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## US-EU Relations in the Trump Era: Quest for Autonomy in Europe

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**Abstract:** *This paper bases on the research related to the change of US - EU relations under Donald Trump administration in the United States and its effect on the EU member states' pursuing autonomous policies. Recent analyses reveal that under the Trump administration, there has been a change of traditional economic and political relations with the EU member states. How this policy change affected the EU member states has not received much attention. The analysis reveals Trump's questioning the function of NATO and putting tariffs on the products of the EU, supporting Brexit process and having close relations with the far-right leaders of Europe present important evidence of this policy change. This change has been visible in parallel with the leading European countries' creating their own foreign and domestic policies related to increasing the power of anti-EU political parties such as in Poland, Hungary, and the United Kingdom. The analysis thus suggests Trump's approach to these countries encouraged them to pursue autonomous policies. Moreover, current President of the US, Joe Biden's connivance of European politics shows the continuation of this policy even without direct support to the far-right leaders of Europe. With the neoclassical realist theory informed analysis, this paper aims to present the effect of Trump administration's restructuring attempts of US - EU relations on EU member states' pursuing autonomous policies.*

**Keywords:** *Trump Administration, US-EU relations, European Union, member states, national interest.*

### Trump Yönetimi Döneminde ABD-AB İlişkileri: Avrupa'da Bağımsız Politika Arayışları

**Öz:** *Bu çalışma ABD'de Donald Trump döneminde ABD - AB ilişkilerinin değişmesi ve bu değişimin son dönemde AB üye devletlerinin daha özerk politikalar takip etmelerine etkisini incelemektedir. Önceki çalışmalar ABD'de Trump döneminde, AB üye devletleriyle geleneksel ekonomik ve siyasi ilişkilerde batı ittifakı fikrinden uzaklaşan bir yaklaşım olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu politika değişikliğinin AB'ye üye devletleri nasıl etkilediği üzerine yapılan çalışmalar sınırlıdır. Trump'ın NATO'nun işlevini sorgulaması ve Avrupa Birliği'nden ithal edilen ürünlere ilave gümrük vergisi uygulaması, Brexit sürecini desteklemesi ve Avrupa'daki aşırı sağ liderlerle yakın ilişki kurması bu politika değişikliğinin önemli kanıtlarıdır. Bu politika değişikliği; Polonya, Macaristan ve Birleşik Krallık gibi Avrupa ülkelerinde, Avrupa Birliği karşıtı siyasi partilerin gücünü artırmalarının da etkisiyle kendi çıkarları çerçevesinde iç ve dış politikalarını oluşturmalarıyla paralel olarak aynı dönemde gerçekleşmiştir. Dolayısıyla bu çalışma, Trump'ın bu ülkelere yaklaşımının onları daha özerk politikalar izlemeye teşvik ettiğini gösteriyor. ABD'nin şu anki Başkanı Joe Biden'ın Avrupa siyasetini görmezden gelmesi, Avrupa'nın aşırı sağ liderlerine doğrudan destek olunmaması bile bu politikanın devam ettiğini gösteriyor. Neoklasik realist teori çerçevesinde yapılan bir analizle bu çalışma, Trump yönetiminin ABD - AB ilişkilerini*

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*yeniden yapılandırma girişimlerinin Avrupa Birliği'ne üye devletlerin daha özerk politikalar takip etmeleri üzerindeki etkilerini sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.*

*Anahtar Kelimeler:* Trump Yönetimi, ABD-AB ilişkileri, Avrupa Birliği, üye devletler, ulusal çıkar.

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## I. Introduction

Research into the rise of nationalism in Europe and European Union (EU)'s integration problems has become prevalent in the social science in the last decade. Notable studies brought into consideration of the refugee crisis, the problems arising from the EU's inability of creating a common constitution and creating own defence policy (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Webber, 2014). The effect of transatlantic relations<sup>2</sup> is mainly overlooked. This study aims that the impact of the US's economic and political restructuring moves in the Trump administration and the changes in the parameters of foreign policy, defense policy, and trade relations on the EU. The Trump period has been found to be important to the analysis of the policy change as it represents the strict transformation of foreign policy of the US.

The recent isolationist foreign policy of the US has a root of 2007-2008 financial crisis, started during Barack Obama's administration, in parallel with the global political trend (Eichengreen, 2009: 316). According to Stephen Walt, many Americans wanted their leadership to focus on the domestic problems, rather than the international affairs (Walt, 2018: 133-136). The election of Donald Trump in 2016 provided a relatively free arena that transforms traditional policy perspectives. As a result, traditional economic and political alliance in the West under the hegemony of the US started to transform from the relations with the EU to individual policy relations with the European states. These developments include the transformation of the leading role of US in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), increasing Trump-Putin relations as a threat to EU's security on the eastern borders, Trump's support of Brexit, the empowerment of European far right and close relations with the far right figures and Trump administration's imposing tariffs on the European products.

The developments mentioned above have been important contributions to the changes in the European politics. Even, interest policies heading the way of European politics, the member states still meeting in the common point under the EU umbrella in relation to their own interests. These all developments indicate the way back from the European integration process.<sup>2</sup> Civil society background of these changes in the recent process has been seen with the civil protests and foundations (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA), Alternative for Germany (AFD) in Germany) (Druxes and Simpson, 2016: 3). The contributions of the Trump

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that European integration had developed with the challenges to the dominant realist paradigm from the Cold-War conditions of the World.

administration discussed in this paper formed the basis of these transformations. This process of transformation and its effect can be identified as the emergence of autonomous policies in Europe during the period under review.

