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## European security and the challenges ahead

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### Summary

Donald Trump's second term presents three key challenges: a shift in global politics, tech moguls' dominance, and European security concerns. Traditional party systems are weakening, with new cleavages like migration and identity reshaping politics. Tech giants monopolize information, creating economic imbalances, while governments struggle to regulate them. In Europe, the war in Ukraine highlights divisions among NATO allies. U.S. disengagement forces Europe to rethink its security strategy, but internal challenges like migration and party fragmentation hinder unity.

### Key Takeaways

- The erosion of traditional party systems is driven by societal shifts like migration, identity politics, and distrust in establishments.
- Tech giants are reshaping capitalism, consolidating power, and challenging government regulation globally.
- Europe's security depends on addressing internal divisions and uniting against external threats like Russian expansionism.

Europe is facing a rapidly evolving security landscape shaped by geopolitical tensions, military conflicts, and emerging threats like cyber warfare and energy dependency. Russia's aggression in Ukraine has reinforced NATO's role as a key pillar of European defence, prompting increased military cooperation and defence spending. At the same time, migration pressures, hybrid warfare, and economic instability create additional challenges. Addressing these issues requires strategic investments, technological advancements, and stronger transatlantic partnerships. The future of European security will depend on how effectively NATO and European nations adapt to these evolving threats while maintaining stability and democratic values.

How should NATO and European nations strengthen their security in response to modern threats? What impact does energy security have on overall stability in Europe? How can countries balance defence spending with economic priorities? How can Europe better respond to cyber threats and hybrid warfare? How does migration affect security, and what strategies can ensure both protection and humanitarian responsibility?

## The three challenges

Donald Trump's second term in office is marked by one factor: Americans, allies of the US, enemies of the US of any kind, long-time Trump supporters around the globe, as well as analysts and political scientists, are confused.

Are we standing on the threshold of a completely new era of international relations, one that will be accompanied by an "America-first" policy, a struggle for a place in the world, and the disintegration of old alliances, or are we simply going back in time, with America copying interwar trends of isolationism? Is there a solid but hidden goal behind the dramatic changes in domestic and foreign policy that Donald Trump and his entourage are pursuing, or is it a disorganized operation of disconnected and ill-considered executive orders? And what will it mean for us?

What is happening and what will happen can be understood and interpreted from several perspectives, depending on the way we use to deconstruct the current international political situation in Europe.

The first fundamental challenge is caused by the breakdown of traditional party systems, the rise in importance of other cleavages at the expense of the so-called "left-right division", and the growth of individualistic tendencies in society. So, the situation, which is not new to us, has been developing since the 1970s, but only in the 21st century has it become a clearly visible part of mainstream politics.

The fact that the Tories in the United Kingdom have weakened the most in the last 200 years is not due to a "party personnel crisis" or a "loss of confidence". This is due to a fundamental shift in political conflict and the rise of new issues such as migration, security, cultural and national identity, the shape of society and our common future, which now largely lies not between the Conservative Party and Labour, but between the establishment (and it doesn't matter how we define it) and the new, rising parties. The weakening of the two-party political system in Great Britain and the grand coalitions between previously antagonistic forces in continental Europe, such as the grand coalition in Austria composed by the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) and the NEOS, or the newly emerging government between the CDU-CSU and the SPD in Germany, are clear symptoms of this shift.

The second challenge that we could see with our own eyes during the inauguration of Donald Trump, is the gradual transformation of the economic model and the functioning of advanced capitalism, especially in Western countries. The globalization of capital and the virtualization of society are exploited by those who hold information channels, which causes monopolization of information flows

and the rapid enrichment of the richest. Data are the main raw material of the 21st century, just as oil and uranium were in the 20th century. Gone are the days of influential traditional media, the emerging technology companies have transformed the way we obtain information in such a way that we have not yet fully felt the effects of this change.

This is not a new situation either and humanity experienced a similar situation more than 100 years ago. The power of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil holding was broken down during the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt (1901 to 1909). At that time, the state won over a private company that was affecting the economy, politics and social spheres and threatened the functioning of US democracy.

But today we live in different political, technological and, above all, economic conditions. Today's capitalist system, where globally active companies can deliver their products everywhere, instantly and with almost no transaction costs although with massive profits, is creating a newly unbalanced environment where the states themselves are getting the short end of the stick. The inability to effectively enforce the Digital Services Act (DSA) in the EU member states is an example of how even supranational entities composed of one of the most developed countries in the world are weaker players compared to technology giants and how the game changed from the times of Teddy Roosevelt.

