



Top 10 — GAC Essay Competition 2025

Essay Question

Germany, the United States, and the wider alliance are at a crossroads. We are entering a new era of international relationships, affecting dimensions such as global trade, defense, and security. This moment calls for a Transatlantic Transformation – a rethinking of how we collaborate, communicate, and confront global challenges together.

What are your ideas for redefining the transatlantic partnership in light of this transformation? How would you reinvigorate it for the future?

Title of the Essay

Why Culture and Politics Must Share the Stage: Social media trend “Euro Summer” reveals a new Transatlantic Script

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Essay

Pop culture is a mirror with bad lighting: it never shows the whole picture, but what it reflects is always telling. Internet culture is much faster than policy procedures. A law takes months or even years to pass, a trend starts in a single viral video. The everyday choices people make – what they wear, post, craft memes about – are reactions to the realities they live in before they can find the names for them. Pop culture leaks tiny hints of the political status quo. By the time economists confirm a recession, you’ve already seen it in thrift hauls and “girl dinner” TikToks. Before political scientists confirm a shift in transatlantic relations, you see “Euro Summer” collages on the platforms. In this essay, I am arguing that the seemingly superficial “Euro Summer” trend exposes a new transatlantic script and highlights the ongoing importance of maintaining cultural ties.

Tourists from the US spending their summers in Europe is nothing new; slow summers in Europe have a long tradition. What is new, and only visible in this decade, is the celebration of a particular aesthetic of it on social media. The social media phenomenon of the “Euro Summer” started as a fashion trend at the beginning of this decade: chic, elegant tops from



Milan, flowing maxi dresses from Copenhagen, pastel color schemes and puffy sleeves. The “Europecore”¹ aesthetic paints a picture of an easy summer: long vacation days in half-timbered houses in small German towns, Aperol Spritz on a Spanish island or French pastry in a small café by the beach. “Euro Summer” reveals a cultural inversion in transatlantic perceptions: while Gen Z in Germany idealizes the US, young US-Americans are now romanticizing Europe as a desirable destination.

This trend is not an analysis of the political or economic order but exposes a new cultural perspective young people on both sides have of the life across the Atlantic. On the one hand there is the dream of a road trip crossing San Francisco, New York, LA or a netflix-like year abroad at a US college. On the other hand, young people in the US create short “Euro Summer” videos of sunny coasts in Italy, small cafés in Copenhagen, rolling cigarettes in narrow streets in Italian towns or hitting 10k steps during the day while on holiday. Gen Z and millennials are showing how transatlantic relations are culturally taking a turn – one that could bring them closer together. While fashion magazines like Vogue write superficially on “What To Wear On Your Euro Summer Trip”², and the New York Times on “6 Beaches in Europe That Take the Sizzle Out of Summer Vacation”³, social media videos often focus on observations from travelling in Europe: the walkable cities, the 20-30 paid vacation days a year, dancing in clubs at 18, the well-developed train networks. Beyond the superficial seeming aesthetics in these videos, for young US-Americans, Europe becomes a tiny part of the US-American Dream.

Transatlantic ties don’t just live in the White House or the German Chancellery; they thrive precisely because they don’t only happen on a diplomatic level. They live in the general interest, in countries becoming dream destinations: the half-timbered houses in southern Germany, the Wadden Sea, the history-haunted city of Berlin. Just as the soft orange shapes of Grand Canyon, a night in a Las Vegas casino or looking down at the New York skyline from a skyscraper sit on so many bucket lists.

These transatlantic relations were for many in Gen Z like Angela Merkel as chancellor: It was unthinkable that another political office, another political situation, could take its place – they had never experienced it differently. You could rely on the partnership thriving; it felt like a promise. Therefore, it came as even more of a shock when that stability began to falter, and reports emerged of tourists being denied visas over their private Instagram feeds. The freedom

¹ While there is no political analysis around „Euro Summer“ or “Europecore”, Laura Pitcher offers a brief fashion-political analysis of the term ‘Europecore’. Pitcher, L. (2023, 24. May). *The Rise of “Europecore” Is Peak American Escapism*. Nylon. <https://www.nylon.com/fashion/the-rise-of-europecore-american-escapism> (accessed August 10, 2025).

² Tang, B. (July 1, 2025) *What To Wear On Your Euro Summer Trip*. Vogue. <https://www.voguehk.com/en/article/fashion/european-summer-fashion-inspiration/> (accessed August 10, 2025).

³ Castro-Root, G. (July 23, 2025). *6 Beaches in Europe That Take the Sizzle Out of Summer Vacation*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/07/23/travel/beaches-europe-summer.html> (accessed August 10, 2025).



that Gen Z sought while driving Route 66 in self-built vans is now curtailed, as even basic freedom of expression is no longer a given.

However, unlike the economic and political ties, the cultural ones still remain, and the political situation should orient itself around that: Around the fact that there is mutual interest in one another. Many know of their German or US ancestry, but it is also the curiosity about the countries themselves that fuels this strong cultural connection. Exactly this must be maintained and nurtured, particularly for young people. It must be kept alive through youth exchange programs, language classes and transatlantic cultural events.

The “Euro Summer” is more than a fashion trend, it’s a manifestation of cultural transatlantic relations, and at the same time a continuation of them. Young people from both continents romanticize the life on the other side of the Atlantic; they long for a simpler way of living and use the social media trend as a form of escapism. Within this lies a political power – young generations should engage in exchange and dialogue about these desires. How come from both sides the grass always looks greener across the Atlantic?

Against this backdrop, the greatest damage in the current economic and political transatlantic situation occurs when tensions begin to break or place barriers around the cultural relations that have long connected Germany and the US. While policies and trade disputes often dominate headlines, it is the erosion of cultural exchange that ultimately undermines the foundation of the transatlantic partnership. These cultural ties foster trust, empathy, and a sense of belonging that cannot be replaced by diplomacy alone. Politics must recognize that it can’t succeed without nurturing these cultural connections.

In this light, reinvigorating the transatlantic partnership means to uphold democratic principles – starting with the fundamental right to move freely, safeguarding freedom of speech, and not having to delete Instagram stories about ceasefire protests to be granted a visa. Ultimately, maintaining cultural relations isn’t just a nice extra, it’s essential for a democratic alliance. When politics shift, governments change, and when the unexpected shakes the ground beneath us, cultural ties keep the partnership alive.

References / Bibliography

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