The previous studies analyzed the emergence of autonomous policies of EU member states from various perspectives, including economic, social and political. This study focuses on the contribution of Trump administration through its influential foreign policy changes, practical activities and active engagement in the media discussions. The research and analysis are based on finding an answer to the research question, what is the effect of Trump administration's policy change in transatlantic relations to the EU member states' following autonomous policies? In the qualitative methodological base, literature review, research and analysis of the discourses of Trump and leading political figures in Europe are conducted. These discourses are particularly important in light of the change of the domestic and international politics perspectives of both the US and European states that reflect these national interests policies. The main claim of this paper is that by transforming the ideological base of transatlantic relations through supporting anti-EU political approaches in Europe, having close relations to the Russia, and creating economic and military security problems, Trump administration contributed to the emergence of autonomous policies in Europe. The main claim of the study will be tested according to the theoretical approach of neoclassical realism. Neoclassical realism is selected for the analysis of this study. Thus, neoclassical realism is not only considering the changes in the international system, but domestic factors and other factors including the political party and the leader in a country are important to shape the foreign policy (See Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2004).

## **II. US-EU Relations: Historical Background**

In the historical process, the involvement of the US in the World War II in Europe was related to stopping the NAZI Germany's occupations. The war resulted in the defeat of Germany as a result of the alliance of the great powers. At the end of the World War II, the Europe was divided by Iron Curtain and starting from the eastern part of Germany, most Eastern and Central European countries stayed under the occupation of Soviet forces. Under these circumstances, Germany was divided as East and the West. After a few years being under occupation of the US, France and Britain, West Germany became an independent state pursuing western democratic values. However, the Soviet occupation in the Eastern Europe continued. It was considered to be a threat of Soviet forces to spread in the other western European countries in the later process.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Soviet Union became the single power in the Central and Eastern Europe. The US shined as the most powerful country in the West of military, political, economic and cultural matters (See Kennedy, 1989). Thus, under the hegemonic position of the US, the Atlantic alliance was formed based on the protection of Europe against to the expansion of the Soviet Union. Moreover, restructuring plans for Europe and economic cooperation was created on the transatlantic level. Concerning the involvement of the US in the European politics, Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan are important to mention. Thus, with the declaration of US President Harry S. Truman in 1947, called Truman Doctrine, the assistance to Turkey and Greece were given to

prevent the communist domination in these countries. It is known also the start of the Cold War by many historians as it was first mentioned the competition against the Soviet expansion (Steil, 2018: 85-116).

Moreover, with the Marshall Plan, which was named after the US Secretary of State George C. Marshall and enacted in 1948, financial assistance to western European countries, including Britain, West Germany, Belgium and France, were provided. The main aim with the Marshall plan was to reconstruct cities, industries and infrastructure in the western Europe and remove trade barriers with these countries to foster trade relations with the US (Ibid: 93). These all developments were regarded as the first step of the empowering transatlantic relations with an aim at an emerging alliance based on both economic and security levels.

#### **A. NATO and European Security**

In the following phase of the reconstruction of Europe in the post-World War II, concerning the security of the transatlantic region, NATO has been an important security alliance led by the US. In this regard, not only through the economic aids, but also through military support, the domination of the US on the European politics has been constructed (Petersen, 2016: 44). Thus, these two pillars brought Europe, more stability under the US hegemony. The NATO was formed in 1949 with the signature of North Atlantic Treaty in Washington, D.C. by Belgium, Canada, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States, Denmark, Iceland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, as a defensive alliance. Moreover, with Turkey and Greece's inclusion in 1952 as well as West Germany in 1955, NATO positioned against to the invasion of the Soviet Union towards the West (Lafeber, 1989: 461). In 14 May 1955, the Warsaw Pact was founded with the inclusion of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In this regard, each side of the cold war was formed under the hegemonic positions of the US and USSR.

Moreover, even the West European Union (WEU) was established in 1948 with the Treaty of Brussels included the United Kingdom (UK), France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands that focused on the reconstruction of Europe as well as forming the security of Europe, it was not replaced with the NATO. NATO became the main security umbrella for the western Europe. Even during President of France Charles De Gaulle rule in 1966, France declared withdrawal from the NATO's integrated military command with the fear of new Soviet invasion of France over Germany (Moravcsik, 1998: 13). However, France pursued the policies in cohesion with NATO's general political strategies and even returned to NATO with full participation in 2009.

In the 1970s, as a result of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks-SALT I, between the US and USSR as well as West Germany's approach to the Eastern Europe under its Ostpolitik strategy, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) was formed on 1 August 1975 with the signature of Helsinki Final Act by 35 participating states (Garthoff, 1994: 132). The main aim has been to end the division of Europe and form the security and stability in the European continent. This period could be regarded

also the Europeanisation of Germany that brought the hegemonic position of Germany in Europe in the post-Cold War period.

Moreover, the post-Cold War period in European politics brought new opportunities and the new challenges. Importantly, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the new countries in the Eastern Europe provided new opportunities for the enlargement towards the East. In this regard, with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the EU as political union was formed as a result of the long integration process. Through this political union mechanism, priority of the EU was set to enlargement towards the East (Moltke, 1995: 1-2). Moreover, with the Maastricht Treaty a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was formed for the regulation of EU's security mechanism. This could be explained as a spill-over effect during the European integration on the formation of new policy mechanisms from politics to security and defense (Çakır, 2001: 36). Also, main policies under the WEU were pursued to create a defence policy of the EU. However, all these policies continued under the NATO umbrella. The EU's enlargement followed by the NATO's towards the East in a way of expansion of the Atlantic alliance for creating peace and stability in Europe.

