

Atlantic by Necessity How Allies from the Northeastern Flank of NATO Embraced the New Normal in Washington

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Abstract

This paper examines how five NATO Allies on the northeastern flank – Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and Finland navigated the second Trump administration’s more transactional approach to Europe. The paper draws lessons applicable to Romania, which has faced significant diplomatic setbacks with Washington since 2025, including troop withdrawals and a delay in the entry on the Visa Waiver program. Rather than choosing between reflexive Atlanticism and decoupling from the United States to pursue European strategic autonomy now, the northeastern allies charted a third path: persistent, multi-channel engagement grounded in concrete strategic offers, consistent messaging on Ukraine, and year-round presence in Washington. They are Atlantic by necessity, given the proximity to an assertive Russian Federation, but they did not import the MAGA model internally just for the sake of appeasing Washington.

Keywords: NATO, Northeastern Flank, Trump Administration, Russo-Ukrainian conflict, Romania.

¹ This publication draws exclusively on open-source materials. The opinions expressed herein are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the institution.

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INTRODUCTION

Romania's current national security strategy frames the strategic partnership with the United States as "an irreplaceable pillar of our security and a platform for advancing Romania's prosperity".³ Although the strategic partnership is still considered vital for national security, over the past year Romania has experienced a series of significant setbacks in its bilateral relationship with the United States, which have placed the country at the forefront of Washington's strategic recalibration toward Europe. These setbacks manifested fully in Vice President J.D. Vance's speech at the 2025 edition of the Munich Security Conference, in the delay in Romania's inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program despite the technical criteria having been met, and in the fact that Romania was the first European country from which American troops were withdrawn in the second half of 2025. Although the election of President Nicușor Dan began to normalize the situation and correct some of the diplomatic shortcomings, Romania is still struggling to navigate the new normal in Washington – defined by a more transactional policy toward Europe – and to recalibrate its strategic partnership with the United States considering this reality.

Broadly speaking, two paths have emerged in the public debate to chart Romania's foreign policy course in the context of the strained relationship with the United States: that of reflexive Atlanticism, implying that Romania must mimic the MAGA agenda internally and within the European Union to secure goodwill with the new administration in Washington, and that of pursuing European strategic autonomy, where "autonomy" is often read as decoupling from the United States. President Dan already outlined publicly that Romania shall not choose between United States and the European Union, as it is dependent on both: dependent on Washington for the security umbrella and dependent on Brussels for the funds that sustain Romania's public investments.⁴ So how does one navigate the Euro-skepticism in Washington without alienating its European vocation?

³ Romanian Presidency, "National Security Strategy 2025-2030," Bucharest, n.d., <https://www.presidency.ro/files/userfiles/Strategia%20Națională%20de%20Apărare%20a%20Țării%20pentru%20perioada%202025-2030.pdf>.

⁴ Florin Marinescu, "Nicușor Dan, după participarea la Consiliul pentru Pace: E important să fim acolo unde se iau decizii / Nu se pune problema să alegem între SUA și UE," *G4Media.ro*, February 19, 2026, <https://www.g4media.ro/nicusor-dan-declaratie-de-presa-dupa-participarea-la-consiliul-pentru-pace.html>.



Romania does not need to reinvent the wheel. A third path has been already crystallized by allies in the northeastern flank of NATO: that of persistent engagement to maintain the transatlantic partnership functional, while the European strategic autonomy is still under construction. States like Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, and Finland, that share the same geostrategic vulnerabilities as Romania charted this third path through continuous, multi-channel diplomacy, on the ground presence in Washington for building bipartisan support, investment in an ideational infrastructure through track 1.5 and track II engagements and framing of win-win commercial opportunities. They did this while championing Ukraine's cause on the Hill and without alienating the Western European partners.

This paper aims a response to the following research question: How have allied states on NATO's northeastern flank recalibrated their strategic partnerships with the United States under the second Trump administration, and what lessons can Romania draw from their experience to revitalize its own bilateral relationship with Washington? The analysis is structured as follows: after outlining the methodology, each of the five case studies will be analyzed in depth, with a focus on the specific actions and strategic messaging carried out by institutional actors involved in the foreign policy making of the respective state. Through process tracing, it will be emphasized how these actions yielded policy outcomes in relation to Washington. The paper will conclude with practical recommendations inspired by northeastern NATO allies' model of multi-channel diplomacy that could be applicable in Romania's case, with the purpose of revitalizing the strategic partnership with the United States.

Key findings of the analysis include:

- **A defining feature of all the five countries' engagement strategies was the speed and volume of engagement with the new administration.** Latvia's Minister of Foreign Affairs made no fewer than 6 working visits to Washington since Trump's reelection and held her first conversation with Secretary Rubio just 4 days after the inauguration. Lithuania's Foreign Minister made 4 trips to Washington and spoke with Rubio within one week after the inauguration. Poland's Minister Sikorski met Rubio face-to-face just one month after the inauguration, becoming the first European foreign minister outside the Quint to do so.
- **Across all five case studies, advocacy for continued American support for Ukraine was not treated as competing with bilateral security agendas - it was the foundation upon which those agendas were built.** Every ministerial visit, congressional hearing, and phone call with Secretary Rubio included an explicit call for maintaining pressure on Moscow, preserving sanctions, and supporting Ukraine's sovereignty.

- **Beyond ministerial visits, the northeastern allies invested in innovative structural tools designed to ensure year-round visibility in Washington.** Estonia opened a business hub at its Washington embassy in October 2024 and expanded its consulate network to strengthen the technology partnership with the U.S. West Coast ecosystem, Latvia's Parliament appointed a dedicated parliamentary special representative to the United States in July 2025, Poland's in-house think PISM opened a Washington office in 2022, which has since become an active participant in the U.S. security policy conversation.
- **All five allies made deliberate efforts to reframe the transatlantic relationship as mutually commercially advantageous, not a one-way security subsidy.** Finland's \$6.1 billion icebreaker deal anchored U.S. Arctic ambitions in Finnish shipbuilding. Latvia built its pitch around 5G and 6G testing, quantum technologies, and AI. Poland leveraged nuclear energy cooperation and LNG supply as bilateral deliverables. The common denominator: these nations arrived in Washington as strategic investment destinations, not just defense dependents.
- **Allies made efforts to engage with the MAGA elites and thought leadership without importing MAGA internally.** Foreign Minister Sikorski participated in the conservative gathering CPAC and all foreign ministers engaged with the America First Policy Institute think tank or Heritage Foundation in addition to think tanks that have explicit European-focused programs like Atlantic Council and CEPA.
- **Securing bipartisan support in Congress - particularly for the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI), which secured \$200 million in the 2026 U.S. defense budget was a consistent priority.** Tools included joint letters from Baltic parliamentarians to U.S. senators, hosting Congressional staff delegations, ministers testifying in committee hearings, and regular visits to Capitol Hill. As a result of continuous engagement, the U.S. House Baltic Caucus in Congress reached a milestone of 100 members in 2025.

METHODOLOGY

5 states from the North-Eastern flank of NATO were selected as case studies for the scope of this policy paper: the three Baltic countries (Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia), to which Poland and Finland were added. They represent instructive examples of how NATO allies from the northeastern flank have navigated the diplomatic challenges posed by the second Trump administration without alienating their European identity. Each offers lessons that are transferable to Romania's strategic context. The selection was guided by two criteria: geographic proximity to the same threat environment Romania faces (the Russian Federation) and the existence of comparable structural constraints – namely, the imperative of securing American commitment to regional security while operating as a mid-size or small ally with limited leverage. These case studies cover a range of engagement strategies – from Estonia's institutional consistency to Latvia's high-tempo diplomacy and parliamentary innovation and



from Lithuania's model ally branding to Poland's track-two depth and Finland's presidential access. Although no single case constitutes the perfect blueprint for Romania, the comparative reading of all five reveals a modular toolkit from which Bucharest could draw instruments proven effective and already implemented by peers under similar constraints.

This policy paper draws on a combination of discourse analysis, foreign policy analysis, and process tracing to examine how the five selected allies adapted their engagement strategies toward Washington. Discourse analysis was applied to identify the key frames, narratives, and rhetorical strategies each country deployed in its public-facing engagement with the United States – including how they positioned themselves as credible allies, how they framed the Russian war in Ukraine or how they constructed a value proposition for the bilateral relationship beyond traditional security cooperation. It was also used to examine whether these allies reproduced the MAGA-specific identity discourse with the hope of mimicking ideological intimacy. Process tracing was used to reconstruct the sequence and logic of diplomatic actions undertaken by each state, with the aim of identifying which interventions produced observable outcomes. These methods allow the paper to move beyond descriptive cataloguing of bilateral contacts toward an analytical account of what distinguished effective alliance management under conditions of strategic uncertainty.

The data collection strategy was focused on the key institutions involved in the foreign policy making process in these 5 countries:

- (1) The Ministries of Foreign Affairs;
- (2) The Presidency;
- (3) The Government/Office of the Prime Minister;
- (4) The Parliament (Committees on Foreign Affairs);
- (5) Main in-house think tank focused on foreign policy issues.

This institutional scope was deliberately designed to capture the full range of actors involved in the foreign policy process, rather than limiting the analysis to executive diplomacy alone. This is relevant for a competitive diplomatic environment like Washington's, where track II diplomacy and personal contacts may matter even more than a presidential summit or a bilateral photo-op.

This model is not one without limitations, but it is dense enough to capture the scope of the paper, which is to analyze the adaptative nature of diplomatic strategies pursued by northeastern allies in navigating the new normal in Washington DC. Additional insights could



have been gathered if the data collection strategy would have included elite interviews, and this can be integrated in a future research program.

CASE STUDIES

Case study #1 - Lithuania: the model ally with intentional, front-facing engagement

Lithuania pursued an active engagement strategy with the United States during the early months of the second Trump administration. The Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs made 4 trips to Washington DC since Donald Trump was re-elected, complemented by a phone call with Secretary of State Rubio shortly after the inauguration. These engagements reflected Vilnius's resolve to remain visible and relevant in the new political context. While security and defense cooperation formed the backbone of bilateral discussions, Lithuania deliberately expanded the agenda to encompass economy, technology, and artificial intelligence (data centers investments in particular), showing how the Vilnius government works towards making the country a natural choice for American investors.

Support for Ukraine was a defining threat running through nearly every bilateral engagement. Vilnius advocated consistently for continued American commitment to Kyiv and the maintenance of sanctions against the Russian Federation and Belarus. In terms of positioning, Lithuania worked to present itself as a model ally, pointing to its ambitious defense spending target of up to 6% of GDP by 2030.⁵ Among all channels of engagement, bipartisan outreach to the U.S. Congress proved the most consistent.

In late November 2024, after the reelection of Donald Trump as president, Lithuania was the first state on the eastern flank of NATO to join the initiative launched by the United States to strengthen the security of undersea cables. This initiative followed the sabotage of submarine cables in the same month in Lithuania, Sweden, Finland and Germany, part of the hybrid destabilization toolkit of the Russian Federation.⁶

Just one month after the elections, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania made a first working visit to the United States in the new political context. He testified at the U.S.

