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How Europe is preparing for Trump II

European Perspectives on potential consequences and the policy areas most affected

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Introduction

The triangle of European concerns over Trump: Democracy, Defence and Trade

Laura von Daniels, Claudia Major, Nicolai von Ondarza

The US Presidential elections has cast a shadow over Europe. Although still more than half a year away and with an uncertain outcome, the potential return of Donald Trump to the White House is widely viewed by politicians, officials, experts and the public across Europe as a challenge for international and especially European politics. Many fear that Trump's transactional, isolationist and disruptive style of governance would not only challenge but destroy the current transatlantic relationship. However, there are also voices that emphasise common ground with Trump on certain foreign and security policy issues, as well as on cultural and "identity" issues. Some, like the Baltic or Central European countries, see themselves in a more comfortable position, prepared to focus on bilateral cooperation, while others, like Germany, are bracing for open verbal attacks from the former and potentially future U.S. president. The consensus among policymakers and experts in these countries is that Trump's attacks will not remain mere rhetoric, but are more likely to be quickly followed by (disruptive) decisions on foreign, security, economic and climate policy, given that Trump and his team are better prepared than back in 2017-21, both in terms of policy and personnel.

In order to get a better understanding of the different views across the continent, the SWP has brought together experts from 19 different European countries, both inside and outside the EU/NATO, to report on the thinking in their capitals on a potential second Trump presidency. Each were given the following question:

1. If Trump is re-elected, what consequences would your government expect - positive and negative?
2. What areas would be the most affected?

European states raise a number of concerns across a number policy areas. However, three areas stand out as the most common to the responses: democracy, defence as well as trade and broader economic relations. The fear of democracy being abolished by democratic means is a primary concern in many European capitals.

There is indeed a fear of a spillover on countries "throwing out" democratic rules, fuelled in particular by Trump's penchant for authoritarian leaders. At the very least, one can expect right-wing populist European leaders to turn to Trump and offer cooperation, as seen with Hungary's Orbán. Several experts also noted that a second Trump Presidency would be welcomed by the far-right, right-wing populist and/or national-conservative part of their political spectrum. This might not only apply to Europe, but globally, such as in Latin America where authoritarian leaders might feel emboldened by Trump, with cascading effects for the international order as such. Yet, Europeans raise the concern not only with regard to domestic policies (autocratic forces being emboldened), but also with regard to the international order and the credibility of the Western states acting together on the international scene: without US support and leadership, the voice of the Europeans will carry less; and acting against the US will be a particular challenge.

In the defence realm, the US is perceived as irreplaceable in terms of military support for Ukraine and its role in guaranteeing European defence. A recurring concern in almost

all national perspectives regarding the support for Ukraine, with questions looming over the end of financial and military aid, and the fear that Trump might impose a ceasefire on Ukraine against Kyiv's will (and potentially against European interests) and aim for a reset with Russia. This is particularly true for Ukraine and EU/NATO countries bordering Ukraine and/or Russia, even if they might generally welcome Trump's push for more burden-sharing in defence spending. Trump's statements along the campaign trail, his controversial interactions with Zelenskyy, and the hostility of influential right-wing groups like the Heritage Foundation towards continuous support for Ukraine add to the worry. The more - and the faster - the U.S. would withdraw support from Ukraine, the more pressure will be on national budgets of European countries to step up - without them being able to fill the gap left by the US. However, there is speculation that Trump might be willing to agree to a transition from grants to loans, allowing Ukraine to continue to fight. Beyond Ukraine, there are also individual concerns regarding Trump's policy towards regions of particular interest, such as the Western Balkans (e.g. for Bulgaria) or Northern Africa (e.g. for Spain). Another concern in the defence field is that Trump might question the added value of Allies and Alliances as such, impose a transactional reading of the transatlantic relationship and question the credibility of NATO's Article 5. This fear is particularly perceptible in those countries geographically close to Russia and with negative historical experiences with Russia, like the Baltics, Nordics and Poland. Additionally, NATO could be embroiled if not divided in debates such as the 2 percent (or more, as agreed in Vilnius) per GDP defence spending target, with different views on how the EU and European countries in NATO should react to Trump's transactionalism. While all allies agree that Europeans need to do more and improve their capacity to act, they disagree on how to achieve this. Many countries, such as Norway and Germany, make an effort to reach the 2 percent defence spending before the NATO Washington summit 2024, as a kind of preventive policy for a potential Trump presidency. There are, however, also nuances: Some experts report that their countries are less concerned about being directly affected, either because they believe to have a credible deterrent themselves (such as France) or because they have recently strongly increased defence spending (such as Poland).

On trade and wider economic relations, European countries are clearly anticipating disruptions in transatlantic relations, including tariff wars, anger over possible unilateral decisions to extend technology controls against China, and a potential extraterritorial application of all kinds of U.S. legislation (financial sanctions, export and investment controls). These factors could have far-reaching implications for global trade and investment flows. Such concerns are particularly pronounced in countries whose economic models rely most strongly on global trade, such as the Netherlands, Germany, Ireland or Sweden.

Finally, on a meta level, the differences and nuances point to a major strategic challenge for European policy makers if Trump returns to the White House - on how to create and maintain unity *visa-a-vis* what remains for most European countries an indispensable ally. On first sight, the large overlap in concerns leads some to "hope for the best", a Trump Presidency as a unifying factor. Pushed towards stronger self-reliance - some dare say strategic sovereignty - a less trustworthy U.S. could lead to a renewed sense of shared responsibility among Europeans, inside the EU, but also with crucial partners such as the UK. It could also give a new sense of urgency to long derailed European defence efforts.

A closer look at the nuances, however, underlines that such a push for unity is far from guaranteed. On the contrary, even the subtle differences between European countries make them susceptible to divisions, as does the willingness to engage in transactional actions to maintain security support. The more likely scenario, given this exercise on the range of views across Europe, seems - in our view - to be the opposite: if the U.S. were to challenge European commitments, Europeans would not react in unity but separately - especially on defence issues, but also on trade and economic security - and would be

tempted to enter into (competitive) bilateral and minilateral agreements with the US in order to safeguard their national interests – ultimately at the expense of all Europeans. Given the depth of the triangle of concerns, the strategic tasks for European leaders in the event of a Trump II Presidency will be even greater than between 2017 and 2021: To address and maintain relations with the U.S., increase European's own capabilities and maintain unity rather than being played out against each other.

Country Reports

Austria: Austria's Navigation Act – Balancing Relations between Trump's America and Europe

Velina Tchakarova

If Donald Trump were to be re-elected as President of the United States, the Austrian government could anticipate a range of consequences, both positive and negative, across various sectors.