After the EU's declaration of the CFSP, the relations of the EU and NATO were based on the two important pillars. First is related to the EU's using the NATO infrastructure for developing its own security agenda. Secondly, the EU's relations with other NATO members that are not a member of the EU. At this point, the post-Cold War EU integration process and NATO's enlargement towards the East were majorly seen in cohesion even minor contradictions arises in the process. In this process, the regulation of the EU - NATO relations was based on the Berlin Plus Agreement signed by the EU and NATO in 2002. This regulation is related to regulate the EU's benefiting from the NATO for the formation of its own security and defence policy. To regulate this cooperation in win-win perspective, the agreement included seven important pillars:

- “a NATO - EU Security Agreement that covers the exchange of classified information under reciprocal security protection rules;
- assured access to NATO planning capabilities for EU-led operations;
- availability of NATO assets and capabilities for EU-led civil-military operations;
- procedures for release, monitoring, return and recall of NATO assets and capabilities;
- terms of reference for using NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) for commanding EU-led operations;
- EU-NATO consultation arrangements in the context of an EU-led operations making use of NATO assets and capabilities;
- arrangements for coherent and mutually reinforcing capability requirements, in particular the incorporation within NATO's defence planning of the military needs and capabilities that may be required for EU-led military operations” (EEAS, 2016).

Moreover, based on the common principles of the Berlin Plus Agreement, NATO and the EU had joint actions in both regional and international levels. These actions have been related to the common security interests of both the EU and other NATO member states, including the US (Tardy and Lindstrom, 2019: 5-6). In post-11 September 2001, the major concern of the US and NATO has been related to fighting against international terrorism. Here, this concern relates to the preferences of the US, rather than the institutional positioning of the NATO (Sireci and Coletta 2009). In this sense, the rise of religious extremism was regarded as an important threat to the EU. The EU positioned as the major supporter of the US in Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 under the NATO umbrella. Hence, the EU member states contributed to US led Operation Enduring Reform in Afghanistan as individual supports.

Also, after the Berlin Plus Agreement's entering into force the most important operation of the EU was Concordia Operation in Macedonia in 2003. During this operation, the EU forces fulfilled operational command duty in the NATO military quarter. Moreover, another important duty of EU member states under the NATO operation was in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Babuna, 2014: 7-8). Thus, after the Bosnian War, for restoring the peace and stability in the region, the EU forces have fulfilled their operational command duty in the framework of DSACEUR. In the framework of the Berlin Plus Agreement, it is possible to say that the EU and NATO apply simultaneous activities in the regions which related to the security of Europe.

As an important example, NATO's security force in Kosovo since 1999 and the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) dealing with the empowerment of the rule of law since 2009 continued in cohesion (Ibid). Moreover, a similar base of civilian support for NATO's operations in Afghanistan continued with the EU's active involvement until NATO's withdrawal from Afghanistan on 30 August 2021. In relation to this, European Union Police Mission (EUPOL) in Afghanistan, continued activities dealing with the training of the Afghan police and contributed to restore the peace and stability in Afghanistan. In sum, not only during the Cold War, but also in the post-Cold War, NATO has been the most important security concern of Europe in relation with creating peace and stability in the region. These relations are the major determinant of the success of the European integration for the member states' acting together under the EU umbrella.

### **B. Transatlantic Trade and the EU-US Cooperation**

In the scope of the reconstruction of Europe in the post-World War II, trade relations with the US have an important share. In this regard, being under common security umbrella of the NATO for the defence of Europe, these relations have constantly had an effect on increasing trade relations between the countries in the both coasts of the Atlantic. In the Cold War political process, in which the reconstruction of Europe was achieved through the US aids, trade relations gradually developed with the increasing interdependence of both economies. Important to this research, especially the 2000s has been the golden period of the rise of trade in the transatlantic region. Thus, for boosting the economic relations between the US and the EU, EU-US Open Skies Agreement was signed in 30 April 2007, in Washington DC. The agreement allows any airline in the EU

and US to fly from the airports of both the US and the EU (Gaspari, 2011: 21). By allowing also all cargo flights, it was aimed to empower the trade relations between the US and the EU member states.

Moreover, to regulate trade relations between the US and EU, Transatlantic Economic Council was established on 30 April 2007, in Washington DC with the aim of direct economic cooperation. In this regard, it was expected from the Council to regulate a free trade arena and provide new dynamics to the free trade in Transatlantic region. The works under Transatlantic Economic Council were regarded as contributing a half point in the growth of the EU's economy (Yılmaz, 2013: 2). These all cooperation based on the ideals of the liberal world and pursuing common security was regarded as "transatlantic Renaissance" by many scholars (Zaborowski, 2009: 230).

Furthermore, one step further in making the trade free in the North Atlantic region, Transatlantic Free Trade Area has been an important proposal for the both sides of the Atlantic since the 1990s. In this sense, the yearly not only political but economic relations increases in both sides. It was expected to create a free trade arena for both the EU member states and the US. However, these ideas could not be a reality and stayed at the proposal level, even negotiations within the Transatlantic Economic Council continued. Within this process, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) was negotiated in the post-2013 (Yılmaz, 2013: 2). With these negotiations, specific regulation on easing the market access of the traders was aimed.