⁵ "Lithuania to Allocate 5-6% of GDP for Defence in 2026-2030, Foreign Minister Says," Europe, *Reuters*, January 17, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/lithuania-allocate-5-6-gdp-defence-2026-2030-foreign-minister-says-2025-01-17/>.

⁶ Media, "Lithuania Joins the U.S. Initiative to Strengthen the Security of Undersea Cables | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 28, 2024, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/lithuania-joins-the-u.s.-initiative-to-strengthen-the-security-of-undersea-cables:43315>.

Helsinki Commission's Congressional Hearing on the topic of Belarus's role in the war crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, chaired by the Republican Joe Wilson.⁷ The Lithuanian MFA used this opportunity to further emphasize the need of Western mobilization for helping Ukraine prevail in the conflict started by the Russian Federation. His visit also included meetings with representatives of the State Department, NGOs and journalists.⁸

Only a week after Donald Trump's inauguration, the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs had a telephone conversation with the U.S. Secretary of State Rubio, discussing bilateral cooperation in domains such as security, defense, energy, export controls, support for Ukraine, and sanctions against Moscow. The MFA underlined Lithuania commitment to further invest in its security, allocating up to 6% of its GDP for defense by 2030 and the need to strengthen the U.S. military presence in Lithuania. The Lithuanian official emphasized that "it was not enough to simply end the war in Ukraine" and "ending Russia's aggression is essential", which can be achieved by tightening the policy of sanctions against Moscow.⁹

In February 2025, Foreign Minister Budrys visited Washington DC to participate in the GLOBSEC Forum, speaking at a high-level roundtable discussion focused on transatlantic security.¹⁰ In his speech, Budrys emphasized that the only way to strengthen European security "was to increase defense spending and allocate it in a targeted manner – to fill the exist gaps in military capabilities, empower the defense industry, and continue to support Ukraine consistently".¹¹ During the same visit, the Lithuanian Minister met with representatives of the U.S. Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus, the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the U.S. Special Envoy for Ukraine and Russia, General Keith Kellogg, and the Congressman Joe Wilson of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.¹² The Lithuanian official used

⁷ Media, "Landsbergis Testifies at the U.S. Helsinki Commission Congressional Hearing Dedicated to the Role of Belarus in Russia's Crimes during His Visit to the United S," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, December 6, 2024, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/landsbergis-testifies-at-the-u.s.-helsinki-commission-congressional-hearing-dedicated-to-the-role-of-belarus-in-russias-crimes-during-his-visit-to-the-united-states:43361>.

⁸ Media, "Landsbergis to Pay a Working Visit to the United States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, December 5, 2024, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/landsbergis-to-pay-a-working-visit-to-the-united-states:43347>.

⁹ Media, "Minister Budrys Had a Telephone Conversation with the U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, January 27, 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-had-a-telephone-conversation-with-the-u.s.-secretary-of-state-marco-rubio:43569>.

¹⁰ Media, "Minister Budrys to Participate in the Transatlantic Security Forum in Washington D.C.," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-to-participate-in-the-transatlantic-security-forum-in-washington-d.c.-:43613>.

¹¹ Media, "Budrys in Washington: 'Europe Must Do More for Its Security' | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-in-washington-europe-must-do-more-for-its-security:43631>.

¹² Media, "Budrys Meets with the Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission: "We Must Continue to Stand Together against Attempts by Authoritarian Regimes"," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-meets-with-the-chairman-of-the-u.s.-helsinki-commission-we-must-continue-to-stand-together-against-attempts-by-authoritarian-regimes-to-undermine-the-values-of-freedom-and-democracy:43651>; Media, "Budrys in Washington: 'The U.S. Has All the Leverage to Weaken Russia and Bring It to the Negotiating Table,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-in-washington-the-u.s.-has-all-the-leverage-to-weaken-russia-and-bring-it-to-the-negotiating-table:43643>; Fresh Media, "Budrys Met with Representatives of the U.S. Senate Baltic Freedom Caucus," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the



these opportunities to advance multiple security causes, ranging from the need to strengthen NATO's posture on the eastern flank to the U.S. continued support both for Ukraine's prevail and Belarusian democratic forces.

In late March 2025, Lithuania's MFA paid another working visit to Washington DC, together with foreign ministers of Latvia and Estonia to participate in a commemoration event of the Stalin-era Soviet mass deportation at the Victims of Communism Museum, a museum to which all the 3 Baltic states contributed to.¹³ He engaged with U.S. Senators from the Republican and Democratic party, as well as with the Special Envoy Kellogg, advocating for a long-lasting peace in Ukraine and the need to strengthen NATO by increasing defense spending.¹⁴

Lithuania hosted in June 2025 a delegation of U.S. Congressional staffers to discuss about the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine, as well as bilateral cooperation between Lithuania and the United States.¹⁵ This visit is organized twice a year as an opportunity for the employees of the Congress to get acquainted with the security environment in the Baltic region.

In November 2025, the Lithuanian Minister had another set of bilateral meetings in Washington DC, this time with the U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and the Secretary of Treasury Scott Bessent.¹⁶ The imperative of U.S. engaging to support Ukraine emerged again as a topic that the Lithuanian MFA advocated for, as well as the need to maintain sanctions targeting the Russian energy sector.¹⁷ In addition to Ukraine and the Security partnership with the U.S., the Lithuanian delegation highlighted the hybrid attacks of Belarus against Lithuania that threaten the security of international aviation.¹⁸ In New York, Minister Budrys met with

Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-met-with-representatives-of-the-u.s.-senate-baltic-freedom-caucus:43630>; Media, "Budrys Met with the Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee: 'The U.S. Leadership and Support for Ukraine Is Crucial,'" Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-met-with-the-chairman-of-the-u.s.-senate-foreign-relations-committee-the-u.s.-leadership-and-support-for-ukraine-is-crucial:43622>.

¹³ Media, "Minister Budrys Pays a Working Visit to the United States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, March 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-pays-a-working-visit-to-the-united-states:43901>.

¹⁴ Media, "Budrys in Washington, D.C.: It Is Clear That the Only Person Who Does Not Want Peace Is Putin," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, March 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-in-washington-d.c.-it-is-clear-that-the-only-person-who-does-not-want-peace-is-putin:43912>; Fresh Media, "Budrys in Washington, D.C.: Peace in Ukraine Is a Common Goal for Europe and the USA," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, March 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-in-washington-d.c.-peace-in-ukraine-is-a-common-goal-for-europe-and-the-usa:43914>.

¹⁵ Media, "A Delegation of the U.S. Congressional Staffers Is Visiting Lithuania," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, June 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/a-delegation-of-the-u.s.-congressional-staffers-is-visiting-lithuania:44419>.

¹⁶ Media, "Budrys to Meet with the United States Secretaries of State and Treasury in Washington, D.C.," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-to-meet-with-the-united-states-secretaries-of-state-and-treasury-in-washington-d.c.:45200>.

¹⁷ Media, "Minister Budrys Met with U.S. Treasury Secretary Bessent: Severe Sanctions against Russia Are a Language of Force That It Understands," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-met-with-u.s.-treasury-secretary-bessent-severe-sanctions-against-russia-are-a-language-of-force-that-it-understands:45211>.

¹⁸ Media, "Minister Budrys at the Meeting with the U.S. Special Envoy to Belarus: It Is Necessary to Increase Pressure on the Belarusian Regime," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-at-the-meeting-with-the-u.s.-special-envoy-to-belarus-it-is-necessary-to-increase-pressure-on-the-belarusian-regime:45208>.



the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mike Waltz to discuss the security situation at NATO's eastern border and the pursuit of a just and sustainable peace in Ukraine.¹⁹ The visit was completed by meetings with American technology and financial companies like Citi, Palantir, and IBM. These engagements explored the possibility to further develop the strategic partnership in areas like artificial intelligence, data analytics, cloud solutions, and fintech.²⁰

In February 2026, MFA Budrys had another visit to the U.S., this time for the international ministerial on critical minerals hosted by the Department of State.²¹ The Lithuanian MFA also discussed with U.S. administration representatives and Congressmen from both parties the security environment in the Baltic region and on NATO's eastern flank.²²

On the Independence Day in 2025, the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Lithuanian Parliament joined several members of European parliaments in congratulating the United States on the anniversary of the founding of the republic, recalling that "Ukraine, like America 249 years ago, is defending its right to live in peace and determine its own destiny."²³ This letter was also signed by counterparts from Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Finland, Slovakia, France, Croatia, and Bulgaria.

The Lithuanian government has focused on the complementarity between the security dimension of its partnership with the United States and maintaining robust economic diplomacy to attract new American investment to their country. In January 2025, the Lithuanian Consulate in Los Angeles organized a visit for national laser companies to the U.S. Department of Defense Innovation Unit and NASA Ames Research Center in Silicon Valley, "where collaboration opportunities in defense innovation and space research, as well as potential partnerships with Lithuanian optics and photonics manufacturers were discussed".²⁴ In April 2025, the Latvian Prime Minister met with the American-Lithuanian Business Council, represented by officials from companies operating in key sectors such as defense, financial

¹⁹ Media, "Minister Budrys Met with Mike Waltz in New York," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-met-with-mike-waltz-in-new-york:45232>.

²⁰ Media, "Foreign Minister Budrys Met with Representatives of U.S. Companies Citi, Palantir, and IBM," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/foreign-minister-budrys-met-with-representatives-of-u.s.-companies-citi-palantir-and-ibm:45230>.

²¹ Media, "Budrys on a Working Visit to Washington," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2026, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-on-a-working-visit-to-washington:45530>.

²² Media, "Budrys in Washington: The U.S. Support Remains Critically Important for the Security of the Baltic States," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2026, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/budrys-in-washington-the-u.s.-support-remains-critically-important-for-the-security-of-the-baltic-states:45542>.

²³ Media, "Minister Budrys at the Meeting with the U.S. Special Envoy to Belarus: It Is Necessary to Increase Pressure on the Belarusian Regime," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, November 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/minister-budrys-at-the-meeting-with-the-u.s.-special-envoy-to-belarus-it-is-necessary-to-increase-pressure-on-the-belarusian-regime:45208>.

²⁴ Media, "Strengthening Partnerships with the U.S. West Coast," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, February 2025, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/strengthening-partnerships-with-the-u.s.-west-coast:43603>.



services, cybersecurity, biotechnology, and the pharmaceutical industry.²⁵ The Lithuanian Prime Minister emphasized that the government's plans to reduce the tax burden on the business environment, coupled with ambitious plans in the field of infrastructure and rearmament will create more incentives for the development of the Lithuanian-American economic partnership.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organizes annually the Snow Meeting in Vilnius, bringing together foreign and security policy experts to discuss topics on the geopolitical agenda, including experts from the United States-based think tanks.²⁶ In 2026, the premier security policy event in Lithuania was focused on topics such as NATO's deterrence and defense policy and preparations for the NATO Summit in Ankara. This high-level event is a public diplomacy tool that Lithuania uses to promote its foreign policy vision to the Euro-Atlantic expert community, including in the United States.

Lithuania's engagement toolkit combined high-frequency ministerial visits with a deliberate bipartisan Congressional focus, using every Washington appearance to advance an interlocking set of priorities – Ukraine support, sanctions enforcement, NATO eastern flank reinforcement, and a prominent economic pitch centered on AI, data centers, and defense technology. The result was a front-facing, agenda-dense engagement style that leveraged Lithuania's model ally credentials – anchored by its ambitious 6% GDP defense spending target.

