



RESEARCH PRIORITIES 2026-27

CEPS' ROLE AND EVOLVING PRIORITIES IN AN EVER UNCERTAIN WORLD

2025 was a deeply troubled year but 2026 started out even worse. And Brussels has at times looked more irrelevant or vulnerable than ever on the world stage. This should be a deafening alarm bell.

The lesson to learn is no longer theoretical. For as long as Donald Trump occupies the White House, the US will remain self-interested, unpredictable and, at times, openly hostile. The EU can no longer assume automatic alignment with Washington. The US' own National Security Strategy makes that abundantly clear. The question is no longer whether Europe must act – but whether it's ready to face an era of unapologetic strongman politics.

The EU and all its Member States now face a once-in-a-generation test of political will and responsibility. Strategic autonomy doesn't mean isolation. It means navigating between the US and China with clarity, building smart partnerships and choosing battles wisely.

In 2026, US tariffs will begin to bite and AI's rapid uptake will reshape entire sectors, with the impact on jobs finally becoming visible in official statistics. Europe's dependence on foreign sources for raw materials, semiconductors, connectivity and defence equipment may become unbearable. If handled poorly, this convergence will only worsen Europe's existing vulnerabilities. If handled well, it could become a catalyst for renewal.

Elections in Hungary, Colombia, Brazil, Israel, and the US midterms in November will once again test the global order – with consequences that won't stay confined within each country's borders.

Through a credible industrial strategy, sustained investment, global research collaboration, deeper capital markets and more agile institutions, the EU can turn a permanent state of crisis into a new cycle of prosperity – one that combines competitiveness, security, technological sovereignty and an uncompromising commitment to sustainability.

In the months ahead, CEPS' work will span the future of European defence; the reboot of EU external action and enlargement; a new roadmap for completing the Single Market ('Project 2028'); Europe's leadership in science and technology; global health; climate, critical raw materials and biodiversity; and frontier domains such as AI, quantum and space policy. We'll push institutions and stakeholders to pursue simplification responsibly, for long-term wellbeing, not short-term regulatory relief.

We'll also be bringing new platforms online, including updated versions of AI World and HELIX, dedicated to AI and global health; data-driven analysis of regional competitiveness to help redesign global value chains; a new series on 'R&D perspectives' to inspire smart investment in science and technology in the next EU budget; and, alongside and complementary to our research, a newly rebooted CEPS Academy will raise the intellectual level of our exchanges with members and future subscribers. We'll also continue our efforts to deepen and expand our partnerships with leading think tanks across all continents.

Andrea Renda

CEPS Director of Research



CEPS RESEARCH PRIORITIES

What follows is a succinct breakdown of each of CEPS' research units' key priorities for 2026-27.

ECONOMIC POLICY

The EU budget and economic governance

One of the main priorities will be analysing the ongoing negotiations of the post-2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). We will focus on spending priorities, governance reforms conditionality, and the balance between national and regional levels as well as policy instruments.

EU trade and investment in an increasingly fragmented global economy

We'll work on the EU's trade and investment flows, specifically on transatlantic relations, but also on the growing links between the EU and China, including supply chain reconfiguration. We'll also work on the EU's interconnected financial and real investment systems, global imbalances and the impact of geopolitical tensions on the EU's economic openness and resilience.

The EU's industrial policy, competitiveness, and strategic autonomy

We'll focus on the EU's industrial policy tools and how they can effectively support the EU's competitiveness, innovation and digitalisation. The trade-offs between industrial and competition policies, and internal market integration, as well as the links between trade and industrial policy, will also be an integral part of our research.

GLOBAL GOVERNANCE, REGULATION, INNOVATION AND DIGITAL ECONOMY

Because of its large size, CEPS' GRID unit has been split into four sub-teams, each focusing on a specific domain.

AI+ (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND RELATED TOPICS)

AI strategy and sectoral implementation

A dedicated CEPS Task Force will be launched looking into priority sectors to bridge the gap between theory and practice for AI. This will ensure that we move beyond generic AI applications to address the specific technical and strategic nuances of high-value industries.

International AI governance

We'll be analysing and identifying shifts in global AI policy and examining international frameworks and standards, specifically on AI safety and governance.

