How Does Donald Trump's 2nd Presidency Affect the EU? Does It Make It Stronger or Weaker?

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Introduction: How Can Trump Be Considered a Crisis To the E.U.

The E.U. is faced with a poly-crisis that has caused discussion over whether the E.U. as an institution will fail and disintegrate, or grow stronger and affirm European integration. Some scholars believe that the E.U. has grown more adaptive to this poly-crisis and has reinvigorated the E.U.'s goals, projects, and reforms; which has in response caused greater integration (Rhinard et al. 128). Other scholars would argue that the E.U. has failed to define itself as a benevolent hegemon in a geopolitical context throughout the European continent, which has caused the institution to lack strategic direction (Rhinard et al. 204). Scholars who are pessimistic about the future of the E.U. also point to how the E.U. finds it difficult to connect with E.U. citizens, which is a factor of the growing Euroscepticism festering in European national political systems through radical political parties (Rhinard et al. 111). This debate is still ongoing with no clear or definite answer to this question; however, this thesis paper believes that the E.U.'s transnational relation with the U.S., specifically under the Trump Administration, is the key to determining whether the E.U. will fail or not. Donal Trump held his first presidential term from 2017 to 2021, and in those four years, his administration was able to shack E.U.-U.S. relations in a way no previous presidential administration had done before. Under the first Trump Administration, the U.S.'s interests in the transatlantic starkly differed from the interests of the E.U. and its member states.

As Donald Trump prepares to form his second administration cabinet, the rest of the world watches on with horror and anticipation to see what the president-elect will have in store for the world through his foreign policy agenda, especially vis-a-vis the E.U. Trump has exacerbated tensions that the United States and Europe have over defense security, and cybersecurity issues, tariffs on E.U.-U.S. trade of aluminum and steel, energy and climate issues

concerning sustainability, and health security. Currently, as president-elect, Trump has also made many concerning statements with his unique "peace through strength" approach, from threatening that as president he will continue fighting the E.U.-U.S. tariff war, to impulsively claiming that he will end the Russian-Ukraine War "within a day". The president-elect seems convinced that if he pushes for U.S. interests in such a reckless manner, other foreign leaders would fall in line. However; many of the interests that Trump champions go against or strain the E.U.'s interests. The E.U. is a prominent international organization that can be considered a challenge to Trump and his administration concerning U.S. interests on the European continent, and even U.S. interests abroad in the Middle East and China because the E.U. has been working towards strengthening its organization ever since Donald Trump's first presidency. E.U. member states have been working together to define their common interests, allowing the E.U. and its members to act as a strong unified front so that Europe can become independent from the protections of U.S. security.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz stated that "The European Union must stand close together and act in a united manner" in response to Trump's re-election, but is it possible for the E.U. to become stronger in its integration (Irish and Melander)? Many E.U. member states are facing challenges domestically and Trump's threats to trade and security in Europe only increase the number of crises that the E.U. faces. In this paper, the research conducted hopes to predict whether the 2nd Trump Administration could potentially cause disintegration in the E.U., ultimately leading to its failure; or if the E.U. is capable of adapting to Donald Trump's radical conservatism whims while working towards ensuring its own interests. The previous research done on the 1st Trump Administration all points to chaos erupting in all sectors that the E.U. prioritizes, so the E.U.'s disintegration due to Trump threatening E.U. interests is very likely if

E.U. members are unable to cooperate and prepare for the inevitable future with Trump as president.

Literature Review: How Did The E.U. Handle the First Trump Presidency?

The European Union is currently facing a poly-crisis, which is defined as "the tight sequence of integration crises the E.U. has undergone since the outbreak of the euro crisis" (Rhinard et al. 19). The poly-crisis the E.U. is facing encompasses issues such as COVID-19, Russian-Ukraine War, the 2008 - 2010 Financial Crisis, the Climate Crisis, the Migration Crisis, and Brexit; which manifest threats to European integration by making apparent the domestic differences between E.U. member states. During COVID-19, E.U. member states were forced to focus on issues such as the rise in unemployment and increasing death rates on a domestic level; and the 2008-2010 Financial Crisis showed major macroeconomic differences between E.U. member states. The Russian-Ukraine War brought to light the E.U.'s shortcomings as an institution since it failed to understand Russia's interest in geopolitics and the E.U. lacked a concept of how to build democratic institutions in states that lacked the essential features of one. The Climate Crisis illustrated how the E.U. can lack the commitment to a crisis weakens when more immediate issues present themselves, the Migration Crisis placed pressure on domestic governments to focus on their states rather than ensuring E.U. integration. Brexit even challenged the E.U.'s legitimacy and E.U. member's commitment to the E.U.'s core fundamental values; however, the most surprising factor to the E.U.'s poly-crisis was Donald Trump and his 2017-2021 Presidency.

