

# I. THEMATIC ARTICLES

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## TRANSATLANTIC TWILIGHT? THE IMPACT OF THE MUELLER INVESTIGATION ON US-EUROPE RELATIONS

### **Abstract:**

*The Mueller investigation into Russian interference in the US 2016 Presidential election has dogged the Trump administration, almost from the beginning of its time in office. The impact of the probe is widespread and affecting the United States in myriad ways both domestically and in foreign policy. We contend that, regarding US-European relations, the Mueller investigation is hastening two broad trends. Firstly, the continuing revelations are pushing the traditional US foreign policy establishment closer towards Europe. Secondly, and simultaneously, these revelations, as well as the continued actions of the President himself, are acting as a source of tension in US-European relations that are pushing European elites into awkward policy choices. The Mueller investigation has uncovered an ill-defined Russian strategy of sowing discord during the 2016 election cycle, matching other initiatives in Europe itself. In the rhetoric of prominent American politicians, it has succeeded. Donald Trump has been loath - unlike his verbosity towards the majority of the US's traditional allies - to criticise the Russian state. Meanwhile, the US Congress has tightened sanctions against Russia. While Trump has distanced himself from the European Union on issues such as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Iranian Nuclear Deal, other parts of the US polity – from city to mayors to state governors and Congress itself – have sought to reinforce*

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relationships with European countries. The forthcoming 2018 midterm Congressional elections are likely to result in an exacerbation of the process, particularly if there are further allegations of Russian cyber-attacks. The impact on European leaders is varied. Whereas the German government wants to push ahead with a new gas pipeline, which would increase reliance on Russian energy supplies, the EU has thus far held firm over sanctions and presented a united front denouncing the alleged Russian state-sponsored use of a nerve agent in Britain. This paper will aim to explore the impact of the Mueller investigation on these two trends and the effect on wider US-European relations.

**Keywords:**

Donald Trump, Russia, Robert Mueller, European Union, Theresa May, Angela Merkel, Emmanuel Macron, Transatlantic Partnership

Since his appointment in May 2017 as a Special Prosecutor tasked with investigating potential collusion between the Trump Campaign and the Russian state, as well as broader potential Russian attempts to disrupt the 2016 US presidential election, much has been written about the actions of Robert Mueller. The same can also be said, though perhaps to a lesser extent, of investigations into these matters by other parts of the US government. Understandably, much of what has already been written about the Mueller investigation and the broader Trump-Russia issue has focused on domestic US politics, with the effect on the operations of the White House and the impact the investigations may have on the 2018 midterm elections being particularly prominent themes. Writing prior to Mueller's appointment, for instance, Allan Lichtman argued that, should the most lurid allegations against Trump and his campaign prove correct the US Congress would have a “near-airtight Case” for impeaching him for “treason”<sup>3</sup>, with John Burke stating that “at the very least”, contacts between the Trump campaign and administration and Russia were “inappropriate”<sup>4</sup>. In the media, *The Guardian's* Luke Harding has documented the attempts of the Trump Campaign to “discredit” Mueller<sup>5</sup>, whereas George W. Bush's former speechwriter and a senior editor of *The Atlantic* David Frum has claimed that the Trump Administration represents a “crisis” for the “work in progress” that is US “[d]emocracy”<sup>6</sup>. Whilst former Democrat staffer and contributor to *The Hill*, Brent Budowsky, positing that the continuous run of “bombshells” emanating from the investigations will have a

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<sup>3</sup> A. Lichtman, *The Case for Impeachment*, Kindle Edition, London 2017, Loc. 1851.

<sup>4</sup> J. Burke, *The Trump Transition, Early Presidency, and National Security Organization*, “Presidential Studies Quarterly” 2017, Vol. 47, No. 3, pp. 574-596, p. 585.

<sup>5</sup> L. Harding, *Collusion: How Russia Helped Trump Win the White House*, Kindle Edition, London 2017, Loc. 3332.

<sup>6</sup> D. Frum, *Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic*, New York 2018, p. IX.

negative effect on the Republicans in the 2018 midterms<sup>7</sup>. Finally, participants involved in the events have also had their say, with James Comey, the former Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) whose firing led to Mueller's appointment, hypothesizing that Mueller is likely to consider whether or not his firing was an attempt to "obstruct Justice"<sup>8</sup>, whereas Hillary Clinton, Trump's opponent in the 2016 election, has labelled Russian actions during the 2016 US election "unprecedented"<sup>9</sup>. Yet, what has been missing from the ink spilled so far has been a sustained consideration of the ways the Mueller investigation, and the broader Trump whirlwind, has impacted and may continue to impact, Europe.

