

EU AND CANADA:

Yes, EU CAN!

*How can the EU and Canada
build a new strategic partnership?*

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 TOIVO

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strategic partnership?*



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FOREWORD

On 17 September 2026, in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen** addressed Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney**.

“We see the world with the same eyes, from AI to climate change from the Arctic to geopolitics, and we have stood together on Ukraine, on defence, on raw materials and supply chains. But above all, dear Mark, Europe and Canada believe in democracy.”

There was much sympathy and symbolism in the room, and Carney took part in the State of the Union session as the first leader of a non-EU country to do so.

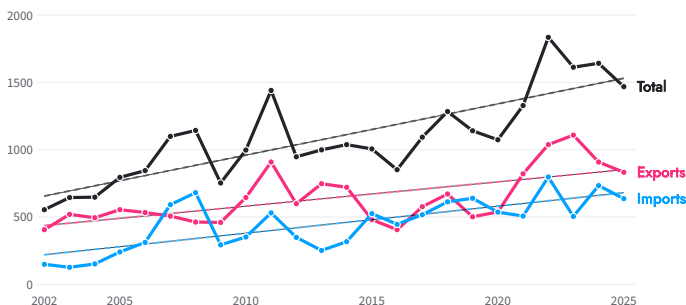
The unpredictability of US President **Donald Trump** in world politics, and the trade war he has stoked, are pushing Canada and the EU closer together. Von der Leyen floated the possibility that Canada could become an “associate member” of the EU. The proposal raised many questions. Associate membership is not an official membership category in EU law.

Canada is an advanced democracy of some 41 million people and a G7 country, committed to the multilateral international system and held in high regard in Europe. It is a heavyweight economy. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Canada’s gross domestic product in 2026 is about 2,500 billion US dollars, making it the world’s

eleventh-largest economy. Canada's economy is larger than Australia's (about 2,100 billion dollars), close to Italy's (about 2,700 billion) and more than seven times the size of Finland's (about 340 billion). Finland's trade with Canada is growing steadily.

Trade with Canada is growing along a clear trend

Finland's goods trade with Canada, € million, 2002–2025. Dashed line: linear trend.



Source: Finnish Customs, International Trade Statistics.

The contributions by Finnish experts in this report assess, from different perspectives, how cooperation could or should deepen in practice, as well as what it is realistic to expect and over what time frame. What they have in common is the view that Canada is a like-minded partner for both the EU and Finland, and that deepening cooperation with it is worthwhile.

The report closes with the key results of a public opinion survey commissioned by the Finnish Toivo Think Tank, which reveal that Finns very nearly love Canada.

Helsinki, October 2026

Raine Tiessalo

Executive Director, Toivo Think Tank, Finland

THE STORY OF THE COVER



The two swans on the cover, reaching for each other, are coloured in Canada's white and the EU's blue. The blue and white and the swans also refer to Finland, and swans, which mate for life, stand for commitment, partnership and peacefulness. In the middle run the twelve stars of the EU flag and, in addition, the maple leaf, Canada's emblem, all in motion and reorganising themselves. Behind the leaf, rays of light represent a prize or glory, associated in Finland especially with professional ice hockey.

— Annika Lehmusvaara, cover artist



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Elina Valtonen is Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs and a Member of Parliament for Finland's National Coalition Party. Before entering politics, she worked as a programmer and start-up founder and held senior positions in finance, including in Copenhagen and London.



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Canada, the “sixth Nordic country”, defends the rules-based system

Elina Valtonen

Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs

ELINA VALTONEN



Together with Canada, we can defend the international rules-based system at a time when its very foundations are increasingly being called into question, writes Elina Valtonen, Finland's Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Under Prime Minister **Mark Carney**, whose term began in spring 2025, Canada has become an ever closer and more important partner for both Finland and the EU. The growing geopolitical weight of the Arctic, the impact of Russia's war of aggression on European security and the questioning of the fundamental pillars of the international system have all helped bring Canada and Europe closer together. Some of the credit for the EU–Canada rapprochement can, of course, also be given to the difficulties between Canada and the United States, which have recently shown themselves in, among other things, trade negotiations. This has further strengthened Carney's determination to diversify Canada's foreign trade and global partnerships.

That Prime Minister Carney attended the European Commission President's State of the Union address this September, as the first leader of a non-EU country to do so, demonstrates Canada's importance as a strategically significant like-minded partner. Canada is geographically vast, rich in raw materials and technologically advanced, and there are excellent opportunities to develop cooperation with it, both at EU level and bilaterally between Finland and Canada.

Europe's and the EU's strength in cooperation with Canada is our large single market, while Canada has substantial raw material resources, including critical minerals. CETA, the EU–Canada free trade agreement, provisionally applied since 2017, has also created very good conditions for developing trade between the Union and Canada, even though national ratification is still pending in a few Member States. Finland's exports of goods and services to Canada grew by around 90 per cent between 2016 and 2025. In goods exports, however, Canada was in 2025 only Finland's tenth-largest destination outside the EU, so there is plenty of room for growth. Our priority export sectors include the mining and maritime industries, bio- and forest econ-

omy, communications technology and the defence industry. Finnish technology, tested in cold conditions, is also well suited to Canada's harsh conditions.