After Donald Trump's first presidential term, which began on January 20, 2017, and ended on January 20, 2021, scholars had much to analyze, specifically how the Trump Administration handled U.S. relations with foreign states. During the 2016 presidential election,

few European states believed Donald Trump would win the presidency, so they were completely unprepared for the first Trump Administration's foreign policy. Scholars Shapiro and Pardijs in 2017 found that three main views arose in Europe after Trump's shocking victory in the 2016 presidential election; European officials either viewed Trump as a madman, a messiah, or an anarchist. Eighteen of the twenty-eight E.U. member states believed Donald Trump to be a madman. They hoped the Trump administration would have competent cabinet members and ambassadors who would do most of the diplomatic work. At the same time, Trump just acted as a presidential figurehead and nothing more (Shapiro and Pardijs 3). Seven of the twenty-eight E.U. member states were convinced that Trump's first presidency would call for the end of the modern transatlantic system, and E.U. member states needed to work towards European reformation if Europe wished to survive the destruction Trump's foreign policy would bring about.

Only four E.U. member states and small conservative populist parties had confidence that as president, Donald Trump would act as a "messiah", or a leader who signaled a new era in international diplomacy, and who would guide states all over the world into a new age of international relations. Shapiro and Pardijs' findings suggest that overall the reaction towards Donald Trump, even before his presidency began was not a positive one, and now with a second Trump presidency just a few months away these reactions are a telling tale of Europe's feelings toward the president-elect. John Peterson notes that during his first presidential term, Donald Trump made it clear that he believed American allies owed the United States for all of its past and present security guarantees that were not directly a part of the U.S.'s national interests. After the Cold War, the security guarantees that the U.S. provided to Europe slowly began to be viewed as unnecessary by American conservatives (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 114). Trump was also confident in claiming that every trade deal the U.S. was in took advantage of the U.S. and

cheated hardworking Americans from benefiting from their tax dollars; while also showing favoritism towards authoritarian leaders and not towards his democratically elected counterparts (Peterson 8). In response to Donald Trump's challenges, twenty-five of twenty-nine NATO member states increased defense spending during Trump's first year in office, while also creating new command centers in Europe as a way to easily move military and defense forces across the continent during a crisis. The E.U. also threatened retaliatory sanctions on goods such as bourbon, blue jeans, and motorcycles when Donald Trump put tariffs on imported steel.

These responses as Peterson notes show how the Trump presidency opened an opportunity for E.U. states to become stronger, independent, and more unified by defining and establishing E.U. interests against Trump's opposing interests for the United States. E.U. leaders also had to "to step up their efforts to preserve multilateralism and ensure the liberal international system's survival" (Peterson 12), while Trump pushed his "America First" Policy in the U.S.'s international relations. However, during Trump's first presidency, the E.U. was faced with a poly-crisis and did not have the proper coordination or resources to completely assert itself against the U.S. Some scholars argue that the problems of E.U.-U.S. transatlantic relations cannot all be attributed to Donald Trump's becoming president or the isolationist foreign policy he championed under U.S. interests. Rather the E.U. is a strong international actor that can push back against Donald Trump's threats and pressures when U.S. foreign policy takes an opposing stance to E.U. interests (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 117). Scholars Aggestam and Hyde-Price in 2019 mention how even though the Trump Administration tried to change trading terms between the E.U. and the U.S., the economic relationship between the E.U. and the U.S. is too strong and deep for Donald Trump to have changed in just four years.

Aggestam and Hyde-Price also show instances where the E.U. had defined and strengthened its interests during the first Trump administration against Trump's interests for the U.S., such as with the Iranian Nuclear Deal and NATO. The E.U. believed the JCPOA to be crucial for diplomacy and sought its preservation, while Trump worked to get the U.S. out of the JCPOA claiming it was "the worst deal ever negotiated" (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 119), so the E.U. was forced to take on a leadership role on this foreign policy issue. With NATO, the E.U. holds that this alliance is the "bedrock of peace, security, and stability on the European continent" (Aggestam and Hyde-Price 121) while the Trump administration believed all members of NATO are free riders of U.S. security. However, since the E.U. acts as an outside pressure on the U.S., and the U.S. Congress and American citizens act as inside pressure, Trump was limited in his retaliatory action against NATO members. Scholars, such as Aggestam and Hyde-Price, found that Donald Trump renewed the E.U.'s aspiration for European strategic autonomy, but the attempts made during the first Trump administration were not as strong or unified as hoped since European states had differing interests such as on defense in Europe. Kaminski discusses how many issues plaguing the E.U. are domestic-based, such as food security and health security, and the only impact that the Trump presidency had was helping E.U. officials realize that they need to be able to "define and defend European interests" (Kaminski 37), or the E.U. will risk being exploited or defenseless against the E.U.'s security issues.