In short, we contend that, regarding US-European relations, the Mueller investigation, and the broader dynamic set of investigations, lawsuits and journalistic inquiries that it arguably spearheads, is hastening two broad trends. Firstly, the continuing revelations are pushing the traditional US foreign policy establishment closer towards Europe. Secondly, and simultaneously, these revelations, as well as the continued actions of the President himself, are acting as a source of tension in US-European relations that are pushing European elites into awkward policy choices. To explore and illustrate these contentions, this article evolves into two sections. To begin with, the current landscape of the US government investigations into the 2016 US elections, the Trump campaign and administration, and Russia is mapped. This occurs to enable readers to ground themselves within a complex and ever-shifting set of interconnected investigations. Next, this piece surveys some of the current and potential future effects for Europe of these investigations and the broader actions of Trump and his administration. Effects explored include the challenge that Trump poses to that rule-based order seen as sacrosanct by many US and European elites that, in theory at least, underpins US-European relations, sustained attempts to work around Trump and the inspiration that deliberately divisive European populists may find in the words and actions of Trump and the emulation this inspiration is likely to engender. All told, the Trump administration's approach is threatening the transatlantic order that has prevailed since the end of the Cold War.

## **The Current State of US Government Investigations into the 2016 Election**

As of the end of May 2018, the four most high-profile US government investigations into attempts by the Russian state and related actors to influence

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<sup>7</sup> B. Budowsky, *GOP Faces Midterm Disaster as Mueller, Rosenstein, Cohen Bombshells Explode*, <<http://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/385861-gop-faces-midterm-disaster-as-mueller-rosenstein-cohen-bombshells-explode>> (28.05.2018).

<sup>8</sup> J. Comey, *A Higher Loyalty: Truth, Lies and Leadership*, Kindle Edition, London 2018, Loc. 4093.

<sup>9</sup> H. Clinton, *What Happened*, New York-New York 2018, p. 356.

the elections of 2016, as well as collusion by members of the Trump campaign, have been an FBI investigation that was cut short when Trump dismissed Comey in May 2017, an investigation by the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee that ended in March 2018, an ongoing investigation by the Senate Intelligence Committee and the Mueller investigation.

The FBI probe has its roots in the hacking of emails from the Democratic National Committee. This hack was confirmed on July 25th, 2016 and led to an investigation that began exploring potential links between the Trump campaign and the Russian state<sup>10</sup>. A formal investigation was likely triggered by information pertaining to Trump campaign advisor George Papadopoulos<sup>11</sup>, who told Trump in March 2016 that “he had connections” that could “help arrange a meeting between [...] Trump and President Putin”<sup>12</sup>. On March 20th, 2017, then FBI Director Comey confirmed that the FBI was “investigating the nature of any links between individuals associated with the Trump campaign and the Russian government” as well as whether coordination between them occurred<sup>13</sup>. The FBI investigation ended when Trump dismissed Comey on May 9th, 2017<sup>14</sup>.

The next investigation to be terminated was run by the House of Representatives Intelligence Committee. From January 2017, the committee's work coalesced around four main themes; Russian “cyber activity and other active measures”, whether such “active measures included links between Russia” and US individuals and “associated political campaigns”, the US response to such active measures and what future responses should be and, finally, whether “leaks of classified information took place related to [a January 6th, 2016] Intelligence Community Assessment of these matters”<sup>15</sup>. This assessment found with “high confidence” that Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered an “influence campaign” to “undermine public faith in the US democratic process” and that “Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump”<sup>16</sup>. The house investigation was ended in March 2018 by the committee’s Republican majority. Key outcomes included a finding that

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<sup>10</sup> D. Volz, *Democratic Party Email Leak Points to Russia: Cyber Experts, U.S. Officials*, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-russia-fbi-idUSKCN1051TD>> (25.05.2018).

<sup>11</sup> House Intelligence Committee Majority, *January 20th, 2018 Memo to House Intelligence Committee Minority: Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Abuses at the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

<sup>12</sup> R. Mueller, *October 5th, 2017 Statement of Offense of George Papadopoulos*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> House Intelligence Committee, *Testimony, and Questioning of James Comey March 20th, 2017*.

<sup>14</sup> D. Trump, *May 9th, 2017 Letter Dismissing Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation James Comey*.