Trump's presidency could open up new opportunities for Austrian companies, especially in sectors such as automation technology, consumer goods, and the automotive industry. His focus on re-industrialisation and local production in the U.S. could benefit Austrian firms that offer niche technologies and specialized services. In addition, Austria's strong open economy, with exports accounting for 62 percent of GDP, positions the country well to benefit from any favourable bilateral trade negotiations or agreements with America.

Austria's neutral stance and its ability to act as a mediator in international conflicts could be further leveraged under a Trump administration. The unique relationship established during Trump's previous term, highlighted by his meeting with Chancellor Sebastian Kurz in 2019, could continue to provide Austria with a platform to shape U.S. policy in Europe. The expected drift towards populism and far-right ideologies following Austria's elections this autumn centred on strict immigration controls, protectionism, and conservative values, mirrors key aspects of Trump's own policy framework. This ideological alignment could lead to a strengthening of bilateral relations. The Trump administration's aggressive stance on trade imbalances and its propensity to impose tariffs, however, could have a negative impact on Austria, given that the U.S. has a trade deficit with the country. Negative effects could also come from the high degree of interconnectedness of the Austrian economy with other European economies. The threat of tariffs on European goods, such as those on German car exports, could have a cascading effect on the Austrian economy.

While Austria's neutrality exempts it from direct criticism of insufficient NATO defence spending, the broader security community in Europe could be affected by Trump's demands for increased military spending from NATO members. This could lead to increased tensions within Europe and between the U.S. and European countries, indirectly affecting Austria's security landscape in a negative way.

In addition, Trump's scepticism towards climate change and his previous withdrawal from the Paris Agreement could hamper global efforts to combat climate change, negatively impacting Austria's environmental objectives. Austria's commitment to green transition and renewable energy on the international stage could suffer, potentially affecting the country's initiatives to combat climate change.

Both Austria and the Trump administration have demonstrated strong support for Israel and a relatively positive attitude towards Russia. This alignment could enhance their diplomatic engagements and strategic priorities once again. During Sebastian Kurz's tenure, the signing of a 40-year gas supply contract with Russia underscored Austria's willingness to engage economically with Moscow. A far-right or staunchly conservative government could align with Trump's often controversial stance on Russia, offering potential areas for cooperation. However, this alignment also poses challenges in siding with broader European and NATO positions in the future.

Bulgaria: Trump's re-election as a source of regional instability

Vessela Tcherneva

The possible re-election of President Donald Trump has raised concerns and uncertainties among governments across Europe, including the Bulgarian one. Trump's foreign policy priorities could have significant implications for Bulgaria domestically and in the wider region. One of Trump's key foreign policy positions is his intention to "freeze" NATO, a move that could create security challenges for countries close to the frontline with Russia. With confidence in NATO on the rise, Bulgarian society and the security establishment seem content to rely primarily on the Alliance for its security and stability. However, with defence and defence industrial cooperation still a faraway vision in the EU, and key EU member states reluctant to mobilise in support of Ukraine, countries close to the frontline still prefer to look across the Atlantic for their defence modernisation and security. Undermining NATO's Article 5 readiness could leave Bulgaria vulnerable to external threats and increase tensions in the region.

Trump's ambitions in the Western Balkans could further complicate the situation. The region, which has a history of ethnic and political tensions, is already fragile. Trump's approach to the Western Balkans, particularly to Kosovo-Serbia and his plans to support a land swap between the two, could, if not carefully managed, open the Balkan Pandora's box of border disputes, destabilising the region and sparking new conflicts. Bulgaria, as a neighbour to the Western Balkans and an actor in a recent dispute with North Macedonia over the Bulgarian minority there, would be directly affected by any instability in the region. The volatility of the Western Balkans could be exacerbated, leading to increased migration flows and wider security risks, which Russia has traditionally been adept at exploiting.

On the domestic front, a re-elected Trump is expected to empower anti-European forces in the Bulgarian parliament that are sympathetic to Orbán's sovereigntist approach. This shift in power dynamics could have repercussions for Bulgaria's relationship with the EU, potentially luring the former into the Orbán-Fico camp. It is already apparent that the pro-Russian president, Rumen Radev, feels comfortable joining forces with Orbán in his critique to the European support for Ukraine. During a visit by his Hungarian counterpart, he shared Hungary's position on the war, stating that the conflict would not be resolved by sending more weapons, but by "the will for dialogue and diplomatic efforts". Radev may not be the only mainstream Bulgarian politician betting on Trump's return. GERB leader Boyko Borissov has a long-standing relationship with Orbán and visibly enjoyed Trump's hospitality during a visit to Washington in 2019. However, the volatility of the Black Sea region, the threat of the Russian aggression and the destabilisation of the Western Balkans should be serious enough to focus the attention of Bulgaria's political leaders on enhancing the country's security by planning for the Trump eventuality.

Czech Republic: Czech expectations of a second Trump presidency

Tomáš Weiss

Czech foreign and security policy has traditionally been closer to Washington than Brussels on the Atlanticist/Europeanist spectrum. Over time however, Czech policymakers have begun to increasingly appreciate the value of CFSP/CSDP, leading to a very active engagement of the Czech military in Mali and the Czech foreign policy concept's statement that the EU "provides an underlying framework for Czech foreign policy to be put into effect". But NATO, and by extension the relationship with the US, remains crucial – in words of the 2023 Security Strategy, Czechia's defence hinges on "[its] participation in the collective defence system of NATO". Consequently, the upcoming US presidential elections feature prominently in the Czech public debate and Czech policymakers discuss potential consequences and possible reactions to them.

The risks associated with a future Trump presidency are voiced very loudly in the European media, and Czech policymakers and experts share these concerns. First and foremost, there is the issue of NATO's future and the US commitment to the alliance. Equally important is the future of US and even Western support for Ukraine, into which Czechia has invested a lot of political and financial capital. The government is concerned that if Russia does not lose in Ukraine, it might be emboldened and further escalate in Eastern Europe, or even in Central Eastern Europe. Lastly, the Czech government has been concerned about the potential impact on transatlantic trade and fears future trade wars between the EU and the US.

However, Czech policymakers also have positive expectations of a possible Trump presidency. The first Trump administration was not seen as too bad for Czech foreign policy, apart from the trade wars with the EU. Donald Trump and people in his team had established a good relationship with Central Europe, and it can be expected that his next administration would pay some attention to the region and engage with the Central European allies more than the current Biden administration. The foreign policy of Democratic administrations has also been considered as somewhat problematic on many issues, such as Obama's reset of relations with Russia and its approach to the Middle East and China. Czechs do not expect Trump II to be worse on the latter two.

