

HOW DONALD TRUMP COULD SAVE EU FOREIGN POLICY

STEFAN LEHNE AND HEATHER GRABBE | JANUARY 12, 2017

The EU should take Donald Trump's arrival as U.S. president as a major wake-up call to upgrade its foreign and security policies. Trump's comments on foreign policy during the election campaign suggest he might bring the most significant rupture in the transatlantic order since World War II. His transactional approach to long-standing alliance commitments and skepticism about trade liberalization could cause the United States to stop serving as the anchor of the liberal world order, at least for the next four years.

The EU has huge stakes in preserving a rules-based global system. A relapse to a world dominated by protectionism, power politics, and competing nationalisms would undermine the EU's foundation as a transnational union that seeks collective solutions to its members' problems. The EU's best defense is to lead the resistance to these tendencies and build support around the values on which it was founded. However, this would require a much greater focus on foreign and security policies, with mobilization of resources and increased solidarity among member states to take responsibility for this task.

TIME TO WEAN EUROPE OFF U.S. LEADERSHIP

Generations of European politicians have been conditioned to expect Washington to take the lead in responding to any emerging crisis. Close and continuous transatlantic consultations, in both Brussels and national capitals, kept policies mostly in sync. EU successes such as the stabilization of the Western Balkans, the July 2014 international agreement on Iran's nuclear program, and the common response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine

were based on intensive cooperation with the United States. When this cooperation broke down, as over the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the EU was effectively paralyzed. Independent European initiatives were rare—and even more rarely successful.

This close partnership—with Washington firmly in the lead—served both sides well, but it came at a cost. Over decades, Europeans neglected the development of independent strategic thinking and invested far too little in Europe's own security and defense. As reliance on U.S. leadership must come to an end, it is high time to fill these gaps.

Building capacity must go hand in hand with building coherence. Europe will feature even lower on the Trump administration's agenda than it has under his predecessor. The new U.S. focus will be on China, Russia, Iran, and the self-proclaimed Islamic State. To the extent that Washington engages with Europe at all, it will likely deal with countries individually. When a leader opposes his agenda, Trump's government may well seek to play off one European against another. If EU leaders

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Stefan Lehne is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, where his research focuses on the post-Lisbon Treaty development of the European Union's foreign policy, with a specific focus on relations between the EU and member states.

Heather Grabbe is the director of the Open Society European Policy Institute.

fail to pull together and speak up much more loudly than before, they risk being sidelined.

The EU's prosperity and security remain very reliant on the post-war multilateral institutions and economic order that the U.S.-European partnership built and maintained over more than half a century. That's why the EU has invested so much in areas that Trump deplors, such as international action on climate change and promotion of liberal values. Without U.S. engagement, it will be much harder to move this agenda forward. Trump's preference for ad hoc deals could undermine long-standing commitments and alliances. His transactional approach crowds out the kind of institution building and rules maintenance that is central to the EU's way of managing itself and dealing with the world.

Trump's reality-TV style is also having an impact on domestic politics in Europe. His denigration of political institutions, constitutional constraints, and independent media encourages demagogues and would-be authoritarians to reject liberal values that constrain their power—and to echo his xenophobic statements, which heighten social tensions and nationalism. The political battleground in Europe had already been moving from policies to personalities. For the EU, the Trump style of spontaneous messaging from an individual leader is especially challenging because it is the opposite of the bloc's method of consensual decisionmaking and accommodating all interests.

All these negative effects are compounding the sense of crisis that resulted from the British referendum decision in June 2016 to leave the EU. But rather than fall into despondency, Europeans should see the Trump presidency as a salutary shock. Finally there is real urgency for Europeans to get their act together. Trump has provided an alternative vision of foreign policy that grates against their instincts. His opposition could catalyze European action as no previous U.S. president's encouragement did.

