



Report

REASSESSING EU-US RELATIONS AFTER THE EP AND US ELECTIONS: VIEWS FROM CENTRAL EUROPE (AND BEYOND)

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About EUROPEUM

EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan, and independent think-tank focusing on European integration and cohesion. EUROPEUM contributes to democracy, security, stability, freedom, and solidarity across Europe as well as to active engagement of the Czech Republic in the European Union. EUROPEUM undertakes original research, organizes public events and educational activities, and formulates new ideas and recommendations to improve European and Czech policy making.



On December 10th, Think Visegrad in Brussels organised an expert discussion on Reassessing EU-US relations after the EP and US elections: Views from Central Europe (and beyond). The debate examined the potential implications of Donald Trump's re-election for the EU and the transatlantic relationship. Attended by experts, policymakers, and academics, the session explored critical challenges and opportunities across political, security, and economic dimensions. The debate aimed to foster an in-depth understanding of how the policies of the Trump administration might reshape the EU's strategic choices and influence EU-US relations.

The outcome of the US presidential elections brings EU-US relations to a critical crossroads, with concrete challenges emerging in trade, security, or climate policy. On the political and security front, **NATO's cohesion comes at the forefront of the relations** as the EU faces uncertainty about the US commitment to its leadership role or a possible reduced military involvement on the European continent. This can have an immediate impact on the support of Ukraine in its fight against the full-scale Russian invasion, as well as on Ukraine's path towards the EU and NATO memberships. Furthermore, EU-US relations will be tested by its different approaches to China, with the Trump administration possibly pushing the EU to align with the positions of the US.

Both sides are grappling with policies around de-coupling from critical Chinese supply chains and implementing measures to reduce economic dependence while managing competition in technology and infrastructure. Last but not least, **the EU will be tested in its unity** as the Trump administration will most likely prioritise bilateral diplomacy directly with the EU member states, potentially creating divisions within the Union.

The discussion delved into several interrelated areas. A central topic was the normalisation of Trumpism, a concept raised by one of the speakers, and its implications for the EU's political and strategic landscape. Trump's transactional approach to diplomacy, characterised by **prioritising short-term economic benefits over long-term alliances**, was seen as potentially reshaping how EU leaders interact with the US. Panellists argued that this shift might compel the EU and its member states to rethink its traditional reliance on the US as a stabilising force and strive towards a more self-reliant position.

Rising populist sentiments across the EU further contribute to these challenges.

As one expert observed, populism and the weakening of centrist politics could undermine the EU's unity. This evolving dynamic underscores the need for the EU to develop more resilient frameworks capable of addressing both internal and external challenges.

Consequently, Ursula von der Leyen's leadership was highlighted as critical in maintaining a unified EU front and filling the political void left by major member states, particularly Germany and France. Von der Leyen's ability to build coalitions and lead on issues such as defence and competitiveness was seen as pivotal for maintaining cohesion within the EU.

Moving to the issue of EU-US dialogue, the debate explored the question of who could act as the EU's principal interlocutor with the US during Trump's second term. While Viktor Orbán was dismissed as a potential candidate due to his ties with China, other leaders, such as Italy's Giorgia Meloni, were seen as better positioned due to their pro-European and pro-Ukraine stances. Nonetheless, the need for a unified approach rather than bilateral deals with the US was reiterated. In that regard, the role of Ursula von der Leyen was highlighted as a favourable choice, as her leadership within the EU Commission enables her to present a unified EU voice while maintaining strategic alignment with transatlantic interests. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine emerged as a focal point, highlighting both the risks and opportunities for the EU.

Concerns about Trump's potential alignment with ultra-conservative leaders like Viktor Orbán raised alarms about the ideological direction of Europe under his renewed presidency.

Experts warned that Trump's preference for burden-sharing could push EU member states to take on a greater security role in Ukraine, a task for which it may not yet be prepared.

The discussion emphasised the need for innovative approaches, such as considering EU enlargement options tailored to Ukraine's circumstances and providing meaningful security guarantees. The reconstruction of Ukraine, even amidst ongoing conflict, was presented as a key EU responsibility that demands strategic and financial commitment.

Participants also noted a historic shift in European defence and security policy, marked by a **growing recognition of the need for the EU to move beyond its reliance on the US as the primary security guarantor.**

This shift was described as a profound change in the EU's strategic culture, necessitating greater investments in defence and the development of an independent EU security framework.

Economic relations between the EU and the US were another key area of discussion. Trump's transactional approach was seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for the EU. While his emphasis on defence spending and burden-sharing within NATO could strain transatlantic ties, it also presents a chance for the EU to assert its strategic priorities and leverage its current investments and economic cooperation with the US in key sectors. The expansion of the EU's defence industry and the push for joint procurement among EU member states were highlighted as steps toward reducing dependency on the US while maintaining collaborative ties.

Concerns were raised about Washington's perception that the EU acts as a competitor rather than a partner.

Trade relations were also widely discussed. Participants argued that this narrative could increase tensions unless the EU actively highlights mutual interests, such as addressing shared challenges posed by the growing economic influence and the so-called Axis of Upheaval, for which the US will need like-minded partners.

Opportunities for collaboration in sectors like energy and technology were identified as potential areas for strengthening economic ties while addressing global challenges.

The panel also touched upon the role of Central and Eastern European countries in the evolving transatlantic relationship. Poland's proactive approach to defense spending and its strategic alignment with NATO were seen as assets in navigating Trump's policies. Poland's leadership in security matters and its role as a bridge between the US and the EU were underscored as critical in maintaining regional stability. However, participants also emphasised the importance of balancing these transatlantic ties with commitments to EU cohesion.

The Three Seas Initiative, a regional platform for collaboration among Central and Eastern European countries, was mentioned as an example how regional efforts can complement broader EU strategies while aligning with US interests.

The role of Poland, Romania, and other EU member states was also discussed in relation to the current government crises in Germany and France, who are generally considered pivotal players within the EU.

In Germany, the ongoing debates around coalition building, debt regulations, and structural economic reforms underscore the difficulty in maintaining its leadership role in the EU and being able to act as a counterpart to the Trump administration. France, on the other hand, continues to grapple with issues of government stability and populism, creating uncertainty in its leadership role within the EU. These dynamics place additional pressure on smaller member states and EU institutions to step up as stabilising forces.

Although Germany remains a primary contributor to Ukraine, its internal political fragmentation has raised concerns about its ability to take decisive action on EU-level initiatives.

The debate concluded with a consensus on the need for the EU to adopt a proactive and adaptive approach to navigating the challenges posed by Trump's re-election. Strengthening EU autonomy in defense, trade, and global governance was identified as a priority. Participants stressed that autonomy does not imply isolation but rather the ability to engage with the US on equal footing while safeguarding EU interests.

Another key recommendation was to engage Trump pragmatically. By leveraging shared interests and emphasising areas of mutual benefit, the EU can navigate Trump's transactional style while maintaining a balanced and constructive relationship. Unity within the EU was highlighted as essential for preserving the EU's influence and ensuring that its strategic priorities are effectively pursued.

Ultimately, the discussion underscored the complexities of the transatlantic relationship under Trump's leadership while highlighting opportunities for the EU to assert its strategic views and advance its long-term interests.