European Union: Defence, trade and the threat of "technology sanctions"

Daniel Fiott

A second Trump presidency is more than likely to affect at least two core policy areas of the transatlantic relationship: trade and defence. There are already signs that the Trump team will yet again take a hard line on trade, with the risk of reversing President Biden's moratorium on steel and aluminium tariffs introduced during Trump's first term. We have to consider that trade, a core competence of the European Commission, is already under strain globally, with international bodies being undermined by nationalist and protectionist measures. The return of Trump, combined with domestic grievances in Europe over free trade deals (think of the farmers), could put additional pressure on free trade. However, a second Trump presidency will more than likely tackle technology issues, which may make the €6.4 billion worth of tariffs Trump imposed on European steel and aluminium exports pale in comparison. It will not be lost on Trump that the Commission has fined some of America's most valuable tech companies. What if a second Trump presidency leads to technology sanctions against the EU until the Commission drops its antitrust investigations and fines of American "Big Tech"?

The EU will also feel the brunt of Trump's likely bold moves on NATO. Although ensuring the health of the alliance is not the core business of the Union, it could nevertheless find itself in the blast radius of Trumpian measures to ensure that European allies spend more on defence. Additionally, Trump's campaigning and messaging on Ukraine presupposes that the EU will have to be prepared and able to make up for a shortfall in American political and material support for Kyiv. For Europe's own defence, Trump's calls for increased European defence spending are needed and long overdue, yet Trump is likely to return to the idea that more European defence spending should primarily mean more spending on American military systems and equipment. As we saw during his first term, Trump wanted to halt or considerably water down EU defence investment efforts unless EU programmes came with a guarantee that American firms would gain access to EU investment. In a positive sense, Trump's re-emergence may push Europeans to invest more enthusiastically in defence via the EU, and a second Trump presidency may encourage bold new ideas/initiatives, such as a €100 billion fund for defence investment. Such steps would also be essential in case any Trump administration pulls its support for Ukraine. The reality, however, is that individual European countries will more likely engage in the same game we witnessed during Trump's first presidency: bilateralism. If that happens, then the ambitious plans for defence-industrial cooperation being promoted by the European Commission today could be trumped by Trump.

Finland: Impact of a second Trump administration

Charly Saloniemi-Pasternak

For Helsinki, a second Trump presidency has the potential to be more disruptive than the first, adding to an already unpredictable global and regional security policy and business / trade environment. Having seen one version of a Trump administration in 2017-2021, Finnish politicians, civil servants and businesses are more attuned to and concerned about what a second administration might bring. The general expectation is that it would be more disruptive than the first, because this time 'Team Trump' is preparing in advance to make major changes and is likely to have the wherewithal to see them through more rigorously – if only as a tool to negotiate a 'better deal'.

Finnish politicians and civil-servants express confidence that Trump would see Finland as 'having paid its dues' in the defence field, and thus as an ally to be supported in Trump's eyes; the selection (in 2021) of F-35 fighters to replace F-18s and spending over 2 percent of GDP on defence are seen as things that any US administration would appreciate. Finnish officials are also buoyed by the fact that during Trump's presidency, Finnish-U.S. defence cooperation continued on the same deepening trajectory as during the previous administration(s). However, officials recognise that Finnish security is intimately tied to the health of the transatlantic relationship and NATO, both of which are expected to suffer in a potential second Trump administration; it does not help if your house is not on fire if the rest of the neighbourhood is. Efforts are therefore focused on ensuring that multilateral cooperation and the development of military capability with regional allies are such that any U.S. administration would see genuine burden-sharing and security contributions from Finland and nearby allies.

While recent U.S. congressional action makes an actual U.S. withdrawal from NATO unlikely, the risk of a weakening of US commitments to European security, NATO or some of its member states (as opposed to bilateral security commitments) is seen as genuinely possible. Finnish interlocutors suggest that recent events in Ukraine and the threat of a second Trump administration have focused minds across Europe. However, they do not expect Europe as a whole to actually procure and make operational the wide range of defence capabilities that would be needed if the U.S. were for some reason unable (Asia contingency) or unwilling (increased likelihood with a second Trump administration, when compared to a second Biden one) to provide the required forces and enablers.

The U.S. is Finland's largest trading partner, and Finland has an export-dependent economy that relies on a relatively well-functioning global trading system. A second Trump administration is expected to lead to an even more geo-economically driven global trade environment and a worsening of trade relations between the U.S. and Europe/EU.

As Finland is in the early stages of developing a new, more robust *modus vivendi* with Russia, President Trump's behaviour towards Russia and its political leadership would be of great interest to Finland. How a President Trump might change U.S. sanctions policy towards Russia, influence the end of Russia's war against Ukraine, or affect the general tenor of transatlantic relations would all be relevant to Finland. The broader transatlantic relationship is seen as setting the framework, even if President Trump would not harbor specific ill-will towards Finland.

France: Trump - a challenge and a boon for Macron

Rym Momtaz

If Donald Trump is elected in November, it will be seen both as a confirmation of the increasingly divergent paths within the transatlantic relationship, of more challenges for Europe on defence and trade, but also as a possible opportunity for France and Europe.

For Paris, it would first be a vindication of French President Emmanuel Macron's push for strategic autonomy, for European countries to do more for their security.

But the consequences of Trump's return to the White House will also be felt far and wide in trade, industry and diplomacy.

France fears a doubling down on the pivot to Asia, a weakening of NATO and a distancing from Europe, a more unilateral approach to world affairs and a further undermining of multilateral diplomatic fora, and the primacy of reinvesting in American jobs. Policies that to varying degrees, have been seen in Paris as guiding U.S. decision-making since at least the presidency of Barack Obama.

The expectation among French policymakers is that a Trump presidency is likely to permanently weaken the credibility of NATO's Article 5 and force tough choices in the realm of European security. There will be pressure on national budgets, to allow European countries to step up. The most immediate example of this will be Ukraine. It will be a tremendous challenge for Kyiv and its main European backers to navigate the continuing Russian war. Whether that will translate into forcing a negotiation on less than favourable terms is less clear, however. Trump is expected to be even more unpredictable than in his first term.

Paris also expects a Trump II administration to broaden the scope of, and apply more aggressively the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act, which is seen as protectionist and an attack on European industry. Trump's tariff wars during his first term are expected to play an even bigger role.

But, Macron is also likely to attempt to turn a Trump return to the White House into an opportunity to permanently change the terms of the transatlantic relationship and influence the reshaping of the multilateral international system. He is likely to focus on three main areas: supercharging European defence, overhauling international economic and financial relations between the North and South by trying to replace the "Washington Consensus" with a "Paris Consensus", and finding a path forward on climate change that takes into account the imperatives of economic growth. But to meet this challenge, he will have to be more effective in delivering concrete change while navigating considerable economic headwinds and ever more transactional international relations.

France: Trump and the prospects for European strategic sovereignty

Elie Tenenbaum

The French government considers the potential re-election of Donald Trump as President of the United States increasingly as a credible possibility. So far, this possibility has evoked mixed feelings, which can be categorized into two main lines of thought.