HOW TO MAKE THE EU FIT FOR A TRUMPIAN WORLD

To take up this challenge, EU leaders will need to make a qualitative shift in the priority they give to external policies, which have too long suffered from political inattention, bureaucratic infighting, and a lack of serious resources. EU foreign policy has a rare chance to emerge from its teenage laziness into full maturity of taking responsibility. But EU leaders

have to grasp this opportunity quickly, before the risks and costs become overwhelming as Trump takes office. The first serious challenges for the EU could emerge soon after his inauguration on January 20.

The greatest immediate danger is that the Trump administration may enter into deals with Moscow, particularly on Ukraine, that increase Eastern Europe's dependence on Russia and ultimately divide the continent into two zones of influence. The United States may drop its support for the sanctions imposed on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine without much progress in implementing the Minsk agreement on stabilizing Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. Given existing divisions among its members on the sanctions, the EU might then abandon the measures too when they come up for renewal in mid-2017.

So far, negotiations on the crisis in the Donbas have been led by two European powers—France and Germany—in the so-called Normandy format with Russia and Ukraine. A U.S.-Russian deal could cut the EU out of the negotiations, as happened over Syria, marginalizing the bloc's voice on an issue of major European interest. Ukraine—and probably also Moldova and Georgia—would lose the option of a Western orientation, allowing Russian influence to dominate the whole of Eastern Europe up to the EU's borders and even inside them.

A U.S.-Russian bilateral deal would diminish the EU's capacity to offer Eastern European countries a modernization agenda and assistance to build a strong and close partnership. This would also increase the vulnerability of the Baltic states if Russia then felt free to meddle and put pressure on them. Trump's mixed messages about the U.S. commitment to NATO risk weakening the alliance and might encourage further Russian pressure in the Western Balkans and Central Europe.

This risk alone should be a huge motivation for the EU to upgrade its capacity as a foreign policy player. The union has to become stronger to avoid a new Yalta-style deal to carve out areas of influence in Eastern Europe, negotiated over the heads of the countries whose fates are at stake. Important players in the U.S. administration and Congress have to be convinced that the EU cannot be cut out of decisions about the future of the continent if such agreements are to be sustainable. The EU has to resist a return to a bipolar European order.

Trump could pursue other transactional deals with Russia, or with Turkey or various Arab autocracies, that would run counter to the EU's long-term engagement and destabilize subregional order in several places. Such deals might lead to sudden and sharp U.S. disengagement from the Caucasus, North Africa, and the Western Balkans, where EU-U.S. cooperation has been close for several decades. They might shift U.S. policy on Syria, moving Washington toward accepting a solution imposed by Russia and Turkey. And they might ease U.S. pressure on Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan regarding his harsh crackdown on rights, which the EU has criticized.

In addition, the incoming Trump administration may try to take apart the 2014 Iran deal and step up U.S. economic and political pressure on Tehran, creating serious new regional tensions. The Trump team may also seek to ratchet up U.S. counterterrorism efforts in ways that violate fundamental European values and approaches.

To rise to the challenges that Trump's foreign policy will present to Europe, the EU must raise its game in several ways.

First of all, the EU must invest in its strengths. The EU has to become more capable of withstanding the onslaught of strongman politics based on transactional relationships by investing in foreign and security policies on the same scale as it has in economic policy. It should move faster toward pooling assets, sharing resources, and building stronger institutional capabilities. Even more importantly, the EU needs to change its mind-set. Foreign policy has long been a sideshow of European integration; now, EU leaders must give it much higher priority. For the first time in the EU's history, foreign policy needs to become a core responsibility among its areas of competence.

There are good ideas on how to do this in the EU global strategy presented by EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini in June 2016. The document offers a convincing path toward more coherent and active international engagement by the EU. It had the misfortune of arriving straight after the British referendum and consequently did not receive the attention it deserved. But it could have a second life now that Trump's election has refocused attention on the EU's interests, principles, and priorities.