<sup>15</sup> House Intelligence Committee, *Russia Investigation Parameters Announced in March 2017*.

<sup>16</sup> US Intelligence Community, *January 6th, 2017 Intelligence Community Assessment Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections*, p. ii.

Russia had attempted to influence elections in Europe and the US, but that collusion between the Trump Campaign and the Russian state did not occur<sup>17</sup>. Recommendations included the development of better bulwarks in the US and Europe against potential Russian electoral interference and a call for the European States to lessen economic dependence on Russia<sup>18</sup>. The closing of the investigation was criticised by the committee's Democrat minority, who unsuccessfully tried to extend it by proposing motions that, amongst other things, called for subpoenas to be issued to, among others, Trump's son and son-in-law, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and the Trump Campaign organisation<sup>19</sup>.

The Senate Intelligence Committee investigation also started in January 2017, meanwhile, is ongoing<sup>20</sup>. It was launched with the aim of reviewing "the intelligence that informed" the January 6th, 2017 US Intelligence Community assessment of Russian activities related to US elections, as well as broader concerns of the Intelligence Community "related to Russia and the 2016' election<sup>21</sup>. A month after he was dismissed, Comey claimed before the committee that Trump had told him in January 2017 that 'I need loyalty, I expect loyalty" and that in February 2017, referring to the FBI's investigation of Trump's former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, Trump urged Comey to "let this go" because Flynn "is a good guy". Comey also stated that in March 2017 Trump had denied any links with Russia and asked Comey to publicly confirm that the FBI was not investigating Trump personally<sup>22</sup>. Thus far, this investigation has avoided the partisan disagreements of its House equivalent.

The fourth, and potentially most consequential, investigation began on May 17th, 2017 when Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein appointed Mueller, a former FBI Director, as a Special Prosecutor<sup>23</sup>. Mueller was directed

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<sup>17</sup> House Intelligence Committee Majority, *March 22nd, 2018 Report on Russian Active Measures Findings and Recommendations*, pp. 1, 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> A. Schiff, *March 22nd, 2018 Schiff Statement After Committee Republicans Voted to Release Partisan Report*.

<sup>20</sup> Senate Intelligence Committee, *January 13th, 2017 Joint Statement on Committee Inquiry into Russian Intelligence Activities*.

<sup>21</sup> Senate Intelligence Committee, *March 30th, 2017 Hearing Entitled 'Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns*.

<sup>22</sup> J. Comey, *June 8th, 2017 Statement for the Record Delivered to the Senate Intelligence Committee*.

<sup>23</sup> J. Ainsley, *Former FBI Chief Mueller Appointed to Probe Trump-Russia Ties*, <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump/former-fbi-chief-mueller-appointed-to-probe-trump-russia-ties-idUSKCN18D1XT>> (17.05.2018).

Rosenstein had the authority to appoint Mueller because Sessions had previously refused himself from considering matters pertaining to Russia because he failed to disclose contacts with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak while acting on behalf of the Trump campaign.

to “ensure a full and thorough investigation of the Russian government’s efforts to interfere in the 2016 presidential election”, was “authorized to conduct” the investigation Comey had confirmed in March 2017 and given latitude “to prosecute federal crimes arising from the investigation of these matters”<sup>24</sup>. Thus far, Mueller’s investigation appears to have coalesced around three interconnected strands:

1. The extent and significance of contacts, and potential coordination, between members of the Trump campaign and administration and representatives of, or at least those claiming or thought to be representatives of, the Russian state;
2. The evasion of tax and the failure to register work for foreign governments and political parties, mainly in Ukraine, by those linked to the Trump Campaign;
3. Attempts by individuals and organisations with links to the Russian state to disrupt the US elections of 2016.

Thus far, the first strand has seen Papadopoulos, a foreign policy advisor to the Trump campaign, plead guilty to lying to the FBI in January 2017 regarding contact with a Russian academic thought to have connections to “Russian government officials” believed to have “dirt” on Clinton<sup>25</sup>. Similarly, Flynn pled guilty to lying to the FBI in January 2017 about his discussions with Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak whilst Trump was President-Elect<sup>26</sup>.