It is no coincidence that tech moguls like Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeff Bezos were in the front row at Donald Trump's inauguration. The message to the public is clear – tech companies will play a leading role in US government, significantly different compared to previous years. Joe Biden (and the US government) was able to drive Zuckerberg up to the wall and force a regulation (critics would say censorship) of information about Covid-19 on platforms like Facebook and Instagram (CNN, 2024). We cannot expect similar action from Donald Trump. Since he owes his re-election to one (or more) such moguls, and the new media that the owners have under their thumb will help him overcome the critical attitude of the traditional ones and further weaken their influence. We can describe the current situation as symbiotic – between the US government and billionaires, which will also mean that we cannot expect any regulation of tech giants for another 4 years. In addition to economic and technological dominance, US billionaires have gained another crucial element in the pathway to become a superpower: the office of the US president.

But be careful, focusing too much on the US alone can lead us to wrong conclusions. We can see a very similar development on the other side of the world. Chinese president Xi Jinping held a rare meeting on February 17th, 2025, with some of the biggest names in the technology sector, such as Jack Ma, founder of Alibaba (Reuters, 2025). Ma's disfavor is probably gone, but something else is more important: The fact that similar processes are happening in a centrally controlled economy dominated by hardline communists. The role of technology companies in the future development of advanced capitalist economies is simply irreplaceable, regardless of the type of regime and level of their democracy.

The third important challenge concerns primarily Europe. Today's war in eastern Ukraine can be seen as an attempt by the Putin regime to reverse the development in Europe and Asia since the 1990s and reverse the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Marxist terminology, this is essentially a counter-revolutionary campaign. The fall of the Berlin Wall, Polish and Hungarian independence, the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia, the disintegration processes in the Soviet Union (the Baltic countries, but also the cases of Moldova, Chechnya, and Georgia) and their involvement in security alliances such as NATO are understood as only temporary, until these counter-revolutionary efforts are suppressed.

In the eyes of the Kremlin and its cronies, Ukraine and the West are to blame for the war, as they stole the country from the "fairly elected" President Yanukovich through a Euromaidan. The source of the potential conflict between the West and the East thus lies deep in the past, in the events

of Tsarist Russia, and now manifests de facto the echoes of the Cold War. The 20 th century is trying to invade the 21 st century. Western states, which were never part of the Eastern Bloc (unlike the eastern flank of NATO), are thus involved in the conflict through alliances that arose in a completely different international situation. And this is precisely the critical moment that affects European security, creating old and new challenges ahead.

## European distress

After Donald Trump took office, there is a more noticeable discrepancy between how important the war in Ukraine is for the US and how important it is for the European allies in NATO.

For Donald Trump, war in the territory of the former Soviet Union is just one of the problems he has decided to solve. The gains for the US in the event of Zelenskyy's victory over Ukraine are, in the eyes of the new president, too small compared to the price the US (and its allies) would have to pay. And we are not talking only about military, economic and humanitarian support, political complications and the threat of conflict spreading, but especially the losses from restrictions on trade between Russia and US private companies.<sup>1</sup> The distance of the conflict and the belief of the American administration that the disastrous level of command and the inability of the Russian army to conquer a broken country full of collaborators and informants during 3 years of intense fighting simply show that Russia is not as dangerous as Democrats and European allies claim.

On the contrary, for Poland, the Baltic states, Finland, Sweden, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, and Germany (eastern part), the issue of stopping Russia on the borders of Ukraine in 1992 is vitally important. For Great Britain and France, the American shift is an opportunity to play a greater role in the continent's security architecture. After all, France has been trying to do this since the 1960s.

But if we want to talk about a European solution and a "new European security architecture", we must see that for some European members of NATO (i.e. Portugal) and the EU (i.e. Ireland), the war in Ukraine is simply not a priority, like for US representatives. Therefore, I assume that European states creating some new version of NATO on the EU's map or pulling together for Ukraine is unfortunately naive. Central and Eastern European allies ignored the migration crisis in the South of the EU, now Portugal will probably be just as active in helping with Russia. Moreover, there are some EU members neighbouring Ukraine who are more than critical of the current Ukrainian leadership (Hungary and Slovakia).