Governing autonomous AI

We'll work on leading the discussion for a future where autonomous AI agents act on behalf of users, specifically on the critical balance of trust and control. This involves defining how humans and machines can coexist safely and ensuring AI remains a reliable partner.

Sovereign AI and competitiveness

We'll analyse the intersection of edge and cloud infrastructure to boost the EU's digital sovereignty and economic resilience.

AI in government

We'll work towards developing a roadmap for integrating AI across public services to improve efficiency and service delivery for citizens. This work will focus on identifying high-impact use cases while maintaining the rigorous standards of accountability required for public sector technology.

Human-machine interaction and agency

We'll work on how to design AI systems that enhance human decision-making and autonomy. The goal is to ensure that as AI becomes more integrated into daily life, the human user remains the ultimate authority in the loop.

TIPIC (TECH POLICY, DIPLOMACY AND GOVERNANCE)

EU tech sovereignty, resilience, and economic security

Building on our previous research on digital public infrastructure, tech sovereignty, the EuroStack initiative and other partnerships, we will conduct and scale-up research on economic security in line with the 2023 European Economic Security Strategy and the 2025 Communication.

Defence innovation

In partnership with the Atlantic Council, we intend to support the establishment and rollout of the European Defence Innovation Council as a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform placing innovation at the core of EU defence strategy.

Quantum computing and space policy

We'll expand dedicated workstreams following the completion of both the CEPS Space and Quantum Task Forces.

EU International Digital Strategy

We'll expand our work on the EU's International Digital Strategy focusing on the roll-out of tech diplomacy (including a series of dedicated CEPS forums), digital partnerships and EU Tech business offer. We will also scale-up our work on mapping global technology specialisation, notably through the forthcoming Horizon Europe Science Diplomacy project.

Ukraine

Our work will support Ukraine's EU accession process and digital and AI adoption through research and targeted training for government officials, SMEs and civil society, with a focus on Ukraine's alignment with the EU digital acquis and integration into the Single Market.

BRIEF (BETTER REGULATION, INDUSTRIAL ECONOMICS AND FORESIGHT)

Foundations for a new industrial strategy

We'll work on establishing principles tailored to the emergence and convergence of general-purpose technologies, the increasing complexity of the economy and the multiplicity of objectives pursued by policymakers.

Tech competitiveness

One of our priorities is mapping technological specialisations and possible synergies and collaborations, as well as establishing scenarios for an optimal redesign of value chains for industrial policy and R&D.

Simplifying digital legislation through new digital tools

Better regulation would maintain environmental, social and consumer protection and avoid a patchwork of differing national regulation. Following the 28th Regime, we'll also give development proposals for a EUR-Lex AI system that works with EU legislation and provides an open-source basis in better regulation and AI-assisted drafting.

Better regulation: making EU institutions more agile for decision-making

In the face of uncertainty, notably through accelerated technological change, virtualisation and softwarisation, democratisation of access to science and innovation, increased use of dual use products. Use of tools from foresight to adaptive policymaking, co-regulatory schemes, backcasting, citizen involvement and quantitative storytelling for better policymaking.

HAGRID (HEALTH, AGRICULTURE, RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND DEVELOPMENT)

R&D for global health and agriculture

A new CEPS R&D Perspectives series of papers will be launched, focusing on how global health and agriculture R&D are laying the foundations for Europe's continued leadership in science, and renewed ability to lead on global challenges and innovative new ventures in sectors like health and agrifood.

Europe's leadership in R&I

Our work on Horizon Europe post-2028 and the EU as a global R&I leader will continue, shaping the EU's new Framework Programme for R&I with a redesign of its governance to strengthen the EU's competitiveness while consolidating leadership in tackling global challenges.

Global Health Resilience Initiative

The Global Health Resilience Initiative will be our key project, defining priorities to build stronger, more resilient global health systems that can better prepare for, respond to, and recover from health emergencies while ensuring equity, sustainable financing and the promotion of international collaboration (including on R&I).