The growing interest of Finnish companies in Canada is shown by the participation of some 40 companies in Finnish President **Stubb's** working visit to Canada last April. When I met company representatives in Ottawa during the visit, the mood was positive and the representatives were enthusiastic about the new opportunities. Many were old hands at trade with Canada, but several were also in Ottawa for the first time. This is exactly the kind of activity I have promoted and supported as Foreign Minister.

Relations between Finland and Canada took a significant leap forward with Finland's NATO membership. Security, stability and sustainable development in the Arctic are at the heart of our cooperation. Finland and Canada are also united by a northern national character and a love of ice hockey. The latter, admittedly, regularly causes challenges in our bilateral relations at the semi-final or final stage of the World Championships.

Canada is one of the like-minded partners named in Finland's government programme with which Finland is investing in developing bilateral relations. In August 2025, together with my counterpart, Canadian Foreign Minister **Anita Anand**, I issued a joint statement on the strategic partnership between Finland and Canada in foreign and security policy. The joint statement reflects a mutual desire to deepen cooperation. During my visit in April, we agreed in further detail on the implementation of the partnership in the areas of security and crisis resilience, bilateral economic relations, and Arctic and multilateral cooperation.

Canadians often describe themselves as the “sixth Nordic country” or as “the most European of non-European countries”. It is a description with which one can readily agree. Canada is very similar to us in its values and objectives. Together with Canada, we can defend the international rules-based system at a time when its very foundations are increasingly being called into question. In these times, Finland and the EU need reliable, like-minded allies. Canada is, without question, one.

The EU–Canada rapprochement from the perspective of EU integration

Juha Jokela

Programme Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs

JUHA JOKELA



One of the most concrete areas of cooperation that could be linked to associate membership is defence-industrial and security cooperation. [...] Canada is a pioneer in this context, writes Juha Jokela, Programme Director at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs.

The rapprochement between the European Union and Canada is not a mere rhetorical gesture but a deeper strategic response to the rupture in the world order and to the uncertainties of the transatlantic relationship. To understand this development, it is necessary to examine the motives behind it and the key political initiatives.

The catalyst for the closer relations can be seen in the meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos in early 2026. There, Canadian Prime Minister **Mark Carney** presented a thorough analysis of the global change under way. Carney described the present not merely as a transition but as an outright rupture, in which power is shifting from the West to new actors and existing structures are beginning to break down. As a particular concern, Carney highlighted the United States' withdrawal from the rules-based system, which leaves a gap especially in trade and security policy.

According to Carney, middle powers must in this situation deepen their cooperation. Their task is to defend and renew the rules-based system, especially in the areas of economic and trade policy. In this context, Canada has actively encouraged the EU to take the lead in upholding and renewing the rules-based order, which reflects Canada's own interest in seeking a balance in its trade-policy disputes with the United States.

Von der Leyen fills the EU's power vacuum

On the EU side, the most significant initiative was seen in European Commission President **Ursula von der Leyen's** speech to the Parliament in Strasbourg in September 2026. She proposed that Canada become an "associate member" of the EU, which prompted

wide debate and even surprised some Member States. Von der Leyen's initiative can be interpreted as an attempt to fill the leadership vacuum inside the EU.

Germany and France are in a difficult domestic political situation, and their capacity to provide leadership in European policy questions is weak. Von der Leyen has taken a proactive role in crisis situations before, for example with the sanctions packages at the beginning of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The Commission President's initiative on associate membership for Canada also responds to citizens' wishes for a stronger EU on the world stage.

“Associate membership” and its nature

From the standpoint of the EU treaties, the term “associate membership” is not an official category of membership in EU law but a political expression. Technically, it concerns association, which has been possible since the Treaty of Rome in 1957 through association agreements. The Treaty of Rome, concluded in 1957, established the European Economic Community and laid the foundation for today's European Union and its internal market.

Association agreements are now provided for in the Lisbon Treaty, which entered into force in 2009, and more precisely in Article 217 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). Association involves reciprocal rights and obligations, but the partner does not become a member of the Union. Association can nevertheless lead to attachment to various EU policy sectors. For example, Turkey joined the EU customs union in 1995.

In Canada's case, associate membership, that is, association, could in practice mean deepening the existing free trade agreement (CETA). At the same time, the dimensions of political association linked to it could be expanded. The EU has concluded similar agreements, among others with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (deep and comprehensive free trade agreements), even before those countries became candidates for EU membership. This would, however, require a lengthy negotiation process and the unanimity of the Member States on certain contentious political questions. CETA, signed in 2016, is still applied provisionally because ten EU Member States have yet to ratify it. Against this background, the quickest route to deepening the relationship is likely to be various types of cooperation arrangements in different policy sectors.