However, negotiations were halted by President Donald Trump in the post-2016. The motivation of Trump to cut the negotiations has been related to the EU's benefiting more from the trade with the US.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the trade between the US and the EU has been the beneficial factor for the EU's integration process in a way of creating a welfare zone in Europe through eliminating the conflict areas. In this sense, this welfare zone has been a main factor to attract the other countries for the continuation of the negotiation process for the EU membership. Thus, while the military security of the EU was under the protection of NATO, the economic security was provided with economically prosperous EU in which the economic aids of the US and trade relations had the major effect in a way of EU's becoming an economic power.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

In the historical process, first of all, it is important to mention that the liberal approaches have been important for the analysis of the European integration dealing with the interdependence of the countries based on economic and political cooperation (See Viner, 1950; Lipsey, 1957: 40-46; Haas, 1958; Nye, 1968: 855-880). The liberal approaches are found insufficient to analyse the recent process of the policies of the EU member states. Besides, the liberal approaches deal with the cooperation of the governments in the formation of new organizations that lead the countries for the development of this cooperation into the political union (Nye, 1968: 855-880). They are

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<sup>3</sup> In 2012, the EU's import from the US was 356 Billion € for the goods and services. It exports the goods and services for 457 billion € (Gambini et al., 2015: 2).

far from explaining of pursuing own interest of the states in Europe based on the structural changes of the domestic politics and international system.<sup>4</sup>

The selected unit of analysis in this paper is the EU member states, pursuing autonomous policies. The preferred approach here is neoclassical realism, which gives emphasis on not only the changes in the international system, but also domestic and social influences that drive country's foreign policy way of pursuing national interests (See Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2004; Zakaria, 1998; Wohlforth, 1993). Different from other realist approaches, such as neorealism in which the anarchic international system determines the actions of the states, in neoclassical realism there are different variables that affects the actions of the states. In this sense, for shaping the states' actions, power capabilities of the states, the effects of the international structure directly or indirectly, other states' actions and their threats and political approaches, domestic dynamics, behaviour of the decision makers and civil society actors in the states, are important influences (Rose, 1998: 146). Therefore, neoclassical realism stays between structural theorists and constructivists. In this case, it both deals with systemic influences and unit-level behaviour (Ibid: 152-153). According to Sterling Folker (1997: 1), in realist approaches domestic level variables are causal and affected from the international system. However, different from other realist approaches, neoclassical realism gives emphasis on domestic factors in influencing the state policies.

Importantly for this research, in neoclassical realism, the actions of the states in international politics are analyzed in different intervening variables that also gives emphasis to the internal dynamics of the states comparing other realist approaches. These explanations are not only to apply in the international politics, but also the current balance of power in the European politics. Thus, this paper does not dismiss current European politics as states' acting together as the union. This policy positioning importantly, based on the interest of the individual member states, even under the EU umbrella, for example, counter tariffs to the US. This policy is not only in the supranational positioning, but also having different versions as individual member states pursuing own policy approaches such as in Britain, Hungary, and Poland. In neoclassical realist perspective, the political leaders are influential actors to shape the foreign policy choices (Rose, 1998: 147). Thus, within the Britain, Hungary and Poland in which the political leaders have close contact with Trump, the leaders' positioning are important to shape the interest based policies.

The first important point of the analysis in the study, in relation to the neoclassical realist approach, is the change of the Trump administration of the policies towards the EU. This explains the function of the political leader in shaping the foreign policy of a country in neoclassical realist theory. This change includes Trump's questioning common security umbrella under NATO, imposing more tariffs for the European products and supporting Brexit as well as having important cooperation with the far-right

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<sup>4</sup> Considering democratic participation and the certain right-wing political parties' influence on the change of this policy of the EU member states in the recent process, the analysis requires a socially constructed perspective on the effects of the changes that covers domestic dynamics.

leaders in Europe and Putin in Russia. These developments show that the recent policy way of the US towards Europe is related to its position in the international system, trying to empower the hegemonic positioning. Thus, powerful positioning could be used to influence other countries' policies as explained neoclassical realist approach as the power of a country in economic and political way is a driving force for intervening in other country's affairs (Ibid: 145).

The second important point of the analysis relates to the reactions of the European states to this transformation of the US foreign policy. These reactions include rising discourses to pursue own national interests on military and trade matters. In this regard, pursuing own policies of the countries are such as Brexit process, Hungary and Poland's following reactionary policies against the EU directives and different political approaches on the refugee policy of the EU. Thus, in neoclassical realist approach, the pressures of the international system are not only effecting the states' actions, its power and domestic variables are effecting also the states' behaviour (Schweller, 2004: 164). In this case, a state's behavior was affected from its position in union's umbrella as well as its domestic dynamics.<sup>5</sup>

Overall, in this paper, recent cases selected in the European politics are based on these states' pursuing own national interests on political and economic matters that can be analyzed with the neoclassical realist approach. Thus, these all cases having a relation to the change in the international system in a more interest driven policy way that is related to the policy change of Trump administration. As mentioned the selected unit of analysis in this study is the EU member states, which are driven into pursuing autonomous policies in the recent process. They are selected based on their position in the European and international politics. These cases are particularly important to their capacities of influencing the European politics in relation to the EU's political actions in the future.