The foreign policy agenda it sets out plays to the EU's strengths. As a regional power with multilevel decisionmaking, the EU is

not well suited to becoming a major geopolitical actor. However, in a world of strongman leaders in the United States, Russia, Turkey, and elsewhere, the EU cannot abstain from *realpolitik*. In fact, it must get better at it. To start with, the union must streamline its heavy decisionmaking processes and promote greater discipline to overcome its propensity to leaks. However, the need to find agreement among more than two dozen countries will prevent it from ever acting with the speed of a nation-state.

The EU should build on its comparative advantage of vast experience in developing rules and commitments based on a careful balance between the interests of many players. Most of the critical challenges of the twenty-first century, from climate change to cybersecurity, can be resolved only through multilateral negotiation and broad consensus, so there is a great need for this kind of leadership. In a multipolar world characterized by the return of *realpolitik*, it is increasingly difficult to preserve a rules-based global order, but this makes the EU's engagement even more necessary. No international actor is better positioned to build the networks and partnerships that can support and develop global governance in the coming decades.

Europeans often point with pride to their ability to bring together an array of instruments, from diplomacy to military assets to trade and development assistance, in tackling international problems. In practice, the EU's record has often been marred by fights between institutions and with national capitals, but the high representative has helped improve coordination between foreign and security policies, on one hand, and the European Commission's roles in trade, development, humanitarian aid, and neighborhood policy, on the other. Yet for the EU to become a coherent and comprehensive external actor, its members need to align their policies much more with the common policy of the EU.

The EU needs to upgrade its security and defense. Of all the elements of the EU global strategy, security and defense have received the most attention since the UK referendum. The sense of urgency grows as turmoil in neighboring regions spreads and future U.S. commitment is in doubt.

Since the British referendum, the other 27 member states have made a rapid series of verbal pledges to upgrade investment in European security and defense, strengthen capabilities, enhance cooperation, and improve responsiveness to crises. However, they

will need to follow through with stronger political will than they have demonstrated in the past to deliver on these commitments. Long before Trump's election, U.S. administrations have understandably complained about unequal burden sharing for Europe's security. Defense budgets are now rising again after a 12 percent drop over the past decade, but European governments need to do a great deal more. Upgrading Europe's efforts in this area is more vital than ever—whether to convince a reluctant United States to remain engaged or to prepare in case it cannot be convinced.

The EU must also manage migration responsibly. Migration was one of the issues that brought Trump to power. How and whether he implements his campaign promises—for example, to expel irregular migrants and ban Muslims from entering the United States—could have a major impact on the politics of migration in Europe. Managing migration better will be crucial for the EU's survival and for the credibility of its external action. The EU needs a comprehensive strategy for sustainable migration management, which would encompass better control of the union's external borders, burden sharing among member states, harmonization of policies and laws, stronger institutions, and fair arrangements with third countries.

But the migration challenge goes far beyond Europe and its neighborhood. It is a consequence of globalization and needs to be tackled at the global level. However restrictive the Trump administration's migration policies might turn out, the EU has to find partners for building effective international regimes that protect vulnerable people and provide legal routes for the international movement of labor.

DEFEND THE GLOBAL COMMONS

In addition to the multiple problems that Trump's foreign policy could create for European unity and regional security, it could pose serious threats to the global commons. A combination of neglect and aggressive rhetoric from Washington could damage many parts of the international architecture intended to solve global problems, from the UN to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The EU needs to build stronger defenses for the three areas in which it has most to lose: trade, nonproliferation, and climate change.

Trade

The world trade regime was already in trouble before Trump was elected. Trade growth had leveled out as the boom unleashed by liberalization came to an end. The politics of trade have changed, with many formerly open countries turning protectionist. The growth of opposition to two flagship deals, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), showed that what used to be one of the most effective instruments of EU external policy has become increasingly contested, including by the European public. Trump has announced he will cancel the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement among twelve countries in the Pacific region. Further protectionist steps are likely to follow. If this trend continues and spreads to other regions, the cost to the EU could be tremendous, as much of its prosperity relies on a liberal trade regime for both goods and services.