Cooperation in defence and security

One of the most concrete areas of cooperation that could be linked to associate membership is defence-industrial and security cooperation. Von der Leyen has even used the word “integration” when speaking of the defence industry. Canada is a pioneer in this context. It is the first non-EU country to be able to join the EU's new SAFE programme, a €150 billion financial instrument intended to fund defence-related capabilities. Although Canada finances its own participation, its joining demonstrates an interest in bearing greater responsibility for North Atlantic defence. At the same time, Canada gains access to defence projects planned with EU support. SAFE is linked to the EU's broader ReArm Europe 2030 initiative, which aims to create incentives also for jointly producing so-called strategic enablers, and thereby to reduce

dependence on the United States. These include, for example, intelligence and satellite systems, air defence, and the development and use of new technologies in defence.

The EU's four freedoms

It is not realistic to expect that Canada and the EU would agree in the near future on implementing all the freedoms of the EU internal market (the free movement of goods, services, capital and people). In the model of the European Economic Area (EEA), for example, Norway and Iceland implement EU legislation without a vote in its decision-making, which would hardly suit Canada. Deeper bilateral arrangements are nevertheless possible. Canada already participates in part in the EU's Horizon research programme and is currently negotiating fuller association with the Erasmus youth exchange programme.

Since Brexit, the United Kingdom too has returned to, among other things, the Horizon research programme, and it will return to Erasmus exchanges in 2027. This also serves as a point of comparison for Canada, which can proceed in a similar way through bilateral arrangements as part of political association. EU–UK relations are framed by the trade and cooperation agreement that entered into force after the UK's departure from the EU, which can be developed and deepened. UK Prime Minister **Andrew Burnham** has promised to consider new options for deepening Britain's relationship with the EU. Under consideration are closer foreign, security and defence policy cooperation than before, a return to the EU customs union and access to the internal market, and even a new application for EU membership.

Although von der Leyen's initiative on Canada was a politically significant gesture, its substance and implementation are complex. The EU nevertheless relies on its legal order, and any arrangement with Canada must fit within the frameworks offered to other partners.

The solution to be built for Canada arouses interest not only in the United Kingdom but also in Norway, Iceland and Switzerland. It may also cause concern in candidate countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, Albania and Montenegro. They do not want a new category to become a permanent parking place for them instead of full membership.

Membership is a Spectrum

Mika Aaltola

Member of the European Parliament for Finland

MIKA AALTOLA



If we ask Kyiv, London, Oslo and Ottawa to build with us, we must let them sell to us and invest alongside us on fair terms. Access is the currency of this alliance, and we should spend it on those who share our vision, writes Mika Aaltola, Member of the European Parliament for Finland (Finnish National Coalition Party).

For most of its history the European Union has treated membership as a door. A country is either inside or outside, and the only question is how long it must wait in the corridor. That picture served a calmer age. It does not serve this one.

Three emergencies now press on Europe at once. Russia wages a war whose outcome will decide the security of the whole continent. China tightens a geoeconomic stranglehold over the materials and technologies our industries depend on. And the United States has turned to a transactional view of alliances, in which protection is priced and loyalty is negotiable. None of these pressures stops at the Union's legal border. Our answers cannot stop there either.

Consider who stands just outside the door. Ukraine holds the front line of European defence and builds weapons at a speed and cost that our own industry cannot match. The United Kingdom is a nuclear power with a seat on the Security Council and one of the continent's deepest capital markets. Norway supplies much of our gas, guards the northern approaches and already lives under most of our single market rules. Canada, an Arctic and Atlantic power rich in energy and critical minerals, is looking across the ocean for partners it can rely on. The idea of an associated membership for Canada would have sounded eccentric a few years ago. Today it is a conceptual innovation worth taking seriously, because it asks the right question: what kind of belonging fits this partner and this moment?

To call these countries "third countries" is a legal fiction that hides a strategic fact. They are part of our security. The binary view forces us to choose between full accession, which is slow and built on principles set before the wars, and a status of polite distance, which wastes what these partners can offer now. A spectrum gives us more to work with.

The treaties allow more than we use. Enhanced cooperation and permanent structured cooperation in defence already let groups of states move ahead. Association agreements can be as deep as political will allows, and Article 8 speaks of special relationships with our neighbours founded on the values of the Union. Differentiated integration is no heresy. The euro and Schengen have worked that way for decades. What has been missing is the imagination to use these leeways outward as well as inward, and the readiness to amend the treaties where they fall short.

What would a tailored position look like? For Ukraine, integration should begin where the need is greatest: defence industry, energy, and the gradual opening of the single market, with full membership as the destination and not as the precondition for everything else. For the United Kingdom, a structured place in European defence, in sanctions policy and in industrial and technological programmes, without reopening the question of 2016. For Norway, a seat in the rooms where security and industrial strategy are decided, and not only the obligation to apply the rules that follow. For Canada, an associated status built around defence production, critical minerals, energy and the Arctic.

The key to all of this is market access. We speak easily of pooling and sharing: joint procurement, common stockpiles, shared production lines. But no partner will pool its capabilities with a Union that keeps its market closed. If we ask Kyiv, London, Oslo and Ottawa to build with us, we must let them sell to us and invest alongside us on fair terms. Access is the currency of this alliance, and we should spend it on those who share our vision.