#### **IV. Trump Era in the US and the Rise of Autonomous Policies in Europe**

To analyse the effect of Trump administration on the rise of the EU member states' pursuing autonomous policies, it is the most useful to take up neoclassical realism. According to neoclassical realists, foreign policy of a country is shaped by the international structure and the domestic affairs as well as the complex relationship of both (Rose, 1998: 147).<sup>6</sup> As explained in neoclassical realist conception, the transformation of the approach of US towards the EU under Trump administration seems to contribute to the creation of a new international structure that affected the countries in Europe to search for their own interests in relation to their own domestic dynamics. Below, the change of policy approaches of EU member states will be analyzed with the effect of the policies of Trump administration. The analysis will also reveal how the

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<sup>5</sup> The analysis refers here to the actions of the member states, even they stay under the EU umbrella.

<sup>6</sup> In this regard, interaction between the international structure and domestic actors, including institutions, leaders, and the civil society (especially in the developed western European countries) are important to mention for shaping the policies of the states.

discussion of these cases contributes to a further reflection of the neoclassical realist approach.

### **A. Military and Economic Security of Europe**

It was presented in the previous section that after the World War II, in the European politics, the security of Europe has been the important determinant of the relations with the US. Under the NATO umbrella against to the expansion of the USSR towards the Western Europe, the hegemonic position of the US had been formed in Europe under the common defence policy. In the post-Cold War, the expansion of NATO towards the Eastern Europe with the containment policy of Russia provided improved benefit not only for security but also the enlargement of the EU towards the East. According to Bruce Jones (2009: 65), there has been deep admiration of the US presidents of the success of the EU project because of it provided a peaceful environment for the historical enemies. In this sense, the transatlantic relations are regarded as essential for the US to the continuation of security cooperation under the NATO (Ibid).

The research topic of this study covers the Trump period in the US. However, right before the Trump presidency in the US, Russia's military intervention in Ukraine since 2014 and the annexation of Crimea in the same year created the fear of all member states of NATO and the EU, including Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the Baltic region. Even, some Lithuanians and Estonians started to train themselves in the forest for the guerrilla warfare (Naylor, 2020: 34). These developments could be related to the Barack Obama's reluctance on intervening the European politics and involving more on domestic problems. In the same way with Obama, since the start of his administration, Trump's unwillingness to act against to Russia's aggression in the Eastern Europe by following a non-intervention policy has provided mistrust of EU member states for NATO's protection. Not only these policies of Trump, but also the investigations opened in the US in 2017 about Trump's former campaign manager Paul Manafort and adviser Carter Page, having close ties with Moscow triggered these mistrusts (Buncombe and Carroll, 2017). This positioning has been also related to Trump's having the authoritarian leader positioning as Putin does, but not having the liberal positioning as Obama. Trump's this positioning relates to his personality that favors national interest, and having sympathy to nationalist and far right ideologies (Barnett, 2018: 16-19). Since the election period, his main pledge of "America First" has revealed that nationalism and national interest have been forefront in his policy way (Ibid). According to Bruce Jentleson (2014: 9), the previous presidents of the US were also pursuing the national interest policies, although they pursued it within the rules of the international system. However, Trump era differs from other presidencies since it represents a dramatic change of the international system. It is the main pillar of the start of dissolution of western alliance that opened the way for acting some of the EU member states for pursuing autonomous policies rather than following the EU directives.

Moreover, unlike Obama, with the Trump period in the post-2016, questioning NATO's function and the responsibilities of other members created suspicion of the EU member states about Europe's security. Thus, Trump mentioned in 2016 that in case of attack of Russia to the Baltic states, he would look for if those nations have fulfilled their

obligations to the US (Kaufman, 2017: 263). On the one hand, this discourse was related to the change of US politics in the past that dealt with the security of Europe under own hegemony. On the other hand, it has been the continuation of Obama's approach to deal more with the domestic policies. But, Trump's approach has been the more direct sense. Thus, in the later process, in the same year, Trump threatened European countries to withdraw the US forces from them if they do not pay more for the protection of the US (Sanger and Haberman, 2016).

Moreover, in the later process, Trump's discourses followed to see Europe as the enemy of the US. Thus, in Trump's conception they are "as bad as China", even the US paid more for the protection of them (Steinberg, 2018). In neoclassical realist perspective, this position represents a change in the international structure related to the power of the countries (Wohlforth, 1993: 4). This conception relates to change of the power of the countries over time that affects their relations with the other countries. So, Trump's policy shift from being a hegemonic power in the western alliance to a competitor position presents this change in the international structure. In this regard, Trump approaches the European countries as the competitors in the international trade rather than dealing with the cooperation partners as during the Obama period. Also, European countries' benefiting from the US protection while US's spending for them is the main positioning of him. In this sense, Trump's 'America First' relates to the increasing economic gain of the US through having more profit. Importantly, by the time of Wales Summit of NATO in 2014, the share of the US for NATO's expenditure is 73% that shows the greatest financial support of the US (NATO, 2017). In Trump's conception, breaking these ties with the transatlantic countries is plausible, however, in reality because of strong connections in the historical process, it is difficult to achieve (Deudney and Ikenberry 2018, 22).