On the second strand, in October 2017 Mueller claimed in an indictment that Paul Manafort, one of Trump's campaign managers, and Richard Gates, a campaign aid, had acted as “unregistered agents of the government of Ukraine” and two Ukrainian political parties, had raised millions of dollars for Ukrainian entities, had laundered these funds through “scores” of “corporations, partnerships and bank accounts” and drew on them personally without paying tax required in the US<sup>27</sup>. In February 2018, Gates pled guilty to aiding Manafort in tax evasion, misleading accountants and deliberately misclassifying payments as loans<sup>28</sup>. Manafort, meanwhile, is due to stand trial on charges related to “bank fraud, tax evasion” and foreign bank accounts in Virginia in July 2018 and for “making false statements about his foreign lobbying work” and “engaging in a money laundering conspiracy” in a federal trial in

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L. Gambino, S. Ackerman, *Jeff Sessions Recuses Himself from Russia Inquiry Amid Calls for Resignation*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/02/jeff-sessions-calls-for-resignation-claims-lies-russia>> (17.05.2018).

<sup>24</sup> R. Rosenstein, *May 17th, 2017 Order Appointing Robert Mueller as Special Prosecutor*.

<sup>25</sup> R. Mueller, *October 5th, 2017 Statement*, pp. 2, 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> Idem, *November 30th, 2017 Statement of Offense of Michael Flynn*.

<sup>27</sup> Idem, *October 27th, 2017 Indictment of Paul Manafort and Richard Gates*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>28</sup> Idem, *February 23rd, 2018 Statement of Offense of Richard Gates*, pp. 1-3.

September 2018 in Washington D.C.<sup>29</sup> On a related note, on February 14th, 2018, Alex van der Zwaan, a Dutch attorney, pled guilty to lying to Mueller about his contacts with Richard Gates and about his role in the dissemination of a report about a Ukrainian trial of Yulia Tymoshenko, a Ukrainian politician “generally regarded as pro-western”<sup>30</sup>.

On the final strand, on February 12<sup>th</sup>, Richard Pinedo pled guilty to running a company that “offered [...] services designed to circumvent” the security of “online digital payment companies” that were allegedly exploited by Russian individuals and companies attempting to disrupt the 2016 US election<sup>31</sup>. Four days later, Mueller filed an indictment against 13 Russian individuals who worked for a company named Internet Research Agency LLC. According to the indictment, these individuals engaged in a conspiracy with the aim of interfering with US “political and electoral processes”<sup>32</sup>.

Beyond these four investigations, there are also a broader set of investigations, legal cases, and sanctions that often overlap in focus. The Senate Judiciary Committee has, for example, pursued evidence related to a meeting involving Trump's son and son-in-law, Manafort and three Russians, including a lawyer named Natalia Veselnitskaya who was thought to have material damaging to Clinton, with particular zeal<sup>33</sup>. Whilst the Democratic Party lodged a lawsuit in April 2018 based on the claim that the Trump Campaign was “a willing and active partner” of the Russian state during the 2016 US election<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> J. Gerstein, *Federal Judge Rejects Manafort's Bid to Dismiss Mueller Indictment*, <<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/05/15/manafort-mueller-indictment-590215>> (25.05.2018); Idem, *Manafort Virginia Trial Delayed Two Weeks*, <<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/05/25/paul-manafort-trial-schedule-609041>> (29.05.2018); C. Kelly, K. Polantz, *Manafort Trial Set to Begin July 10*, <<https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/08/politics/manafort-trial/index.html>> (25.05.2018).

<sup>30</sup> M. Crowley, D. Stern, K. Vogel, *Trump tells Ukrainian Politician he Won't lift Russia Sanctions*, <<https://www.politico.eu/article/trump-tells-ukraine-politician-he-wont-lift-russia-sanctions/>> (20.05.2018); R. Mueller, *February 14th, 2018 Statement of Offense of Alex van der Zwaan*.

Interestingly, Taras Kuzio has argued that the image of Tymoshenko as inherently pro-western in her outlook and actions is overplayed, highlighting a persistent failure to stick to verifiable facts and her fostering of animosity towards foreign investment in the Ukrainian economy, regardless of its origin, as evidence. See for instance:

T. Kuzio, *Yulia Tymoshenko's Policies Sit Uneasily with Her Image as a Pro-European Politician*, <<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2018/05/04/yulia-tymoshenkos-policies-sit-uneasily-with-her-image-as-a-pro-european-politician/>> (30.05.2018).

<sup>31</sup> R. Mueller, *February 2nd, 2018 Statement of Offense of Richard Pinedo*.

<sup>32</sup> Idem, *February 16th, 2018 Indictment of Internet Research Agency LLC and Named Individuals*.

