

Sir Robert Cooper: “Trump’s victory puts Europe in unknown territory”

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*Following Donald Trump’s election as President of the United States, we will be running a number of short reactions from prominent European academics and political actors on what the result means for Europe. In this contribution **Sir Robert Cooper** writes that while there are doubts over whether the new President-elect will follow through on the promises he made in the campaign, the result has put Europe firmly in unknown territory.*



Now we are in unknown territory. That’s not new – the future is unknowable, and new presidents are always unknown quantities – Hillary Clinton would have been an exception. But Mr Trump takes unknownness to a whole new level.

The campaign was more about attitude than policy. The attitudes amount to: don’t trust China; stay out of the Middle East; don’t bother about climate change; trade is bad for jobs; NATO are a bunch of free riders; and why is Russia a problem anyway? Since truth (and foreign affairs) have not been a notable feature of Mr Trump’s campaign we should wait and see what President Trump does. It may not be the same as what candidate Trump said he will do.

How should Europe react? Politely and calmly. It takes time to set up a new administration and to turn attitudes into policies. And though the tone is different, some of the content recalls President Obama’s thoughts. He too is frustrated with the European contribution to NATO; he regards Russia as a second class problem, and would love to get out of the Middle East. Trade and climate change will need some work!

Instead of asking whether Donald Trump is serious, we should ask when we are going to get serious ourselves, collectively. Here are three difficulties: first our record of getting serious is not good. Second, it would be better to do this with the UK but maybe that’s no longer possible; third the United States itself has been an important element of the glue that keeps the EU together. That is surely over. Now it’s up to us.

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About the author

Sir Robert Cooper

Sir Robert Cooper is a diplomat who has been a Counsellor of the European External Action Service and a Special Advisor at the European Commission. He was also formerly Director General of Political and Military Affairs of the EU’s Council of Ministers, and former chief foreign policy adviser to British Prime Minister Tony Blair. He has also been a Visiting Professor at LSE IDEAS.