Each relationship should rest on a geostrategic understanding worked out together with the partner: what it contributes, what it re-

ceives, where it sits in a developing European alliance system. Such understandings must be tailored and mutually beneficial. Obligations should rise with rights, and a voice in decisions should follow real contributions. No one should be offered a waiting room dressed up as a partnership.

The usual objection is dilution. If belonging comes in degrees, the argument goes, full membership loses its value and the Union loses its coherence. I understand the fear, but it belongs to an age when our main task was to protect the inside from the outside. Today the task is to organise the space around us before others organise it against us. A Union that guards the purity of its membership while its neighbourhood is pulled apart will find little left to guard.

We should think less about who qualifies and more about what we want to build: a zone of geopolitical stability stretching from the Arctic to the Black Sea and across the Atlantic, anchored in the Union and open to those who defend the same order. Times are changing. Our treaties were written by people who were not afraid to invent. We should show the same courage.

A partnership with Canada strengthens the EU's role in world trade

Timo Vuori

Director, Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK)

TIMO VUORI



A closer EU–Canada partnership would be important for Finland, because in the economy and in technology the expertise of our companies complements each other well, writes Timo Vuori, Director at the Confederation of Finnish Industries (EK).

In the upheaval of the world economy, the European Union has been left in a supporting role while the United States and China have dominated the geopolitical stage. President **Trump**'s erratic geopolitics and trade policy have now pushed the EU and Canada to deepen their co-operation. A new kind of deep strategic partnership with Canada could at last open the way for the EU to rise as a strong global actor and a guarantor of well-functioning economic value chains, and bring benefits to Finland.

The "associate agreement" outlined for Canada has yet to take shape, but it can already be assessed that Canada is seeking to deepen its cooperation with the EU through various agreements in the areas of politics, trade, investment, technology and defence.

The EU already has several association and partnership agreements with countries in its neighbourhood, such as the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean countries. The Eastern Partnership has also been strengthened, among others with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The aim of partnership agreements is not merely to increase trade, but also to diversify economic supply chains, advance the green transition, secure the availability of critical raw materials – including energy supply – and strengthen the EU's geopolitical influence. In my view, the same objectives apply, in the first instance, to a possible deeper partnership between the EU and Canada.

The CETA agreement must be brought fully into force

A good starting point for a new strategic partnership is that the EU and Canada agreed on economic and trade cooperation (the so-called CETA agreement) some ten years ago. Thanks to it, as many as 99 per cent of tariffs on goods have been eliminated, public procurement has been opened up on both sides, and technical barriers to trade have been reduced. For example, Finland's trade in goods with Canada has grown by more than 30 per cent since CETA entered into force. Trade in goods between the EU and Canada grew by 76 per cent from 2016 to 2025, from EUR 46.3 billion to EUR 81.5 billion.

Unfortunately, CETA is only partially in force, because ten EU member states (Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland and Slovenia) have still not had the agreement ratified, for reasons relating, among other things, to national investment protection and agriculture. If the EU genuinely wants to deepen its relationship with Canada, the swift and full ratification of the already concluded CETA in all EU countries would be the obvious first step.

Towards a strategic economic alliance under EU leadership

If the EU aspires to rise as a strong global actor and a guarantor of well-functioning economic value chains, deepening cooperation with Canada opens up an entirely new vision and opportunity for it. The EU

now has a unique opportunity to create a new kind of model of strategic partnership that goes beyond trade agreements, regardless of whether associate membership is possible under the EU's current treaties.

With the new model, cooperation could be deepened, alongside Canada, with other like-minded countries in the fields of trade and investment, the economy and technology, and security.

For example, there may soon be a need to deepen the EU–United Kingdom relationship as the wounds caused by Brexit heal into scars. The EU also already has trade agreements with Chile, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and New Zealand. With Australia, the EU concluded free trade negotiations in March 2026, and the agreement is awaiting entry into force.

Deeper cooperation should be considered with each of the countries mentioned above. Some of these countries already belong to multilateral trade arrangements, such as the Pacific CPTPP partnership agreement or the Asia-Pacific RCEP trade agreement, in which the EU does not take part.

The EU has the chance to rise as a strong global player and an engine of the economy, but this will take a great deal of work. The EU should seek to bring about a new alliance of like-minded, market-liberal countries as a counterweight to the rivalry between China and the United States and to the hobbling of international free trade. Historical inspiration could be sought, at least figuratively, in the spirit of the trading network of the medieval Hanseatic League, or indeed of the global commercial influence of the British Empire.

What is needed from the EU now is speed and agility in seizing the Canada opportunity. In the turmoil of world politics and the world economy, the EU should be an open-minded builder of new bridges, in

the economy as much as in security. That would also serve Finland's economy and security, as well as our companies' interests in international trade.

Finland has only to gain

A closer EU–Canada partnership would be important for Finland, because in the economy and in technology the expertise of our companies complements each other well. Canada accounts for only about one per cent of Finland's foreign trade, but in the bigger picture Canada is a strategically very interesting partner for us in terms of both the economy and security.

