

Stuart Austin

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## Can European security be “Trump-proofed”?

*European security will have to adapt to the realities of a second Donald Trump presidency. Stuart Austin writes it may be necessary for European leaders to downplay arguments around shared democratic values and appeal instead to practical, transactional politics.*

In February 2024, **Donald Trump told a rally** that he would encourage Russia to do “whatever the hell they want” to NATO countries that don’t meet defence spending obligations – a nightmare scenario for Europeans. As of November 2024, Trump is now president-elect of the United States of America, and his Republican Party will dominate both the Senate and House.

The question now is whether European security can effectively be “Trump-proofed”. The challenge is made even greater by the fact that Europe is already facing several important pressures of its own, all of which could be exacerbated by the policies of the new Trump administration.

## Resurgent strongman politics

As we end the “**year of elections**”, a third (or is it fourth?) “wave of autocratisation” rolls on. September saw Austria’s far-right Freedom Party come first in legislative elections. In October, with widespread accusations of domestic and foreign meddling, **Georgia’s pro-Russia Georgian Dream party** won a majority in parliamentary elections, while **pro-EU Moldovan President Maia Sandu** narrowly escaped losing office.

For 2025, Czechia’s former Prime Minister Andrej Babiš – nicknamed the “Czech Donald Trump” – is anticipated to make his own comeback after his right-wing populist party ANO made landslide gains in regional and senate elections this year. Meanwhile, Slovakia’s anti-Ukrainian Prime Minister Robert Fico can even share something profound with Trump: surviving an assassination attempt.

In an era of resurgent strongman politics, these individuals and movements – centred on pro-authoritarianism, anti-immigration sentiment, ardent nationalism and “illiberal values” – will have a

greater chance of making an impact on the global stage. We are likely to see Trump retreat from status quo multilateralism and establish a fractious order of bilateralism that is still dominated by the United States, but with Trump playing court favourites. Brussels will find it increasingly difficult to find a political consensus across the continent and our definition of “the West” may have to shift accordingly.

## Trump-proofing

No statesman may be happier than Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, who has adopted the slogan “Make Hungary Great Again”. Orbán has courted, and been courted by, US Republicans alongside hard right populist parties and think tanks in recent years.

At present, Hungary holds the rotating EU presidency, although by the time Trump takes office, Poland will hold the ropes. Poland’s Prime Minister, Donald Tusk, is reportedly preparing meetings with the UK, EU and NATO leaders, and the Nordic and Baltic states in response to Trump’s re-election. “Trump-proofing” is the new watchword in Europe’s frontline states and beyond.

The Baltic states especially understand the vital role that US boots on the ground play in deterring Russia. If Ukraine is abandoned militarily, financially and politically then the Baltics will wake up to an expansionist Russia knocking on their (and NATO’s) doors. Trump’s re-election has accelerated the debate on European defence spending and coordination. The world is now definitively moving on from the post-Cold War framework in which Europeans rely on America’s protection.

With the US increasingly turning its back on Europe and directing resources toward its strategic competition with China, Europeans may have to downplay their arguments around shared democratic values, appealing instead to practical, transactional politics. However, with the central-eastern and Balkan region of Europe increasingly enmeshed in populism and resurging authoritarianism – combined with the conflict in Ukraine and potential flashpoints in Transnistria and Kosovo – the prospect of European unity and stability in this new world appears doubtful.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [Gints Ivuskans / Shutterstock.com](#)*

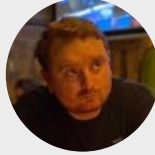
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