Moreover, in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America issued by the White House on December 2017, it is mentioned that the US has had a balance of trade deficit for years and the government will take necessary actions to have fairer trade with the industrialized nations (White House, 2017: 19-20). This is mainly presented as protecting the workers and industries of the US (Ibid). In relation to these arguments, the US imposed tariffs to import steel and aluminum products from the EU member states along with Canada and Mexico on 1 June 2018. The tariffs would mainly affect Germany as she exports 20% of steel products to the US and with other exporting countries a total of 3.6 million tonnes steels exported from the EU. The first response in the EU was on 1 June 2018 in the community mentality against to these tariffs. The EU launched legal proceedings against the US at World Trade Organization (WTO). Under a re-balancing measures EU imposed tariffs to the imports of selected steel products from the U.S. as of 22 June 2018 (European Commission, 2018). The EU also launched a protection programme on June 2018 to protect steel and aluminum producers (Harte, 2018).

Moreover, in October 2019, the US imposed a new tariff, costs 7.5 billion \$ for the European products from cheese, wine and olives to many other products. These tariffs were introduced in response to EU's subsidies to Airbus (DW, 2019). The responses to these tariffs are based on individual reactions of the EU member states in relation to their

own national interests. As an important example, President of Italy, Sergio Mattarella visited Donald Trump at the White House on 16 October 2019, in search of solving trade issues and avoiding retaliatory tariffs. In the news conference with the President of Italy, Trump mentioned that “without the burdens, as unfair as they are, imposed by the European Union, we would actually have a much higher number than \$70 billion between Italy and the United States...We’re talking to the president about that as it pertains to Italy. He thought we were a little bit harsh on Italy, and we don’t want to be harsh on Italy. We’ll never do that. So, we’ll look at that very strongly” (Trump, quoted in Euractive, 2019). In this regard, Mattarella’s visit to Trump for requesting of lifting tariffs for the Italian products could be regarded in the neoclassical realist perspective of searching own interests in relation to the structural change in international politics and the domestic requirements. In addition to this, Trump’s response of asking Italy to get rid of ‘EU burden’ could be regarded as his encouragement of this policy way.

### **B. Trump, Refugee Crisis and the Way for Brexit**

Another development related to the security of Europe is the refugee crisis that started after the uprisings against the authoritarian leaders in the Middle East. These uprisings started in December 2010 in Tunisia, ended the rules of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Husni Mubarak in Egypt. However, the protests against to Bashar al-Assad in Syria did not come to a conclusion of the change in Assad’s regime. In this regard, the civil war since 2011 in Syria caused to the emergence of refugees moving to the neighboring countries as well as to Europe via Turkey. In 2014, the asylum applications to EU countries jumped to more than 625 000 and 20% of them were from Syria (Eurostat, 2015). In the first few years, notable European countries approached the refugees with the welcoming spirit, including Germany, Sweden and the UK. The approaches based on the references to humanitarian values and filling the labour gaps of these countries which were already looking for the qualified people around the world.

However, this welcoming spirit has ended with the developments, including the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 and in Belgium in March 2016 that affected to the emergence of fear, racism, and ignorance. These developments followed by massive rape events in the new year celebrations in Germany in 2015/2016 (BBC, 2016a). Moreover, massive amount of refugees coming to the EU member states and lack of infrastructure and organization affected to the emergence of hostility against refugees in many European countries. Some of the EU member states, including Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Hungary, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Belgium, started to reintroduce internal border control after September 2015 with a claim of controlling the refugee flow in their countries (European Parliament, 2016: 15). These problems affected to change the media and political speeches such as in the UK. It was one of the important reasons for the Brexit referendum in 2016.

The main effect of the refugee crisis on the EU member states’ moving from the regional cooperation perspective to autonomous policy approach is on three aspects. First is related to some of the EU member states’ closing their borders and introducing security

checks such as Denmark, Hungary and Belgium did in 2016 (BBC, 2016a). Second is related to the rise of extremist voices in many EU member states that positioned as anti-EU political parties. Third is related to opening the way for exiting from the memberships such as with Brexit, started with the referendum, happened on 23 June 2016, with the 52% majority vote British people decided to leave the EU. These three aspects are related to both the changes in international structure and the domestic policies of the member states as it was formulated in neoclassical realist approach. These aspects are also related to the capacities and state structures, including the leader's function of the states (Rose, 1998: 147). Thus, it is a major determinant of Britain's heading the way for exiting from the EU.

In the National Security Strategy of the United States of America issued by the White House in December 2017, the refugees are presented as a factor that is negatively affecting the stability of the developed countries (White House, 2017: 48-49). In this sense, Trump administration by having an anti-refugee stance, emphasized on the cooperation with the European counterparts (Ibid). This could be regarded as Trump's approach against to the open border policy for the refugees of Angela Merkel. Thus, Merkel was trying to apply a common refugee policy of the EU at that time. In these instances, Trump administration contributed to the rise of euro-scepticism with his anti-refugee stance and support to Brexit as well as having close relations with the emerging far-right leaders in Europe.

