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# Trump, Brexit, populism – wither multilateralism and liberal world order?

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## The Current Column

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## Trump, Brexit, populism – wither multilateralism and liberal world order?

*Bonn, 20 January 2017.* Never before has the change of administration in the United States caused this much concern globally, and never before has an US-President incited so much tension ahead of taking office. As the hopes for a Damascene conversion for the new POTUS are waning, one thing has become evident by now: the path of naive unilateralism that the forthcoming American government is set to follow will prove to be of little help for of international development and a burgeoning global policy of common good. Trump's pronouncements as well as the choice of his cabinet members and closest advisors raise fears that the future US government will be vehemently opposed to multilateral co-operation. The shock waves of the reactionary political tsunami in America are already being felt in all fields of international co-operation, with the effect set to endure; for example in the form of body blows to free trade agreements and climate negotiations, the risk of a trade war and even a military stand-off with China as well as the open questioning of the NATO partnership. In addition, it is also Trump's utterly disrespectful attitude towards women and minorities, his reductionist-mercantilist worldview, his laissez-faire mentality towards autocrats, his proven disinterest in poverty reduction and global development as well as his populist style of manipulation, polarisation and disparagement that give cause for concern. Trump's 'politics of rage', his ruthless power gamble with the protest capital generated by the growing social inequality in the US and his recklessness in the pursuit of corporate interest ( transpiring from his emerging line on economic and fiscal policy) will serve to further expand the gulf between the disadvantaged and the chronically over-rewarded, not just in America, but also increasingly throughout the world.

For Europe this also means that it will occupy an increasingly lonely position in the struggle for fair and global development, democracy and human rights, as well as in climate protection and sustainable economic policy. Whilst there is speculation that the approach of the new US administration to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) could possibly represent an opportunity for Europe and China to work more closely as partners, Japanese and Koreans fear the effects of protectionism, isolation and the deterioration of relations on the political order and security in the region as well as, ultimately, on growth and prosperity. In Europe the weakening of the North Atlantic alliance is a nightmare scenario. Between the resurgent confidence of Putin, Trump's malign mentor, the growing volatility of Turkey, a strategically-central NATO member, and the ongoing threat of terror due to the conflicts in the EU-neighbourhood, Europe finds itself in a tight spot. There are increasing indications that the reaction to

this precarious situation will result in increasing emphasis on security and defence policy compared to other aspects of foreign relations. It is argued that citizens expect a toughening of migration policy and border management in order to protect their own freedom and prosperity. In a year of important elections and policy decisions in several European states politicians will be clamouring for more security, whilst issues of sustainable development will probably find less strident advocates.

Under these conditions of extreme uncertainty the EU is also faced with the departure of a key member state. And across the channel the Brexit speech delivered by Theresa May on 17 January provided an indication of how hard a course the United Kingdom intends to pursue. Even before taking office, Trump has applauded Brexit as "a great thing", and announced his intention to conclude a bilateral trade agreement with Britain as quickly as possible. The British foreign minister Boris Johnson flew in especially for discussions on the matter. However, official negotiations of such a treaty would represent a clear infringement of EU law, by which the UK remains bound until its formal departure from the union. With a shift towards economic nationalism in the UK and the US, including the introduction of extra tariffs and a vague threat to turn Britain into a tax haven to attract businesses, a , the signs point to an end of the liberal economic order, a trend that further industrialised countries could emulate. This presents the multilateral efforts in the field of global sustainable development of the EU – and thereby also Germany – with enormous challenges. The reform of the "European consensus for development" that is planned for 2017 must provide a strong indication for new paths of global co-operation and bundle the progressive forces in Europe. The aim must be to find ways keep the UK engaged in European foreign and development policy, as May hinted at in her speech. In the negotiation of the EU's next multi-annual financial framework efforts should be made to allow for British participation in the common development policy instruments, . The alternative would be a particularly painful loss – for Europe and the world. Faced with the centrifugal forces of populism and EU scepticism, Europe needs common answers to the economic and social problems that threaten the cohesion of the Union, as well as new partners for multilateral co-operation. In the medium term, if Europe wants to avoid further decline and an even greater loss of credibility and attraction, it needs to assume more responsibility for tackling global challenges - and also pay a larger share of the costs of these measures.