Protectionism in the United States will lead to clashes of interests that could result in trade wars with the EU. The initial idea behind TTIP was to create a comprehensive framework for furthering the U.S.-EU economic relationship, with trade as one of its strategic pillars; but now, the dynamic is likely to reverse, with tensions over many trade and investment ties.

Countering protectionism requires three types of action. First, within countries, the interests of workers and regions that have lost out from trade liberalization require more serious redistributive measures than were offered during the neoliberal years. The EU's budget instruments, through structural funds that support poorer regions, are tiny in comparison with the scale of the problem. Member states should also create greater protections at the EU level, for instance through a pan-European unemployment insurance scheme, so that the EU not only enforces fiscal discipline and is an agent of globalization but also provides benefits directly to citizens.

Second, the EU should pursue its own agenda for advanced bilateral and regional free-trade agreements that promote rather than remove protections for environmental and social standards. The union should also push for a comprehensive communications strategy that sets out clearly the advantages and risks of each trade agreement for citizens. Most importantly, trade negotiations need to be conducted in a more transparent manner, in dialogue with civil society, to build trust and ensure the protection of consumer, environmental, and social interests.

Third, the EU should put together a strong international alliance to resist protectionism and defend an open and fair trading system centered on the WTO.

Nonproliferation

Trump's opposition to the Iran nuclear deal, his December 2016 tweet about the United States needing to expand its nuclear arsenal, and his loose talk about the potential benefits of a Japanese nuclear weapons capability raise the prospect of weaker U.S. commitment to nuclear nonproliferation. After seventy years and despite significant flaws, the Non-Proliferation Treaty remains indispensable to international security. U.S. security guarantees and active diplomacy have been fundamental in convincing countries to desist from nuclear weapons programs. Europeans will need to mobilize their collective persuasive powers to ensure Washington holds to its course of many decades during the next four years.

Climate Change

While the nonproliferation regime depends on U.S. involvement, action on climate change is an area in which the EU can move forward with other allies. Thanks to strong European leadership, the Paris climate change agreement reached in December 2015 opened a new chapter in the long struggle to address global warming. U.S. support and diplomacy, not least in strengthening China's commitment, was crucial for this achievement. If, as indicated by a number of statements on the campaign trail and recent senior political appointments, the Trump administration disengages from climate diplomacy and reverses policies to reduce emissions at home, this would weaken the climate change regime significantly but would not bring it down.

Many of the national commitments set out in the Paris agreement stand to benefit the signatory countries, regardless of future U.S. policies. People living in Brussels, Paris, and Rome will continue to want improved air quality whether or not Trump rescinds outgoing U.S. President Barack Obama's Climate Action Plan. European commitments to expand the share of renewables in the energy mix and to expand cooperation in the energy market will remain important factors in accelerating innovation and improving energy security.

Given its size as a global carbon emitter and its role in climate diplomacy to date, the EU is in a unique position to fill the vacuum left by the United States and work alongside China to provide leadership in this area. The EU will need to increase its

own engagement and international efforts even further, investing in new partnerships both multilaterally with major emitters in the developing world and with new actors at the substate level to deepen the commitment to the target of keeping global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, as set out in the Paris agreement.

WHERE WILL LEADERSHIP COME FROM?

None of these major shifts in policies and instruments can happen without strong leadership in foreign policy at the EU level. The heads of the EU's institutions have their role, but only national leaders can convince their populations to take foreign policy seriously. Both types of leadership are needed for the EU to engage with strongman and liberal international players alike.

Germany cannot carry the whole weight alone and needs France's commitment of its military and intelligence assets, UN Security Council role, and global reach. By the end of 2017, elections in France and Germany may have produced stable governments with democratic mandates to revive the partnership that has provided leadership to the whole EU in the past. That would give a core group of willing and able EU members strong regional expertise and significant assets with which to invest in European and not only national solutions.