Concerning the process that leads Britain to Brexit, it is important to mention that the fear of sharing economic burdens of refugee crisis leads the anti-EU discourses. According to Friedberg (1988: 288), a change in state policies, not only affected from the external issues, but domestic dynamics and internal developments affect these changes. Thus, in neoclassical realist conception, not only the international structure affects the state policies, but also domestic policies affect to pursue their own way driven by their interests. So, the civil society's position and the desires of the public in a country is also important to mention for shaping the state policies. In this regard, domestic crises and Trump, during his election propaganda as well as after being elected as the president of the US in 2016 supported Brexit process with his discourses and encouragements. Thus, during his election campaign Trump had mentioned that "I would personally be more inclined to leave, for a lot of reasons like having a lot less bureaucracy" (Trump, quoted in Jackson, 2016). So, these arguments of Trump revealed his political positioning would be against to the integration of Europe during his governance of the US. Moreover, after his election, Trump often claimed the Brexit is a "wonderful thing" and argued that former Prime Minister of England, Theresa May followed his advice and even should sue the EU (Steinberg, 2018). While his arguments made feel the European leaders vulnerable and uncomfortable, they contributed to the other member states acting on their own way in relation to the rise of far-right leaders in some of the EU member states. This is the important example of his effect on EU member states' pursuing autonomous policies more.

After the several trials on ratifying the Brexit agreement from the House of Common in the UK, Britain's exiting process from the EU could not be successful until 2020

because of the Conservative Party's limited number of members in the parliament. In this process, Prime Minister of UK, Theresa May, resigned in 24 July 2019 after her unsuccessful attempts of realizing the Brexit. In the following process, Boris Johnson was elected as the leader of the Conservative Party as well as appointed as the Prime Minister. On 17 October 2019, UK and the EU agreed on a withdrawal agreement to regulate the further process on UK's withdrawal from the EU (See Curtis et al., 2019). Even so, because of minority seats of conservative Member of Parliamentarians in House of Commons, Johnson could not succeed Brexit process. With Johnson's call for a general election, on October 2019 parliament was dissolved and a general election was held in 12 December 2019. The election resulted in the majority vote for Johnson's Conservative Party with a majority of the seats of the parliament. The elections results have been regarded as the support of the British people for exiting from the EU membership (Kottasova and Britton, 2019). So, with the advantage of majority seats in the parliament, the withdrawal agreement from the EU was ratified on January 23 and the UK formally exits from the EU membership in 31 January 2020.

After the elections, Trump congratulated Johnson with his achievement on the elections that opened the UK the way for exiting from the EU membership. Trump mentioned in his twitter account:

“Congratulations to Boris Johnson on his great WIN! Britain and the United States will now be free to strike a massive new Trade Deal after BREXIT. This deal has the potential to be far bigger and more lucrative than any deal that could be made with the EU. Celebrate Boris!” (Trump, quoted in Walker, 2019).

As it is seen in Trump's arguments, he congratulates Johnson with his new proposal for having a new trade deal with the UK that he regarded this would be better than the one that would be made with the EU. In this sense, Trump positioned himself to be with the UK and continued his encouragement of the UK towards having steps to have more distance from the EU politics. On the one hand, Trumps' these arguments can be regarded as his contribution to UK's pursuing autonomous policies. On the other hand, it seems to be an encouragement strategy for the future exiting attempts of the other member states that he constantly made arguments about exiting would bring more benefit of the member states of the EU. Moreover, after Trump, Joe Biden seems to pursue the same political approach to the UK. Thus, in 2021 US, UK and Australia signed the AUKUS Pact as an effort to counter China (White House, 2021). So, it is regarded as the US is dismissing the EU from the future security plans (BBC, 2021).

### **C. Trump and the Rise of European Far Right**

It was mentioned in the previous section that political trends in Europe in parallel with Trump's election of the US President were indicating the rise of far-right ideologies. Important examples at that time are the rise of Lega in Italy, the National Front in France, Islamophobic policies of Austrian Chancellor and People's Party (ÖVP) Chairman Sebastian Kurz, authoritarian policies implemented by the Hungarian and Polish governments and the emergence of AFD by increasing their popularity in Germany

(Ehmsen and Scharenberg, 2018). These political parties and related ideological groups had mainly positioned for anti-EU policies and aimed to make own country first policies.<sup>7</sup>

Trump, even before his victory of being the President of the US, started to have collaborations with these political parties and their leaders. As the important examples, the leader of right wing Lega party in Italy, Matteo Salvini, met with Donald Trump in Philadelphia during the Trump's election campaign in April 2016. After the meeting, Salvini mentioned that Trump gets his backing (Kirchgaessner, 2016). Importantly, Salvini served as the Deputy Prime Minister of Italy and Minister of Interior from 1 June 2018 to 5 September 2019. During his governance, he acted the Eurosceptic policies and took action against to the immigration policies of the EU (Waring, 2018).

Moreover, after the elections, as being in the position of EU's locomotive, in Germany, AfD was one of the political parties that immediately congratulated Trump's victory in the US elections (Scholz, 2017). This approach shows the parallel ideological position of AfD with Trump. Furthermore, with the effect of AfD politics and increasing the power of ultra-nationalism in Germany, the open border policy towards the refugees changed to be more protective. Especially, fewer reception of the refugees in the current process of Covid 19 pandemic is regarded as with the effect of the rise of nationalist ideology that is related to the national interests in the political sphere (DW, 2020).

Moreover, after the election victory, Trump also met in November 2016 with Nigel Farage, who is the UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader and one of the architects of the Brexit process. Trump shared from his Twitter account about this meeting and mentioned that "Many people would like to see @Nigel\_Farage represent Great Britain as their Ambassador to the United States. He would do a great job!" (Trump, quoted in BBC, 2016b). These discourses show Trump's dealing with the issue in a European country, not with the EU level, but also mutual interest perspective even before the Brexit process.