Finland has export potential in the Canadian market. Correspondingly, we need Canadian investment, for example, in exploiting the critical minerals found in Finnish soil. Finland and Canada have shared interests in the energy, forestry, technology and defence sectors, as well as in the maritime industry. The ICEPact partnership on icebreakers has already brought concrete benefits to Finland. In security, moreover, NATO membership and Arctic cooperation unite us more and more as great-power competition affects the Arctic regions in many different ways.

When Finland's President **Alexander Stubb** made a working visit to Canada in April 2026, he was accompanied by the largest business delegation of his term in office. As many as 40 companies took part, especially from the defence, technology, maritime and mining industries, led by **Aaro Cantell** (Normet Oyj), Chair of EK. Beyond the ice hockey rinks, our two countries are meeting more and more often at economic and security forums.

Canada as part of the new global strategic system

Stefan Lindström

Head of Mission, Consulate General of Finland in Houston

STEFAN LINDSTRÖM



Canada's economy, security and geography bind it permanently to the United States, but at the same time Ottawa is seeking to expand its strategic room for manoeuvre towards Europe and other partners, writes Stefan Lindström, Head of Mission at the Consulate General of Finland in Houston.

The transformation of the world is often described by listing separate megatrends such as artificial intelligence, great-power competition, energy security, supply chains, drones, space, information influence and rising geopolitical risk. When each trend is considered as part of a whole rather than individually, it becomes clear that they are merging into a single new global strategic system. Canada is exceptionally well positioned within it.

In the new global system, the chain of dependencies is strong. AI needs data centres; data centres need fibre-optic cable, electricity and semiconductors; semiconductors need critical minerals and reliable trade relationships. The same applies to security. Military performance relies increasingly on AI, satellites, drones and industrial capacity. Technology, energy, industrial, security and foreign policy are therefore no longer separate policy areas but parts of a single whole.

AI is becoming basic societal infrastructure, as electricity and the internet did before it. As AI is integrated into defence, industry and science, strategic competition seldom concerns algorithms alone. Instead, it is about computing capacity, energy and minerals. The same logic is visible in warfare. Cheap drones have “democratised” war, and the capacity for mass production has returned to the core of strategic thinking. Energy security (Ukraine, the Red Sea, the Strait of Hormuz) is part of the same equation, because energy policy has also become technology, industrial and security policy.

The basic question of globalisation, “where is it cheapest to manufacture?”, is giving way to the question “how do we get goods or services even in a crisis?”. Companies and states are building alternative supply chains (“friendshoring”, “nearshoring”, strategic autonomy) in order to reduce dependencies that can turn into instruments of coercion in a crisis. This has also made geopolitics an internal matter for

companies. Decisions on where to locate production and data are increasingly both commercial and geopolitical.

Space and information are part of the same infrastructure. Navigation, telecommunications and intelligence rely on satellites, and competition has spread from the physical world into people's minds in the form of information influence and cyber operations. Trust has become an ever more important strategic asset. As AI makes information cheap, the competitive advantage shifts back to judgement, human relationships and leadership.

At the same time, the multilateral system that emerged after the Second World War (the UN, the WTO) is weakening, and states are turning increasingly to sanctions and various coalitions rather than permanent institutions. In the new world, the importance of middle powers such as Canada is growing. Power is no longer determined by size alone but by strategic indispensability.

Canada at the nexus of the new strategic system

Canada offers a particularly interesting example of what the new strategic system means in practice. Canada has traditionally been viewed above all as a neighbour of the United States, a NATO country, a resource economy and a supporter of the liberal international order. In the new situation, however, its geography, natural resources, energy, Arctic dimension and technological capabilities are acquiring a new kind of strategic value.

Canada's first defence industrial strategy, launched in 2026, illustrates this change well. It treats defence not merely as a matter for the

armed forces but links the defence industry to strategic autonomy, supply chains, critical minerals and technologies such as AI, quantum technology, space and autonomous systems. At the same time, Canada is seeking to increase domestic production capacity and reduce dependence on individual foreign suppliers.

Canada also holds a significant position in critical minerals. Its aim is not to remain a mere producer of raw materials but to build value chains from mining to processing, manufacturing and recycling. Canada produces, or has the potential to produce, all 12 minerals that NATO has defined as critical for defence.

The same logic is evident in AI. In 2026 Canada launched a programme to build large-scale domestic AI computing explicitly as “sovereign” infrastructure. The national AI strategy, for its part, links AI to energy, natural resources, transport, agriculture, industry and defence, among other areas.

The Arctic makes this whole even more interesting. As the significance of the climate, natural resources, sea routes, Russia, North American defence and space infrastructure grows, Canada’s northern location is changing from a periphery into a strategic front line. This year Canada has announced significant investments in military and civilian infrastructure in the North. At the same time, it has linked Arctic sovereignty to defence, minerals, energy and new transport corridors.

Canada’s most interesting strategic question, however, concerns its international positioning. Its economy, security and geography bind it permanently to the United States, yet Ottawa is seeking to increase its strategic room for manoeuvre towards Europe and other partners. This may become the core of Canada’s new position: not a break with the United States, but an expansion of strategic room for manoeuvre.