Case study #2 - Finland: the “very good player” with a cause

Finland's engagement with the second Trump administration reflected a calibrated blend of personal diplomacy, principled advocacy for a just and long-lasting peace in Ukraine, and economic statecraft. From the outset, President Stubb understood that access to Donald Trump requires more than traditional channels – it requires personal chemistry. A shared round of golf at Mar-a-Lago in March 2025 earned Stubb the coveted presidential endorsement as a “very good player” and opened a line of communication that proved durable in the negotiations over bringing peace in Ukraine. As the only NATO ally bordering the Russian Federation consistently included in the high-level Ukraine discussions at the White House, Finland

²⁵ “Prime Minister Met with Representatives of U.S. Companies Investing in Lithuania,” Government of the Republic of Lithuania, February 4, 2025, <https://lv.lt/en/news/prime-minister-met-with-representatives-of-us-companies-investing-in-lithuania/>.

²⁶ Media, “Snow Meeting to Address Top Security and Defence Policy Issues | Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, January 14, 2026, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/snow-meeting-to-address-top-security-and-defence-policy-issues:45453>.

gradually emerged as the de facto voice of NATO's northeastern flank in transatlantic diplomacy. At the same time, Helsinki recognized that durable influence in Washington requires economic substance. The landmark icebreaker deal, worth \$6.1 billion, anchored American Arctic ambitions in Finnish shipbuilding expertise. This exemplified Finland's broader pitch in the new transatlantic architecture: that the transatlantic relationship could be simultaneously strategic and commercially rewarding.

A first engagement with President Trump occurred on 29 March 2025, during an unofficial visit of President Stubb at Mar-a-Lago in Florida. According to the readout, the Presidents "met over breakfast, played a round of golf and had lunch together", discussing the bilateral relationship but also security policy matters, including Ukraine.²⁷ The sympathy between the two presidents was best observed in Trump's Truth Social post that followed the meeting, in which Stubb was described as a "very good player".²⁸ Finland's President later evolved as a "Trump whisperer" in the European Union, playing a more important role in the transatlantic dialogue focused on ending the war in Ukraine. President Stubb had telephone conversations with the U.S. President and with Ukraine's President on 11 May 2025, discussing the proposal for a ceasefire and the possibility of peace negotiations. The Finnish head of state expressed support for the proposal for an unconditional 30-day ceasefire and highlighted the importance of maintaining sanctions on the Russian Federation.²⁹ President Stubb spoke again with President Trump on 19 May 2025, together with the leaders of Ukraine, France, Germany, Italy, and the European Commission, discussing the war in Ukraine and steps towards achieving a just and lasting peace.³⁰ Ahead of the Trump-Putin summit in August, President Stubb alongside other European leaders signed a statement urging that "a diplomatic solution must protect Ukraine's and Europe's vital security interests", reiterating that the signatories will continue to stand firmly by the side of Ukraine and continue to cooperate closely with President Trump and the U.S. government for a peace that protects the European security.³¹

²⁷ Virpi Pekkarinen, "President Stubb Meets President of the United States Donald Trump in Florida," *Presidentti*, March 29, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-meets-president-of-the-united-states-donald-trump-in-florida/>.

²⁸ Commentary Donald J. Trump Posts From Truth Social [@TrumpDailyPosts], "just played a round of Golf with Alexander Stubb, President of Finland. He is a very good player, and we won the Men's Member-Guest Golf Tournament at Trump International Golf Club in Palm Beach County, with the Legendary Gary Player, Senator Lindsey Graham, and former," Tweet, Twitter, March 29, 2025, <https://x.com/TrumpDailyPosts/status/1906097680633446491>; Amanda Macias, "Fairways, Friendship and a \$6 Billion Deal: How Finland's President Found a Partner in Trump," Text.Article, Fox News, Fox News, October 9, 2025, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fairways-friendship-6-billion-deal-how-finlands-president-found-partner-trump>.

²⁹ Virpi Pekkarinen, "President Stubb Spoke with President Trump and President Zelenskyy," *Presidentti*, May 12, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-spoke-with-president-trump-and-president-zelenskyy/>.

³⁰ Virpi Pekkarinen, "President Stubb Speaks with President Trump," *Presidentti*, May 19, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-speakes-with-president-trump/>.

³¹ "Statement by President Macron, Prime Minister Meloni, Chancellor Merz, Prime Minister Tusk, Prime Minister Starmer, President von Der Leyen and President Stubb on Peace for Ukraine Ahead of President Trump's Planned Meeting with President Putin," *Presidentti*, August

Following the Alaska Summit, President Stubb participated in a meeting on peace in Ukraine at the White House, joined by President Zelensky and other European leaders.³² Stubb was, however, the only representative of the northeastern flank of NATO included in the meeting, mentioning the following: “our influence is limited, we are a small country. At the same time, we are the only country around the table, in addition to Ukraine, with a border with Russia. Our point of view has relevance.”³³ The readout also mentions that Stubb met Zelensky at the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington DC ahead of the summit at the White House.³⁴

In October 2025, joined by the Prime Minister of Finland Petteri Orpo, President Stubb made another working visit to the United States. President Trump received both leaders at the White House as the two presidents signed a memorandum of understanding between Finland and the United States on a collaboration to grow the U.S. arctic fleet. The United States committed to invest in 11 icebreakers, 4 of which will be built in Finland. The U.S. Coast Guard “will enter into separate commercial agreements with the shipyards building the icebreakers”.³⁵ The icebreaker contract will have a reported value of \$6.1 billion.³⁶ More than commercial opportunities and economic cooperation, the discussions at the White House also included the war in Ukraine. Finland’s activism for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine continued, including by signing the Berlin declaration on 15 December 2025. The declaration, signed by multiple European leaders, included the commitment that the officials “agreed to work together with President Trump and President Zelensky to get to a lasting peace which preserves Ukrainian sovereignty and European security”, noting the “strong convergence between the United States, Ukraine and Europe”.³⁷

The activity of the President was completed by that of the Government. In April 2025, the Finnish Minister of Foreign Affairs had a bilateral meeting in Washington DC with Marco Rubio to discuss bilateral relations, the Russian Federation’s war of aggression in Ukraine and

9, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/statement-by-president-macron-prime-minister-meloni-chancellor-merz-prime-minister-tusk-prime-minister-starmer-president-von-der-leyen-and-president-stubb-on-peace-for-ukraine-ahead-of-president/>.

³² Katja Uusi-Hakala, “President Stubb to Washington D.C.,” *Presidentti*, August 17, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-to-washington-d-c/>.

³³ Leila Kalliala, “President Stubb Attends Meeting on Peace in Ukraine in Washington D.C.,” *Presidentti*, August 19, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-participates-in-meeting-on-peace-in-ukraine-in-washington-d-c/>.

³⁴ Kalliala, “President Stubb Attends Meeting on Peace in Ukraine in Washington D.C.”

³⁵ Leila Kalliala, “President Stubb and Prime Minister Orpo Visited Washington D.C.,” *Presidentti*, October 10, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/president-stubb-and-prime-minister-orpo-visited-washington-d-c/>.

³⁶ Justin Katz, “White House, Finland Sign Deal for Four Icebreakers,” *Breaking Defense*, October 9, 2025, <https://breakingdefense.com/2025/10/white-house-finland-to-sign-deal-for-4-icebreakers/>.

³⁷ Matti Porre, “Statement by Chancellor Merz, Prime Minister Frederiksen, President Stubb, President Macron, Prime Minister Meloni, Prime Minister Schoof, Prime Minister Store, Prime Minister Tusk, Prime Minister Kristersson, Prime Minister Starmer, as Well as President Costa and President von Der Leyen,” *Presidentti*, December 15, 2025, <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/statement-by-chancellor-merz-prime-minister-frederiksen-president-stubb-president-macron-prime-minister-meloni-prime-minister-schoof-prime-minister-store-prime-minister-tusk-prime-minister-kri/>.

Euro-Atlantic security. The Finnish Minister highlighted that there “should not be barriers to trade between allies”.³⁸ On 1 July 2025, Finland opened a new Consulate General in Houston, Texas, with the aim of strengthening its network of diplomatic missions in the United States. The Consulate General will support Finnish businesses in various stages of market access and promote the visibility of Finland’s country brand as reliable and innovative.³⁹ In February 2026, Finland was represented by the Finland’s Minister of Defense and Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs at the ministerial meeting on critical minerals convened by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio.⁴⁰ During the same month, the Minister for Foreign Trade and Development visited Washington DC with the aim of discussing commercial and economic opportunities between the two countries, including telecommunications, machinery and energy. The Finnish Minister met officials from the Department of Commerce and the International Development Finance Corporation, and he also attended the National Prayer Breakfast hosted by U.S. Congressmen.⁴¹

The Finish Institute of International Affairs (FIIA), an independent research Institute affiliated with the Parliament of Finland developed several policy briefs concerning the new U.S. foreign policy approach towards Europe, the EU-US trade deal, and the US-China strategic competition.⁴² FIIA is also the organizer of the annual Helsinki Security Forum, the premier security policy forum in Finland. In 2025, under the theme “the Hour of Europe” and opened by President Stubb, the Forum brought in Helsinki U.S. Senators from both political parties to discuss the new transatlantic bargain.⁴³

Finland’s toolkit under Trump 2.0 was defined above all by the strategic cultivation of personal access – President Stubb’s Mar-a-Lago golf round unblocked a channel of influence that elevated Helsinki well beyond its size, positioning Finland as the de facto voice of NATO’s northeastern flank in high-stakes Ukraine diplomacy. This personal diplomacy was grounded

³⁸ “Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen to Visit Washington DC,” Ministry for Foreign Affairs, April 2025, https://um.fi/press-releases/-/asset_publisher/ued5t2wDmr1C/content/ulkoministeri-elina-valtonen-vierailee-washingtonissa-1/35732.

³⁹ “Finland’s New Consulate General in Houston to Open on 1 July 2025,” Finnish Government, June 30, 2025, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/en/-/finland-s-new-consulate-general-in-houston-to-open-on-1-july-2025>.

⁴⁰ “State Secretary Rajala to Visit Washington DC,” Ministry for Foreign Affairs, February 2026, https://um.fi/press-releases/-/asset_publisher/ued5t2wDmr1C/content/valtiosihteerin-rajala-vierailee-washingtonissa/35732.

⁴¹ “Minister Tavio to Visit Washington D.C. to Promote Finnish-US Commercial Cooperation,” Ministry for Foreign Affairs, February 2026, https://um.fi/press-releases/-/asset_publisher/ued5t2wDmr1C/content/ministeri-tavio-washingtoniin-edistamaan-suomen-ja-usa-n-kaupallista-yhteistyota/35732.

⁴² *Trump’s First 100 Days | FIIA*, FIIA Comment, May 14, 2025, <https://fii.fi/en/publication/trumps-first-100-days-2>; *Much Ado about Civilizations: Donald Trump’s New National Security Strategy Presents an Ideological Challenge for Europe - FIIA - Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, Publications Intended for Professional Communities, December 15, 2025, <https://fii.fi/en/publication/much-ado-about-civilizations-donald-trumps-new-national-security-strategy-presents-an-ideological-challenge-for-europe>.