Even during Trump's first administration, there were instances of U.S.-E.U. cooperation at lower levels that were outside of the executive branch's control, even though Trump's isolationist foreign policy caused the E.U. to distrust America's commitment to their relations (Riddervold and Newsome 131). European political actors recognize U.S. foreign policy as "independent of any sitting president", since such institutions will continuously change with new

administrations being elected term after term in both the E.U. and the U.S. Therefore, though Trump's initial actions intended to break the traditional relations the U.S. has with the E.U., the European Union was able to survive Trump's onslaught through patchy unification efforts made by E.U. member states. However, it is important to mention that during the second half of Trump's first term, the coronavirus pandemic struck the world in 2020, which caused multiple crises in the world economy and generated socio-political instability due to countries closing their borders and isolating themselves (Asturov and Martynov 37). COVID-19 led to many radical policies across many states, so it was difficult to determine Trump's continuing effects on Europe during the second half of his first presidency since all states in the international sphere were preoccupied with health security in their borders. Then in the 2020 Presidential Election, current President Biden beat Donald Trump to become the 46th President of the United States of America, and upon hearing such results a wave of relief struck the world, especially Europe.

The E.U. hoped that President Biden would repair the damage that Donald Trump had done to E.U.-U.S. relations, so once President Biden took office on January 20, 2021, he took immediate action to show that "America was back" (Dimitrova 6). Unlike Trump's foreign policy, President Biden's foreign policy emphasized multilateralism, and the U.S.'s recommitment to the liberal international order and their allies to help in solving international issues. Under President Biden, the U.S. was once again projecting the image of the U.S. as a world leader, and he solidified this image by participating in the G7 summit, attending NATO meetings, and making efforts to rejoin the World Health Organization and the Paris Climate Agreement. E.U. member states were relieved over President Biden's assertion that the U.S. is committed to NATO military security, but since experiencing the first Trump presidency, E.U. member states believed that they must transition into becoming less dependent on the United

States. E.U. member states used Biden's commitment claim as an opportunity to increase their efforts to be independent in facing their own security concerns by taking advantage of the resources that the U.S. provided while adding their own resources to slowly replace U.S. funds to European security (Amaro). Though President Biden brought hope to the E.U., the Biden administration still failed to end the trade war that Donald Trump initiated with Europe during Trump's first presidency, which caused the E.U. to lower their expectations of President Biden's promises.

Now, after the 2024 Presidential Election, the E.U. must once more endure facing Donald Trump's foreign policy after the President-elects sweeping victory against Presidential Democratic candidate Kamala Harris. E.U. member states have experienced going through the first Trump presidency; and therefore, must be prepared once more for the inevitable chaos that the second Trump presidency will bring to the liberal international order. The E.U. member states' reactions to Trump's 2024 presidential election victory definitely differ from their reactions to Trump's 2017 presidential election win. The E.U. has been seen making rapid preparations to prepare for if they must independently aid European security without the financial support of the United States; however, there are still many sectors in the E.U. that are dependent on U.S. cooperation. NATO is considered key to Europe's territorial security, especially with the threat of Russia and the ongoing war in Ukraine so close, but a second Trump presidency has the potential to threaten that. There are also still many internal difficulties that the E.U. faces concerning the permanent structured cooperation plan (PESCO) on topics of inclusivity, operation initiatives, and third-party relationships (Aggestam and Hyde-Price, 121 & 123).

Therefore, this paper hypothesizes the E.U. would fail if it was deprived of the security that the U.S. alliance brings to Europe, and at this moment in time, Donald Trump is the main catalyst to lead the E.U. to failure. In January, Donald Trump will take office once more, and the efforts President Biden has made to improve the relationship between the U.S. and the E.U. may immediately collapse upon Trump's swearing into office. It would be impossible for the E.U. to have fully stabilized a cooperation strategy for all their security issues when Donald Trump takes office in January; therefore, this paper argues that the E.U. will fail due to the defection of E.U. member states.