Canada has the opportunity to position itself as a kind of transatlantic strategic bridge: a country deeply integrated into the North American economy that at the same time offers Europe energy, critical minerals, technology, Arctic expertise and defence industrial cooperation. The strategic rationale for cooperation is thus no longer a single sector but the fact that both sides have to solve many problems of the same new system.

Metachange: separate policies are merging

The most essential question for states, companies and leaders may not be whether they can predict what happens next. The world is too complex for that. A better question is: have we built the kind of technological, economic, societal and human resilience that leaves us ready for whatever comes next?

The aim is not to predict every outcome. The aim is to be ready for what comes next. Canada is currently going about this work of positioning with great determination.

Comprehensive Arctic security at the core of EU–Canada cooperation

Sanna Kopra

Research Professor, Arctic Centre, University of Lapland, Finland

SANNA KOPRA



The Arctic has rapidly risen to the core of international politics, not only because of climate change but also because of heightened geopolitical tensions, writes Sanna Kopra, Research Professor at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland in Finland.

The Arctic has rapidly risen to the core of international politics, not only because of climate change but also because of heightened geopolitical tensions. Although the security agreement signed in September by the United States, Denmark and Greenland calms for a moment the crisis that had escalated between them, Arctic security is expected to remain high on the political agenda and in the headlines in the future as well. The main reason is that the melting of the Arctic Ocean continues inexorably, because the international community has not managed to act quickly enough to prevent climate change. The thinning and shrinking of sea ice opens new economic opportunities in the Arctic Ocean for shipping and the exploitation of natural resources, which places the region at the centre of geo-economic rivalry. In addition, the Arctic plays an ever more significant role in great-power geopolitical competition and military build-up.

It is thus no wonder that the EU, too, has become more active in Arctic policy. Finland has been particularly proactive here – Arctic security, after all, plays a central role in our foreign and security policy. A significant step was seen when a large group of EU leaders gathered for an Arctic summit in Rovaniemi in September. The joint declaration of the summit summed up the priorities of the EU's Arctic strategy and stressed the importance of close coordination and cooperation among the EU, its member states and like-minded partners. Canada undoubtedly holds a central place among these like-minded partners, and the EU and Canada seek to deepen their cooperation in many sectors, such as trade and energy, critical minerals extraction and support for Ukraine.

Arctic security, too, is an essential part of the deepening EU–Canada cooperation. In terms of defence policy, NATO is naturally the main forum of cooperation between the EU's Arctic member states – Finland,

Sweden and Denmark – and Greenland, Norway, Iceland and Canada. Alongside NATO, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, NORAD, is an important security organisation for Canada. Cooperation with the EU can, however, complement these networks, especially from the comprehensive security perspective.

Supporting the international order

As in Finland, maintaining the rules-based international system is vital for the security of the EU and Canada. The paralysis of the Arctic Council, the region's most important intergovernmental cooperation forum, after Russia attacked Ukraine has left a gap in the promotion of international cooperation in the Arctic. Both the EU and Canada swear by multilateral cooperation and regard the international law of the sea as an important pillar, for example in regulating Arctic shipping. Because the basic structures of the international system have recently been under constant pressure, EU–Canada cooperation can help build a counterforce to the rise of authoritarian populism.

Respect for human rights and environmental protection are an essential part of this, so developing various Indigenous-led cooperation forums, for example in investment and research, could offer a good path to deepening cooperation. Before that, however, the EU and Canada should succeed in resolving their historical disagreements over seal hunting, since this is a key issue for the livelihoods and culture of Canada's Indigenous peoples. International cooperation on Arctic shipping and maritime rescue is also in the shared interests of the EU and Canada.

Economic security and preparedness

In a world of comprehensive interdependence, economic security has become a central part of comprehensive security and national defence capability. The EU–Canada partnership, too, is largely tied to protection against global disruptions, reducing critical dependencies and securing supply chains. At the centre of this are above all investments in the green transition and critical resources, in which China has captured global markets. China’s growing Arctic presence in turn challenges the future development of the Arctic security environment. The EU and Canada should discuss the similarities and differences in their China policies and consider possible policy measures for managing dependencies on China. For the EU, cooperation with Canada in critical minerals extraction is one of the most important opportunities to reduce dependence on China.

A third important field of cooperation between the EU and Canada in Arctic security is preparing for hybrid influence and cyber security. In particular, the security of Arctic subsea cables has risen to an important role not only in regional security of supply but also in global security policy. The greatest threat is the deliberate destruction of subsea cables, but natural disasters are also possible. Repairing cables in Arctic conditions is especially challenging, so, for example, the ongoing Polar Connect project aims to build an alternative route to the current vulnerable intercontinental links. The importance of cyber security is also growing constantly, and preventing industrial espionage is a key area of cooperation between the EU and Canada.

Environmental security and science diplomacy

Last but by no means least, the areas of comprehensive Arctic security cooperation between the EU and Canada include environmental security – more precisely, climate change and environmental protection – and Arctic science diplomacy. Tightening general greenhouse gas reductions is of course badly needed globally, but for the Arctic it would be essential for the EU and Canada to develop a concrete roadmap, especially on black carbon and climate change adaptation.