Firstly, there is a prevailing sentiment, common to most Europeans, that consequences of such an election would be mainly negative. Key concerns relate to transatlantic solidarity being reduced to gross transactional politics, especially with the prospect of security guarantees being leveraged for trade benefits. Additionally, Trump's foreign policy views could hardly be more at odds with President Macron's current 'global agenda', which emphasizes accelerated green transition, environmental protection initiatives, global finance regulation, and multilateral governance revitalization.

Nevertheless, this widely shared European apprehension of negative repercussions is occasionally tempered in France by a sense of *schadenfreude* at the prospect of Trump's return—a sort of "I told you so" sentiment. Trump's first term witnessed a growing acknowledgment of the French-conceived "European strategic autonomy" – now more often rebranded under the 'European sovereignty' label – albeit with persisting divergences in comprehension and implementation. This emerging shift was largely reversed when Joe Biden assumed office in 2020 and transatlantic relations seemed to revert to a more traditional state. The swift fluctuation in France's push for a more independent European defence—both operationally and industrially—was bitterly felt in Paris, and the potential return of a President Trump is sometimes viewed as validating the original French perspective.

In contrast to other European nations, which rely more heavily on the U.S. for security and face more immediate threats at their borders, France is likely to be less inclined towards engaging in purely transactional relations, such as conceding trade benefits. This divergence in approach may lead to tensions between Paris and other capitals regarding the level of compliance with U.S. demands. Instead of positioning France at the centre of the game, the estrangement between the U.S. and NATO, coupled with a trend toward bilateralism in transatlantic relations, could potentially isolate Paris within Europe—depending on the strategies employed by the new U.S. administration to divide European states.

In the event of a further breakdown in the transatlantic alliance, however, European nations may finally – and probably reluctantly – resign themselves to turn to France to assume a more central role in regional security, potentially involving adjustments to the "European dimension" of its nuclear deterrence. Nonetheless, France is not currently prepared to undertake such a role, as it lacks both the requisite scale and capacity.

Germany: Berlin braces for headwinds with Trump

Laura von Daniels

Almost all parties, experts and the public in Germany see a second Trump presidency as a potential negative shock for international politics. It could be particularly disruptive for European politics.

On one level, the concern is about a continued and possibly irreversible decline in democratic norms during his presidency. Relatedly, some fear that the success of the 'America First' style of governance could inspire or embolden other populist-nationalist leaders around the world, including in Europe – as seen during the Trump presidency of 2017-21.

On another level, there is the fear that Trump II will bring back a number of senior officials with a grudge against Germany. Berlin's access to Washington could be severely restricted and its influence on US decisions affecting Germany and the EU would be significantly reduced. Germany would become more isolated, including in Europe.

With regard to defence policy, U.S. support is crucial for Ukraine, but also for NATO. Without the United States, NATO would lack the political leadership and the conventional and nuclear capabilities to defend Europe. Many in Germany expect Trump to again threaten to make U.S. security guarantees conditional on countries meeting the threshold of 2 percent of GDP for defence spending or higher. Judging by his past actions, Trump is likely to use Article 5 as leverage to achieve all sorts of goals, including non-defence-related ones (e.g. trade concessions).

U.S. military aid to Ukraine has already been held hostage to congressional politics. Trump is expected to want to negotiate a deal with Putin to end the war. As part of such a deal, the U.S. president could offer to unilaterally ease sanctions. Europe appears ill-prepared for such a move, which would put its companies at a significant comparative disadvantage.

On the economic front, Trump could use many levers to put political pressure on Germany to achieve strategic goals. Threatening to halt LNG exports is high on the list and would do maximum damage to an economy that has yet to find a lasting solution to its energy crisis. Not to mention renewed tariffs on everything from steel and aluminium exports to cars. It's considered likely that Trump will increase pressure on Germany to support his China policy by imposing (broader) export controls on the country and possibly curbing German investment there. With populism on the rise, all this could pose a threat to Germany's political stability.

Perhaps the only positive consequence of a Trump presidency is the prospect of a refocusing on workable – and ideally trustworthy – relations with Germany's closest partners in Europe, France and Poland. Some hope this could be the start of a broader EU and European consensus-building exercise.

Greece: Trump's re-election as an accelerator of constitutional crisis in the EU

Filippa Chatzistavrou

Trump and MAGA Republicans adopted a strategy for winning the 2024 US Presidential election that should worry us in Europe, even more in relation to the upcoming 2024 EU elections. First, they took over the judiciary of the U.S. Supreme Court promoting a subjective approach to justice; then they succeeded in concentrating several billionaire Super PACs, which are much higher compared to the 2020 presidential election cycle. Trump's donors are also behind the campaign of Democrat Robert F. Kennedy Jr., with the aim of siphoning off enough votes from Biden to ensure his victory. Moreover, they have been on their way to take over military and civilian militia in target States through the operation Lone Star since 2021. In mid-January 2024, Texas Governor Greg Abbott tried to take control of immigration away from the federal government. MAGA Republicans have embraced the Compact theory viewing states as "independent sovereigns" that are free to reject federal authority, thus bringing the country to the precipice of a constitutional crisis.

Sending U.S. troops into U.S. cities to enforce order is included, among other policies, in Trump's "Battle Plan" – Project 2025 Presidential Transition Project – sponsored by the Heritage Foundation. This idea could also work its way in Europe. In France, 23 percent of citizens would like "the army to rule the country" (OpinionWay, Feb 2024). Trump's authoritarianism is a ferocious attack against social and economic inclusion, state of law and diversity while advancing plans to impose Christian nationalism on the country. Greece as other EU member states are dealing with authoritarianism, backlash against the constitutional order and militarization. Under Trump, there will be huge pressure on NATO European allies to increase their spending to reach the 2 percent of GDP target. Two-thirds of the 31 allies, nearly twice as many as last year, will invest at least 2 percent of their GDP in defence in 2024. In terms of military spending, Greece, with 3.54 percent of GDP in 2022, was ahead of the U.S., which was in second place with 3.46 percent. Although at different speeds and ways, Greece and other EU member states made a 360-degree turn in their foreign policy doctrine, increasing adherence to NATO without taking into account that Trump's eventual re-election could signify the downgrading of NATO's aid guarantee as the hallmark of U.S. hegemony.

Hungary: Trump and Orbán – Crafting an anti-establishment illiberal alliance

Tamas Csiki

A second Trump presidency was already the preferred choice of the Hungarian prime minister in 2020, when he endorsed then-re-election candidate Trump very early in the campaign. Orbán is betting on the same horse this time as well. The pillars of the Trump–Orbán platform are not only the ‘personal chemistry’ of the leaders and the desired media effect of multiplying their visibility by appearing together and standing up to an alleged ‘deep state’ in Washington D.C. and Brussels alike, but also ideological and pragmatic political similarities. These include a set of values branded as conservative, Christian, pro-family, anti-immigration, sovereigntist and transactionalist.

