

# COUNTRY REPORT

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## 10 New Ideas on how Europe should deal with Donald Trump

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HALF A YEAR AFTER THE INAUGURATION DONALD TRUMP IS STILL THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. THE UNPRECEDENTED GLOBAL HYSTÉRIA OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS HAS NOT CHANGED THIS. TRUMP HAS REMAINED TRUE TO HIS PERSONAL STYLE. HE CONTINUES TO BE POPULAR AMONG HIS SUPPORTERS.

OUR WORLD HAS NOT IMPLDED. DESPITE UNDISPUTABLE AND SERIOUS AGGRAVATION BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND ABROAD, THERE HAVE ONLY BEEN A FEW CONCRETE EFFECTS OF HIS PRESIDENCY. CONTRARY TO THE MANY PROPHECIES OF DOOM AND AUTOSUGGESTIONS AMONG TRUMPS OPPONENTS, IT IS VERY LIKELY THAT DONALD TRUMP WILL REMAIN PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES. TO ENSURE SENSIBLE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE UNITED STATES, THERE ARE TEN RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICY MAKERS:

### 1. Remain calm and confident

Trump sells. This was one of the deciding factors during his successful campaign, where his constant escapades guaranteed him earned media worth billions of dollars. This remains the same during his presidency where media coverage, cover pages, and Trump articles guarantee high sales, tv ratings, and click volume. The insatiable demand for the reproduction of an image of an incompetent and boorish president, on the one hand, is analogous to the hatred of the establishment and populist simplifications, on the other hand. Many editorial boards on both sides clearly have no incentive for a nuanced approach. This does not only apply to the US.

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The economic reasoning for this kind of Trump coverage is easily understandable. Political assessments, however, should not be guided by these factors. This applies especially for the one-sided media coverage in Europe that overwhelmingly reproduces the opinions of the left leaning mainstream media in the US and almost exclusively uses statements and audio clips from the opposition in their reporting. This is as if every political move of Angela Merkel were to be judged by commentators from Martin Schulz's party only.

When engaging with the US politically it is critical during this phase to tune out the noise of Trump's provocations and the media hysteria and focus on the pertinent issues at hand. Tweets should be ignored as well as the constant exaggeration that the Western world is coming to an end.

Remaining calm and confident is especially important now that Trump's negotiation tactics are to fault his negotiating partners before negotiations have even begun, to take extreme positions and to set up maximum demands, with the intent to get as much out for his side as possible. Hysteria helps Trump.

## **2. Accept Donald Trump as President**

Donald Trump was elected by the American people in a fair and democratic election. He is a legitimate President of the United States. Despite persistent discussions and investigations of possible Russian influence, an impeachment is highly unlikely. Donald Trump will not resign voluntarily.

Trump is not president of Germany, France, Italy or Europe. Whether he remains in office, is re-elected, or must change his leadership style, depends exclusively on the American people. In recent months, the US constitution and political system have proven to be robust. Separation of powers, independence of the judiciary, as well as an independent and free media are guaranteed in the US. There are no signs of democracy weakening under Trump. Civil society is very alive.

It makes little sense in the EU to constantly demonstrate against Trump, give advice on American democracy, or the deposition of Trump. It is far better to deal with the political reality of Trump in a rational manner.

## **3. Live with Trump's Personality**

Throughout the world many people feel comfortable talking about "how stupid Trump was again today". His personality makes him an easy victim to make fun of, allows one to feel superior, or talk down on him. However, it is not a valid political strategy to constantly engage with personal style.

Donald Trump was elected president also because of his personality. He is revered by his supporters especially because of his unorthodox style. He is over 70 years old and has consistently been in the American public eye for 35 years. His personal style will not change.

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Many Americans have found ways to live with Trump's personality. In Republican circles, one often hears „I don't like 70% of what he says but I like 70% of what he does.“ One can learn from this mindset.

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#### **4. Resist the temptation of Anti-Trump Populism and Anti-Americanism**

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Donald Trump does not make it easy for the partners of the United States. Many of his questionable actions make him an easy target. Politicians in many countries of the European Union make Anti-Trump comments for which they receive applause domestically. This has resulted in the emergence of a specific anti-trump populism over the past few months, which is particularly noticeable during the electoral campaigns in Europe. Trump, thereby, becomes a catalyst for latent anti-Americanism. This is dangerous for the EU-US strategic partnership. It is not in the interest of the European Union to promote a division in the transatlantic relationship.

In Europe, it has now become commonplace to mention Trump, Putin and Erdogan in the same sentence. Regardless of how difficult Donald Trump may be for Europeans – he is not an autocratic ruler. To equate the US president with dictators is also offensive to opponents of Trump in the US. The United States even with President Trump is a living democracy with a functioning separation of powers, active opposition, free media, and open civil society. Putin's Russia and Erdogan's Turkey are not. Equating them relativizes the anti-Western and antidemocratic regimes in Russia and Turkey and thereby harms our community of shared Western values.