Although the Arctic Ocean lies far from large population centres and industrial concentrations, plastic waste and long-range pollutants pose a significant environmental security threat in the region. Ocean and air currents carry pollutants and plastic waste north from far away, and they accumulate in the region's ecosystems because the cold slows decomposition. The EU and Canada have promoted more ambitious international plastics policy, and both are also parties to the Central Arctic Ocean fisheries agreement, which prohibits commercial fishing in the spirit of precaution until the region's ecosystems are better understood. It is important to keep these processes going and to pursue ambitious policy measures to advance environmental protection, even though geopolitical struggle keeps taking more room on the political agenda.

Canada has already joined many mechanisms that fund Arctic research and are central to Finland, such as the Nordforsk programme under the Nordic Council of Ministers and the EU's Horizon Europe research funding. The need for information on the manifold dynamics of Arctic security in an age of polycrisis can only be assumed to grow,

while the scarcity of national research funding tightens. United States investment in Arctic research is rather unlikely in the prevailing political climate, so EU–Canada cooperation has a special role in ensuring that political decision-makers have an up-to-date and comprehensive understanding of the developments shaping the future of the Arctic.

Finns firmly on Canada's side

Raine Tiessalo

Executive Director, Toivo Think Tank, Finland



More than eight in ten Finns view the deepening partnership between the EU and Canada positively, and nearly two in three would even accept Canada as a full member of the EU, writes Raine Tiessalo, Executive Director of the Toivo Think Tank in Finland.

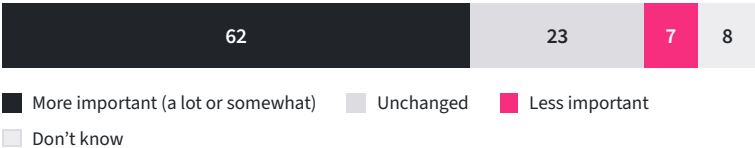
Trump has made the EU more important

It is helpful to approach Finns' attitudes to Canada through the wider picture. According to a survey commissioned by the Finnish Toivo Think Tank in summer 2026, the policies of US President **Donald Trump** have led Finns to look to the EU for support. As many as 62 per cent consider EU membership a lot or somewhat more important to Finland than before, 23 per cent think its significance has remained unchanged, and only seven per cent believe EU membership has lost importance.

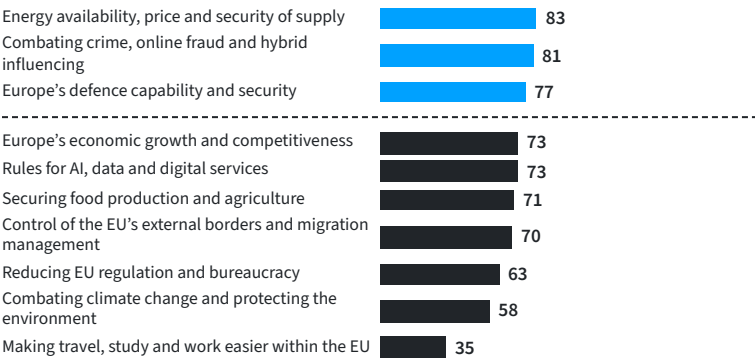
FIGURE 1

The importance of EU membership to Finland in the Trump era

EU membership is now more or less important to Finland than before



What the EU should do more of, % of respondents



Share who want the EU to do a lot more or somewhat more. All respondents (Finnish adults), n=1,000. Source: Toivo Think Tank, More Europe, please! (Finnish polling firm IROResearch, 30 June–27 July 2026).

Finns expect the EU to do more especially in the fields of security and security of supply. The greatest calls for further investment concern energy availability, price and security of supply; combating crime, online fraud and hybrid influencing; and Europe's defence capability and security. These three policy areas unite Finns across party lines. Among supporters of each of the six largest parties in the Finnish Parliament, at least 70 per cent want more EU action in them.

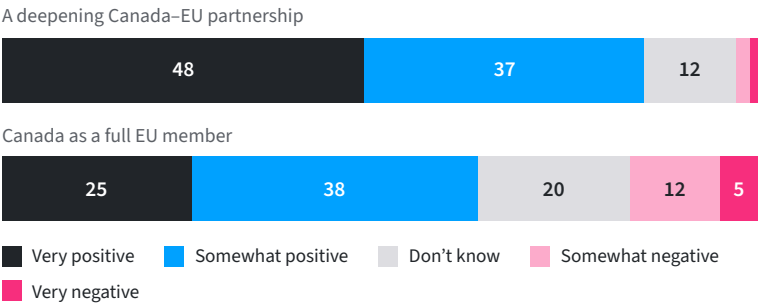
There are also clear differences in views between supporters of different parties. While 75 per cent of National Coalition Party supporters

believe that the importance of EU membership has grown during the Trump era, only 25 per cent of Finns Party supporters think the same.