<sup>33</sup> Senate Judiciary Committee, *Materials from Inquiry into Circumstances Surrounding Trump Tower Meeting*, <<https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/releases/materials-from-inquiry-into-circumstances-surrounding-trump-tower-meeting>> (12.05.2018).

<sup>34</sup> Democratic Party, *April 20th, 2018 Complaint Filed Against the Russian State, Donald Trump and Others*, p. 5.

On a related note, there is a raft of US sanctions against Russia, some of which are coordinated with the European Union (EU) and others, that relate to events in Ukraine from 2014 onward and the 2016 US election. The most recent raft of US sanctions was imposed in April 2018, whereas a new round of related sanctions have also arisen from the poisoning of Sergey and Yulia Skripal in Salisbury, England, in March 2018, which the British government blames on Russia<sup>35</sup>. With the breadth, depth and dynamic nature of these investigations, legal cases and sanctions in mind, we will now consider how they, as well as actions of the wider Trump administration, might impact Europe.

### Effects on Europe

The Mueller investigation has been widely reported in Europe, acting as a proxy for the conflict between the US establishment – one that supports a multilateral rules-based order anchored in a strong transatlantic relationship – and the forces of populism encapsulated by Donald Trump, disinterested or even openly hostile to these principles<sup>36</sup>. In essence, the Mueller investigation exacerbates a dynamic between the United States and Europe, that is to say since Trump became President, European leaders have sought to stay as close as possible to the US state broadly defined, whilst simultaneously widening their policy options. The Mueller probe has uncovered the behaviour of a number of individuals, now or at one time close to the levers of power in the Trump White House, who have shown a disregard for the long-standing transatlantic relationship. Similarly, Donald Trump himself has disdained most of his predecessor's foreign policy, including elements forged through negotiation with the EU. Trump, representing as he does the encapsulation of a particular form of populism, threatens the institutional and normative foundations that European leaders have long taken for granted.

European elites, for the most part, have looked on in horror as Trump has torn up the agreements painstakingly crafted by his predecessor, President Barack Obama. These most notably include the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Iranian nuclear deal. Nevertheless, EU leaders have responded to Trump - and the sentiments of their own citizens to him - in differing ways. President Emmanuel Macron has most clearly sought to engage with Trump. The French leader's visit to Washington in April 2018, in an attempt to prevent the President torpedoing the Iranian agreement, involved the bizarre spectacle of the pair apparently on good terms, while Macron advocated an anti-

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<sup>35</sup> B. Smith, *April 2018 House of Commons Library Briefing Paper: Sanctions against Russia-In Brief*; US Treasury Department, OFAC FAQs: Other Sanctions Programs: Ukraine-/Russia-related Sanctions, <[https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/faqs/Sanctions/Pages/faq\\_other.aspx#567](https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/faqs/Sanctions/Pages/faq_other.aspx#567)> (30.05.2018).

<sup>36</sup> B. Bruno, *Trump is Wrong over Iran, but Europe Can't Afford to Divorce the US*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/may/16/europe-cant-afford-full-divorce-iran-nuclear-deal-trump-europe-antagonism>> (20.05.2018).



Trumpian liberal world order in Congress<sup>37</sup>. With Trump, for his part, seemingly completely disregarding his fellow President's council<sup>38</sup>. Macron, although careful not to directly criticise the President, seamlessly ploughed on with his vision of globalization that, accurately or not, promises to benefit all within a "fair system"<sup>39</sup>.

Theresa May has pursued a similar, if less successful, strategy. An early visit to the White House in 2017, including the offer of a state visit to Britain, met with hostility from the British public<sup>40</sup>. Embroiled by the Brexit process and weakened by the 2017 General Election result, and despite the fact that Trump currently plans to visit the UK in July 2018, May has since kept her distance from Trump, with public animosity, likely feeding into UK policy. Something demonstrated by the fact that Trump will come only for a one day "working visit" rather than the full-state visit originally offered and the mass-protests planned to coincide with his presence<sup>41</sup>. On a broader European level, the EU was initially, through the likes of President of the European Council Donald Tusk, relatively emollient towards Trump. This has gradually hardened, however<sup>42</sup>. Recently, for example, Tusk labelled the Trump administration "capricious", thus deliberately shining a light on its inconsistencies<sup>43</sup>.