Theory Section: Liberal Intergovernmentalism and Its Effect on European Integration

European integration is a specific regional process in which European states become closely connected and share similar goals through cooperation in political, economic, and social spheres on a regional level. One popular theory on integration is liberal intergovernmentalism, which argues that states are the controlling actors in an integration process because states use their bargaining powers to promote national interests and form credible commitments with one another as a way of promoting their interests (Scheidt 9). Andrew Moravcsik, the father of liberal intergovernmentalism, believed that states were mainly driven by achieving their country's domestic economic interests, which were pushed by rational actors and interest groups residing in the state, and were therefore willing to pool and delegate "national sovereignty to a minimum extent necessary to make their mutual commitments credible" (Kleine and Pollack 1493). Liberal intergovernmentalism also views supranational institutions as not as important to integration as state actors are because supranational institutions do not take into account the socioeconomic dynamics between states that can affect the success of integration. This theory focuses on regions

as the perfect level for creating an integrated forum through which states can negotiate their economic interests and make commitments that will create common goals that will allow each state to achieve some form of their goals. Morvacsik saw the European Union as being rooted in liberal intergovernmentalism because European member states can achieve their domestic interests by aggregating such interests through delegating authority and pooling national sovereignty.

Moravcski argued that geopolitical and ideological interests in Europe are secondary to each state's economic interests; however, when economic gain was uncertain for states in the international sphere, regional interests prevailed and increased integration in the E.U. Under liberal intergovernmentalism, states can champion their interests and domestic issues, which can create more comprehensive and inclusive regional values (Borg 353); however, the theory fails to take into account how European integration creates a form of socialization that affects how European states define their interests and fails to explain how Europe amassed mobilization and discourse by Europe's public on issues surrounding the concept of European identity (Kleine and Pollack 1497). The trends of European socialization and talks of a European identity prove that states can be influenced by the supranational institutions that they are a part of. Though liberal intergovernmentalism is limited in explaining such concepts and trends, this theory identifies other important challenges to integration. For example, liberal intergovernmentalism highlights that integration cannot completely solve the underlying tensions felt by member states due to the region's universal interests and values competing with each state's particular domestic values and interests.

Liberal intergovernmentalism views the E.U. as an exemplary model for regional integration. Still, the status as a role model gives the E.U. vast amounts of responsibility and

obligation to aid other regions in reaching the same level of integration and become important actors in shaping international relations (Borg 357). The weight of responsibility can create resentment in European states towards the international world since they are providing time and resources to other states when they have domestic issues that should be attended to. The resentment felt internally by European states explains the increase in populist conservatives in European states who are challenging the legitimacy of the E.U. and calling for disintegration. European right-wing populists are calling for their state to focus on domestic interests and issues rather than giving up some of their government's autonomy to follow the E.U.'s obligations and interests that don't always align with or benefit their domestic goals. This disconnect between the domestic and regional levels can frustrate a state's domestic rational actors and interest groups, which has caused an increase in "Euroscepticism", and acts as a major block to any progress in strengthening integration.

Though these flaws hinder and challenge the legitimacy and strength of the E.U., the idea under liberal intergovernmentalism that states in the same region will increase integration when their economic gain is uncertain can explain the E.U.'s reaction to Trump's re-election. Donald Trump's threats to increase import taxes are a threat to the European state's economic security; therefore, it's in the best interests of European states to strengthen their integration as a way of ensuring their potential economic gains aren't hampered by Trump's challenges to trade imports. The uncertainty that European states feel with a looming 2nd Trump presidency would incentivize the E.U. to decrease its dependency on the U.S. for trade and security and increase its integration as much as possible to achieve strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy was first termed in 1994 to identify, "the E.U.'s [security and] common defense policy and [define] NATO's European pillar"; however, currently strategic autonomy has been used to "assert

Europe's independence and respond to the weakening of the link with the United States" (Van den Abeele 13). As an entity, strategic autonomy views Europe as capable of making decisions and defining its interests for the future without being dependent on the E.U.'s biggest partner, the United States. Therefore, the most considerable E.U. member states are currently calling for all E.U. member states to increase European integration, by ensuring Europe's strategic autonomy on security defense and economic policies, in order to become independent from the U.S. and ensure that the interest of the E.U. can be defined and challenged.