⁴³ FIIA, *HSF 2025 – Helsinki Security Forum*, n.d., accessed March 2, 2026, <https://helsinkisecurityforum.fi/hsf-2025/>.



in economic substance, with the icebreaker deal transforming Finland's Arctic expertise into a concrete American interest.

Case study #3 – Poland: the mature ally that bridges internal divisions to pursue strategic depth

Poland's engagement with the second Trump administration stands out as a case of domestic political rivals channeling their ideological differences into a coherent foreign policy strategy. This approach can be seen as the practical representation of Prime Minister Tusk's pledge that "when it comes to security, there is only one party – Poland".⁴⁴ Despite the deep-seated tension between the conservative President Nawrocki and the centrist government of Prime Minister Tusk and Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, both sides of the executive power in Poland pursued the same overarching strategic objectives vis-a-vis Washington: securing a permanent American military presence on Polish soil, deterring the Russian Federation's further aggression in Ukraine and its neighborhood, and deepening the bilateral cooperation through strategic projects in the energy sector. Despite the tensions felt at the transatlantic level in the past year, Poland succeeded to advance meaningful projects in the bilateral framework, by signing a bilateral bridge agreement for the construction of a first nuclear power plant and strengthening the air defense systems coordination.⁴⁵ The Polish-American partnership extended well beyond official government channels, with Poland investing heavily in track-two diplomacy through institutions such as the Polish Institute of International Affairs' Washington office and through Nawrocki's direct outreach to conservative policy circles in Washington.

Ahead of the Trump-Putin summit in Alaska, the Polish President Nawrocki was present at the teleconference with European leaders organized by President Trump. Nawrocki highlighted that "only through a strong language and concrete, firm action can Russian Federation be contained".⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "When It Comes to Security, There Is Only One Party - Poland," The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, November 19, 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/when-it-comes-to-security-there-is-only-one-party---poland>.

⁴⁵ "Poland and U.S. Strengthen Air Defense," The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, March 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/poland-and-us-strengthen-air-defense>; "Poland and U.S. Sign Bridge Agreement for First Nuclear Power Plant," The Chancellery of the Prime Minister, April 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/primeminister/poland-and-us-sign-bridge-agreement-for-first-nuclear-power-plant>.

⁴⁶ "Karol Nawrocki Represented Poland at a Teleconference Organised by US President," Oficjalna Strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, August 13, 2025, <https://www.president.pl/news/karol-nawrocki-represented-poland-at-a-teleconference-organised-by-us-president,105039>.



In early September 2025, less than a month after Nawrocki was sworn in office, the two presidents had a summit at the White House. President Trump then confirmed that U.S. forces would continue to be stationed in Poland and Nawrocki noted that Poland allocates 4.7% of its GDP for defense. The Polish President committed to achieving 5% of GDP for defense, “but that with American soldiers on Polish soil”.⁴⁷ President Trump later extended the invitation to President Nawrocki to attend the G20 Summit in Miami in 2026.⁴⁸ In addition to the security dimension of the Polish-American strategic partnership, the two presidents discussed economic and regional affairs, including the prospects of constructing the first nuclear power plant in Poland.⁴⁹ President Nawrocki mentioned that he also raised the issue of regional cooperation within multilateral frameworks such as the Three Seas Initiative and Bucharest 9. According to the readout presented before the trip in Washington DC, Nawrocki spoke with Finnish President Stubb and Moldovan President Sandu ahead of this visit.⁵⁰ On this visit, the head of Poland’s National Security Bureau offered an interview for *Newsweek*, detailing Nawrocki’s agenda. In addition to advocating for a permanent U.S. presence in Poland, the Polish official mentioned how the two presidents’ agendas align in the field of energy security. More specifically, Nawrocki was described as “a firm opponent of the restrictive European Green Deal, which undermines both security and growth, and a strong supporter of Poland’s withdrawal from it, while instead championing energy abundance through coal, nuclear power, and LNG”.⁵¹

A second Trump-Nawrocki summit occurred on the margins of the Davos Economic Forum in January 2026. Although he was invited to sign the chart of the Board of Peace, Nawrocki did not join the inauguration of this new international forum, following a diplomatic refusal in which he mentioned that “Poland needs to complete the constitutional procedure in order to conclude such agreement”.⁵² Following an internal political feud between the conservative president and the centrist government, Poland was represented as an observer

⁴⁷ “White House. Talks between the Presidents of Poland and the USA,” Oficjalna Strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, September 3, 2025, <https://www.president.pl/news/white-house-talks-between-the-presidents-of-poland-and-the-usa,106410>.

⁴⁸ Daniel Tilles, “US Invites Poland to Take Its ‘Rightful Place’ at next Year’s G20 Summit,” *Business, Notes From Poland*, December 4, 2025, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2025/12/04/us-invites-poland-to-take-its-rightful-place-at-next-years-g20-summit/>.

⁴⁹ “The President Begins His Visit to Washington,” Oficjalna Strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, September 2, 2025, <https://www.president.pl/news/the-president-begins-his-visit-to-washington,106274>.

⁵⁰ Oficjalna Strona Prezydenta Rzeczyposp. Pol., “The President Begins His Visit to Washington.”

⁵¹ “Polish National Security Advisor in *Newsweek*: Poland Needs U.S. Troop Presence,” Oficjalna Strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, September 3, 2025, <https://www.president.pl/news/polish-national-security-advisor-in-newsweek-poland-needs-us-troop-presence,106414>.

⁵² “Davos. Presidents of Poland and the United States Meet,” Oficjalna Strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, January 21, 2026, <https://www.president.pl/news/davos-presidents-of-poland-and-the-united-states-meet,113740>.

member at the first Board of Peace meeting in Washington in February 2026 by one of Nawrocki's advisors.⁵³

In complementarity with President Nawrocki's efforts, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski has been active over the past year in recalibrating the Polish-American strategic partnership on a basis of shared interests. A first telephone conversation between Sikorski and Rubio took place just 3 days after President Trump's inauguration. One month after the inauguration, Sikorski was already in Washington for a face-to-face meeting with Rubio, focused on Ukraine, but also on bilateral cooperation in the military and energy sectors.⁵⁴ Minister Sikorski was the first European foreign minister from outside the Quint (a group comprising the US, UK, Germany, France, and Italy) to meet with the new head of American diplomacy. The Polish MFA also met with representatives of several think tanks, including CEPA, CSIS, the Atlantic Council, Hudson Institute, and the American Enterprise Institute. He took part in the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), a widely attended national event bringing together conservative voices across the United States.⁵⁵ Minister Sikorski had another bilateral meeting with its American counterpart in September 2025, discussing the bilateral cooperation in security and energy, including joint action for a lasting and just end to the war in Ukraine. According to the readout, the “American military presence on NATO’s eastern flank, including in Poland, was a topic of special interest”.⁵⁶ Rubio also declared that Poland will be involved in arrangements to reliably provide a lasting peace in Ukraine. Sikorski engaged with other representatives of the new U.S. administration, such as general Keith Kellogg and Elbridge Colby, but also conservative think tanks on the Hill, such as America First Policy Institute.⁵⁷ This visit included an important public diplomacy element: Sikorski and Rubio both participated in the ceremony to award the Lech Wałęsa Solidarity Prize to a representative of the Cuban opposition.⁵⁸ This prize was

⁵³ Polskie Radio, “Poland’s president to send aide to Trump’s first Board of Peace meeting,” February 20, 2026, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/395/7785/artykul/3649088.polands-president-to-send-aide-to-trumps-first-board-of-peace-meeting>.

⁵⁴ “Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski Meets with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland - Gov.Pl Website,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, February 22, 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/foreign-minister-radoslaw-sikorski-meets-with-us-secretary-of-state-marco-rubio>.

⁵⁵ “Minister Radosław Sikorski on a Visit to United States on 21–25 February,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, February 23, 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/minister-radoslaw-sikorski-on-a-visit-to-united-states-on-2125-february>.

⁵⁶ “Minister Radosław Sikorski Meets with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, September 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/minister-radoslaw-sikorski-meets-with-us-secretary-of-state-marco-rubio>.

⁵⁷ “Deputy Prime Minister Radosław Sikorski Visits Washington - Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland - Gov.Pl Website,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, September 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/deputy-prime-minister-radoslaw-sikorski-visits-washington>.

⁵⁸ “Secretary of State Marco Rubio at the Lech Walesa Solidarity Prize Awards Ceremony,” *United States Department of State*, September 2, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-at-the-lech-walesa-solidarity-prize-awards-ceremony/>.

established at the initiative of Minister Sikorski. The two Polish and American chief diplomats also had a bilateral meeting on the margins of the Munich Security Conference in 2026.⁵⁹

In December 2025, the national security advisor to the prime minister and deputy MFA visited Washington DC to attend the Aspen Security Forum and hold several meetings with representatives of the Department of State and National Security Council, highlighting that the Polish government is a firm advocate for close transatlantic ties to tackle the challenges that the United States and Europe are facing together, such as the Russia-China alliance.⁶⁰

Another valuable tool Poland is actively using with the scope of strengthening its strategic partnership with the United States is think tank engagements and track II diplomacy. In February 2022, PISM, which is the in-house think tank of Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opened an office in Washington DC.⁶¹ The think tank hosts Polish experts that now not only engage with their American counterparts (PISM), but also exercise thought leadership by publishing op-eds in U.S.-based media and hosting events focused on transatlantic security.⁶² PISM also provides analysis and insights on U.S. foreign and security policy, but also on the internal dynamics of the American political scene.⁶³

Poland's engagement with this administration reveals a toolkit built on a tacit domestic consensus despite ideological differences – rivals Nawrocki and Sikorski pursued the same strategic objectives through complementary channels, with the president cultivating conservative networks and the foreign minister working institutional and multilateral tracks simultaneously. Warsaw reinforced executive diplomacy with embedded think tank presence through PISM's Washington office, outreach to conservative thought leaders, and high-profile bilateral deliverables in nuclear energy cooperation, spending commitments, and U.S. troop presence. The result is a blueprint of mature ally diplomacy in which domestic political division becomes a feature rather than a bug, effectively doubling Poland's bandwidth in Washington while projecting the image of a serious, high-spending partner with the regional weight to match.

⁵⁹ "Deputy Prime Minister Sikorski Attends 62nd Munich Security Conference," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, February 2026, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/deputy-prime-minister-sikorski-attends-62nd-munich-security-conference>.

⁶⁰ "Undersecretary of State Robert Kupiecki Visits Washington, D.C.," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland, December 11, 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/undersecretary-of-state-robert-kupiecki-visits-washington-dc>.

⁶¹ PISM, "Official Opening of the PISM Washington Office by Polish Foreign Minister Zbigniew Rau and Inauguration of the PISM DC Embassy Talks Series," February 4, 2022, <https://pism.pl/conferences/official-opening-of-the-pism-washington-office-by-polish-foreign-minister-zbigniew-rau-and-inauguration-of-the-pism-dc-embassy-talks-series>.

