
Trump, Europe and one year into the US Presidency

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No one can say that **Donald Trump** failed to warn us. After a year as US President he has no intention of turning back, at least not until 2020 (although the possibility that he will win a second term should not be ruled out if the economy continues to grow or if his Twitter games provoke a diplomatic or military crisis of magnitude). Some were confident that the language and content of his election campaign would not survive his arrival to the Presidency; but they were wrong to think that Trump would be just another President, the kind that moderates his message or even changes his ideas upon arrival at the White House. No, Trump has maintained his belligerent tone, sometimes against the press, other times against foreign enemies (as with North Korea, Iran and, even, Europe).

But **what is Europe to Trump?** To be sure, when he thinks of the community project, it is not the content of Article 2 of the EU treaty which comes to his mind: 'The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail'. For Trump, the EU is a mere 'consortium', a word he has employed on many occasions, including when he was visited in Washington by **Theresa May**, the Prime Minister of the UK, to whom he demonstrated his support for Britain's exit from the European club. To praise Brexit, however, has not been enough to strengthen this 'special relationship'. Some of the difficult issues between the two allies over the past year, during which Trump was expected to visit London (although such a visit has not yet taken place), include: (1) differences over their views of globalisation; (2) the US migration veto; and (3) the controversy surrounding Trump's re-tweets of the extremist group Britain First.

The recent appearance of the US leader at Davos – where he added to his well-known 'America First' motto the additional slogan of 'Not America Alone' – seemed more intended to encourage investors than to seriously seek common ground with other world leaders. Indeed, if with Europe there has been no progress (and none is expected) in the negotiations on the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) since Trump defeated Hillary Clinton in the elections, the withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TTP) was Trump's

first decision upon assuming the Presidency, and the renegotiation of NAFTA (which for Trump has been a disaster) is now underway, although it could easily fail. All of this serves as an example of Trump's aversion to globalism and his use of the flag of economic protectionism, alien to European institutions, which have not delayed taking

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advantage of the opportunity to advance the EU's own trade relations with partners like Japan, Mercosur, Australia and New Zealand.

But it is not just that Trump's theses fail to coincide with those of Europe on international trade. They are also diametrically opposed, for instance, in the field of climate change. The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, announced by Trump last June, was poorly received in Europe, especially by the recently inaugurated President of the French Republic, **Emmanuel Macron**, who responded to the US leader by asking that the planet be made 'great again' (referring to another of Trump's slogans: 'Make America Great Again'). In addition to confronting Trump in this area (including the establishment of a system of grants for researchers working on climate change), the French President has also adopted the 'manly' handshake when greeting Trump. Perhaps his gamble on refusing to flee from such a confrontation has been the secret of what appears to be his good relationship with Trump at present. At any event, Macron has been the first leader that Trump has invited to a state dinner at the White House (returning the honour that Macron extended to him with the invitation to attend the 14 July celebrations). Or it could be simply that Trump finds it convenient to maintain good relations with the French leader (for whom it might also be a convenient way to raise his international profile), given his disdain towards the leaders of the European institutions and, of course, Trump's own hostility regarding the European club and, in particular, Germany (clearly visible in his unveiled scorn for Angela Merkel).

One of the issues on which President Trump has more openly demonstrated his hostility to Europeans turns upon how he understands NATO. Echoing the US line on this matter for the last few years, Trump has demanded, somewhat abruptly, an increase in the defence resources of the Allies (specifically, to raise defence spending to 2% of GDP in 2024, a goal that for some countries, like Spain, is unrealistic). On repeated occasions he has denounced what he feels are 'debts' in this regard (but which do not actually exist). This has served as a provocation, at any event, for some Europeans who for many years (decades, even) have believed that the 'American friend' would come to Europe's aid in the event of need. The German leader, Angela Merkel, expressed this realisation fairly succinctly last year: 'The times in which [Germany] could fully rely on others are partly over. I have experienced this in the last few days... We Europeans really have to take our destiny into our own hands'.

In reality, this is a positive development. If any benefit has come from Trump being in the White House (and from Brexit) it has been a new sense of urgency among Europeans, a realisation that Europe cannot continue with business as usual, a feeling that there is no further scope to continue with this particular 'path dependency'. In this respect, Trump has served as a kind of 'external federator'. And if to everything mentioned above is added the growing assertiveness of Putin's Russia –about which, interestingly, Trump will not pronounce a single negative word (indeed, he is likely to say the opposite)– or the growing influence of China in various regions of the world (Latin America and Africa, but also Eastern Europe and the Balkans), a very complex geopolitical situation seems to be facing Europe that will not allow it to rest upon its laurels. The more recent mood, however, has been positive, as in the launch of measures such as Permanent Structured

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Cooperation (PESCO) or the new process of reflection on the future of the European project. In any case, the relationship with Donald Trump's US will continue to be as complicated as it has been this past year, although that is something that should already have become evident.