In retrospect, it's hard to think of a US president closer to Europe and, with regard to the most critical foreign policy issues, closer to the Federal Republic of Germany than President Obama. At least according to expectations, the new president of the United States is going to pay a much lesser attention to the needs of the Allies. Despite campaign promises, the Obama administration was initially devoid of interest in the events that characterized the political life of the other side of the Atlantic. By itself, this was not judged as something necessarily negative, especially since the Obama administration foreign policy has proved suitably harmonious with that of many European governments, and, most notably, with that of the German government. The importance given by the Obama administration to diplomacy, and its unresponsiveness to an easy recourse to military force, were shared and supported by the entire German political spectrum.

America and Europe, after Brexit and Trump

From his earliest days, the Obama administration has adopted an approach towards the Russian Federation quite welcomed by the German government. Examples are plenty, as in the case of the implicit waiver of any effective effort to quickly expand NATO to the East, and the sudden cancellation of the third phase of a European Phased Adaptive Approach, which provided placement in Eastern Europe of new anti installations ballistic missile. Then, when the US relations with the Russian Federation have become difficult, despite the resentment due to the discovery of espionage carried out by the National Security Agency at the expense of the German political leadership, the international approach of the Obama administration was still perceived as compatible with the interests defended by Chancellor Merkel. In defining the structure of the United States at the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis, President Obama has recognized the need to preserve European unity and he understood the difficulties that Chancellor Merkel would have to face in order to support the latter against a greater US role. As a consequence, resisting the strong internal pressures in favor of the exercise by the United States of a much stronger role, President Obama has left the European countries to face the Russian Federation. In addition, the Obama administration has decided not to provide Ukraine the important military equipment that the Congress was willing to insure, most likely due to the desire of avoiding new crisis with the Allies. The convergence that has characterized relations between the United States and the Federal Republic of Germany in recent years is no less evident in the case of Iran. The Obama administration has decided to pursue the nuclear agreement rather than to punish this country, threatening a military intervention aimed at regime change, as desired by many of his critics both inside and outside of United States. Similarly, the balanced Obama administration policy toward Israel has been well received by a German public that sees in Israel a key partner, but at the same time is deeply sympathetic with the Palestinians. In addition, the restraint shown in the case of Syria, although heavily criticized by some members of the German politician, has allowed the Merkel government to avoid dealing with thorny issues such as the type and extent of a possible German participation in international intervention.

The relatively minor role chosen by the Federal Republic of Germany during the Allied military operations in Libya in 2011, married well with the desire of President Obama to implement for the United States a “leading from behind” stance. The overall approach chosen for the United States in that crisis by the Obama administration could have allowed for a deeper European involvement in operations and, consequently, could have promoted greater European responsibility on issues of security and stability in North Africa.
The convergence of interests between the Obama administration and Chancellor Merkel is also evident in the efforts for the implementation of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, in the opening of diplomatic relations with Cuba, and in a policy of not interference with the many internal problems lately experienced by the European Union. From this point of view, the only two major exceptions were the support shown to Chancellor Merkel during of the Syrian refugee crisis and the firmly pro-European stand taken on the eve of the British referendum on the European Union. Although questions about the future policies of the Trump administration are both complex and many, it is difficult to imagine that President Trump will shove the United States in a more compatible way to the interests of the Federal Republic of Germany than President Obama. President Trump has repeatedly professed his faith in economic protectionism and into an increased militarization of foreign policy. President Trump has always been relentless on the need to revise the European contributions to the common defense. In his view, the Europeans are not paying what is needed to the extent that NATO could eventually fade in oblivion. In addition, President Trump seems very skeptical of the same international organizations that have always been very important for the Federal Republic of Germany, such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization and, perhaps, the European Union itself. If the respect so far expressed by President Trump for Russian President Putin can still buy him some consensus in the Federal Republic of Germany, at the same time it can be especially harmful to the political investment made by Chancellor Merkel to draw a tough European policy about the Ukrainian state of affairs. In that case, the Trump administration's impact on the European Union could force the Federal Republic of Germany to assume more international responsibilities, with all financial and diplomatic obligations that such a development will lead to. The last eight years will be remembered as the moment when the world leadership of the United States began to change. The Allies found themselves, sometimes in spite of themselves, much richer of freedom of action. On the other hand, they found they could no longer delegate responsibilities to the United States, both at the military and the political level.