⁶² Jeffrey F. Collins et al., "Building a Stronger Maritime Defence Industry Partnership with Poland," *The Hill Times*, n.d., accessed March 3, 2026, <https://www.hilltimes.com/story/2026/01/15/building-a-stronger-maritime-defence-industry-partnership-with-poland/487915/>.

⁶³ PISM, "The Democratic Party Ahead of the 2026 Midterms," February 20, 2026, <https://pism.pl/publications/the-democratic-party-ahead-of-the-2026-midterms>.

Case study #4 - Estonia: the digitally assertive ally banking on strategic consistency

Estonia's engagement with the Trump 2.0 administration can be characterized by composure and institutional continuity. Tallinn approached the transition in a principled, pragmatic way, banking on the stress-test with Republican America since Trump's first term. This was reflected in the MFA's statement the day after the election: the result changed nothing, because Estonia's foreign policy foundations had not changed either. What followed was a multi-track engagement spanning executive diplomacy, parliamentary outreach, business promotion, and two-track channels. Although the channels differed, the messaging remained consistent: assuring the American support for Ukraine, containing the Russian aggression and portraying Estonia as a credible, high-spending, low-burden ally that delivers. Tallinn reinforced these narratives not only through its foreign minister's repeated visits to Washington and the Hill, but also through presidential diplomacy, a business hub at its embassy, new honorary consulates on the U.S. West Coast, and the Lennart Meri Conference, which continued to serve as a platform for shaping transatlantic discourse regarding the Baltic region.

In March 2024, Estonia became a member of the U.S.-led Minerals Security Partnership as the first country representing NATO's eastern flank.⁶⁴ This initiative, launched under the Biden administration, was aimed to improve international cooperation and security of critical raw materials. That same month, Estonia's Foreign Minister visited Washington and saluted the adoption by the Congress of \$228 million in security assistance to the Baltic States, as a bipartisan commitment through the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI).⁶⁵

In October 2024, Estonia opened a business hub at its Embassy in Washington DC aimed at boosting business diplomacy by presenting business opportunities in Estonia to U.S. entrepreneurs and public. The hub also offers tools for Estonian companies of all sizes for establishing contacts with U.S. partners and boosting relations.⁶⁶ Right before the presidential elections, Estonia's MFA met with the Ranking Republican Member of the U.S. Senate's Committee on Foreign Relations to discuss the defense and security cooperation between the two countries.⁶⁷ A day after the elections, the MFA issued a statement highlighting that

⁶⁴ "Estonia Joins the Mineral Security Partnership | Välisministeerium," March 6, 2024, <https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-joins-mineral-security-partnership>.

⁶⁵ "Tsahkna: US Security Assistance to the Baltic States Shows Allied Commitment to Our Defence | Välisministeerium," March 25, 2024, <https://vm.ee/en/news/tsahkna-us-security-assistance-baltic-states-shows-allied-commitment-our-defence>.

⁶⁶ "Estonian Business Hub Opens in Washington | Välisministeerium," October 17, 2024, <https://vm.ee/en/news/estonian-business-hub-opens-washington>.

⁶⁷ "Foreign Minister Tsahkna Met with Ranking Republican Member of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Jim Risch | Välisministeerium," October 30, 2024, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-met-ranking-republican-member-us-senate-foreign-relations-committee>.

“Donald Trump’s victory in the presidential elections of the United States of America does not change Estonia’s foreign policy aims and actions towards the U.S. because the foundations of Estonia’s foreign policy have not changed”, echoing the previous experience of good cooperation with Trump’s administration during his first term.⁶⁸

In January 2025, before the inauguration, the Estonian MFA released a statement criticizing Biden administration’s AI diffusion rule that restricted access to advanced AI chip exports for selected EU member states and NATO allies as a “completely ungrounded, thoughtless, and harmful” error that “should be rectified quickly”.⁶⁹ The AI diffusion framework was later dropped by the Trump administration. A day after the new administration’s inauguration, the Estonian MFA released a statement congratulating President Trump and Vice President Vance. He pledged that the restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, and the defeat of the aggressor in this war remain Estonia’s main foreign policy objectives.⁷⁰ In addition to this statement, the Estonian MFA launched another outlining that “Rubio’s clear foreign policy positions are the basis for successful cooperation” and that “the most serious shared concern is the increasingly strategic cooperation between Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran”.⁷¹ The two chief diplomats had their first phone call on 28 January, 8 days after the inauguration, speaking about the bilateral relations and Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine.⁷²

In the first weeks of the new administration, the Estonian Undersecretary for Economic and Development Affairs and an Estonian business delegation were visiting the West Coast of the United States with the purpose of promoting Estonia’s innovative business environment and investment opportunities.⁷³ Estonia also opened new honorary consulates in Portland and San Francisco, with the purpose of strengthening the technological partnership between the two nations.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna: Estonia’s Foreign Policy Aims Remain Unchanged | Välisministeerium,” November 6, 2024, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-estonias-foreign-policy-aims-remain-unchanged>.

⁶⁹ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna: The Decision of the Biden Administration Is an Error That Should Be Rectified Quickly | Välisministeerium,” January 16, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-decision-biden-administration-error-should-be-rectified-quickly>.

⁷⁰ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna: We Will Continue Reinforcing Our Alliance with the USA | Välisministeerium,” January 21, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-we-will-continue-reinforcing-our-alliance-usa>.

⁷¹ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna: Rubio’s Clear Foreign Policy Positions Are the Basis for Successful Cooperation | Välisministeerium,” January 21, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-rubios-clear-foreign-policy-positions-are-basis-successful>.

⁷² “Tsahkna in Phone Call with Rubio: A Just Peace in Ukraine Makes Both the USA and Europe Stronger | Välisministeerium,” January 28, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/tsahkna-phone-call-rubio-just-peace-ukraine-makes-both-usa-and-europe-stronger>.

⁷³ “Undersecretary Ratnik: US West Coast Is Open to the Solutions of Our Companies | Välisministeerium,” January 30, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/undersecretary-ratnik-us-west-coast-open-solutions-our-companies>.

⁷⁴ “Estonia Opens New Honorary Consulates in Portland and San Francisco | Välisministeerium,” January 31, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/estonia-opens-new-honorary-consulates-portland-and-san-francisco>.

Together with his Latvian and Lithuanian counterparts, the Estonian MFA visited Washington DC in February 2025 to meet with congressmen from both sides of the political aisle and demonstrate unity in assisting Ukraine and pressuring the Russian Federation because it would also deter other hostile powers, including Iran, North Korea, and China.⁷⁵ In late March 2025, the Estonian MFA and his Baltic counterparts met with the U.S. Secretary of State Rubio for the first time since the inauguration of the new administration to discuss transatlantic relations and achieving a lasting peace in Ukraine.⁷⁶

In the context of the news that U.S. will impose tariffs on the European Union, the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs released a statement mentioning that “trade tensions do not benefit either side” and that “the EU must stand up for its interests”.⁷⁷

In May 2025, the Foreign Ministers met with members of Congress from both sides of the political aisle and think tanks – Heritage Foundation, the Institute for the Study of War, and the American Enterprise Institute. The Estonian minister mentioned that “China, Iran, and North Korea are also following developments in Ukraine” and that the cost of war must be raised for the Russian Federation.⁷⁸

At the NATO Summit in The Hague, the Estonian MFA said that, during a conversation with U.S. President Donald Trump, he thanked the U.S. for the efforts that led to the release of an Estonian citizen from a Belarusian prison.⁷⁹ On the margins of UNGA in New York, the MFA met with U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine General Keith Kellogg and with U.S. Secretary of Marco Rubio to discuss Ukraine’s potential to win the war.⁸⁰

In November 2025, a representative of the Estonian MFA participated in the US-Nordic-Baltic foreign and security consultations, that were focused on Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine, NATO priorities, the security environment in the Baltic region, and developments in the Indo-Pacific.⁸¹ These consultations were held under the E-PINE

⁷⁵ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna in Washington: USA and Europe Need to Demonstrate Strength to Ensure Security | Välisministeerium,” February 6, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-washington-usa-and-europe-need-demonstrate-strength-ensure-security>.

⁷⁶ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna Met with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in Washington DC | Välisministeerium,” March 25, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-met-us-secretary-state-marco-rubio-washington-dc>.

⁷⁷ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna: Tariffs Benefit No One | Välisministeerium,” April 3, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-tariffs-benefit-no-one>.

⁷⁸ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna in Washington: The Kremlin Understands Only the Language of Strength and Action | Välisministeerium,” May 7, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-washington-kremlin-understands-only-language-strength-and-action>.

⁷⁹ “Foreign Minister Tsahkna at the NATO Summit: Estonia Can Be Contented | Välisministeerium,” May 26, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-nato-summit-estonia-can-be-contented>.

⁸⁰ “Tsahkna Meets with Rubio: NATO Allies Are Firmly Committed to Collective Defense | Välisministeerium,” September 25, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/tsahkna-meets-rubio-nato-allies-are-firmly-committed-collective-defense>; “Foreign Minister Tsahkna at Meeting with Special Representative Kellogg: By Jointly Increasing Pressure, Russia Can Be Defeated | Välisministeerium,” September 24, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-meeting-special-representative-kellogg-jointly-increasing-pressure>.

⁸¹ “Undersecretary Roger Takes Part in US-Nordic-Baltic Foreign and Security Policy Consultations | Välisministeerium,” November 14, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/undersecretary-roger-takes-part-us-nordic-baltic-foreign-and-security-policy-consultations>.

(Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe) framework, active since 2003. The U.S. delegation was led by Allison Hooker, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs at the US Department of State. That same month, the Foreign Minister participated in a Congressional hearing on the Russian Federation's escalating hybrid attacks chaired by the Republican Roger Wicker, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Chair of the Helsinki Commission.⁸²

Another key tool for adapting the partnership with the United States to the new political context was parliamentary diplomacy. In December 2024, one month after Trump's reelection, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament met with its American counterpart, Senator Jim Risch, as well as other Republican senators to underline that restoring lasting peace in Europe is only possible "through a united and forceful policy of the Western countries that would help Ukraine win the war of aggression launched by Russia, and join NATO".⁸³ In March 2025, the Chairman of the National Defense Committee in the Parliament also had a series of meetings on the Hill to discuss transatlantic relations and the imperative of supporting Ukraine, engaging also with the Atlantic Council and the Department of Defense.⁸⁴ The Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, joined by parliamentarians from France, Germany, and Poland had another visit in Washington in April 2025 with a focus on transatlantic security, organized by the Polish think tank Casimir Pulaski Foundation.⁸⁵ In his dialogue with U.S. senators, the Estonian official highlighted that strong support and military assistance to Ukraine is necessary, highlighting also the fact the Estonia's sharply increased its defense spending levels and is committed to NATO unity in the face of threats coming from Moscow and Beijing.⁸⁶ A delegation of the Foreign Affairs Committee led by its Chairman returned to the U.S. in July 2025 to meet Brian Mast, the Chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, officials from the Department of State, think tanks, and the Estonian diaspora with the purpose of strengthening bilateral ties.⁸⁷

⁸² "Foreign Minister Tsahkna at a U.S. Congressional Commission: Russia's Escalating Hybrid Attacks Will Receive a Firm Response from NATO | Välisministeerium," November 18, 2025, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-us-congressional-commission-russias-escalating-hybrid-attacks-will>.

