



## Trump in Europe: He Came, Saw and Lost

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He came, saw and lost. On his first European trip since he was elected president, Donald Trump singlehandedly transformed the transatlantic relationship in a fundamental way. All the efforts that had been made by the NATO Secretary General and a considerable number of European leaders to find an approach that might allow at least some level of optimism regarding the future development of the relations between Europe and the United States proved futile.

European leaders, even if trying very hard, can no longer shut their eyes from recognising that this US President is not willing and will not be willing to partner with Europe. The one big message, impossible to ignore, from Trump's visit is this: as president, he is going to run his administration on foreign policy pretty much in the way he promised during his campaign. The multiple efforts to paper over differences, to have Trump reined in by the so-called grown-ups in his team or to grant him time to master his personal learning curve, have all been in vain.

When meeting at NATO, Trump demonstrated that he was not at all mollified by the fact that NATO members went out of their way to make concessions he could interpret as a victory. They did so by agreeing to have NATO join the anti-ISIS alliance even though all NATO members had already individually joined that alliance before. Secondly, they promised to impose a stricter discipline on themselves in their efforts to deliver on much higher defence spending. But Trump just wouldn't say the one sentence that everybody else hoped for so dearly, namely that America would continue standing by article 5 of the NATO Charter, NATO's core pledge to help defending members if they are attacked. As a matter of fact, when Vice-President Pence spoke at the Munich Security Conference in February, he actually did mention article 5, but in a way that still undercut the security guarantee of this article. Pence spoke of a kind of conditionality that would predicate America's article 5 guarantee on America's evaluation of whether Washington would be of the opinion that allies had spent enough on defence. At the time, the media didn't make a big fuss about this highly questionable position. Everybody seemed to be hoping that somehow, we could avoid taking account of the new narrative and that somehow mysteriously everything would still be fine again. That exercise of self-deception was finally blown to pieces by President Trump when he refused to say those precious few words in Brussels.

President Trump also revived his hypocritical criticism of the German automotive industry. In his conversation with Presidents Tusk and Juncker, he returned to his polemical attacks against Germany. The German chancellor's visit in Washington, where she, together with a small group of industrial leaders, had tried to create some plausibility for a different interpretation of the role this industry plays in the US, had obviously not had a lasting effect on the president. Some of the German media engaged nonetheless in a ridiculous debate over how to translate Trump's words that 'Germany is bad, very bad', as if a less stinging translation would somehow allow us to avoid understanding the message.

On Russia, EU Council President Tusk found himself forced to explicitly note differences with President Trump. Considering how much European institutions had tried to contribute to a visible success of Trump's visit, Tusk's admission of diverging views on Russia came across as particularly disquieting.



And then, at the G7 meeting in Taormina, Trump again nixed all the efforts that the other participants made to get at least a minimum common understanding on climate policy included in the final document. The disappointment about Trump's unwillingness to budge even one millimetre resulted in the very unusual publication of a 6 versus 1 statement from the G7 on climate change. The Europeans plus Canada and Japan were obviously so fed up that they decided to isolate Trump and to pointedly state their determination to continue fighting against climate change.

If Trump were honest to himself, he would concede that his European trip has not helped "making America great again". Looking at the reportedly grandiose successes of which Donald Trump boasted on his return to the United States, one is tempted to ask how much more of such Pyrrhic victories the US is going to suffer under this President.

At the beginning of the trip, in Brussels among NATO members, Europeans still tried to win Trump over by playing into his hand. At the end of the trip, in Sicily, they had moved beyond that and decided to assert their own leadership. After their meetings, two European leaders underscored their decision to stand up to Trump in a very remarkable way. President Macron did so when he told the French media that his particularly stern handshake with Donald Trump was meant to signal a message of determination. And Chancellor Merkel on the campaign trail in Bavaria spoke unusually clear words about the conclusions she had drawn from this European visit of Donald Trump. She said that Europe simply could not continue relying on the partnership with the US in the way that we had grown accustomed to anymore.

It is still too early to say what practical conclusions European leaders will draw, but one thing is clear: they have not made their own task easier. In fact, the bar has been raised for what Europe has to do to get its act together and to create trust in its own ability to guarantee freedom, sustainable progress and security.

The United States with all its might is still going to be a dominant power. But it is not going to be a leading power anymore. When Donald Trump was elected, many early comments expressed the concern that his presidency might lead to the end of the West as we know it. Since then, there had been a lot of hope, hope against better knowledge, that things wouldn't be as bad as they seemed. Well, that was an illusion. Now, with a clearer understanding of what to expect and what not, we have to work on building a new West with new responsibilities for Europe. It will be a long and arduous journey.