Berlin has, perhaps, demonstrated the most restrained attitude towards the Trump administration out of the large EU states. Chancellor Angela Merkel's meetings with the President have been cautious and she has issued carefully calibrated statements on EU-American policy. Perhaps most visibly, Merkel said in a 2017 speech that Germany could no longer "completely rely" on its

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<sup>37</sup> E. Macron, *April 26th, 2018 Speech to US Congress*.

<sup>38</sup> M. Landler, *Trump Abandons Iran Nuclear Deal He Long Scorned*, <<https://www.npr.org/2017/10/13/557622096/transcript-trump-s-remarks-on-iran-nuclear-deal>> (28.05.2018).

<sup>39</sup> World Economic Forum, *President Macron Unveils Bold, Inclusive Agenda for Globalization*, <<https://www.weforum.org/press/2018/01/president-macron-unveils-bold-inclusive-agenda-for-globalization/>> (28.05.2018).

<sup>40</sup> L. Hughes, G. Parker, E. White, *Labour scared Trump into scrapping UK visit, says Johnson*, <<https://www.ft.com/content/e9769786-f78c-11e7-88f7-5465a6ce1a00>> (20.05.2018).

<sup>41</sup> J. Elgot, *Donald Trump to Meet Queen on UK Visit in July*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2018/apr/26/donald-trump-to-visit-uk-on-friday-13-july>> (28.05.2018); J. Watts, *Donald Trump UK Visit Set for July as Mass Protests Planned*, <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/donald-trump-uk-visit-date-us-july-protests-a8322596.html>> (28.05.2018).

<sup>42</sup> M. Birnbaum, G. Witte, *As Tensions with Trump Deepen, Europe Wonders if America is Lost for Good*, <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/as-tensions-with-trump-deepen-europe-wonders-if-america-is-lost-for-good/2018/05/18/6f90c56e-587f-11e8-9889-07bcc1327f4b\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.716a394bfa97](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/as-tensions-with-trump-deepen-europe-wonders-if-america-is-lost-for-good/2018/05/18/6f90c56e-587f-11e8-9889-07bcc1327f4b_story.html?utm_term=.716a394bfa97)> (21.05.2018).

<sup>43</sup> D. Boffey, *"Capricious": Donald Tusk Condemns Trump Administration*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/16/donald-tusk-condemns-donald-trump-transatlantic-trade-war>> (21.05.2018).

allies Britain and the United States<sup>44</sup>. A sentiment subsequently repeated by the Chancellor<sup>45</sup>. Germany, seemingly desperate to uphold both its vital interests and the rule-based system that has helped it prosper economically, has seen its most important relationships sour, with Russia over Crimea and Donbas, with Turkey over President Erdogan's growing authoritarianism, with Britain over its exit from the EU and now with the United States<sup>46</sup>. The 2018 German government's coalition agreement revealed the grains of a new transatlantic strategy<sup>47</sup>. Without mentioning Trump, or the executive, the agreement outlined an approach of increased engagement with other centres of American power – at state level, with the security services and the Congress – and put Canada on a par with the US<sup>48</sup>. As the Mueller investigation reveals how Trump and his inner circle hold the current international order in contempt, Germany has apparently sought to maintain a transatlantic relationship by, at least partially, circumventing the White House. The agreement also put forward a view on US trade policy: “protectionism is not the right way”<sup>49</sup>.

Although the German government has led the sanctions policy against Russia, it also has vital interests at play with its giant neighbour. A proposed gas pipeline, Nord Stream 2, has been one area where Germany has continued to work with Russia<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, after President Trump announced he was pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018, Angela Merkel, as well as her Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, was quick to travel to Moscow to consult Vladimir Putin and Sergei Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister<sup>51</sup>. As such, the

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<sup>44</sup> J. Henley, *Angela Merkel: EU Cannot Completely Rely on US and Britain Any More*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/28/merkel-says-eu-cannot-completely-rely-on-us-and-britain-any-more-g7-talks>> (23.05.2018).

<sup>45</sup> A. Delfs, G. Viscusi, *Merkel Says Europe Can't Count on U.S. Military Umbrella Anymore*, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-05-10/merkel-says-europe-cant-count-on-u-s-military-umbrella-anymore>> (23.05.2018).