Health governance and pandemic preparedness

We'll be working on pandemic preparedness, exploring the future(s) for global pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response through a foresight study in the context of the PRIME Lancet Commission. We'll also continue to focus on HERA's role in global health security governance and work on the future of global health governance and reshaping global health diplomacy in the Global Health Advisory Forum. We'll also be expanding the CEPS HELIX initiative and the dedicated 'Mind the Gap' series, consolidating CEPS as the 'go to' place for EU and global health governance.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Safeguarding European values and the rule of law

Our work on upholding and monitoring EU values and rule of law backsliding in the EU institutions and its agencies, as well as in the Member States, will continue. This includes judicial independence and effective legal protection in cross-border judicial cooperation and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Migration and human rights

We'll prioritise our work on the implementation of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum, the effectiveness of EU return legislation and policies, EU anti-trafficking legislation and EU partnerships with third countries on labour migration. We'll also pay particular attention to refugees and migrants' meaningful participation and policies regarding their labour market integration.

Justice & anti-discrimination

We'll carry out work on monitoring and tackling racism, discrimination and xenophobia against marginalised communities in the EU, including how they manifest at institutional level. We'll also assess the adequacy of, and alternatives to, the EU-US data privacy framework, and its law-enforcement and national security components.

JOBS AND SKILLS

The Future of Work and skills transformation

Technological change and demographic ageing is reshaping skill demand, organisational structure and job quality. We'll focus on the detailed impacts of these shifts and propose adequate policy responses to skill mismatches, lifelong learning opportunities and workforce adaptability across occupations, sectors and regions.

AI, productivity, and work organisation

AI adoption will impact task allocation and interdependencies across tasks and productivity. AI also presents a series of risks related to job displacement and inequalities, as well as for recent graduates. We'll work together with the GRID and Data Science units on analysing the impacts of AI adoption and present initiatives that support productivity gains while mitigating risks.

New developments in industrial and employment relations

In recent developments in non-standard employment forms such as self-employment and hybrid work arrangements modify working conditions and risk rising inequalities. We'll investigate the implications for labour market regulation, social protection and collective bargaining.

POLITICS AND INSTITUTIONS

The politicisation of the EU

With the growing (party) politisation of the EU's system of governance and institutions, we'll pay particular attention to how this evolves as well as its effects on EU policymaking and democratic quality

Reforming decision-making

We'll work to provide pathways for reforming intra- and inter-institutional decision-making procedures to enhance agility, particularly considering the EU being in a semi-permanent crisis mode and the prospect of further enlargement. Beyond effectiveness, this strand could also address governance and administration.

Enforcement of EU law

We'll dedicate time to assess the enforcement, or lack thereof, of EU law, focusing on whether and how the European Commission fulfils its responsibilities.

Freedom of expression

Freedom of expression and the EU institutions intersect in a wide range of files that we want to monitor and work on: from the right to dissent and whistleblowing within the administration to transparency and access to documents, as well as the strategic hijacking of the concept of free speech by far-right actors and how it can be reclaimed within a democratic and rights-based framework.

FOREIGN POLICY

Defence and security

We'll examine the implications of the EU's defence build-up in shifting transatlantic relations. We'll also work on the building of a European pillar within NATO.

Enlargement

We'll continue our work on how to better prepare both the EU and its candidate countries for the next rounds of enlargement.

We'll provide pathways on how we can link security, enlargement, investments and Europe's long-term competitiveness through Ukraine's recovery.

The EU's engagements and partnerships

We'll analyse the effectiveness of the EU's connectivity engagements through Global Gateway and Global Europe and coordinating Team Europe and harnessing the private sector.

EU tech sovereignty

We'll delve into how geopolitical dynamics can influence the EU's technology partnerships, tech diplomacy, and standard-setting. We'll pay attention to the effects on open strategic autonomy and double de-risking vis-à-vis the US and China.

FINANCIAL MARKETS AND INSTITUTIONS

Savings & Investments Union delivery & deepening capital markets

We'll explore concrete measures to mobilise household savings, scale cross-border investment products, and reduce market fragmentation (market data, trading/clearing/settlement) through more effective EU-level oversight and supervisory convergence.