The biggest expectation is for increased visibility and a shared media image/opinion platform for the two leaders – without any practical impact on policies in the U.S. or Hungary, given the geographic distance between the two. Other hopes include a more understanding (or even amicable) tone in bilateral diplomacy, such as the restoration of U.S.–Hungarian relations in the field of severed tax provisions. Hungary can also count on a safe(r) play within NATO, as the ongoing comprehensive modernisation program of the armed forces will be based on defence spending exceeding the 2 percent of GDP target in the coming years, a fundamental expectation in Trump’s worldview. In a wider sense, Trump’s allegedly different stance on Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, U.S. support for Kyiv, and the possible ‘end of the war’ through talks are highly praised by Orbán, consequently keeping a ‘harbinger of peace’ role and narrative since 2022.

However, there are risks associated with Trump that are currently downplayed by strategic considerations in Hungary. First, the outcome of a possible (announced) Trump–Putin summit cannot be taken for granted: a poorly choreographed or conducted meeting between the two, as well as personal disagreements can exacerbate the conflict, or simply lead to no change (as in the case of the Trump–Kim Jong Un talks). Second, if Trump were indeed to (further) question U.S. security guarantees to allies and abandon active participation in European defence issues, this could challenge NATO’s functioning in many ways, with different effects, depending on the crisis scenarios. But given the fragmented and under-equipped state of European defence, a ‘doomsday scenario’ involving Russian testing and breaking of allied solidarity within the Alliance (by military or non-military means), with Donald Trump quietly watching by, would definitely be an undesirable outcome for Hungary as well.

Ireland: The prospects of a second Trump presidency

Barry Colfer

The social, economic and political links between Ireland and the United States are strong and old. Since the 1840s, millions of people left Ireland to make their home in North America. The impact of 'Irish-America' on U.S. politics is well documented, with most U.S. Presidents, including President Biden, identifying to some degree (and often strongly) with their Irish heritage.

In March each year, in the run-up to St Patrick's Day, the Irish Government goes on a world tour visiting capitals around the globe. Building on a custom that began in the 1950s, the Irish Taoiseach (Prime Minister) meets the President of the day in the Oval Office for substantive talks before a stakeholder lunch, including during Trump's Presidency. Over decades this has become a mainstay of Irish diplomacy and an important part of the country's soft power resources.

Predicting the specific consequences of a hypothetical event such as the re-election of Donald Trump for the Irish government involves speculation. However, based on the dynamics of U.S.-Ireland relations during Trump's first term in office, some potential outcomes can be anticipated.

In economic terms, many U.S. multinationals have their European headquarters in Ireland and the U.S. remains Ireland's largest export market after the EU, and the largest single export partner. Potential shifts in U.S. trade and economic policy under a second Trump administration could significantly impact Irish businesses and the economy.

A second Trump administration would be expected to pursue policies that are favourable to American businesses. This could potentially aid American companies operating in Ireland. However, the introduction of protectionist trade policies, including tariffs, could create uncertainty for Irish exporters and hinder EU-U.S. trade negotiations. A second Trump presidency could also attempt to encourage companies to 're-shore' operations to the U.S. which would undermine economic activity in Ireland and the EU.

Meanwhile, Trump's support for the UK's withdrawal from the EU could complicate the precarious and delicate political and diplomatic efforts underway to navigate post-Brexit relations across these islands, including as regards the border that bisects the island.

Ireland is a neutral country and is not a member of NATO. However, the potential for a second Trump presidency to undermine Europe's collective security by withdrawing or weakening NATO would be of grave concern to all European countries including Ireland.

In conclusion, the greater tendency towards isolation of both the UK and the U.S. has coincided with a concerted effort to strengthen Ireland's diplomatic footprint and reputation as a reliable trading partner. By fostering new diplomatic relations, diversifying trade relationships, and enhancing resilience across sectors, Ireland aims to mitigate risks posed by a second Trump presidency amid the evolving geopolitical realities facing all Europeans.

Italy: Mixed expectations of a second Trump-presidency

Riccardo Alcaro

A possible re-election of Donald Trump as U.S. President could have serious – even grave – implications for Italy, although it also presents some domestic political opportunities for the right-wing coalition government.

Like other European countries, Italy would feel the destabilizing effects of a potential cut-off of U.S. military assistance to Ukraine, especially given that Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has invested considerable political capital in supporting Kyiv. The Italian government would most likely work bilaterally and in coordination with its European partners to persuade the U.S. administration to at least condition the end of military aid on a broader negotiation with Russia involving other European countries and Ukraine itself.

Like everyone else, the Italian government fears that a second Trump administration would significantly reduce the US commitment to NATO. If this were to happen, Italy would be hard-pressed to join in the process of widespread increases in military spending that is taking place across Europe

The problem is that the Italian government's massive public debt would leave it little room to manoeuvre, especially so at a time when the EU is moving (again) towards greater fiscal restraint. The government would face extremely delicate political trade-offs between defence needs and spending on issues of more immediate concern to voters such as pensions and healthcare (in fact, Italians are scarcely supportive of military spending in the first place, partly as a consequence of the legacy of pacifist Catholic and left-wing political traditions). All of this, of course, without taking into account the fact that Italy's security, as well as that of other NATO members, would be severely compromised if U.S. security guarantees were indeed to waver.

Another potentially negative impact concerns trade. In the post-pandemic period, the U.S. has become a major source of relief for the large Italian export sector. As early as 2022, the U.S. became the second-largest destination for Italian goods (after Germany). In 2023, the value of total Italian exports to the U.S. was on track to surpass the previous year's record of 65 billion euros of the year before. If Trump were to start another trade war with the EU, as he has threatened, Italy would be among the most exposed economies.

In terms of opportunities, the current governing majority, more than two-thirds of which is made up of hard nationalist and ultra-conservative parties, would also see advantages in a Republican presidency, with which it shares a good deal of much of its ideological background. It is therefore plausible that the government could use a conservative victory in the U.S. as political capital to further advance its conservative agenda, from restricting refugee admissions and the integration of foreign residents to restricting abortion and the rights of the LGBTQ community. Meloni would likely build on ideological affinity to try to build a personal rapport with Trump and seek a stronger bilateral partnership, especially to protect Italian exporters. A closer alignment with Trump's foreign policy is therefore to be expected, even if that would force a difficult balancing act in Italy's relations with the EU.