A new dimension for the European Union

The arrival of the Trump administration seems authenticating, and consolidating, this new phase in the Transatlantic Relations. For the Federal Republic of Germany, the Trump administration means facing two big issues in the foreseeable future. One is that if President Trump is serious about the need of going beyond a world trade system, the Federal Republic of Germany will have no better choice to build an international coalition to defend Globalization, and to protect the European Union. The other is that if the United States is backing off from its role of guarantor of the world, and the new US administration does not seem anymore eager to interfere in the international arena enforcing the old Pax Americana in a process that started soon after the end of the Bush the Elder administration, twenty five years ago, given the nowadays international system, only three power can eventually took over the US role: the Russian Federation, The People Republic of China, and the European Union. So, this means that the strongest European countries, like the French Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, have to step up and step in. The problem is that is difficult to assess the feasibility of such a development, given the domestic political dynamics underway in these two countries. In any case, for the European Union the Trump administration is an opportunity. A new US isolationism could facilitate a new role for the European Union. Such an opportunity is the product of two quite unexpected events. The outcome of last year British referendum on the European Union and the inauguration of the Trump administration, taken altogether, have opened a new era. In the coming years, the transatlantic community could end up adopting a new trade policy and a new security and defense policy.
Everything seems to indicate that the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), will remain at least frozen until at least until after the French elections planned for the coming months in the French Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany and in The Netherlands, especially as the new US president seems willing to establish the trade relations of his country with the European Union on the basis of specific agreements and not on the delivering of a great global agreement. Of course, if the European Union, under German leadership, will maintain its firm stance against the Russian Federation on the Ukrainian issue, any serious improvement in the relationship between the United States and the Russian Federation, could give to the German leadership more a problem than a benefit. For what concerns the greater European involvement in security and defense issues advocated by the new administration, on closer inspection, there is little of new. The spending issue has been one of the recurring themes of all NATO summits in recent years. Perhaps, the new circumstances may favor the effective implementation by the European Union of its new security and defense strategy.

**Beyond Brexit**

Meanwhile, Brexit represents a significant change in the balance of power on the European continent. The United Kingdom Supreme Court's judgment of the end of January, in confirming the sentence handed down by the High Court last year, has forced a parliamentary passage that prevents the possibility of a second referendum before the invocation of the Treaty of Lisbon Article 50 that establishes the mechanism for voluntary and unilaterally withdrawal from the European Union. The problem is that the withdrawal process has never been tested, and it could require much more than the two years usually indicated. However, at this point, Hard Brexit seems almost inevitable. In that case, the commercial relations of the United Kingdom with the European Union would comply with World Trade Organization rules, ceasing any obligation regarding the free movement provisions granted by the European citizenship. In all probability, the twenty-seven member countries will conduct their part of negotiations with an eye to the objective of holding together the European Union, provided that the European cohesion has not been already fatally undermined by other continental events, such as the forthcoming French elections and the results of the evolution of Italian politics.

To the extent that the European Union will be able to prevent an always possible chain reaction triggered by the United Kingdom, Brexit risks transforming transatlantic relations in the next decade. If the European project will be able to move forward and the Member States will be able to re-launch the process of creating an ever closer union, the Trump administration will necessarily review the way in which the United States interact with the European Union. The Trump administration will certainly be keen to maintain close relations with the United Kingdom. While the United Kingdom will remain a major financial and economic partner for the United States, Ireland is well placed to replace the United Kingdom as a potential gateway for US businesses seeking to penetrate the European market. However, the Trump administration will have no better choice than to strengthen ties with other allies at the European Union, in particular with that French that has always been a strong pillar of the European project.

In the new transatlantic environment, Brexit seems potentially able to create a breach in the European security and defense system. Although the Lisbon Treaty enhances the European Union's ability to act in the international arena, it also defines the foreign policy and defense issues such as inter-governmental policies. This means that Member States retain their power of veto, as well as their ability to conduct their own national security and defense policies, while the coordinating of their respective response to international crises is planned through the activation of organs such as the European Council.
This is the way in which the European Union has responded to the international crises of the last years and to all the other contingencies in which situations in which a common response, eventually involving also the United States was necessary.

The British authorities have always emphasized the point that Brexit will not change, in any way, UK military obligations undertaken within NATO. Since the vote, the United Kingdom has, in fact, strengthened its military presence in Estonia to defend the eastern front of the Atlantic Alliance; has renewed its submarine nuclear capabilities; and launched a closer collaboration with major Allies in the fight against the self-proclaimed Islamic State. Nevertheless, Brexit means for the European Union the loss of a member with strong historical ties with the countries of the Commonwealth and with a permanent seat on the United Nation Security Council. In other words, means losing a country that has played a major role in shaping the response of the European Union in a time of crises.

**Analysis, assessments and forecasts**

The United Kingdom will continue to be viewed as a major ally, and will be essential for the European Union and for the United States to maintain a close cooperation with this country in order to preserve the coherence and effectiveness of NATO. However, the fact that the United Kingdom will no longer have a seat in that European Council which periodically defines the political directions and priorities of the European Union, would force the United States to strengthen cooperation with other European Union members. This entire state of affairs seems to make of the French Republic the country to which the Trump administration will look with greater interest at reorganizing the relations between the two sides of the Atlantic. Although all NATO members provide a valuable contribution to the Atlantic Alliance, the French Republic and the United Kingdom are the major European military powers since the end of World War II. The French Republic has played an important role both in fighting and containing terrorism and civil unrest in its entire former colonial sphere. More recently, the French air force has provided the second largest contribution to the international coalition engaged in operations in Syria and Iraq.

In addition, the French Republic is also a nuclear power with a permanent seat in the Security Council of the United Nations, something that makes of this country a member of a very exclusive club. In the eyes of the United States, another strategic advantage enjoyed by the French Republic over the other European Union members is that in this country a military intervention does not need to rely on parliamentary approval, allowing for very short times of engagement in operations. A possible victory of Ms. Le Pen, at the now upcoming French elections, while it would slow down the European processes, would significantly increase that political and strategic convergence between the United States and the French Republic that already seems in the nature of things.