<sup>46</sup> Deutsche Welle, *Germany and Turkey in 2017: A Rollercoaster Relationship*, <<http://www.dw.com/en/germany-and-turkey-in-2017-a-rollercoaster-relationship/a-41897041>> (24.05.2018); C. Schreck, *Tensions Between Russia And West Simmer In Munich*, <<https://www.rferl.org/a/gabriel-ukraine-peacekeepers-could-lead-easing-russia-sanctions/29045157.html>> (24.05.2018)

<sup>47</sup> CDU, CSU und SPD, *Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa. Eine neue Dynamik für Deutschland. Ein neuer Zusammenhalt für unser Land: Koalitionsvertrag zwischen CDU, CSU und SPD*. [CDU, CSU and SPD, *A new start for Europe. A new dynamic for Germany. A new solidarity for our country: Coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD*], p. 147.

<sup>48</sup> A. Rettman, *The EU and US in the age of Trump*, <<https://euobserver.com/europe-in-review/139870>> (26.05.2018).

<sup>49</sup> CDU, CSU und SPD, *Ein neuer Aufbruch für Europa...*, p. 147.

<sup>50</sup> A. Rettman, *Germany starts to build Nord Stream 2*, <<https://euobserver.com/foreign/141756>> (25.05.2018).

<sup>51</sup> Deutsche Welle, *Germany's Angela Merkel meets Russia's Vladimir Putin*, <<http://www.dw.com/en/germanys-angela-merkel-meets-russias-vladimir-putin/a-43838039>> (25.05.2018).

instability encapsulated by the withdrawal from the Iran deal, something reflected in the on-off summit between Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, as well as the details revealed by the Mueller investigation may have had the perverse result of pushing some EU countries closer to Russia in a search for stability<sup>52</sup>. Seemingly, events in the United States are leading EU leaders to seek “like-minded coalitions” on the range of issues on which Trump has declined responsibility or is seeking to challenge existing norms<sup>53</sup>.

Ultimately though, perhaps the most acute problem that Trump – and the Mueller investigation – poses for European countries is the rise of racially tinged populism<sup>54</sup>. After much apparent relief when Macron was elected in May 2017, populists have taken power in Austria, have consolidated control in Hungary and, if they are able to overcome the structural pro-EU bias in the country, will also do so in Italy<sup>55</sup>. Together, these populists explicitly seek to undermine key rules, at least in theory based on liberal political ideals, generally seen as sacrosanct by elites on both sides of the Atlantic. In short, one of the greatest challenges to the EU emanating from the US is one of emulation, with praise between Trump and European far-right leaders flowing both ways<sup>56</sup>. Meanwhile, the EU’s response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the destabilising of Eastern Ukraine presents a key dividing line between

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<sup>52</sup> D. Trump, *May 24th, 2018 Letter to Kim Jong Un Withdrawing from Summit*.

<sup>53</sup> E. Geranmayeh, *Europe Should Strike a Tough Pose with Trump on the Iran Nuclear Deal*, <[https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_europe\\_should\\_strike\\_a\\_tough\\_pose\\_with\\_trump\\_on\\_iran\\_nuclear](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_europe_should_strike_a_tough_pose_with_trump_on_iran_nuclear)> (25.05.2018).

<sup>54</sup> S. Fröhlich, *Germany Cannot Replace the US, But Europe Can Live with Trump*, <<https://transatlanticrelations.org/publication/germany-cannot-replace-us-europe-can-live-trump-stefan-frohlich/>> (25.05.2018).

<sup>55</sup> F. D’Emilio, *Italy’s Populists Angered as President Foils Their Bid to Form a Coalition Government*, <<http://time.com/5292873/italys-populist-coalition-president-veto/>> (28.05.2018); M. Eder, Z. Simon, *Orban Zeroes In on Soros-Backed NGOs After Dominating Ballot*, <<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-08/orban-dominates-hungarian-ballot-in-win-for-european-populists>> (25.05.2018); M. Eiermann, *The Austrian Election Showed Populists yet Another Path to Power*, <<https://www.newstatesman.com/world/europe/2017/10/austrian-election-showed-populists-yet-another-path-power>> (28.05.2018); N. Slawson, *Austrian President Approves Far-Right Freedom Party Joining Coalition Government*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/16/austrian-president-approves-far-right-freedom-party-role-in-coalition-government>> (28.05.2018); I. Tharoor, *Italy’s Thwarted Populists May Have Their Revenge on Europe*, <[https://investigaterussia.org/media/2018-05-29/mueller-team-detains-stone-contact-logan-airport?utm\\_source=Committee+to+Investigate+Russia&utm\\_campaign=c8987c36fcEMAIL\\_CAMPAIGN\\_2018\\_05\\_30\\_01\\_55&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_70adbf3447-c8987c36fc-49092213](https://investigaterussia.org/media/2018-05-29/mueller-team-detains-stone-contact-logan-airport?utm_source=Committee+to+Investigate+Russia&utm_campaign=c8987c36fcEMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_05_30_01_55&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_70adbf3447-c8987c36fc-49092213)> (30.05.2018).

