

Trump's Rants Won't Unite the EU and Russia (Op-ed)

The EU has little choice but to prepare for a battle on two fronts.

By [Vladimir Frolov](#)

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Handout / Reuters

U.S. President Donald Trump waded into German politics this week with a manipulative tweet that argued, “The people of Germany are returning against their leadership as migration is rocking the already tenuous Berlin coalition.” He falsely added that “crime in Germany is way up.” (It is actually at the lowest level since 1992.)

Trump’s unsolicited intervention on a raw issue came at a sensitive moment in Berlin. A rift over migrants has threatened to unravel Angela Merkel’s governing coalition. Given the stakes, Trump’s gloating came across as a deliberate attempt to destabilize the German government and hasten Merkel’s downfall.

And in the context of scandalous comments made earlier this year by U.S. Ambassador to

Germany Richard Grenell, who said his mission was to boost far-right anti-EU parties, Trump's tweet looked all the more like crude political interference. Former Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt responded on social media, saying: "Is Putin interfering trying to destabilize the politics of the EU? Yes. But Trump is at the moment far worse. This is unheard of."

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Indeed, when U.S. presidents meddled in the politics of foreign states before, it was usually to foster democratic change among U.S. adversaries, not racist fissures among the closest U.S. allies. Trump, of course, does not care about German politics.

It is quite possible that he would not mind seeing Angela Merkel, President Obama's closest international partner, ousted. But what he is actually doing is opportunistically using immigration as a dividing issue to mobilize his base for the midterm elections in November.

Merkel will survive this crisis. She remains Germany's most popular politician. German crime statistics "speak for themselves," Merkel fired back at Trump. Trump is so unpopular in Europe that his criticism may actually work as a catalyst for European unity, despite calls for a Trumpist Axis in European politics by far-right nationalist parties.

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For Moscow, Trump's hostility towards allies may look like an opportunity to close ranks with Europe, end EU-Russia hostility, normalize trade and mobilize a challenge to U.S. "America First" unilateralism.

But don't bet on it. Russia actually stands to gain from a United States weakened by Trump's disruptive rhetoric. If anything, Moscow will work tactically to drive the wedge between the U.S. and the EU even further.

Nor will Moscow ally itself with EU leaders against Trump. Moscow might have endorsed Europe's decision to stay with the Iran deal, but it will not push for Macron's move to now accommodate Washington's new demands. Russia may join Europe in retaliating against U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminum, but Russia's trade with the United States is symbolic.

Russia will never join the EU in opposition to Trump's America. It will play one against the other, like when Putin humiliated Macron by offering Russian security guarantees in place of America's.

The Kremlin's view of the world is closer to Trump's than it is to Merkel's or Macron's. Both Putin and Trump resent the international rules-based order as an unnecessary constraint on their freedom to act; they see it as encroaching on their sovereignty. Both see "the rules" not as obligations that bind countries, large and small alike, but as "deals" between major powers and their leaders to be implemented with scant regard for their consequences for smaller nations.

"Russia will never join the EU in opposition to Trump's America."

This is what Putin means when he appeals to Washington "to sit down and develop the rules of the road together on trade and European security." He will have a shot at it in July when he meets Trump in Vienna.

Russia's disagreement with the EU on the international rules-based order is irreconcilable. It goes to the heart of Moscow's doctrine of "full sovereignty" — the right of rulers to do as they please at home and abroad. Russia's foreign policy strategy is to be untethered and unconstrained by alliances.

The EU has little choice but to prepare for a battle on two fronts, against Russia and America, if it wants to sustain the rules-based order. It is gradually waking up to this uncomfortable reality.

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