⁸³ Karin Kangro, "Mihkelson Urged the USA to Support Ukraine's Victory Plan," *Riigikogu*, December 6, 2024, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/news-from-committees/foreign-affairs-committee/mihkelson-urged-the-usa-to-support-ukraine-s-victory-plan/>.

⁸⁴ Karin Kangro, "Chairman of the National Defence Committee Starts with Meetings at the US Congress," *Riigikogu*, March 31, 2025, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/news-from-committees/national-defence-committee/chairman-of-the-national-defence-committee-starts-with-meetings-at-the-us-congress/>.

⁸⁵ Karin Kangro, "Mihkelson Discusses Security Situation and Cooperation with USA in Washington," *Riigikogu*, April 6, 2025, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/news-from-committees/foreign-affairs-committee/mihkelson-discusses-security-situation-and-cooperation-with-usa-in-washington/>.

⁸⁶ Karin Kangro, "Mihkelson Stressed the Importance of Strong Allied Relations and NATO Unity," *Riigikogu*, April 15, 2025, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/news-from-committees/foreign-affairs-committee/mihkelson-stressed-the-importance-of-strong-allied-relations-and-nato-unity/>.

⁸⁷ Karin Kangro, "In Its Visit to the US, the Foreign Affairs Committee Discusses Support for Ukraine, Pressure on Russia, and Strengthening Security in the Allied Space," *Riigikogu*, July 14, 2025, <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/news-from-committees/foreign-affairs-committee/in-its-visit-to-the-us-the-foreign-affairs-committee-discusses-support-for-ukraine-pressure-on-russia-and-strengthening-security-in-the-allied-space/>.

Estonia's President also played a role in setting the bilateral framework with the United States, albeit a more ceremonial role. In his congratulatory message on the day of Donald Trump's inauguration, Estonia's President highlighted his country's continued commitment to collective defense, probed by the increase spending ("Estonia will spend nearly 4% of its GDP on national defense, with a significant portion allocated to purchasing new equipment and ammunition from the United States").⁸⁸ He also stressed the importance of acting together to support Ukraine and counter global threats. In a meeting with U.S. senators in Estonia in August 2025, President Karis highlighted that transatlantic relations and support for Ukraine are key for European security, mentioning the importance of containing the Russian Federation's foreign policy objectives.⁸⁹ President Karis was accompanied by a delegation from Estonia's creative industries in New York in October 2025. This visit's focus was fostering business and economic partnerships, R&D and the use of AI in education. Estonia's President also gave lectures at Yale University and the University of Chicago, focused on Estonia's foreign and security policy and the importance of bolstering democracy in today's world.⁹⁰

In February 2026, the Congress approved the U.S. defense and foreign operations budget, which also include a \$200 million package to the US–Baltic security assistance program, the Baltic Security Initiative (BSI), as well as \$10 million for training representatives of defense structures through the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program.⁹¹ BSI was established in 2020 with the aim of developing the Baltic States' independent defense capabilities and their interoperability and proved to be a bipartisan instrument of security cooperation that continues in this administration.

Lennart Meri Conference, the annual foreign policy forum organized by the International Centre for Defense and Security (ICDS), founded in 2006 by the Estonian Government, is a public diplomacy opportunity for Estonia to voice its preferences in the Euro-Atlantic security landscape. In 2025, the conference brought together representatives of U.S.-

⁸⁸ Office of the President of the Republic of Estonia, "President Alar Karis Congratulated Donald Trump on Assuming Office as the 47th President of the United States," January 20, 2025, <https://president.ee/en/media/press-releases/56878-president-alar-karis-congratulated-donald-trump-assuming-office-47th-president-united-states>.

⁸⁹ "President Karis: Transatlantic Relations and Support for Ukraine Are of Key Importance," Office of the President of the Republic of Estonia, August 2025, <https://president.ee/en/media/press-releases/57431-president-karis-transatlantic-relations-and-support-ukraine-are-key-importance>.

⁹⁰ "Head of State's US Visit to Include University Lectures, Concerts and UN Meetings," Office of the President of the Republic of Estonia, October 2025, <https://president.ee/en/media/press-releases/57608-head-states-us-visit-include-university-lectures-concerts-and-un-meetings>.

⁹¹ "Foreign Minister Tsahkna: Continued US Security Assistance to the Baltic States Strengthens NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture on the Alliance's Eastern Flank | Välisministeerium," February 3, 2026, <https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-tsahkna-continued-us-security-assistance-baltic-states-strengthens-natos>.



based think tanks such as CEPA and the Atlantic Council, including in a panel aimed at untangling Trump administration's Ukraine policy.⁹²

Estonia's diplomatic toolkit under Trump 2.0 combined institutional continuity with multi-track outreach – spanning ministerial visits, parliamentary delegations, culture-focused presidential diplomacy, and business promotion. These were all anchored by a consistent message that Tallinn is a credible, high-spending ally that shares Washington's concerns about the Russian Federation, China, and the broader authoritarian axis. Estonia doubled down on the foundations it had stress-tested during Trump's first term, while expanding its footprint through new West Coast consulates, an embassy business hub, and the Lennart Meri Conference as a platform for shaping transatlantic discourse, resulting in a confident self-presentation.

Case study #5 - Latvia: the proactive ally with unmatched diplomatic tempo

In a speech opened with the message “Latvia cannot have too many friends in international politics”, the Speaker of the Latvian Parliament outlined that the United States “is and will remain our strategic partner”.⁹³ With this priority in mind, Latvia's engagement with the second Trump administration was defined by relentless diplomatic tempo and a deliberate effort to position Riga as Washington's natural partner in the technology competition with China. Since the November 2024 elections, Latvia's Foreign Minister Baiba Braže made no fewer than six working visits to Washington – a frequency that, for a country of Latvia's size, speaks to a strategic investment in face time that few allies of the ones surveyed in this analysis matched. Across these visits, the Latvian chief diplomat paired the traditional security and pro-Ukraine messaging with a forward-looking pitch centered on strategic investment in telecommunications, quantum technology, AI, and cybersecurity. This framed Latvia not only as a defense contributor to NATO's eastern flank, but also as an eager adopter of American technology stack and willing production partner in high-tech and defense industries. On the parliamentary front, Latvia broke new ground by appointing a dedicated special representative to the United States in July 2025, an institutional innovation aimed at better positioning Latvia

⁹² “The Trump Administration's Ukraine Policy,” Agenda, *Lennart Meri Conference*, n.d., accessed March 3, 2026, <https://lmc.icds.ee/agenda/the-trump-administrations-ukraine-policy-in-cooperation-with-the-council-on-foreign-relations/>; “Speakers,” *Lennart Meri Conference 2025*, n.d., accessed March 3, 2026, <https://lmc.icds.ee/conference-2025/speakers/>.

⁹³ “Speaker of the Saeima: Latvia Cannot Have Too Many Friends in International Politics,” Saeima.Lv, January 29, 2026, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/35463-speaker-of-the-saeima-latvia-cannot-have-too-many-friends-in-international-politics>.

in the high-competitive political space that is Washington. The Latvian foreign and security policy elite shows that securing bipartisan support for instruments like the Baltic Security Initiative requires a permanent, embedded presence on the Hill, not just periodic visits. Together, these efforts add up to a portrait of a small ally looking to make an offer to Washington that goes beyond geography and has built its engagement strategy accordingly.

After the reelection of Donald Trump but prior to his inauguration, Latvia's Foreign Minister already made a working visit to Washington DC to meet with U.S. politicians and several think tanks, such as the Atlantic Council, the American Enterprise Institute, and the Hudson Institute.⁹⁴ Minister Braže engaged in discussion with Republican Congressmen, including the newly-elected Chair of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, to discuss security on the eastern flank of NATO and support for Ukraine. The MFA also highlighted Latvia's desire for the U.S. economic involvement to be deeper, especially in the areas of military industry, ICT, and advanced technologies, underscoring the opportunities for collaboration on 5G testing projects.⁹⁵ 4 days after the inauguration, the Latvian MFA had a first dialogue with the new U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, highlighting the need to increase defense spending within NATO and provide further support for Ukraine.⁹⁶

In February 2025, the Latvian MFA visited Washington DC to meet with members of the Congress and think tanks involved in the strategic planning of the new administration's foreign policy.⁹⁷ She highlighted again the opportunity to develop a range of practical security and economic cooperation projects of shared interest – energy security, cybersecurity and hi-tech, 5G/6G telecommunications and quantum technologies.⁹⁸

Estonia's MFA had another visit in Washington DC in March 2025, this time for meeting Secretary of State Marco Rubio, joined by the other Baltic MFAs.⁹⁹ She also visited the Victims of Communism Memorial in Washington DC, a cultural institution that is also in

⁹⁴ "Foreign Minister Baiba Braže to Make a Working Visit to the United States of America | Ārlietu Ministrija," December 10, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-baiba-braze-make-working-visit-united-states-america>.

⁹⁵ "Baiba Braže on a Visit to the US: Talks in Washington Reaffirm an Invariably Strong Latvia-US Strategic Cooperation | Ārlietu Ministrija," December 14, 2024, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baiba-braze-visit-us-talks-washington-reaffirm-invariably-strong-latvia-us-strategic-cooperation>.

⁹⁶ "Baiba Braže, in a Conversation with Marco Rubio, Highlights Latvia's Close Partnership with the U.S. and Thanks for Support | Ārlietu Ministrija," January 24, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baiba-braze-conversation-marco-rubio-highlights-latvias-close-partnership-us-and-thanks-support>.

⁹⁷ "Foreign Minister Baiba Braže to Make a Working Visit to the USA | Ārlietu Ministrija," February 5, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-baiba-braze-make-working-visit-usa>.

⁹⁸ "Baiba Braže in Washington, D.C.: Together with the Baltic Ministers We Are Enhancing Cooperation with the U.S. in Security, Energy and New Technologies | Ārlietu Ministrija," February 8, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baiba-braze-washington-dc-together-baltic-ministers-we-are-enhancing-cooperation-us-security-energy-and-new-technologies>.