The European Council, which has so far dealt with foreign policy mainly in crisis-management mode, needs to develop a more strategic approach. The EU's national leaders need to engage in regular substantive discussions based on strategic analysis provided by the European External Action Service and the commission to build coherence and raise the EU's collective ambition.

CONCLUSION

Six decades after the postwar order was created, Europe has a massive incentive to overcome its dependence on U.S. leadership. Either the EU fills the vacuum left by a disengaging United States, or the vacuum will fill the EU.

Together with like-minded partners, the EU has the capacity to limit the damage from Trumpian politics and safeguard regional and global cooperation. An EU that gets its act together and takes greater responsibility would also have better chances to convince the United States to remain engaged—or at least to reengage after Trump has gone.

There are five areas in which the EU can and should rise to the challenge posed by the Trump presidency, with EU foreign policy emerging into full maturity.

First, the EU should take responsibility for its neighboring regions. The EU has made commitments to Eastern European neighbors that it has to protect against Russian pressure and potential U.S.-Russian deal making. In the South, Western inaction has allowed the Syrian tragedy to unfold. This experience must not be repeated. The Middle East will remain in turmoil, while demographic pressure and poor governance are burdening African societies. Further cases of state failure are likely. The EU would not be able to contain the fallout just by trying to keep the people who are fleeing instability away from its borders. It will have to invest seriously in the stability of the regions to its East and South through more effective diplomacy and well-coordinated use of all its instruments.

Second, Europeans must take their own security seriously. U.S. disengagement could increase the European will to develop and invest in more active security and defense policies. Strategic autonomy must finally become a top priority. While NATO should remain the principal forum of European security, the increased uncertainty should prompt EU members to develop the capacity to act by themselves.

Third, Europeans must safeguard the international order. The EU should team up with other stakeholders that still want to invest in the liberal world order: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand but also China and India. The EU could become the most attractive partner for China on combating climate change and maintaining the global trading system. If Trump pursues his America First policy, that could push other countries and regions to work together more closely and create greater demand for EU engagement in many parts of the world. Trump's foreign policy

may alienate many countries, and the EU needs to keep the flame of international cooperation alive.

Fourth, the EU needs to preserve a constructive transatlantic relationship beyond the U.S. government. Europe needs to change the way it interacts with the United States. The EU should develop a U.S. policy by reaching out to a broad spectrum of American society and doing much more public diplomacy to convince Americans outside the administration to work with Europe on improving the state of the world. The EU has long promoted civil society dialogue in its relations with third countries. It now needs to apply this method to transatlantic relations, too.

Finally, Europeans must defend liberal values. Trump's election has given a major boost to leaders who want to abandon the commitment to liberal democracy and reduce the constraints it imposes on their powers. Political culture in advanced democracies is changing as hate speech and xenophobia become normalized, fake news affects public perceptions, and the postwar norms of tolerance and antiracism weaken.

These changes have been happening in Europe as well as the United States. The reaction of some mainstream politicians is to claim that they can no longer stand up for liberal democracy against the triangle of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Erdoğan, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, which has been boosted by Trump. But the EU was founded with openness, tolerance, and trust building across borders as parts of its DNA. If illiberal democracy is allowed to sweep away these pillars, the EU will disappear with them. European leaders need to bolster the EU's values base by speaking out for human rights, justice, democracy, and the rule of law and by criticizing more robustly abuses of power and poor governance. Defense of the achievements of liberal democracy could be the real struggle of the next four years, and it needs to be at the heart of EU foreign policy.

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a unique global network of policy research centers in Russia, China, Europe, the Middle East, India, and the United States. Our mission, dating back more than a century, is to advance the cause of peace through analysis and development of fresh policy ideas and direct engagement and collaboration with decisionmakers in government, business, and civil society. Working together, our centers bring the inestimable benefit of multiple national viewpoints to bilateral, regional, and global issues.

© 2017 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. All rights reserved.

Carnegie does not take institutional positions on public policy issues; the views represented herein are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.



@Carnegie_Europe



facebook.com/CarnegieEurope