Latvia: Growing anxiety about a possible second Trump presidency

Māris Andžāns and Jānis Kažociņš

During Trump's first presidency, he was more forthright and controversial than other U.S. presidents about Europe's failure to provide for its own security. Yet American military and political support for Latvia continued and even increased. Small units of American troops continued to rotate through Latvia, financial assistance was provided to the defence sector, and a U.S.-Baltic Centennial Summit was held in 2018. This was largely due to Trump's politically experienced team.

Overall, there is growing anxiety about a possible second Trump presidency. His recent statements about the conditional defence of U.S. allies and that he might stop providing military aid to Ukraine have caused deep concern. Representatives of the Republican Party recently confirmed this to Latvian parliamentarians on a visit to America. U.S. allies in the Asia-Pacific are watching and assessing U.S. reliability in Ukraine. This will be crucial for future U.S. interests in its relations with China and other states, potentially leading to more instability in the entire international system.

Trump may not repeat the "mistakes" of his first term. His administration will be filled with like-minded individuals, potentially leading to increased U.S. isolationism and a reduction in American influence in the world. This could lead to military escalation in the Middle East and growing Chinese, Iranian and North Korean assertiveness.

The cornerstones of Latvia's defence are NATO and the strategic partnership with the United States. Therefore, Latvia expects a solid American commitment to NATO, to the defence of every ally, as well as unwavering support for Ukraine. Latvia is among NATO allies that spend more than 2 percent of GDP on defence and will reach 3 percent in 2027. Nevertheless, there is and will remain a visible military power imbalance with Russia. Without direct NATO/U.S. support, the Baltic States will not be able to defend themselves against a potentially aggressive Russia that may wish to test Western resolve in the future. This requires a solid presence of NATO allied forces in the region, preferably including Americans.

Since the U.S. is not among Latvia's main trading partners, a possible return of protectionist policies in the U.S. would be worrying but not the primary concern. On the other hand, Trump's business-minded approach to foreign policy may, for instance in the sale of U.S. arms to Europe, mitigate his negative approach to NATO.

Netherlands: The Netherlands and Trump – Pragmatism, if possible

Rem Korteweg

At this year's Munich Security Conference, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said that Europe should "stop whining and nagging" about the prospect of a second Trump presidency. After all, Europe would have to "work with whoever is on the dance floor." This pragmatic view has characterised the Dutch approach to transatlantic relations over the past decade, regardless of who is in the White House. While there were major concerns when Donald Trump was in office, the Netherlands also had its share of challenges with President Biden: not least the lack of coordination on the withdrawal from Afghanistan and his unilateral export restrictions on the semiconductor industry, which had a direct impact on Dutch companies such as ASML.

Given that the Netherlands has traditionally been staunchly transatlantist, it is to be expected that a degree of pragmatism will prevail with Trump. Nevertheless, Rutte is on his way out and at the time of writing it is still unclear who will lead the next Dutch government. Personal chemistry between leaders matters and it would obviously make a big difference whether the next Dutch prime minister is, for instance, the eurosceptic Geert Wilders or the former Vice-President of the European Commission, Frans Timmermans.

There are several areas where the Netherlands would expect difficulties with Trump. First, there are concerns about Trump's approach to Ukraine on the one hand and to NATO and European security on the other. NATO is central to Dutch security policy, and The Hague will seek to keep the alliance together. But the Netherlands has not reached a spending level of 2 percent of GDP, although it has increased its defence budget and provided substantial military and financial to Ukraine. This could spark Trump's ire and weaken The Hague's case to persuade him to continue U.S. support for Kyiv and remain committed to the alliance.

Second, there are worries about Trump's trade policy. There is growing concern about unwanted economic dependencies. While this is currently being discussed in the context of China and Russia, it also applies to the U.S. Like others, the Netherlands relies on U.S. cloud services and military technology, and it benefits from LNG imports. With the memories of Trump's tariffs on European steel and aluminium still fresh, could he use these other economic relationships to put pressure on the Europeans? Trump is also likely to continue to pressure the Dutch regarding China, pushing them to impose increasingly stringent technology controls or even cut economic ties. Third, transatlantic cooperation on addressing climate change will be much more difficult, although this may be less problematic if a more climate-sceptical Dutch government takes office. Finally, Trump's brand of unilateralism and his disregard for international agreements will worry the Netherlands, which prides itself on promoting the international rule of law.

Norway: Quietly hoping for business as usual

Paal Hilde

Although Norwegian politicians and officials will not say so publicly, they hope that Donald Trump does not become president again. Fears that Trump has learned from his first term and would install loyalist 'yeasayers' throughout his administration, instead of relying on experienced 'adults', raise concerns that a second term would bring even more uncertainty and chaos than the first.

For Norway, two policy areas are of particular concern. The first is trade, where Norway as a non-EU member is particularly vulnerable to sweeping U.S. tariffs - as evidenced by Trump's 2018 tariffs on steel and aluminium. While the EU was mostly exempted, Norway was not.

The second is security and defence, where Norway has been criticised for failing to meet NATO's minimum 2 percent of GDP defence spending commitment. In 2024, Norway seemed poised to be both the only NATO member bordering Russia and the only Nordic country not to meet the target. Facing the prospect standing out as the only detractor in NATO's North-East, the Norwegian Prime Minister stated in early March that Norway would reach a spending target already this year.

The security concern goes beyond worries about Trump's commitment to NATO, however. In many ways, Norway looks to the United States rather than NATO for security. U.S. interest in keeping an eye on Russia's nuclear-armed, strategic submarines stationed close to Norway has helped Oslo build its special relationship with Washington.

The Norwegian government is likely to prepare for and deal with a second Trump administration in three ways. First, it will build relationships and goodwill with people who are expected to fill important positions in a new Trump administration. Second, if Trump wins, it will seek to gain his favour. Then-Prime Minister Erna Solberg did this during a visit to the White House in 2018, when she emphasised, to Trump's liking, that the United States has a trade surplus with Norway.

Third, and so far, most importantly, Norway will hope that the tentacles of a new Trump administration do not reach deep into the military and intelligence establishments, and that business will continue as usual at lower levels - as during his first term.

For now, the Norwegian government probably hopes for the best but has started to prepare for the worst. Norway's rather exposed position outside the EU and next to a strategically and economically important area for Russia makes this particularly important. As in many European capitals, a second Trump presidency could force Oslo to make tough choices.

Poland: Trump II under different conditions

Michal Baranowski

Poland was one of very few European countries that had good relations with the U.S. under the first Trump administration. The previous Polish government, led by the Law and Justice (PiS) party, bet on strong bilateral ties with Donald Trump, not worrying much about Trump's relations with other Europeans. This time, however, if Donald Trump is elected, the view in Warsaw is going to be different.