Though liberal intergovernmentalism points to the E.U. becoming stronger and more integrated by the uncertainty that Trump's threats to trade and security bring, the question now lies in whether E.U. member states can become more united in their E.U. interests before Donald Trump takes office in January. Donald Trump brings to the international community an isolationist agenda where he aims at making bilateral agreements with states rather than through a regional or international organization because such organizations will push for the U.S. to make commitments that according to Trump do not benefit the U.S. If Donald Trump can challenge the E.U. to the point where the member states are facing difficulty in achieving their economic interests, Trump could pressure the states who are struggling most to form bilateral agreements that could undermine the integrity and legitimacy of the E.U., possibly causing disintegration that could weaken the E.U. Under liberal intergovernmentalism states are only concerned with maximizing their gains and minimizing their losses, so they choose to make "mutual adjustments [to] increase… welfare" (Kleine and Pollack 1498), which can also be interpreted to mean that states are only focused on achieving their own goals who are willing to change commitments when it benefits them. Therefore, it is possible that European states would prioritize their state's relations with the U.S. over their position and membership in the E.U. if

E.U. member states cannot come together and offer a safeguard to weaker E.U. member states that Trump's 2nd Presidency will severely hit.

Analysis: European States' Domestic Politics Cause Fragmentation

E.U. diplomats have even openly stated to news outlets that the E.U. has been preparing for strategic autonomy from the United States because Europe is aware that there could potentially be an emergence of future presidents who think and act similarly to Donald Trump who would hope to see through U.S. interests that go against E.U. interests (Amaro). However, it does not look like the E.U. has done much in their supposed 12 months of preparations for Trump's return to Washington D.C. since there has been no policy that has set in stone an E.U. strategy against the radical conservative leader. Rather, it seems that many E.U. member states wish to comply with as much of the 2nd Trump administration's potential demands as possible without having to give up the organization's principles (Liboreiro). During the E.U.'s 2024 summit meeting in Budapest on November 7th, it seemed to be held by some governmental officials that it is in the E.U.'s best interest to preserve E.U.-U.S. relations through the next Trump Presidency. The Cyprus President, Nikos Christodoulides, and the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Luc Frieden, both made comments during the Budapest meeting that expressed their desire for the E.U. and its member states to preserve and enhance the E.U.'s relationship with the U.S. because the U.S. is Europe's main ally and security provider. Other leaders like Frieden and Christodoulides decided the best strategy would be to wait for Trump to fill out his Cabinet and solidify his foreign agenda so that the E.U. could collectively respond to the 2nd Trump Administration's agenda. Still, such a decision should be considered a misstep in E.U. member states' mindset that can lead the E.U. to its downfall.

However, a lot of current discourse under multimedia platforms has been discussing what the E.U. should do after Trump's win, come to the conclusion that E.U. member states cannot panic nor be in denial of Trump's return to the White House because both fear responses will lead to the E.U. becoming complicit to Trump's pressures. If E.U. member states become complicit to Trump's whims, that will hinder the E.U. in acting as a unified front against the 2nd Trump Administration for the next four years (Leonard). With the limited time the E.U. has left before Trump is inaugurated, the E.U. must draft detailed plans in order to "develop its own political, economic, military, industrial, and technological capabilities to be able to defend its interests in a world of great-power competition" (Quencez). This task is already difficult since it will take the E.U.'s biggest member states - France, Germany, Poland, Italy, and Spain - to lead an E.U. forum on strategic autonomy from the United States, but each of the biggest E.U. member states has differing domestic interests that Donald Trump will most likely try to take advantage of. Italy struggles with high public debt (Reuters), struggles to meet the 2% spending target under NATO, is working on placing restrictive measures on immigration, and has the most right-winged government since World War II led by conservative Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni (Kirby). Germany is severely politically divided because the current German government is failing due to the "traffic light" coalition - consisting of - the Social Democratic Party of Germany, also known as the SPD, the Free Democratic Party (FDP); and the Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, also known as the Greens - collapsing, faces a rise in populist right-wing parties, relies heavily on the US as a trading partner, is pursuing restrictive measure on immigration, and has significantly increased its defense fund (von Lieres).

France also has severe political divisions causing no political group to hold a majority in the French government and ultimately leading to the fall of the French government. A rise in

