

Security Challenges to Modern Europe

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INTRODUCTION

The security of the European Union is being challenged like never before. Central tenets of the international system that Europeans helped build are eroding or even disintegrating one by one. Great power competition is increasingly shaping Europeans' security environment, while other security threats are also on the rise, from terrorism and cyber-attacks to climate change.

The EU now faces security threats from its east and south – and an uncertain ally in the West.

To the east, a new kind of uneasy neighbourly relationship with Russia is developing – one that appears to involve Europeans accepting Russian meddling in their political affairs, from deliberate interference in elections to cyber-attacks on European companies, systems, and political machinery. Further east, China continues to deepen its influence on EU states through trade and investment in the Union and its neighborhood.

To the south, European countries now rely on cooperation with an increasingly autocratic regime in Ankara on some of the issues that their citizens are most concerned about, particularly migration and counter-terrorism. Meanwhile, conflicts and poverty on the other side of the Mediterranean, and the migration that stems from them, are increasingly challenging Europe's security and even its solidarity.

Most importantly, to the west, US President Donald Trump is demonstrating a total disregard for the international agreements and norms that Europeans hold dear. By withdrawing from the Paris climate change deal, by pulling out of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on Iran's nuclear programme, and by attacking the integrity of the international trading system through the unilateral imposition of tariffs, Trump has called into question Europeans' formerly unshakeable faith in diplomacy as a way to resolve disagreements and to protect Europe. European leaders now fear that the transatlantic security guarantee will centre not on alliances and common interests but purchases of American technology and materiel – and on obeisance to an unpredictable president.

Europeans are – understandably – worried about this picture. But they are divided on how to handle it. The political crisis around immigration into the EU from 2015 onwards has revealed fundamental divisions in the way member states view their security. As Ivan Krastev has argued, “the refugee crisis exposed the futility of the post-Cold War paradigm, and especially the incapacity of Cold War institutions and rules to deal with the problems of the contemporary world.” For many Europeans, the migration crisis has called into question the ability of the EU and the global multilateral system to protect them.