Two of Donald Trump's core policies are causing a mix of apprehension and alarm in Warsaw – the first is his lack of support for Ukraine in its fight against the renewed Russian invasion, and the second is Trump's disparaging views of NATO, and U.S. alliances more broadly. For Poland, and several other countries in the region, the war in Ukraine is existential – the view here is that if Ukraine were to fall, Russia would not stop there, but would threaten to attack NATO countries – perhaps the Baltic states at first – but that would become a present danger for the Polish state. A candidate to become President of the United States, who suggests that he would end the war in one day, suggests that it would end on Russia's terms. That would be deeply detrimental to Poland's national interests. If Donald Trump was elected, the Polish government would do everything possible to continue the American military aid to Ukraine, while at the same time building up with other European alternatives to American aid. The importance of this issue is best illustrated by a recent tweet of Prime Minister Tusk, who wrote amid the Congressional debate over the aid package to Ukraine: "Dear Republican Senators of America. Ronald Reagan, who helped millions of us to win back our freedom and independence, must be turning in his grave today. Shame on you."

Donald Trump's disparaging comments about NATO, and his suggestions that he would not defend allies not spending 2% of GDP on defence, are also met with apprehension. Poland will this year spend over 4% of its GDP on defence, therefore some in Warsaw argue that Trump's sentiment has nothing to do with Poland. Others argue that it is just Trump's pressure on the defence laggards, and in fact it would be good for Poland if Trump pressured them to spend more. Yet, the overall consensus in Warsaw is that Donald Trump, with his statement about NATO and allies in general, would be a much less predictable NATO leader, making countries wonder whether they can count on America under his leadership, or not. U.S. credibility has already been damaged by the resistance in the House of Representatives to pass military aid to Ukraine – resistance fueled by the ongoing presidential campaign. Polish Foreign Minister, Radek Sikorski, recently described this in the following way "I'd like him (US House speaker Johnson) to know that the whole world is watching what he would do and if the supplemental were not to pass and Ukraine was to suffer reversals on the battlefield it will be his responsibility." A U.S. leader is unpredictable might be tested by America's adversaries, and many in Warsaw worry that Putin might test Donald Trump if he is reelected this November.

Slovakia: Slovakia in Trump's world

Michal Onderco

When considering how the Slovak government might respond to Donald Trump's election to the U.S. Presidency, it's crucial to understand Slovakia's current foreign policy trajectory. Under Prime Minister Robert Fico, who has returned for a fourth term, Slovakia made a notable shift. While in the past Fico had made critical remarks about the United States domestically, he maintained a pro-Western stance internationally, such as by appointing solidly pro-Western men (yes, they were all men) to key positions. However, in 2024, Fico appears to have adopted a more Orbán-like approach, and appointed loyalists with pro-Moscow leanings to leadership roles. This context matters. Fico's government might not share the same concerns which the Slovak officials and experts would harbour. The reaction of the Slovak government would therefore be an inevitable mix of responses from the political leadership and bureaucratic elites in the public service. Nonetheless, it is possible to speculate on the government's main considerations.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine shook Slovak security and foreign policy to its core. Slovak experts would see Trump as an unnecessary source of instability during an already turbulent period. More concretely, their main worry is likely that Trump would indeed decide to abandon Ukraine. Trump's calls for a peace settlement, including land concessions by Ukraine, are likely to find resonance in Slovakia's government, though. Prime Minister Fico himself has repeatedly said that he is in favour of a peace agreement "as soon as possible", and repeatedly mentioned Ukrainian land concessions as unavoidable. While Fico has not blocked the opening of the EU accession negotiations with Ukraine (even if he had labelled Ukraine as "absolutely not ready" to start such talks); he opposes NATO membership for Ukraine. It is therefore likely that Fico's government would support the Trump administration if it decided to pressure Ukraine into peace negotiations.

However, Fico's views contrast with those of Slovakia's security elites, who are concerned that Russian territorial gains could embolden further aggression, potentially targeting other European countries, including NATO members. Despite Trump's pronouncements on the campaign trail, most Slovak experts would anticipate continued U.S. commitment to defending European NATO allies, given the risk to American soldiers otherwise and the broad support for the alliance within the American Congress. As Fico's government still regards NATO as vital for Slovakia's security, it is likely that they would maintain this expectation. Yet, if Trump's second term prompts renewed discussions on European security cooperation, Slovakia would likely seek participation, albeit without taking a leading role, to avoid missing out on important developments.

Spain: How to approach a second Trump mandate

José-Ignacio Torreblanca

As a country deeply committed to the European integration project, the defence of Ukraine against Russian aggression and to rules-based multilateralism, Spain views the possible re-election of Donald Trump to the US presidency with great concern. Of particular concern is a possible withdrawal of support for Ukraine, the weakening of NATO, the possible trade sanctions Trump may undertake against the EU (and China), and that he may grant Israel a blank cheque on Gaza. Spain is also worried by the potential destabilisation that a Trump victory or his non-recognition of a Biden victory could have on the US political system itself. This position is shared by the vast majority of the Spanish political spectrum, except for the far-right/national conservative Vox party, which won 12 per cent of the vote and 33 seats out of 350 in the general elections held in July. Its leader, Santiago Abascal, has recently met with Trump and invited Tucker Carlsson to Madrid.

In addition to the concerns that Spain shares with its European partners, there are two additional Spain-specific issues of concern. One is Latin America, both in terms of Trump's promotion and its (emboldening) impact on radical leaders in the region such as President Milei in Argentina, Bukelele in El Salvador and former President Bolsonaro in Brazil, and others who may come. Spain is also wary of Trump's restrictive immigration policies and their potential impact on Mexico and Central America.

Trump's policy aim of stopping migration flows could force Mexico to close its own borders and also destabilize the already very fragile countries of Central America and increase migration flows to the EU (Spain is already experiencing record of Colombians and Venezuelan asylum claimers).

The second issue has to do with the Morocco-Algeria-Western Sahara triangle. In his first term, Trump had a major destabilising effect on the region by unilaterally recognising Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, contrary to international law and UN resolutions, in exchange for Morocco recognising Israel and joining the Abraham Accords. This threw Spain's relations with Morocco and Algeria off balance, as Spain had had been committed to a negotiated solution to the conflict under the umbrella of the UN and maintained good relations with both Rabat and Algiers. For Spain, Morocco is a key strategic partner on both the fight against terrorism and illegal immigration and Algeria a key energy supplier. However, U.S. recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara forced a readjustment of Spain's position in favour of Morocco, which led to a profound deterioration in relations with Algeria. The Biden presidency and Russia's war against Ukraine have played an appeasing role in this triangle, especially given the importance of Algerian gas for Europe and the need to contain regional tensions in the Mediterranean. However, a second Trump presidency could again unbalance this triangle by encouraging Morocco to actively seek to regain full control of Western Sahara, which is partly in the hands of the Algerian-backed armed forces of the Polisario Front.