<sup>56</sup> B. Jacobs, *Donald Trump: Marine Le Pen is ‘Strongest Candidate’ in French Election*, <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/apr/21/donald-trump-marine-le-pen-french-presidential-election>> (20.05.2018); Sky News, *Marine Le Pen Praises Donald Trump: ‘I Only have Reason to Rejoice’*, <<https://news.sky.com/story/marine-le-pen-praises-donald-trump-i-only-have-reason-to-rejoice-10779502>> (20.05.2018).

many European establishment and populist parties<sup>57</sup>. Along similar lines, and circling back to where we began, one of the key outcomes of the Mueller investigation thus far appears to be that Manafort and Gates, at one point key members of the Trump campaign, had previously played a part in promoting Ukrainian political parties that deliberately exploited the east-west split in the Ukrainian body-politic for short-term electoral gain (a classic populist strategy reflected in the divisive narrative of Trump), while conveniently enriching themselves in the process<sup>58</sup>.

## Conclusion

The EU and the broader European elite is clearly seeking to wait out the Trump Presidency in the hope that no serious damage is inflicted in the intervening four, or even eight, years. Some analysts believe the implications, however, could be permanent as the old system frays and the US re-orientate its foreign policy<sup>59</sup>. Likewise, Europeans are hardening their attitudes towards the United States. A recent opinion poll showed how German's attitudes on security had shifted from transatlanticism; they now overwhelmingly see their most important security partners as European, and on a wider range of issues specifically France<sup>60</sup>. This fits a historical pattern when less amenable Presidents occupy the White House. European integration, for instance, accelerated in the 1970s when Richard Nixon was in office, and in particular after he closed the so-called “gold window”, jeopardising European monetary stability<sup>61</sup>.

As we have seen, Mueller, along with the broader investigative milieu he unofficially heads, has illustrated that those working for Trump have attempted to exploit connections they had with those believed to be close to the Russian state in order to aide his election and have lied to the FBI about their contacts

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<sup>57</sup> L. Pasha-Robinson, *Marine Le Pen Backs Vladimir Putin and Denies Invasion of Crimea*, <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/marine-le-pen-front-national-russian-kremlin-putin-invasion-annexation-crimea-ukraine-2014-a7566196.html>> (24.05.2018).

<sup>58</sup> L. Harding, *Collusion: How Russia...* Loc. 1729-2110.

<sup>59</sup> M. Birnbaum, G. Witte, *As Tensions with Trump...*

For an interesting counterpoint to this, see the writing of Jake Sullivan, a Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and a former Director of Policy Planning the the US State Department, who posits that the current international system is resilient enough to ‘endure’ the attempts of Trump, among others, to undermine it. Although, Sullivan does caveat this line of thought by arguing that, while a single Trump term is manageable, a second could be ‘cataclysmic’.

J. Sullivan, *The World After Trump: How the System Can Endure*, “Foreign Affairs” 2018, Vol. 97, No. 2. pp. 10-19.

<sup>60</sup> U. Franke, *German Public says ‘Jein’ to European Security*, <[https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_german\\_public\\_says\\_jein\\_to\\_european\\_security](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_german_public_says_jein_to_european_security)> (24.05.2018).

<sup>61</sup> L. Nichter, *Richard Nixon, and Europe: The Reshaping of the Postwar Atlantic World*, Cambridge, pp. 68, 155.

with Russian officials. Whereas it appears Trump himself has not been averse to attempting to interfere with investigations into these matters. Yet, as well as being felt domestically, the effects of these investigations, along with the broader actions of Trump and his administration, are being felt in Europe as well. With the EU, its constituent parts and the leaders of individual states attempting, with differing degrees of success, to chart a course through a world disrupted. In the medium term, much hangs on the results of the 2018 midterms with, one presumes, many European elites hoping for a democratic surge that, at the least, could blunt the instincts of the current White House occupant. Further in the future, whoever the next US president may be, Republican or Democrat, will be faced with a transatlantic alliance frayed by a deliberately provocative president and the shifting of other geopolitical fault-lines that, as of Trump's election, can be said to have entered a new, particularly trying and perhaps more transactional, phase.

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