⁹⁹ "Baiba Braže in Washington, D.C.: Latvia, the Baltic States and the U.S. Are the Closest Allies, We'll Continue Cooperation in Security, Economy, Technologies | Ārlietu Ministrija," March 25, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baiba-braze-washington-dc-latvia-baltic-states-and-us-are-closest-allies-well-continue-cooperation-security-economy-technologies>.

part funded by the Latvian government. Prior to The Hague Summit, the U.S. Ambassador to NATO was invited by the Latvian MFA in Riga to discuss Latvia's contribution to allied defense. The American official emphasized that the U.S. sees Latvia as a "model ally that treats its defense with responsibility and guards NATO's eastern border".¹⁰⁰ The Latvian official emphasized that it is necessary to ensure a fair burden sharing, with all member states moving towards spending 5% of their GDP on defense. Following the NATO Summit, Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs visited the United States to participate at the Aspen Security Forum, meeting U.S. officials, businesspeople, and opinion leaders.¹⁰¹

In September 2025, the Latvian MFA had another conversation with the U.S. Secretary of State concerning support to Ukraine and the peace process, but also the U.S.-Baltic cooperation in the field of defense and technologies through the Baltic Security Initiative.¹⁰²

On the academic cooperation front, the Latvian MFA and Stanford University Libraries signed a memorandum of understanding with the aim of promoting visits by Latvian scholars, researchers, and doctoral students to Stanford University, as well as visits by students at Stanford University to Latvia and the Baltic region. The MoU will also facilitate representatives from Latvia carrying out lectures and seminars at Stanford University.¹⁰³

In December 2025, the Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs had another trip to Washington with the purpose of deepening cooperation in the areas of security and defense, but also to give interviews to U.S. media and hold discussions with Hudson Institute and the America First Policy Institute. Minister Braže met the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Landau to discuss Latvian-U.S. cooperation, but also several Congressmen from both political parties, including Republican Senators Lindsey Graham and Ted Cruz.¹⁰⁴

In February 2026, Minister Braže returned to the U.S. for a working visit covering both New York and Washington, during which she met the U.S. Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby, the U.S. Special Envoy to Belarus John P. Coale, and senators from

¹⁰⁰ "Baiba Braže: We Are of One Mind with U.S. Ambassador to NATO Whitaker on the Importance for All the Allies at The Hague NATO Summit to Agree on a Spending Increase | Ārlietu Ministrija," June 15, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baiba-braze-we-are-one-mind-us-ambassador-nato-whitaker-importance-all-allies-hague-nato-summit-agree-spending-increase>.

¹⁰¹ "Foreign Minister Baiba Braže on a Working Visit to the United States | Ārlietu Ministrija," July 14, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-baiba-braze-working-visit-united-states>.

¹⁰² "On Foreign Minister Baiba Braže's Conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio | Ārlietu Ministrija," September 8, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/foreign-minister-baiba-brazes-conversation-us-secretary-state-marco-rubio>.

¹⁰³ "Latvia and Stanford University Libraries Sign a Memorandum of Understanding, Opening New Opportunities for Academic and Research Cooperation between Latvia and the United States | Ārlietu Ministrija," September 5, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/latvia-and-stanford-university-libraries-sign-memorandum-understanding-opening-new-opportunities-academic-and-research-cooperation-between-latvia-and-united-states>.

¹⁰⁴ "Baiba Braže on a Visit to the US: We Will Continue to Strengthen Our Excellent Cooperation in Security, Economy and the Consolidation of Common Interests | Ārlietu Ministrija," December 10, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/baiba-braze-visit-us-we-will-continue-strengthen-our-excellent-cooperation-security-economy-and-consolidation-common-interests>.

both parties.¹⁰⁵ The Latvian official also attended Donald Trump's State of the Union address and a roundtable organized by the American-Central European Business Association, where U.S. entrepreneurs were introduced to the investment environment in Latvia and discussed opportunities for cooperation in energy, the military industry, drone technology, AI, telecommunications, and quantum technologies. Latvia also declared its support for the Pax Silica initiative for stabilizing technology supply chains.¹⁰⁶

Parliamentary diplomacy was a key pillar for strengthening Latvian-American cooperation, especially with the purpose of attracting bipartisan support for the Baltic Security Initiative. In May 2025, the Deputy Speaker of the Latvian Parliament engaged in Washington DC with Republican Congressmen and the leadership of the Heritage Foundation with the purpose of gathering support for the allocation of \$375 million to the Baltic Security Initiative. The Deputy speaker also emphasized that energy is becoming an important area of bilateral cooperation, especially through the supply of LNG. In July 2025, the Parliament appointed a special representative to the United States with the aim of reinforcing the relationship between the two nations and ensuring that Latvia's voice is heard more widely. This representative's tasks include representing the Latvian Parliament in relation to U.S. institutions, primarily the Congress and supporting engagement with U.S.-based Baltic organizations such as the American Latvian Association and the Joint Baltic American National Committee.¹⁰⁷ This new position will be hosted by the Embassy of Latvia in Washington DC. That same month, a delegation of advisors from the U.S. Congress was received at the Latvian Parliament to discuss bilateral cooperation, especially the U.S. contribution to security in the Baltic region and the sanctions on the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁸ The Parliament was represented at the annual Aspen Security Forum, where the Deputy Speaker engaged with Congressmen and researchers from the Aspen Strategy Group, the Atlantic Council, the Krach Institute, and the Hudson Institute,

¹⁰⁵ "B. Braže on a Working Visit to the United States: Statements at the UN General Assembly and UN Security Council, Meetings with Members of the US Administration and Congress | Ārlietu Ministrija," February 24, 2026, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/b-braze-working-visit-united-states-statements-un-general-assembly-and-un-security-council-meetings-members-us-administration-and-congress>.

¹⁰⁶ "B. Braže on a Visit to the United States: A Strong Mutual Interest in Deepening Cooperation in Security and Economic Matters and Enhancing NATO's Defence Capabilities | Ārlietu Ministrija," February 27, 2026, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/b-braze-visit-united-states-strong-mutual-interest-deepening-cooperation-security-and-economic-matters-and-enhancing-natos-defence-capabilities>.

¹⁰⁷ "Saeima Appoints Representative to the United States to Strengthen Transatlantic Dialogue, Regional Security, and Interparliamentary Cooperation," Saeima.Lv, July 2, 2025, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/34888-saeima-appoints-representative-to-the-united-states-to-strengthen-transatlantic-dialogue-regional-security-and-interparliamentary-cooperation>.

¹⁰⁸ "Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica: Cooperation with the US Congress Is a Priority for the Saeima," Saeima.Lv, July 2, 2025, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/34889-zanda-kalnina-lukasevica-cooperation-with-the-us-congress-is-a-priority-for-the-saeima>.

as well as representatives from technology companies such as OpenAI, Amazon, and Defcon AI.¹⁰⁹

In August 2025, the Republican Congressman Andrew Harris visited Latvia and was received by the Speaker to discuss sanctions and pressure on the Russian Federation, as well as the Baltic Defense line.¹¹⁰ The Latvian politicians emphasized their country's unwavering support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. The Deputy Speaker also highlighted the importance of the return of Ukrainian children abducted and deported by Russia.¹¹¹ In September 2025, members of the 3 Parliaments from the Baltic Sea region issued a letter to Members of the U.S. Congress stating the importance of the Baltic Security Initiative.¹¹² The MPs also emphasized the robust defense contributions of all the three Baltic nations that have long exceeded NATO's minimum threshold of 2%, while also providing the largest per capita military support to Ukraine. Complementary to bilateral efforts, in 2025, the House Baltic Caucus reached the milestone of 100 members, highlighted as "proof of the close cooperation between the U.S. and the Baltic states in this format".¹¹³

Much like in Estonia's case, the role of the Latvian President in the nation's foreign and security policy is rather ceremonial. In the congratulatory message to President Trump, President Rinkēvičs highlighted the importance of countering Russian aggression and supporting Ukraine. Latvia's President also assured that the U.S. can rely on Latvia as a "steadfast and trustworthy ally, dedicated to strengthening its own and the Alliance's capabilities".¹¹⁴ A month later, the President appointed a new Ambassador of the United States to Latvia. The President of Latvia expressed again his "conviction that close and pragmatic transatlantic cooperation remains an indispensable element for both European security and support to Ukraine".¹¹⁵ The Latvian President also mentioned that "we have stood shoulder to shoulder with U.S. troops in addressing the threats of international terrorism in Afghanistan

¹⁰⁹ "Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica Meets US Officials at the Aspen Security Forum," Saeima.Lv, July 21, 2025, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/34898-zanda-kalnina-lukasevica-meets-us-officials-at-the-aspen-security-forum>.

¹¹⁰ "Saeima Presidium to US Congressman Andrew Harris: Sanctions Pressure on Russia Must Continue," Saeima.Lv, August 18, 2025, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/34911-saeima-presidium-to-us-congressman-andrew-harris-sanctions-pressure-on-russia-must-continue>.

¹¹¹ "Zanda Kalniņa-Lukaševica Discusses Regional Security and the Return of Abducted Ukrainian Children with U.S. Congressman Harris," Saeima.Lv, August 20, 2025, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/34927-zanda-kalnina-lukasevica-discusses-regional-security-and-the-return-of-abducted-ukrainian-children-with-u-s-congressman-harris>.

¹¹² "Baltic Parliamentarians Thank the U.S. for Support and Call for Continued Funding of the Baltic Security Initiative," Saeima.Lv, September 11, 2025, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/34965-baltic-parliamentarians-thank-the-u-s-for-support-and-call-for-continued-funding-of-the-baltic-security-initiative>.

¹¹³ "100 Members of Congress Have Already Joined the U.S. House Baltic Caucus | Ārlietu Ministrija," July 30, 2025, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/article/100-members-congress-have-already-joined-us-house-baltic-caucus>.

¹¹⁴ "President of Latvia Congratulates Donald Trump on Inauguration as President of the United States | Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja," January 20, 2025, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-congratulates-donald-trump-inauguration-president-united-states>.

¹¹⁵ "President of Latvia Congratulates Donald Trump on Inauguration as President of the United States | Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja."



and Iraq, even before joining NATO”.¹¹⁶ The newly appointed U.S. Ambassador to Latvia mentioned that “the Baltic States serve as a good example for other countries in investing in their own defense”.¹¹⁷ The Ambassador also praised Latvia’s policy of easing tax conditions for American investors, which will help strengthen the economic relations between the two countries.

What we can observe from analyzing Latvia’s diplomatic engagement with the current administration in Washington is a layered toolkit combining high-frequency ministerial visits, parliamentary innovation, and a technology-forward economic pitch designed to reframe Latvia as more than a geography-defined ally. By institutionalizing its presence through a dedicated parliamentary representative, cultivating bipartisan Congressional support, and pairing eastern flank-related security messaging with concrete offers in AI, quantum technology, and telecommunications, Riga demonstrated that small states can punch above their weight in Washington through sustained diplomacy.

DISCUSSION: WHAT COULD ROMANIA LEARN FROM ITS NORTHEASTERN NATO ALLIES?

For Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Poland, and Finland alike, advocacy for continued American support to Kyiv was not treated as a competitor to their own security agendas. Rather, it was the foundation upon which those agendas were built. The leadership of these five countries was consistent in messaging that the Russian Federation’s aggression in Ukraine threatens all NATO’s eastern flank, and that these countries stood ready to bear their share of the burden. Romania faces an analogous strategic logic. Bucharest’s interest in securing American commitment to Black Sea security, in maintaining pressure on Moscow, and in attracting U.S. defense investment are not advanced by a transactional silence on Ukraine. On the contrary, they must be advanced by making the case, consistently and publicly, that Ukraine’s resilience is an investment in Romania’s security. A Romanian state that is perceived as narrowly self-interested risks being seen as a free rider rather than a reliable ally.

¹¹⁶ “President of Latvia Accredits the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Republic of Latvia, Melissa Argyros | Valsts Prezidenta Kanceleja,” February 20, 2025, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/president-latvia-accredits-ambassador-extraordinary-and-plenipotentiary-united-states-america-republic-latvia-melissa-argyros>.

¹¹⁷ “Daiga Mierīņa: I Am Confident That Our Cooperation with the New U.S. Ambassador Will Be a Success,” Saeima.Lv, February 20, 2026, <https://www.saeima.lv/en/news/saeima-news/35540-daiga-mierina-i-am-confident-that-our-cooperation-with-the-new-u-s-ambassador-will-be-a-success>.