Therefore, we can expect that more European allies will continue to function in a format of an "alliance of the willing"<sup>2</sup>, that is, those countries that consider Russia a real threat, which is already happening now (BBC, 2025). The goal is clear: Stop Russia's counter-revolutionary efforts and banish it back to the borders set in 1992 or at least put a stop to Russian expansionism in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 „In 2022, both U.S. exports to Russia and imports from Russia shrank significantly from 2021. U.S. exports totaled \$1.7 billion, a decrease of 74.0% (\$4.7 billion), and U.S. imports totaled \$14.4 billion, a decrease of 51.3% (\$15.2 billion). The trade deficit was \$12.8 billion, decreasing 45.1% (\$10.4 billion) from 2021.“ (BIS, 2023)

<sup>2</sup> 16 countries that joined the 2025 London Summit on Ukraine on March, 2 nd 2025: Canada, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and United Kingdom.

## Devil inside

The problem with the European stance against Russia is precisely its ambiguity. On one hand, we want Russia to lose in Ukraine, but on the other hand, even after 3 years of brutal offensive war, we are buying Russian raw materials and thus helping to keep Putin's war machine running. The fact, that EU imports of Russian fossil fuels in the third year of invasion surpass financial aid sent to Ukraine (CREA, 2025), simply supports those circles who want to end the war in Ukraine at all costs.

Trump's initiative on Ukraine is the third, and last wake-up call for Europe. The first was Russia's undeclared (and later admitted) invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014. Although European states clearly told Putin that this was a violation of international law, the punishment was commissioning of Nord Stream 2 in 2015 among Gazprom, Royal Dutch Shell, E.ON, OMV, and Engie. The second wake-up call came with a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Here, Europe's reaction was more forceful, but economic ties and purchases of raw materials still took precedence over security. The third wake-up call is accompanied by the US president clearly stating that Europeans on the European continent should primarily take care of their own security.

But Europe's security does not just mean spending more than 3% of GDP on defence. It should be a fundamental change in mindset. And this is not only about Russia. It will be difficult to convince the average European of the need for common European defence and astronomical spending in a situation where even EU members are not capable of defending their borders. If we want the EU to be taken seriously in the world, let's start at home and put an end to the destructive processes that are undermining our democracy and freedom.

The collapse of traditional party systems, as we discussed in the beginning, does not happen by chance. The growth of parties such as the Rassemblement national, Alternative für Deutschland, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs or the UK Independence Party is caused by a combination of several factors, the main ones being immigration and the concerns of the indigenous population about the future shape of Western societies. Few citizens in these countries agreed with the idea that their homeland would become a refuge for the Third World, and even fewer voted for parties that had this on their agenda.

We can simply dismiss the issue of migration by saying that the problems are being inflated by forces backed by the Kremlin. But that is a very short-sighted policy. Europe grew up on the idea of freedom and rule of law. But if only some people follow the law and others can abuse the right to asylum with impunity and receive housing, healthcare and pocket money in return, then we should not be surprised that voters are looking for someone who will decisively resolve the current unsustainable situation. If our societies lose cohesion based on shared history, culture, and traditions, it will be difficult for us to face a common enemy together.

If traditional parties do not respond to voter shifts in a similar way like the social democrats in Denmark, the main political entities in Europe will be replaced, which will later be reflected in the form of European integration, which until now has been mainly formed by people's parties and social democratic parties (with the help of liberals). Overcoming the first challenge (the collapse of traditional party systems due to immigration and ethnic change) will help us be stronger to face the third challenge (Russian expansionism in the European continent).

## Let's be clever

And what about the second challenge of tech moguls hijacking contemporary capitalism? This is a very difficult question to answer now. A staunch Euro-optimist would say that this is an opportunity for a “European solution”. But campaigns favouring European production or initiatives to support European AI development are just spitting into a stormy sea.

The first chance is, of course, closer cooperation with those who will be affected by US tariffs or otherwise harmed by the America-first policy, i.e. Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia, Canada. Fantasizing about Canada joining the EU is probably not on the agenda, but reviving cooperation due to tariffs and overall instability is an opportunity that has its potential. This is also related to the experiences of South Korea and especially Taiwan with disinformation and hybrid warfare. Experience and especially good examples of how to respond to disinformation campaigns quickly and flexibly are crucial for Europeans.

Secondly, it is necessary to understand today's economic and technological relations. By regulating and limiting the availability of services in Europe (e.g. the latest AI models), we are only harming ourselves. In today's situation, rather than regulation, it is necessary to show the public the possibilities of new approaches in information processing and manipulation. Recently, the Estonian government and OpenAI announced a project that aims to provide all students and teachers in secondary schools with access to ChatGPT Edu, a version of ChatGPT adapted for schools, from September 2025 (OpenAI, 2025). This is the only right approach. Europe historically grew in innovations that originated in other parts of the world (e.g. paper, gunpowder, the compass), but Europeans used them in new innovative ways and perfected them. Regulations and restrictions will not help us overcome this challenge.

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