Non-bank finance, investment funds & market functioning

A focus on financial stability trade-offs in market-based finance (leverage/liquidity dynamics, margining/collateral channels) and the investment funds agenda (AIFMD/UCITS implementation bottlenecks: delegation, reporting usability, LMTs, distribution, private credit/loan origination).

Sustainable finance: simplification without losing credibility

We'll look at the interaction of CSRD/CSDDD/Taxonomy/SFDR with capital markets and investor decision-making, as well as options to reduce overlaps and compliance drag while preserving accountability and decision-useful information.

Banking & payments resilience in a digital/strategic context

We'll be working on banks' prudential/resolution constraints and single-market frictions (home-host, ring-fencing, consolidation) alongside EU payments autonomy and the digital finance stack (including PSD3/PSR, instant payments, AML, fraud/APP incentives; FiDA, DORA, MiCA/stablecoins spillovers).

ENERGY, RESOURCES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Industrial decarbonisation & circularity pathways for key EU sectors

We'll participate in a large modelling exercise assessing scenarios for the green transformation of European industry, contributing to shaping of transition pathways and analysing their policy implications. We'll dedicate work to focus on sectors with strong industrial relevance to Europe.

Raw materials supply security

We'll further explore challenges related to securing the EU supply of critical raw materials (CRMs). This work will focus on scaling up secondary production within the EU and neighbourhood regions as well as on developing sustainable markets for CRMs.

International carbon credits in the EU climate framework

We'll continue our work on international carbon credits, particularly on transition credits. This includes further exploring policy options for integrating them into the EU climate framework, and the partnership and enlargement agenda as a potential pathway to reconcile climate objectives with the EU's strategic interests.

Lead markets in the EU chemical industry

We'll conduct focused work on policy options for creating a lead market in the EU chemical industry, assessing pathways to scale up alternative carbon sources. We'll pay particular attention to the intersection of the bioeconomy, circular economy and industrial carbon management.

Nuclear energy

We'll finalise a study on the future of nuclear energy in the EU. This will cover large-scale nuclear power, its changing role in electricity markets and the development of small modular reactors. We'll also continue to explore energy and industrial cooperation between the EU and South Korea and how Korean nuclear vendor and construction firms are participating in new nuclear projects in Europe.

DATA SCIENCE

Web Intelligence Platforms

We'll continue to expand our world-class intelligence platforms, such as AI World and the Observatory of Economic Complexity. These are high-end web-based systems that source, integrate and visualise data into accessible, interactive, and actionable insights. Our platforms are designed for governments, investors, and businesses to explore and understand technologies, industries, and regions through dynamic visualizations and intuitive interfaces.

Smart Investment Tools for Governments (B2G)

We'll continue to support governments at the EU, national, and regional levels with advanced ecosystem analyses based on complexity economics. Our methodology identifies where public investments can generate the greatest impact by revealing technological strengths, related diversification paths, and collaboration gaps. These analyses help policymakers focus resources on the most strategic sectors and regions, fostering innovation, resilience, and long-term competitiveness.

Cross-unit collaboration to enhance domain-specific research

A third, complementary dimension of the data science team at CEPS is to deploy data-science tools as problem-solvers for major policy challenges across the entire CEPS research agenda, while simultaneously strengthening CEPS's internal capabilities. This means working hand-in-hand with other units to translate concrete policy problems - ranging from the digital transition and the future of work to the war in Ukraine, industrial strategy, climate transition, security, and trade - into robust data-science solutions, and delivering actionable outputs tailored to decision-makers.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you're interested to find out more about our research priorities and other plans for 2026-27, we encourage you to reach out.



KAREL LANNOO

Chief Executive Officer

✉ k.lannoo@ceps.eu



ANDREA RENDA

Director of Research

✉ andrea.renda@ceps.eu



LAURA NICOLÁS

Membership Coordinator

✉ laura.nicolas@ceps.eu



**CENTRE FOR
EUROPEAN
POLICY STUDIES**

Place du Congrès 1,
1000 Brussels
Tel: +32 (0) 2 229 39 11



CEPS

Place du Congrès 1, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Tel: +32 (0) 2 229 39 11

Fax: +32 (0) 2 894 49 39

Email: info@ceps.eu