What distinguished the most effective allies in this analysis was not the prestige of any single summit or White House visit, but the relentless cadence and depth of their engagement. Latvia's Foreign Minister made no fewer than six working visits to Washington in little over a year. Lithuania's chief diplomat was testifying before the Helsinki Commission within weeks of Trump's reelection. Estonia was ready with its post-election statement the day after the results came in, having prepared its messaging well in advance. These states were not reactive – they were proactive and moved quickly to shape the conversation in Washington before the new administration's priorities clarified. This engagement was substantive: northeastern allies lead with concrete proposals (such as the icebreaker deal of Finland), precise figures on defense spending, and clearly articulated positions on sanctions, energy, and technology cooperation. Given that Washington's attention is a scarce and competitive resource, Romania should internalize this blueprint of continuous, prepared diplomacy. Sporadic high-level visits cannot substitute for a persistent, year-round engage architecture in which Romanian officials are visible, credible, and capable of moving quickly when the political moment demands it.

One of the most instructive institutional tools documented in this paper is the deliberate investment in parliamentary diplomacy as a vehicle for securing bipartisan support in the United States Congress. Although in the current environment in Washington the foreign policy making is less centered on the Congress and more on the executive branch, the Baltic states, through their continuous diplomacy, assured the funding of the Baltic Security Initiative – a dedicated security assistance framework that secured \$200 million in 2026 for Baltic defense capabilities and retained its funding despite the new National Security Strategy that downplays U.S.'s involvement in Europe.¹¹⁸ Baltic parliamentarians' activism for BSI included joint letters to U.S. Senators, hosting Congressional staff delegations, travels to Washington for committee hearings, and even the establishment of a dedicated representative of Latvia's Parliament on the Hill. By comparison, Romania's parliamentary diplomacy in the past year was scattered and circumstantial. The representatives of the ruling coalition had no unified parliamentary delegation to engage with the U.S. Congress leadership, leaving the room open for the representatives of the far-right party AUR to fill in the gaps. Revitalizing the Foreign Affairs Committees of the Romanian Parliament and the Pro-America parliamentary group as instruments of active American engagement – through regular congressional visits, joint delegations with regional partners, and a clear focus on funding mechanisms for the U.S. Black

¹¹⁸ David Cattler, *What the New US National Security Strategy Really Signals for Europe - International Centre for Defence and Security*, Commentary, December 8, 2025, <https://icds.ee/en/what-the-new-us-national-security-strategy-really-signals-for-europe/>.



Sea Security strategy would fill a gap in Bucharest's diplomatic toolkit and insulate bilateral programs from the volatility of executive-level politics.

Finland and Poland illustrate, in strikingly different ways, what principled personal diplomacy can look like when deployed strategically. President Stubb's round of gold at Mar-a-Lago was not a capitulation to the style of the Trump administration, but a deliberate investment in access. The personal rapport Stubb built with Trump opened a channel that ultimately placed Helsinki at the table in Ukraine peace discussions, a seat that Finland's geographic and historical credentials alone would not have guaranteed (in fact, Finland was offered a greater seat at the table compared to Poland's). At the same time, Finland never compromised its substantive positions: President Stubb consistently advocated for Ukrainian sovereignty, a just and lasting peace, and the maintenance of sanctions on Moscow. Poland's Nawrocki offers a parallel lesson from a conservative political context. His engagement with Trump's inner circle was grounded in the ideological alignment between the two, probed even in the context of the presidential election in Poland, when Nawrocki was publicly endorsed by Trump and benefited from having a cabinet-level secretary at one of his political rallies.¹¹⁹ As president, Nawrocki continued to articulate ideologically aligned positions on energy independence, NATO burden-sharing, and skepticism of the European Green Deal, without abandoning Poland's core security interests, including the importance of containing the Russian Federation. Both cases demonstrate that personal diplomacy does not imply ideological mimicry. Romania's leadership has an opportunity to develop analogous access through shared interests in energy, defense investment, and Black Sea security without adopting the MAGA political framework that countries like Hungary have pursued in a manner that ultimately eroded their credibility across the transatlantic spectrum.

Another defining feature of the diplomatic strategic surveyed in this paper is the consistent effort to frame the transatlantic relationship as mutually commercially beneficial, rather than as one-way security subsidy. Finland's landmark icebreaker deal, worth \$6.1 billion, transformed the bilateral relationship into a commercially anchored partnership that served American Arctic ambitions while showcasing Finnish industrial expertise. Lithuania actively promoted its laser technology and photonics companies to the U.S. Department of Defense Innovation Unit and NASA. Latvia built its pitch around 5G, quantum technologies,

¹¹⁹ Alicja Ptak, "Trump Security Secretary Noem Endorses Polish Conservative Presidential Candidate at CPAC Poland," News, *Notes From Poland*, May 27, 2025, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2025/05/27/trump-security-secretary-noem-endorses-polish-conservative-presidential-candidate-at-cpac-poland/>.



and AI sectors where American investment would find a willing and capable partner. Estonia opened a dedicated business hub at its Washington embassy and expanded its honorary consulate network to the U.S. West Coast specifically to attract technology investment. The common denominator is a win-win framing: these nations came to Washington not only as security consumers but as strategic investment destinations. Romania, too, has a compelling offer to make in this regard – a large, strategically located market, a growing defense industry, a NATO ally committed to reach 5% of GDP for defense, and a Black Sea coastline increasingly relevant to energy transit, undersea cable security, and drone defense. The task for Bucharest is to package this offer proactively, in a language that resonates with both the security and economic priorities of the current administration, and to ensure it is heard not just in the State Department but in other agencies, including Departments of Commerce, Energy, and the Development Finance Corporation.

Romania's foreign and security policy elite has long framed the Black Sea primarily through the lens of Russian military threat – a framing that, while accurate and important, speaks to a narrower audience in Washington than a more expansive geopolitical narrative would. The northeastern allies previously examined offer a more sophisticated model for presenting their neighborhood. Estonia's foreign minister highlighted multiple times to U.S. counterparts that China, Iran, and North Korea are also following developments in Ukraine, deliberately widening the strategic canvas from a bilateral conflict to a broader authoritarian coalition challenge that directly impacts U.S.'s national security priorities. Latvia positioned itself as a partner in the technology competition with China, pitching its telecommunications and quantum sectors as a front line in the contest over critical infrastructure. Lithuania identified the Russian Federation and China as twin threats to the Euro-Atlantic security. This reframing served a strategic purpose: it connected the Baltic security agenda to the Indo-Pacific priorities that dominate the Trump administration's strategic worldview, positioning these small allies as relevant actors in a global competition, not merely as regional defense consumers. Romania is uniquely placed to make a version of this argument for the Black Sea, especially in the context of Turkey's recent affiliation with BRICS and the strategic partnership between Tbilisi and Beijing that resulted in China's deep involvement in the Anaklia port construction.¹²⁰ The Black Sea region is therefore not only contested by Russian military

¹²⁰ Reid Standish, "Chinese-Led Consortium To Build Massive Port Project On Georgia's Black Sea Coast," News, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 13:14:45Z, <https://www.rferl.org/a/anaklia-georgia-china-port-winner/32970697.html>; "BRICS Offered Turkey Partner Country Status, Turkish Trade Minister Says," World, *Reuters*, November 14, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/brics-offered-turkey-partner-country-status-turkish-trade-minister-says-2024-11-14/>.



power, but it is also increasingly targeted by Chinese investment in ports, energy infrastructure, and telecommunications, and could constitute a critical node in the broader effort to diversify supply chains away from producers with opaque security agendas, like China is. Framing the Black Sea as both a Euro-Atlantic security anchor and a theater of great power competition with China would give Romania's diplomatic narrative a reach and resonance it currently lacks.

Perhaps the most structurally significant investment any of the five allies made in their Washington engagement was Poland's decision to open a dedicated PISM office in the American capital in 2022. This office became not merely a source of analysis for Warsaw, but an active participant in the Washington policy conversation by publishing op-eds in U.S. media, hosting events on transatlantic security, and maintaining continuous contact with think tanks across the ideological spectrum, from the Atlantic Council to the America First Policy Institute. This is the infrastructure of influence: a persistent intellectual presence that keeps a country's interests visible even when no minister is in town. The Baltic States complement this with their flagship annual forums, such as the Lennart Meri Conference, the Helsinki Security Forum, the Snow Meeting in Vilnius, which bring American analysts and policymakers into their own capitals and serve as platforms for shaping transatlantic discourse from the eastern flank. None of these countries sought influence in Washington by adopting the MAGA political identity, as Hungary has done. Their approach was ideologically neutral at the level of domestic political mimicry but substantively engaged across the full spectrum of American foreign policy opinion. Romania lacks an equivalent institutional anchor in Washington. Establishing a Romanian policy research office or think tank presence in the American capital – whether affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a major university, or an independent foundation – would be among the highest-leverage investments Bucharest could make in its long-term relationship with Washington. Such an intellectual infrastructure would give Romania a voice that endures beyond any individual administration or electoral cycle on either side of the Atlantic.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The northeastern NATO allies analyzed in this paper navigated the second Trump administration through a blend of engagement strategies that combine institutional continuity, personal chemistry, parliamentary depth, commercial substance, and think tank infrastructure. All of them operated from a shared premise: that influence in Washington must be earned

continuously, not assumed by virtue of alliance membership. Regardless of their domestic politics landscape, all five states prioritized adaptation of their strategic partnerships with Washington without neglecting their shared interests of containing the Russian Federation and supporting Ukraine's prevail.

For Romania, a country with genuine strategic assets and legitimate security interests that depend on a functional relationship with Washington, the gap between what it has to offer and what it has so far communicated to Washington is both a challenge and an opportunity.

Five concrete recommendations emerge from this analysis:

1. Portray the security dialogue with the U.S. as two-fold: bilateral and regional.

In engaging with Washington, Bucharest needs to be more vocal about the need for a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. A just peace in Ukraine is imperative for Romania's security, and this preference must be clearly and principally outlined in relation to the U.S. government.

2. Engage with media and think tanks that are key for shaping perceptions among the MAGA elite. It is instructive to follow the Polish MFA's example: although Radoslaw Sikorski does not share the MAGA ideology – on the contrary, he has been very vocal about the fact that the current Republican leadership is not authentic conservative, he still participated in the CPAC gatherings and engaged with MAGA-aligned think tanks such as the America First Policy Institute. In preparation for the Romanian President's visit to the White House, the Foreign Minister or even the President himself might consider an interview on Fox News or an op-ed in Washington Post or the Washington Times outlining Romania's priorities in relation to Washington.

3. Revitalize the Pro-America group in the Romanian Parliament as an instrument to create bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress. The inclusion of explicit support for Romania in the upcoming National Defense Authorization Act of 2027 should be a goal of this effort.

4. Reframe the Black Sea region as a site for testing the great power rivalry between the United States and China, with the purpose of keeping Washington invested, while working towards a more robust European security infrastructure in the region.

5. Establish an office of a Romanian foreign and security policy think tank in Washington DC with the purpose of promoting the national objectives in relation to the American intellectual community and policy establishment.

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