

Donald Trump at the White House - a reality for Eastern Europe

New Strategy Center

Donald Trump's election represents a new "black swan" scenario becoming reality. After Brexit, the whole world will have to take the unimaginable and the impossible seriously again.

Donald Trump has a strong personality, he is a volunteer type who will listen to his instincts more than to his counselors. He will probably try to demonstrate from the outset that he is totally different from what has been as the White House before. His reflex of businessman will push him to direct, man to man negotiations, including with the President Vladimir Putin, in order to prove that he can unlock critical situations seen as almost impossible to solve. His speech on the victory morning stated the necessity of the discussions with other countries, to reach the agreement and to avoid confrontation or conflict. There was an intervention that took into account several elements of domestic policy, and the recall of his speech of April 27, 2016 becomes useful. Dedicated to the foreign policy topics, that speech evoked Donald Trump's intention to negotiate directly and expressed his strong belief that he could make what is called "a good deal". The reasons behind this outlook are generated by the common threat of terrorism, considered a greater threat, which will make Trump to act according to the logic of "my enemy's enemy is my friend". During his intervention, Donald Trump argued that "we have to find common ground based on common interests. Russia, for example, also knew the horrors of Islamist terrorism. I think a relaxation of tensions and improved relations with Russia, from positions of power, is possible, absolutely possible. Common sense says that this cycle, this horrible cycle of hostility must stop. Some say that the Russians cannot be reasonable. I intend to find out."

But this personalized style might entail certain risks, primarily due to its predictability, especially at a tete-a-tete meeting with a leader like Vladimir Putin, who has a rich institutional experience. Although they come from different political systems and cultures, they both believe in personal success and in their own ability to solve the problems.

Trump Administration's future performance will depend, of course, also on the people who will occupy the key positions like Defense, State Department, and National Security Advisor. However, we do not believe in the thesis that "the system will control the President". The system failed to prevent his nomination, and Donald Trump has gained the elections before some renowned Republican candidates as Jeb Bush, John Kasich or Marco Rubio. In essence, the system has not managed to make his victory impossible.

We should not overlook the fact that the Republican Party won the majority in both Chambers of the Congress (fragile in the Senate, more solid in the House of Representatives), which gives, at least theoretically, a great political advantage to the president of the same political orientation. But Trump is not a Republican assumed by the entire elite of the party and he will have to consolidate his support in the Congress from his new party colleagues.

Let us not forget, however, that he will benefit not only from the surprise effect of the victory that stunned even many Republicans, but especially from the way the establishment of the party and not only complies with the winner's mandate on first term of a new president. The positioning of the traditional system in these elections can be seen in the way that the District of Columbia, the capital, and the other two neighboring states, Maryland and Virginia, have voted. In the District of Columbia, 260,233 people voted for Clinton, and only 11,553 for Trump. The same was in neighboring Maryland: Clinton won 1,497,951 votes, and Trump 873,346. In Virginia, the other neighboring state to DC Washington, where several federal institutions (including the Pentagon and CIA) have their headquarters, Clinton won, but at a much smaller difference - 1,911,574 votes comparing to 1,728,446 as Trump obtained.

As regards the transatlantic dialogue, it is expected not to be so predictable and consistent any more. Justified fears will arise in Central and Eastern Europe, where the new US Allies will query to what extent the new president Donald Trump will support the strong involvement of the USA in NATO's new military posts in this region. The European Reassurance Initiative, a program designed by the USA to fund the military exercises, to increase the capacity for cooperation with the Eastern Allies, and to improve the military infrastructure in the area, means not only an investment of \$ 3.4 billion last year, but especially a solid political commitment.

For shaping a tailored forward allied presence in the Black Sea region, Romania has supported a set of projects covering land, air and sea at the political and military level. There is setting up a Multinational Brigade, launching a training program - Combined Joint Enhanced Training Initiative (CJET), establishing a functional framework for the Alliance's presence in the Black Sea region and, not least, a combined air training initiative. All these initiatives have been undertaken and promoted by the Allies, the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence in late October being a success for Romania. Regarding the maritime posture, Romania envisages a steady, rotational, presence for common training of the ships belonging to its Allies and Standing NATO Maritime Groups, in order to adapt their program. The process of creating a combined maritime allied framework in the region (*NATO Combined Maritime Framework - NCMF*) has been and will still be based on a very close coordination with the other NATO member states bordering the Black Sea: Turkey and Bulgaria. Following the demarches conducted at national level and within NATO, such a decision is expected to be taken until the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence in February 2017. The Allies also showed interest in providing air support capabilities for the air police missions in the region. Romania's initiative on setting the framework for combined air training was analyzed at the level of the allied military staff and the responsible NATO structures are to propose concrete solutions for implementation next year.

We have described all this laborious process of negotiation and planning in order to point out that Romania is still expecting significant decisions both within NATO and in the bilateral dialogue with the USA, the most important partner in the military and intelligence field. If a further firm commitment from the USA is lacking, all these plans should be much revised, if not postponed, because we must not forget that without the US political, financial and logistic support, NATO cannot fulfill its mission.

The Eastern Europe is primarily expecting to see the first actions of the new American Administration towards the Russian Federation. In Moscow, the first reactions denote a moderate optimism. In his congratulatory message, the President Putin shows his openness to dialogue and hope for “a common activity for removal of Russian-American relations from the crisis, and also for solving the current problems on the international agenda and searching for effective responses to the global security challenges”, while the Kremlin wants all this “constructive dialogue” to be based on “mutual respect”.

However, until further clarifying statements and specifications regarding the future government team, more questions remain regarding the first foreign policy decisions of the future Administration. Which will be the relation with the European Union? What interest will be for the economic agreements like the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) or Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), given that economic protectionism was one of the major themes of the election campaign? What relations will the USA develop with Israel and the Arab partners? There will be any changes in Washington’s relations with Ankara or Iran? And, not least, after Brexit, will the US elections influence the vote in Europe, the performance of Western and Northern nationalist parties with xenophobic rhetoric or the nationalist-conservative parties from Central Europe?

Besides the expectation of details and nuances of the elected President Donald Trump, aimed at alleviating especially the fears of reevaluation of the US commitments to NATO, and shaping the team the new President will work with in national security and foreign affairs, Romania must act to open channels of communication with the new team at the White House. Now is the time that, immediately after the elections in Bucharest, the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense and Presidential Administration to promote our national interests to the new American Administration and Congress, and to meet the people who will influence the US foreign and security policy over the next four years. Any bilateral dialogue is useful, especially using those institutionalized communication channels in areas where we cooperate the best with the USA and where Romania's contribution is appreciated.

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