Moreover, after the election, another example is from Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who had tense relations with the US during the Obama period. Thus, Obama regarded the Orban rule in Hungary as undemocratic and refrained to have a better relationship of economic and political level (Vaski, 2021). However, after Trump's election as the US President, in a press conference Orban mentioned that Trump invited him to the US to reset the ties (Simon, 2016). This invitation can be analyzed as Trump has been approaching to the authoritarian leaders in Europe as having a similar ideological base. Moreover, in relation to the Trump's influence on European leaders to follow their own interest, Viktor Orban praised Trump's America first nationalism in his talk in a conference in Budapest and argued that "We have received permission from, if you like, the highest position in the world so we can now also put ourselves in first place" (Orban, quoted in Batchelor, 2017). This political positioning could be regarded in

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<sup>7</sup> Here, the main argument is not that all mentioned political parties and their leaders are having the exact same ideological position about the EU's future, but they represent a general trend of following own country first policies.

neoclassical realism as a state's policies are shaped by not only the international influence, but also the domestic factors as well as a complex interaction of both. Orban's discourses show both the domestic positioning of the EU member states whose leaders are authoritarian and the influence of the Trump existed for pursuing autonomous policies. Moreover, a Pew Research Center report released in 2020 shows that while the confidence in the US in the Western Europe is decreasing, in the Eastern Europe, there is not a significant change and Trump administration gets positive reviews as such in Hungary 66%, and in Poland 79% (Wike et al., 2020). This shows a socially constructed political alliance of authoritarian leaders in these countries existed. According to Fareed Zakaria (1992: 197), "a good theory of foreign policy should first ask what effect the international system has on national behavior, because the most powerful generalizable characteristic of a state in international relations is its relative position in the international system." In light of this argument based on neoclassical realist conception, Trump's policies, because of the powerful position of the US in international system, directly affected the political approaches of the EU member states.

Furthermore, in search of the allies in the European politics, Trump continued his discourses with the aim of intervening elections in some of the EU member states. As an important example, during the French Presidential Elections in 2017 Trump revealed his ideas that the leader of Front National Marine Le Pen is the strongest candidate. Thus, he argued that "she is the strongest on borders, and she's the strongest on what's been going on in France... Whoever is the toughest on radical Islamic terrorism, and whoever is the toughest at the borders, will do well in the election" (Trump, quoted in Jacobs, 2017). Le Pen's positioning has been in cohesion with the Trump that was related to the refugees and the threat coming from the Middle East. Thus, in 2018 National Defence Strategy of the US, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and Syria were regarded as the source of extremism and US declared the cooperation strategy against extremism, coming from these countries, with the local partners in Europe (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018: 9-10). In this sense, Trump administration positioned on working with the political leaders having an anti-refugee positioning. Even Le Pen could not win the elections in 2017, his support continued on her ideology as the possible future ally.

Moreover, as the direct intervention in the European politics in terms of the intervening to the working dynamics of supranational EU body, Trump praised populist ruling Law and Justice Party of Poland for acting independent against to the EU's directives. Trump's praise came after that EU referred Warsaw to European Court of Justice because of the government's violating the judicial independence of the Supreme Court. Trump mentioned that "In Poland, a great people are standing up for their independence, their security, and their sovereignty" (Gaouette, 2018). As it is seen in Trump's arguments, his encouragement of the Polish government to act against to EU's directives is mainly visible. Overall, as the President of the US, Trump's positioning has been to influence the EU member states to act against the supranational body of the EU and follow their own interest. Moreover, current president of the US, Joe Biden, is not having a direct interaction with the authoritarian leaders of Europe. However, he is acting independently on the issues which also relate the European allies such as during the

withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 presents the continuation of America first policy of Donald Trump (See Lowen, 2021).

## V. Conclusion

As a result, Trump administration's change of the transatlantic politics by questioning NATO's function of the security of Europe, imposing economic threats, drawing a collaborating image with the Putin, supporting far right political leaders in the EU member states and supporting the countries to leave from the membership of the EU have been the important contributions to emergence of the autonomous policies of the EU member states. These developments have happened in the historical process because of the Trump's approaching to the EU as the important trade competitor that had a root of losing the US in the trade balance. This positioning affected him to approach the member states individually rather than considering EU's supranational entity by supporting the countries to create their independence against to the EU's control mechanisms.

Thus, during this period, the far-right political ideologies increased their power and started to influence the European politics in a way of pursuing their own interests. Within the democratic interaction of far-right political leaders of Europe with the Trump, importantly the emergence of Brexit process, search of Italy's individual trade relations with the US, Hungary and Poland's pursuing their own ways and with the effect of the rise of far-right ideologies notable countries' applying authoritarian practices in their territories proves the shift of the politics of Europe from regional integration to autonomous perspective. These mentioned processes are found in the neoclassical realism as states' acting to follow their own national interests affected from both the change of the international structure and their own domestic dynamics. In the neoclassical realist point of view, Trump's change of the policies on transatlantic relations refers to change traditional relations of the western alliance, namely the change of the international structure. The political interaction affects to change domestic dynamics of EU member states that contribute to pursue more autonomous policies comparing pre-Trump period. So, these states act in cohesion with the political situations of the time for pursuing their own interests. Moreover, current President of the US, Joe Biden approaches the EU as being not an important economic and political partner, but having a search of the new security alliances against to China. This could be regarded as Biden's continuation of Trump's political approach towards the EU, even without having an authoritarian leader figure.

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