far-right parties started discourse over a French referendum and has caused President Marcon to lose power, and France also faces a ghastly debt crisis due to 50 years of continuous deficit spending (Perkins). Poland, run by President Andrzej Duda and the populist conservative party Law and Justice, is mainly concerned with the Russian-Ukraine War since Poland's territorial security could be threatened by Russia's ambitions to expand if the Trump administration plans to deprive Ukraine of its territorial integrity (Baranowski). Spain is concerned over the olive oil market since the country's economy relies heavily on importing olive oil into the U.S., and is trying to focus on increasing its maritime security (Iribarren). Each of the big E.U. member states has differing interests in similar sectors of foreign policy; therefore, it would seem unlikely that big E.U. member states would be able to find common ground on European interests before Trump is sworn in in less than a month. So Trump's reelection will "more realistically [will] lead to a general fragmentation of the continent" because European states will want to be in the good graces of the Trump administration and will likely make bilateral deals with the U.S. (Quencez). This fragmentation will most likely cause disintegration inside the European Union because the domestic politics of each E.U. member state does not fully align with one another to create a common defined interest that it could defend against the U.S. The main states urging for E.U. unification are Germany and France because both states have publicly called for a more united E.U. since it was announced that Trump will be president once more. Both states have vowed to take leadership roles in order to strengthen the E.U. against Trump's isolationist agenda; however, Germany and France are currently at odds over issues that they believe the E.U. needs to define as common interests. For example, Germany and France are both staunch supporters of the E.U. having strategic autonomy over Europe's defense security but both find conflict over how to finance defense spending (Irish and Melander), how to manage Europe's energy grid, and

what percentage of tariffs should be imposed to challenge the tariffs that Trump will implement once in office (Christie).

The world is only weeks away from witnessing a second Trump Presidency, and the fact that Germany and France – considered to be co-leaders of the European unification process – are unable to define common interests for the E.U. between themselves, sadly shows that fragmentation will be the likely reality of the E.U. since member states have been unable to come together over defining common interests. Of the other E.U. member states mentioned, some seem more likely to work towards pursuing positive bilateral relations with the president-elect, as such relations would aid them greatly in helping them meet their interests. Poland; for example, is struggling with figuring out how to house 3.5 million Ukrainian refugees for the long term, while worrying that their state would become Russia's next target if Ukraine falls (Duszczyk and Kaczmarczyk). To fight for its interests it would make sense for Poland to deal with the Trump administration through bilateral treaty talks rather than go through an international organization such as the E.U. Poland has increased its NATO spending to 2% GDP - making the state a leader in NATO defense spending - which can enhance Poland's standing in bilateral talks with the U.S. under Trump to show that Poland can be a committed partner to the US in defense against Russia.

Poland also has a better chance of having favorable talks with Trump outside of the E.U. since historically, Poland has always had good bilateral relations with the U.S. whether the U.S. presidency was under the Republican party or the Democratic party, so with Trump in office, this bilateral relationship is unlikely to change. Poland's far-right party, the Law and Justice Party (PIS), also had a good relationship with Trump during Trump's first presidency since President Duda and Trump are politically aligned; therefore, it is favorable for Poland to work with Trump

privately to ensure that Russia is kept in check. Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is also politically aligned with Donald Trump, specifically acting as a leader confronting the China-Russian nexus, which acts as an important stepping stone in forming strong bilateral relations. Though Meloni has also urged the E.U. to focus on itself after the U.S.'s 2024 Election, most scholars agree that Meloni would be a potentially good partner for Trump. Prime Minister Meloni has pushed forward an "Italy First" agenda that is very similar to Trump's "America First" plan, so it should be Meloni's main objective to have bilateral discussions with the president-elect; for example, over talks to advance each states' shared interests in the Indo-Mediterranean trade (Arha and Messa). States like France or Germany however have leaders that are not politically aligned with Donald Trump, and who - for lack of better words - do not get along with the president-elect at all, which will make bilateral negotiations and talks rather difficult. French President Emmanuel Macron, and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, have had a tumultuous relationship with President-elect Trump during his first presidency, and they both worry about Trump's threats on increasing tariffs and decreasing defense security in NATO.

Previously Trump had clashed with Germany's former chancellor, Angela Merkel, over its participation in NATO (Paternoster); and Trump and Macron had made hateful remarks against each other concerning their differing stances on all economic and security issues. Therefore, it does make sense that Germany and France would work towards unifying Europe in defining common interests since they will be able to challenge and defend their own states against Trump. But as previously mentioned, neither Germany nor France could even agree on common interests through their bilateral relations, and currently, Macron and Scholz are facing "political crises" where the rise of populist conservatism in their respective states has weakened their roles as leaders. Their weakened positions in their state governments have even made it

hard for Germany and France to defend their agendas at the E.U. (Hess), so it can reasonably be concluded that it would be impossible for Germany and France to unify all E.U. member states together to create defined common interests. The informal summit meeting in Budapest with E.U. leaders can be argued to show that all E.U. member states are making efforts to increase E.U. competitiveness and independence against the U.S. as Trump prepares to reenter the presidential office.