The partnership with Canada is beyond dispute

In September, Toivo commissioned a survey asking citizens how they feel about Canada and the EU deepening their relations as a counterweight to US tariff policy and the trade war. The answer was clear. As many as 85 per cent view the partnership positively, 48 per cent of them very positively. Only four per cent view it negatively, and 12 per cent do not know what they think.

FIGURE 2
Attitudes to the EU–Canada partnership and to Canadian membership



%, all respondents (Finnish adults), n=1,000. Source: IROResearch, A Thousand Finns, September 2026.

Positive attitudes are widespread in all age groups (77–92 per cent are positive) and in all income brackets (83–90 per cent). A clear majority of supporters of every party in the Finnish Parliament back a deeper partnership. Among supporters of the National Coalition Party, the

Greens, the Left Alliance and the Social Democrats, it enjoys 87–99 per cent support. Even among Finns Party supporters, 78 per cent are behind the partnership. Even in that group, only ten per cent are negative.

Full membership divides opinion more

A second question went further, asking how respondents would feel about Canada applying for full EU membership and becoming the Union's 28th member state.

Finland's President **Alexander Stubb** toyed with the idea in June 2026:

“Wouldn't it be lovely if Canada was the 28th state of the European Union rather than the 51st state of the United States?”

The question is nevertheless hypothetical, since the EU treaties do not provide for associate membership, and full membership is not intended for states outside Europe. The question therefore measures, above all, an attitude.

Full membership receives somewhat less support than closer relations by other means.

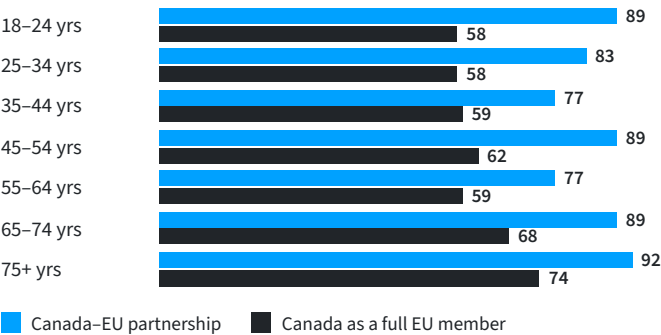
63 per cent view the idea positively and 17 per cent negatively. The share of the undecided is clearly larger than on the partnership question: one in five (20 per cent) does not know what they think, and among women as many as one in four. Positive attitudes grow with age. Among those under 45, 58–59 per cent support the idea of Canadian EU membership, but among those over 75 the figure is 74 per cent. The youngest age groups also contain more critical voices: 24 per

cent of 25–34-year-olds view membership negatively. Finns are more positive about the idea than Europeans elsewhere.

In a YouGov survey conducted in April 2026 in the five largest EU countries, Canadian EU membership was supported by 55 per cent of respondents in Germany, 51 per cent in Spain, 46 per cent in Poland, 42 per cent in France and 41 per cent in Italy. The wording and timing of the surveys are not fully comparable.

FIGURE 3

Share with a positive attitude, by age group

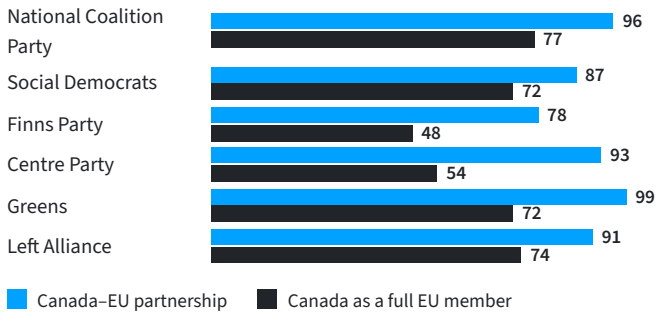


Share with a positive attitude (very + somewhat), %. Source: IROResearch, A Thousand Finns, September 2026.

By party preference, the differences are larger than on the partnership question. Membership is supported most by supporters of the National Coalition Party (77 per cent), the Left Alliance (74), the Social Democrats (72) and the Greens (72). Among supporters of the Finns Party (48) and the Centre Party (54), about half view the idea positively, but 26 per cent in these groups are also negative.

FIGURE 4

Share with a positive attitude, by party preference



Share with a positive attitude (very + somewhat), %. Parties in order of support; party groups number 66–177 respondents in the sample. Source: IROResearch, A Thousand Finns, September 2026.

The result gives Finland's political decision-makers room to move forward. For Finns, Canada is already a close and trusted partner. The question is not whether Finns want Canada closer to Europe, but how far the relationship can be taken.

Canada and the European Union are turning to each other in a new, more uncertain world. The foundations of the rules-based multilateral system are being undermined by the United States under President Donald Trump, a rising China and an aggressive Russia.

In this report by Think Tank Toivo, top Finnish decision-makers and experts explore how the EU and Canada could build a new strategic partnership, and what it would mean for the EU, Canada, and Finland.

“Together with Canada, we can defend the international rules-based system at a time when its very foundations are increasingly being called into question,” says Finnish Foreign Minister Elina Valtonen.

Toivo is a think tank rooted in the values of the Finnish National Coalition Party: democracy, individual freedom and a positive approach to the market economy and international cooperation.



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