Sweden: Sweden and the return of Trump

Björn Fägersten

The re-election of Donald Trump could pose challenges for Sweden as it has just joined NATO and seeks to maintain global free trade. Should this happen, however, Sweden has resources that could prove beneficial in a more transactional relationship that is likely to ensue.

Swedes are among the most critical of Trump, with polling during his first administration showing 82 percent viewing him negatively. This scepticism was not as prevalent among voters of the far-right Sweden Democrats, who currently support the centre-right-led minority government, although even their enthusiasm seems to have waned due to Trump's radicalization.

The Swedish government has remained relatively quiet on the prospect of Trump 2.0, likely to avoid jeopardizing future transatlantic relations as Sweden joins NATO. However, the opposition has been more outspoken against Trump, advocating for a contingency plan should he be re-elected. Despite this, opposition leader Magdalena Andersson has emphasized NATO's intrinsic value for Swedish security, regardless of Trump's potential return.

A major concern for Sweden is the U.S. commitment to Article 5, now that Sweden is a member and the implications for international trade. To address security commitments, Sweden intends to maintain its approach: promoting EU defence cooperation with key mechanisms and programs (PESCO, EDF, EDIS) being as open as possible to the U.S., fostering good relations with Congress, individual US states, and the U.S. industry, and fulfilling its defence investment pledge with 2% as a baseline.

Trade issues also loom large, as Sweden, a trade-oriented economy, is particularly vulnerable to increasing barriers to international trade. Concerns were recently illustrated by remarks from the CEO of Swedish truck giant Scania about the negative impacts a second Trump administration could have on exports to the U.S. and global trade.

While Sweden has much to worry about a possible Trump comeback, it also possesses resources that could prove useful in such an event. Sweden is in a geostrategic area of great importance for reinforcing the northeastern part of NATO (where most members also spend adequately on national defence), so unless Trump fully scales down U.S. engagement in NATO, Sweden should remain important from a U.S. perspective. Additionally, Sweden has access to critical raw materials, a high-tech sector, and a capable national defence industry, all important assets in an era marked more by transactionalism than cooperation.

Ukraine: A continuous fight for survival

Alyona Getmanchuk

The more disappointed Ukrainians are with the Biden administration, the less they fear Donald Trump's return to the White House. This sense of disappointment is currently shaping the common thinking about the U.S. elections among political leaders and experts in Ukraine. In general, it is important to underline that Trump's previous presidency is not seen as a catastrophe in Ukraine despite the fact that his call with Zelensky in July 2019 triggered the first impeachment of Trump and fuelled fears that he might take revenge. Trump's subsequent rhetoric towards Ukraine was hostile and outright aggressive. However, his decisions turned out to be more substantial and meaningful than under the Obama-Biden administration. The most significant was Trump's decision to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons - something that had been discussed but never adopted under the Obama administration.

There is now a dominant view in Ukraine that a second Trump administration could be different from the first. This time, there may be more Trump and less administration, with those around him more loyal to him. They may also have less opportunity to rein in his most destructive policies. The biggest concern is Trump's inclination to strike a quick deal with Putin to end the war. There are no illusions about Trump's ignorance of the rules-based international order. Nor is he expected to protect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Many are concerned about the potential consequences of an ill-conceived deal for European and transatlantic security. But it remains a big question whether Putin, who is known for violating all sorts of treaties when it comes to Ukraine, would be able to deliver on this particular one. Moreover, there is still the question of how any deal would be implemented in practice. It is clear that Putin has not changed his intention to destroy Ukraine as a state. Therefore, Ukraine is going to continue to fight to survive.

To be sure, it is not a foregone conclusion that Trump will cut all U.S. aid to Ukraine. Rather, he could suggest switching from irreversible aid (i.e. grants) to the loans. In fact, Kyiv was already prepared for this scenario in 2022, when it pushed for a lend-lease programme for Ukraine, but was convinced by some American partners that it was better to receive grants than loans that would have to be repaid in the future.

Unfortunately, Ukraine doesn't have the luxury of properly preparing for post-election scenarios in the U.S., because the period before the American election could be the most vulnerable for Ukraine. At the moment, Ukraine seems to be suffering more than it is benefiting from Trump's interference in politics, as he has played a major role in blocking a U.S. military aid package in Congress for months at a time when Ukraine desperately needs that aid. There is hope, however, that should he return, two negative features of Trump's temperament - his unpredictability and his vanity - could under certain circumstances work in Ukraine's favour.

Regardless of who becomes president of the United States, there is a growing understanding that Ukraine should rely more on Europe in the future, not only in terms of its development as a future member of the EU, but also in terms of security.

United Kingdom: Unpredictability will be an opportunity to make hard choices

Edward Arnold

Timing matters for the UK. It will have its own General Election, to be held in either spring or autumn 2024 with a change of government highly likely. It will become all-consuming. A spring election would allow the new government six months to 'bed in' before the U.S. election, with a further two months to prepare for 'President Trump 2.0' before the inauguration. If the UK election is later in the year, it will starve the new government of preparation which could still be within the first 100 days come the U.S. election. Therefore, ministers will only just have their feet under the desk before having to deal with their new U.S. counterparts - who are likely to be less experienced, and more ideological, than in Trump's first term in 2016-2020. The main consequence will therefore be uncertainty and unpredictability, leading to instability.

Concerning defence and security policy, four areas will be most affected: First, NATO. The Alliance has attracted most of Trump's ire and is therefore also most at risk to unpredictable U.S. policy. This would be hugely consequential to the UK due to its position and influence within the Alliance and its function as a multiplier of UK power. Specifically, any reduction in specialist U.S. capabilities in the Euro-Atlantic, within NATO or bilaterally, such as anti-submarine warfare or intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, will put UK forces under greater pressure.

Second, Ukraine. The UK government is politically committed to Ukraine's defence. It has pledged the third most in military, economic and humanitarian support, has supplied critical capabilities often and early, and was the first G7 country to sign its bilateral security agreement with Kyiv. Again, any reduction in U.S. support to Ukraine will put immense strain on the UK to make up the shortfalls, precisely when it needs to focus on its own forces to meet its NATO commitments. If a future President Trump cuts off aid altogether to force a settlement it will strike at the heart of UK security policy and likely force the UK and European powers closer together on European security.

Third, the Five Eyes intelligence community. The revelations in 2023 that hundreds of classified documents were found in a shower in Trump's Mar-e-Lago resort, including details of allies' defence capabilities and potential vulnerabilities, will send shivers through the UK intelligence community.

Finally, the AUKUS partnership between Australia, the UK and the U.S. could be placed in jeopardy if Trump decides to reopen the 'Biden's deal', or his new advisors argue that the U.S. cannot afford to give up any Virginia class submarines and that the agreement no longer serves American interest.

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