However, there has been no detailed plan created by the leaders concerning how a new European competitiveness deal should be implemented, since E.U. leaders only "stressed" and "emphasized" the importance of creating a more unified Europe. During the summit, E.U. leaders discussed "taking decisive steps towards a savings and investment union by 2026", the need for industrial policy to help Europe remain an industrial powerhouse, and the High Representative and the Commission needing to present options for public and private funding on defense, etc. (Casinge and Piperidis). These discussions only show that E.U. member states are still working on creating a defined common interest, and such talks without decisive action will do no good for the E.U. since Trump will be sworn into office in January 2025. This summit reveals just how little progress the E.U. was able to make in unifying its interests, so a lot of the E.U. leader's statements urging the E.U. to strengthen itself or become more unified in its agenda have very little weight in actually initiating change. And so E.U. member states would fare better in having bilateral relations with Trump over issues such as security and trade, which Trump would much more prefer over discussing any international matters with the E.U.

During his first presidency, Donald Trump had a very bilateral transactional approach to diplomacy while using economic statecraft - using economic means to achieve foreign policy goals - as a tool (Balfour and Ülgen). Currently, as president-elect, Trump has already threatened

Canada and Mexico with higher import tariffs if they don't help stop the flow of illegal drugs and immigrants into the United States, which shows that Trump is willing to use economic threats to achieve his foreign policy goals. Therefore, through his second administration, Trump will most likely use the threats of increasing import tariffs, the U.S. leaving NATO, and the US leaving the E.U. out of peace talks with Russia to cause fear in E.U. member states in order to make European states docile in Trump's efforts to achieve his foreign policy goals in Europe. For example, the threats of increasing import tariffs directly target Italy and Spain, since Italy's car industries will be hurt by Trump's claims of increasing tariffs on steel and aluminum for locomotives, and Spain's olive oil market will be severely affected by the general tariffs Trump warns he will put on all imported goods coming into the US. Trump's threatening remarks about the US leaving NATO would also worry Italy and Poland since Italy struggles to meet the 2% spending on defense for NATO, and Poland is territorially right next to the Russian-Ukraine War.

These three states would be under immense pressure from Donald Trump, and since there is very little time for all 29 E.U. member states to come together and define common interests they can challenge and defend against Trump's interests. It makes sense for states that have been dependent on the U.S. to get in the good graces of Trump by focusing on bilateral relations with the U.S., outside of the E.U. Though German and French leaders both publicly declare their distaste for the present-elect and his foreign strategy approach, both leaders cannot do much to bring other E.U. member states to take on a more detailed approach than just saying they urge the E.U. to come together since they have been severely weakened by their domestic politics. Far-right populist parties in Germany France, and Romania have actually been bolstered by Trump's reelection since Trump's reelection can show their electability to government by demonstrating how they are politically aligned with Donald Trump (Bond et al.). There are also

E.U. member states such as Hungary and Slovakia, whose leaders, Hungarian autocrat Viktor Orbán and Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico, welcome Trump's reentering into the White House with excitement believing that the world needs Trump to fix it. Orbán and Fico, have followed Trump's past policies when it came to restricting immigration policies, have taken similar stances as Trump over the Russian-Ukraine War, and are both as skeptical as Trump towards international institutions (Naughtie).

Both can be considered outliers in the E.U., but the fact that there are states inside the E.U. that support Trump's far-right ideologies and isolationist agenda shows that there are small steps internally in the European Union with some E.U. member states to follow a similar Trump policy. Member states like Hungary and Slovakia also do not help the E.U. in solidifying defined interests that can be strong enough to defend and challenge the second Trump administration's foreign policy, since their leaders won't want to challenge Trump's interests in Europe. Hungary and Slovakia's Trump-style policies differ greatly from the liberal policies that France's Macron and Germany's Scholz urge the E.U. to take on, which further adds to the point that fragmentation could be the reality for E.U. member states. There are also small Central and Eastern E.U. member states, like Romania for example, who are facing an increase in populist right parties and officials that have consequentially debilitated or halted the functions of government. Romanian parliamentary and presidential elections were held after the U.S. presidential elections, and the far-right candidate presidential candidate, Călin Georgescu, unexplainably won the first round of elections. Romania's Constitutional Court has suspected Russian interference in the elections in favor of Georgescu and has postponed the electoral process until further notice, and caused a halt in governmental proceedings.