#### **5. Utilize the American political system**

The US political system consists not only of the President. Since Trump took over, it has become clear to him and all observers that he cannot rule at will. In all important questions, the President needs support from the House of Representatives and the Senate. For the EU and its member states this opens important points of reference for a dialogue. In the last few months, Russia policy, health policy, fiscal policy and many other issues have highlighted how Trump needed to adapt his positions to find compromises with the Republican members of the House and Senate as well as with Congress in general.

Seeking close dialogue with members of the House and Senate as well as their staff is also an important means for the European Union to understand which of Trumps' viewpoints find support with the American people and with the Republicans, and with which ideas he stands alone. Some of Trumps' political positions are deeply rooted in American society. It would be a mistake to solely attribute these to him.

Federalism is very strong in the US. Many Americans see themselves as being only partially affected by Trump, since significant decisions are made at the local and state level. Dialogue of European decision-makers with actors outside Washington DC, New York City, and the Silicon Valley has so far been neglected. It might prove useful for the transatlantic relationship during Trump's administration if European

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politicians and businesses intensify dialogues on a local level with governors, mayors, and legislators.

## 6. Meet the US on legitimate issues

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Many points that Donald Trump addresses politically are neither new nor unjustified. The demand for more European contributions to their own defense is a prominent example. The topic has been aired by the many US administrations for decades. Trump's extreme style regarding this topic is certainly unacceptable. However, this does not alter the fact that the claim is justified and has broad bipartisan support as well as with the American people.

During the Obama administration, the European NATO partners self-imposed a commitment to higher defense spending. It is, however, undeniable that the security situation in Europe has changed significantly due to the annexation of the Crimea, Russian intervention in the Eastern Ukraine, the war in Syria, refugee development, cyber warfare, and terrorist threats. It would be a political mistake to link the demand for higher European defense contributions to the individual of Donald Trump alone. It would strengthen the argumentation of European partners in the transatlantic relationship if they met the USA on this issue. In this regard, the Brussels NATO summit was a missed opportunity on both sides.

## 7. Develop clear counterarguments in areas of disagreement

Some of Trump's positions are in stark contrast to the principles of European Union policy. Trade policy is one of them. Trump's negotiating tactics with sharp and extreme starting positions also irritates many partners in the EU, who have for decades been practicing quiet negotiations, avoiding public positioning, and seeking constant compromises.

As a self-proclaimed "dealmaker", Donald Trump has no problems with tough counter-positions. This is the method that he understands. The path towards consent with Trump and his government regarding areas of conflict requires the EU to develop and communicate clear counterarguments.

## 8. Stand together as the European Union

President Trump and his inner circle have repeatedly expressed the opinion that going forward it is better for the US not to negotiate with the EU but rather with its member states individually. The idea being, this way, the US would be in a stronger negotiating position and therefore would be more able to achieve its demands. Whether this strategy can succeed depends, however, not on the Trump administration but on the EU member states. If they stand in unity Trump's intended tactics will not work.

To achieve such unity among the EU Member States they will have to constantly inform each other of their encounters with the US administration, and closely coordinate positions before important meetings. It would also be useful if, in the fu-

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ture, representatives of EU Member States would travel together to Washington D.C. to discuss certain topics.

## 9. Stay true to your own values

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Among the more irritating foreign policy approaches of Trump is the failure to differentiate between traditional and new US partners. National Security advisor McMaster and National Economic Council advisor Gary Cohn published in May a key policy essay in the Wall Street Journal illustrating this prominently. It appears that the US administration is willing to abandon the special status of value-based partnerships in favor of purely transactional politics.

However, in response, the EU should not make the same mistake. For the EU, Western values continue to apply. In contrast to Trump, this is also clearly shared by many Republican members of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The EU and its member states should not take Trump's approach as a reason to believe that China or Russia should be our new partners. Their rhetorical advances are ultimately directed against the cohesion and strength of the West.

The special partnership of the community of Western democracies remains of great importance, regardless of who is currently governing. This is particularly true considering the backdrop of increasingly aggressive authoritarian regimes in many parts of the world.

## 10. Seek public engagement in the US

Current EU developments in areas of security and defense, the EU refugee policy, EU foreign aid, and within its member states and the European Union itself are not well-known in the US. For many younger Americans and non-elites, close ties to Europe and the importance of the transatlantic relationship are no longer self-evident. Of course, this is an ongoing challenge between partners. In the current tense situation, it is noticeable that people to people dialogue and exchanges between the EU and the USA require new initiatives. This also includes that the EU should explain its policy agenda with confidence on a local State level and should make efforts to develop a broader media presence outside of Washington DC. Thereby, the EU can better anchor European positions in contemporary US debates. The transatlantic alliance now requires more commitment.

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European unity and a stable transatlantic alliance based on common values and interests have been the guarantor for freedom, peace and prosperity in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The election of Donald Trump has not changed this. It is in the European interest, even with Donald Trump, to achieve successful joint policies with the United States of America. Truthfully, this has never been really simple.