some more strategic supplies which have become more important in light of changes in the geopolitical arena, especially as the relationship between China and the US cools off.

The chapter demonstrates that the relationship between Canada and the EU is determined in part by geography—Canada is not very close to the EU. Yet, the two entities are culturally and economically close. They also benefit from each other as partners of the US. The chapter has touched upon areas where Canada has a bit more clout, such as the Arctic but also its contribution to the war in Ukraine.

All in all, Canada and the EU share values about the international liberal order, a preference for multilateralism (from a federal or quasi-federal perspective), and a desire to remain close to the United States—the country that dominates in the military domain. Both Canada and the EU realise, however, that changes are coming and that the US will not take care of global security in a way that had become the norm during the Cold War. A particularly salient experience of such changes was felt during the Trump presidency, which saw a more protectionist and less rule-bound and predictable US in the years 2017–2020. Some of the negative effects of this that Europeans and Canadians experienced have been documented in this chapter. The Canadian researcher Kim Richard Nossal (2023) in his book *Canada Alone* paints a bleak picture of the transatlantic and multilateral world should Trump re-enter the White House. With this now happening, there is no doubt that strengthened Canada–EU ties would be one important measure to counter this dramatic development.

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