Though there is suspected outside interference in Romanian affairs, Georgescu still has the support of millions of Romanians and three far-right groups that have recently been elected to parliament (Ross and Popoviciu). Therefore, this halt in the Romanian government and other small state governments have been facing, does no good for potential further E.U. integration, since such states are too focused on stabilizing domestic politics. Under this reality, it would be better for member states to focus on creating a domestic foreign policy approach that can handle Trump than keep having discourse with their counterparts, which will lead to no progress made on the E.U. having coherent common interests. Romania also, as a small Eastern state, is heavily dependent on its relations with the United States, especially regarding security and economic issues concerning the Black Sea and Russia. Since Trump will push more for bilateral relations, Romania and other small weak Central and Eastern European states, would benefit more in focusing more on bilateral relations with Trump's U.S. than risk their economic interest and security on the promises made by the considerable E.U. member states calling for strategic autonomy. Fragmentation over foreign policy in dealing with the US under Trump leads to the question of whether the E.U.'s internal division on common interests can potentially lead to E.U. member states considering leaving the E.U. if it benefits them, which is not an impossibility since the United Kingdom left the E.U. officially in January 2020. When Brexit was voted on in the UK, the polls indicated that many U.K. citizens wanted their government to have control over domestic issues rather than the U.K. having to follow E.U. rules and regulations on how domestic issues should be handled.

Brexit was a huge blow to the E.U. since the U.K. was one of the biggest members who contributed a lot financially to the organization, and it was difficult for the E.U. and the U.K. to figure out how to become separate from each other since the U.K.'s economy is deeply

entrenched with the E.U. There was also a major dispute over how the U.K. sharing borders with Ireland would affect either state, and there was concern over what British citizen's rights would look like across Europe once the U.K. exited the European Union. Once the U.K. officially left the E.U., other countries were somewhat inspired and started domestic discourse over whether their own states should consider doing the same, such as French far-right populist parties calling for a 'Frexit'. Though Trump wasn't a reason for the U.K. deciding to leave the E.U. through Brexit, with the second Trump administration coming faster than most would like, it may be in the interests of E.U. member states that depend on the US for NATO support and economic stability. The E.U. has only made statements to urge E.U. unification but has failed to implement programs on how E.U. member states can challenge Trump's foreign policy interests without facing negative consequences.

Conclusion: Will The E.U. Weaken or Disintegrate Under Another Four Years of Donald Trump?

The E.U. therefore does not present any safeguard against Trump's threats to impose import tariffs or halt NATO defense spending for the sake of "peace talks" with Russia and Ukraine. That is why most EU states, though saying they want to help create a stronger EU, will most likely focus on creating bilateral relations with Donald Trump's second administration so that they will be able to strike a deal that at least may be beneficial to them domestically. Many news outlets such as Politico, Euronews, Reuters, and CNBC have written many articles concerning how E.U.-U.S. relations would change now that Trump has become president once again and how the E.U. will respond to Trump's threats. The biggest E.U. member states won't even be able to rally or guide the smaller E.U. member states to further increase E.U. integration, because their domestic issues stop them from forming defined common interests. Right-populist

parties also continue to gain popularity in European states, which hinders integration because conservatives are only interested in achieving their state's goals and not giving up sovereignty to follow a supranational organization that does not completely align with their state's domestic interests. French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz are the most prominent supporters of forming a stronger E.U., and though France and Germany are both powerful states that could lead toward furthering European integration, both these leaders have lost their power and influence due to their state's governments failing.

It is also important to mention that on December 1st, two new E.U. leaders were elected to the European Parliament the new FP chief, former Estonian prime minister, Kaja Kallas, as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission; and, former Prime Minister of Portugal, António Costa, as the new E.U. Council President. These two new leaders are entering office right before Trump is sworn into office in January, which leaves very little room for António Costa and Kaja Kallas to define and defend their priorities. Though Kaja Kallas and António Costa are known to be liberal political leaders who are prominent supporters of E.U. integration, there is not enough time to understand how their policies will react to Donald Trump's threats. Since new leaders are taking important positions in the E.U. at this time, it will be difficult for E.U. officials to come together and lead E.U. member states towards increasing integration when the European Parliament has at the moment no set plan on how to achieve and defend E.U. interests. Therefore, it seems like the E.U. will start to weaken or at most disintegrate as weak E.U. member states will most likely decide to form strong bilateral relations with the U.S. rather than wait for E.U. leaders and strong member states to create policies that could defend their interests against the 2nd Trump Administration. It will be difficult to predict to what degree the E.U. will either weaken or

disintegrate or if it will occur at all, so the world must wait until Trump is inaugurated in January to see what the next four years will look like for U.S. - E.U. relations.

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